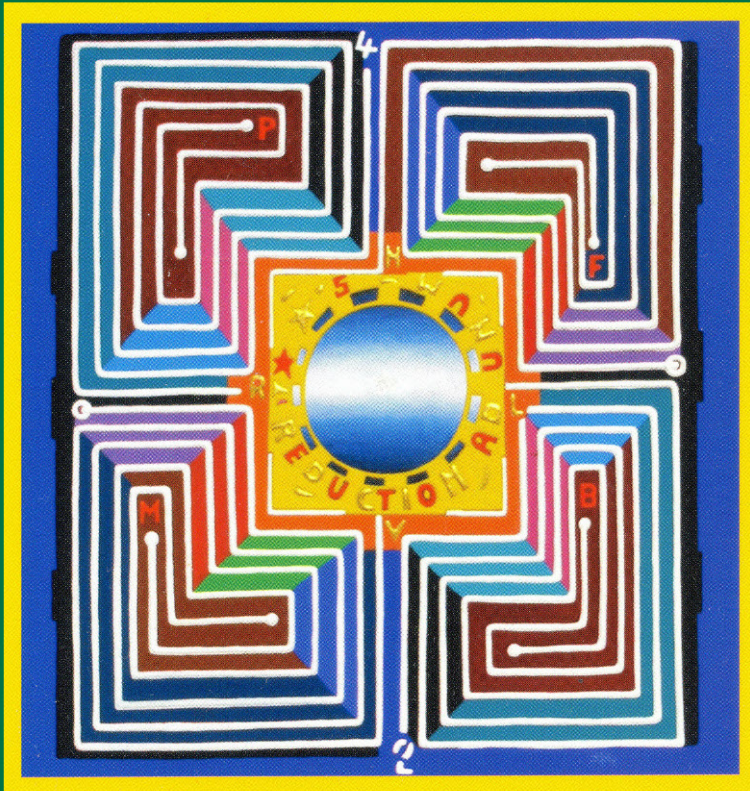


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of Italian Translation



Editor Luigi Bonaffini

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**Journal
of Italian Translation**

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Journal of Italian Translation

Editor
Luigi Bonaffini

Volume VII Number 1 Spring 2012

In each issue of *Journal of Italian Translation* we will feature a noteworthy Italian or Italian American artist. In this issue we feature the work of photographer **Nino Bellia**.

La Sicilia: terra di forti contrasti, di colori, di luce. Tutti elementi che Nino Bellia riproduce nelle sue immagini di paesaggio, facendoci scoprire angoli sconosciuti del mondo nel quale è nato e nel quale si immedesima. Cieli saturi, luci magiche, un'orgia di colore che solo chi vive in questa isola del mediterraneo può percepire così profondamente. Bellia ci racconta questi scenari con semplicità e maestria, con tagli appropriati ma mai esagerati, con una naturalezza che gli deriva da una lunga militanza dietro l'obiettivo e da una sensibilità spiccata, ma anche dal grande rispetto nei confronti della sua terra. I paesaggi di Nino possono essere senza luogo come l'Etna innevato che, per chi non conosce quello spicchio di Sicilia, sembra catturato in un posto lontano migliaia di chilometri o le foto che hanno per tema dominante il mare, veri e propri ritratti della potenza e della bellezza della natura, universali nella loro localizzazione.

Ma le foto di Nino Bellia sono anche immagini di gente fiera del proprio lavoro, di gente conscia del proprio dovere, del proprio fare; artigiani, contadini, casalinghe che si incontrano in strada e che vengono messi in rilievo dall'abilità dell'autore nel cogliere quell'attimo che racconta una storia, capacità propria solo dei veri fotoreporter.

La sintesi dei due racconti, paesaggi e gente, rende una idea precisa della vita siciliana ed in particolare della sua bellezza e vitalità ma anche della sua semplicità naturale e ci racconta anche di un autore innamorato della sua terra, fiero di esserci nato e di viverci.

Nino Bellia nasce infatti a Motta S. Anastasia (CT) il 7 novembre 1943 ed ora vive a Santa Flavia, in provincia di Palermo. Attualmente è Presidente Nazionale UIF (Unione Italiana Fotoamatori). Compie i primi passi dell'arte fotografica nella Scuola Fotografica Siciliana di Paesaggio diretta da Riccardo Ascoli nella quale segue i corsi tenuti da grandi fotografi italiani quali Gianni Berengo Gardin, Mauro Vallinotto, Ernesto Bazan e Franco Villani. Il passaggio da studente a insegnante avviene naturalmente quando nel 1989 collabora alla docenza di Paesaggio nel corso tenuto a Geraci Siculo. Successivamente Nino Bellia tiene corsi di fotografia in vari luoghi

della Sicilia (Termini Imerese, Lascari, Brolo e Bagheria). Dal 1994 al 2000 dirige la Galleria Fotografica Cartier Bresson di Bagheria. Dal 1995 cura la stampa di libri fotografici a tema, con immagini proprie e di altri fotoamatori siciliani ("Frammenti di Sicilia" - "Arti, Mestieri ed Espedienti" - "Sicilia, Costumi e Tradizioni" - "Gente di Sicilia" - "Insolita Sicilia"). Le immagini di Nino Bellia sono apparse spesso nelle riviste fotografiche, in Italia ed all'estero così come in numerosi libri fotografici, calendari e cataloghi di mostre. Come autore ha vinto molti premi in concorsi fotografici ed ha partecipato e partecipa tuttora a mostre personali e collettive in Italia ed all'estero (Argentina, Austria, Polonia, Brasile e Stati Uniti). Nel 2005 la UIF gli ha conferito il titolo onorifico di Maestro della Fotografia Artistica mentre, nel 2009, a Terrasini (Pa) gli viene conferito il "Premio Liolà" per l'attività fotografica svolta. Fa parte del Direttivo del "Circolo Culturale Giacomo Giardina" di Bagheria.

Dal 2005 collabora con il COES (Centro di Orientamento Emigrati Siciliani) con il quale si è recato negli USA (2005, 2006, 2008 e 2009) per esporre le proprie immagini e cura la stampa del suo organo ufficiale "Siciliani nel mondo". Sue foto si trovano, tra l'altro, presso: il Centro Culturale italiano di Stone Park (Chicago, Illinois), Museo Guttuso di Villa Cattolica (Bagheria-Pa), Palazzo Aragona Cutò (Bagheria), La Plata (Argentina) e collezioni private ovunque nel mondo.

Michele Buonanni
(Direttore "Fotografia Reflex")

Journal of Italian Translation

Volume VII, Number 1, Spring 2012

Table of Contents

Essays

Sharon Wood

Textual tourism: Cecilia Stazzone meets Voltaire and Lady Mary 11

Translations

Susan Amatangelo, Alexandra Bruzzese, and Francesca Bruzzese English

Translation of "La donna e l'opinione" by Anna Maria Mozzoni40

Santi Buscemi

English translation of an excerpt from *Il Marchese di Roccaverdina* by
Luigi Capuana 57

Adria Bernardi

English translation of poems by Francesca Pellegrino 72

Estelle Gilson

English translation of the third episode from Umberto Saba's *Ernesto* 78

Antonello Borra

English translation of poems by Giovanni Raboni 113

Peter D'Epiro

English translation of *Inferno* Canto X..... 120

Lawrence J. Lujan

English translation of excerpts from Dante's *Inferno* 130

Paul D'Agostino

English Translation of poems by Valerio Magrelli 155

Special Features

Classics Revisited

Joseph Tusiani

English translation of poems by Carlo Porta 163

Re: Creations

American Poets translated into Italian

Edited by Michael Palma

Luigi Bonaffini

Italian translation of poems by Dana Gioia..... 185

Gianluca Rizzo

Italian translation of poems by Wallace Stevens..... 196

Voices in English from Europe to New Zealand

Edited by Marco Sonzogni

M. R. Sottocorona and Marco Sonzogni

Italian translation of poems by Joseph Lennon 212

Poets Laureate of the United States

Edited by Luigi Bonaffini

Luigi Bonaffini

Italian translation of poems by W. S. Merwin 230

Poets of the Italian Diaspora - Venezuela

Edited by Michele Castelli

Vittorio Fioravanti and Valeriano Garbin translated by John Duval.. 240

Le altre lingue

Edited by Achille Serrao

Franca Ronchi Francardi, Poems in the Eugubino dialect Translated

by Justin Vitiello..... 259

Confronti poetici / Poetic Comparisons

Edited by Luigi Fontanella

John Ciardi and Giovanna Sicari 266

New Translators

Edited by John DuVal

Emma Kantor

English translation of selectd stories from Gianni Rodari's

Favole al Telefono (1962)..... 276

Dueling Translators

Edited by Gaetano Cipolla

An excerpt from *Gilberte* by Ignazio Apolloni translated by

Giuseppe Bruno-Chomin and Miguel Valerio 300

Book Reviews

Salvatore Di Marco, *L'aranciu amaru e àutri puisii/The Bitter Orange and Other Poems*, Reviewed by Antonio Pagano..... 309

Alfonso Gatto, *The Wall Did Not Answer. Selected Poems 1932-1976.*

Reviewed by Amelia Moser 313

Essays



Rahusa- Barocco.

Textual tourism: Cecilia Stazzone meets Voltaire and Lady Mary

by Sharon Wood

Sharon Wood is Professor of Italian at the University of Leicester, UK. Publications include: *Language and Gender in the work of Alberto Moravia* (1990); *Italian women writing* (1995); *Cambridge history of women's writing in Italy* (2000, edited with Letizia Panizza); *Collaboration in the Arts from the Middle Ages to the present* (2006, edited with Silvia Bigliuzzi); *Under Arturo's star: the cultural legacies of Elsa Morante* (2006, edited with Stefania Lucamante); *Grazia Deledda and the challenge of Modernity* (2007). Translations include Primo Levi, *L'assimetria e la vita* (*The black hole of Auschwitz*); Dacia Maraini, *Passi affrettati* (*Hurried Steps*); Romana Petri, *Alle Case Venie* (*An Umbrian war*) and *La donna delle Azzorre* (*The Flying Island*).

.....

If culture depends on the transmission of meaning across time
[...] it depends also on the transfer of meaning in space

George Steiner¹

Translation doesn't so much communicate the foreign text as
inscribe it with the intelligibilities and interests of the translating
cultures

Lawrence Venuti²

A little known Nineteenth century Sicilian writer, Cecilia Stazzone, author of plays, short stories and novels, also translated:³ from French she translated Voltaire's hugely popular play, *Zaïre*;⁴ and from English the letters of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, or to be precise those letters which came from her year-long stay (1716-1717) in Constantinople, where her husband was British ambassador.⁵ While *Zaïre* (1732), a love story between a Turkish *pacha* and his Christian slave torn between duty and desire, drew

on the rapidly growing public appetite for exotic tales following the expansion of travel into the Orient, Lady Mary's letters offered an early and tantalising glimpse into the lives of women, screened and veiled from the more usual male writer and traveller, and into that eroticised locus of Western imagining, the Eastern harem. An educated aristocrat, Stazzone's multilingualism should not surprise. Her choices, however, merit a moment of speculation. Stazzone was herself a traveller, although, as far as we know, only within the peninsula of what was in the process of becoming the nation state of Italy. Indeed, she wrote an account of her own, of a journey from Sicily to Venice, the *Rimembranze di un viaggietto in Italia*.⁶ Her choices of texts to translate – for these were personal rather than commercial transactions – suggest translation as travel or relocation, an imaginative transportation of the translator herself into the exotic Other, Steiner's transfer of meaning across both time and space.

I propose here to compare Stazzone's translation strategies with those of other translators of these same texts in a triadic formation: Aaron Hill's translation of *Zaire* into English,⁷ and Maria Petrettini's translation of Lady Mary's letters, also into Italian, some thirty years before Stazzone published her own version.⁸ A comparative and empirical focus will explore the role of the translator as mediator of textual meaning and the translations themselves, constructs of linguistic, semantic and paratextual strategies, as expressions of ideological and ideational positioning: translation, then, as both metaphor and metonym for a series of multiple cultural transactions and negotiations. The functional effect of the translator is seen as rather different from that of choosing between a range of (linguistic, semantic, commercial) available options, when choice is itself conditioned, consciously or unconsciously, by an infinite regression of constraints and desires. In the 'Introduction' to *Post-colonial translation. Theory and Practice* Susan Bassnett and Harish Trivedi observe that translation is a highly manipulative activity that involves all kinds of stages in the process of transfer across linguistic and cultural boundaries. Translation is not an innocent, transparent activity but is highly charged with significance at every stage [...] the act of translation always involves much more

than language. Translations are always embedded in cultural and political systems, and in history.⁹

Translation is not a neutral, objective or, in Bassnett's term, 'innocent' activity. Aaron Hill's translation of Voltaire, for example, exhibits a diverse set of strategies from that of Stazzone, the Sicilian woman translating perhaps for private performance, and becomes instead a struggle for national/cultural prestige, an imperialist project, an effort to assimilate a text both linguistically and culturally, to consume and negate it; Petretini's translation of Lady Mary is performative, an attempt to insert the text within a prestigious literary polysystem and thus the translator herself within the magic circle of national cultural borders.

Translation is here viewed not as unidirectional transmission of message from source to target language, nor is it seen as 'innocent.' Translation, so often seen in metaphorical terms of sexual coupling, penetration, or in the perhaps even more disturbing aggressively militaristic metaphors of capture and seizure, will instead be considered here, again metaphorically but with the same loss of innocence, as a *ménage à trois*, whose riotous excess of meaning challenges a dyadic model of translation in favour of one in which a text is received into complex and sometimes antagonistic contexts where the translator may have other agendas in play. Translation is in and of itself cultural difference, or rather a Derridean *différance*, an unstable chain of signifiers where meaning is constantly deferred, overflowing the boundaries of the text, beyond the monogamous and chaste dyad of source and target text. This topology of the translator suggests not so much an intermediary figure, poised or caught between two parallel, associative or referential chains of meaning, but as the disruptive figure who breaks down codes, turning difference into *différance*.

Voltaire and *Zaïre*: cultural nationalisms and national cultures

The tragic drama *Zaïre*, written in a whirl of creative fervour in 1732,¹⁰ was Voltaire's most popular and most performed play. Set loosely against a backdrop of the thirteenth century Crusades, it speaks of the love between the eponymous *Zaïre* and the Sultan Orosmane, in whose harem she has been raised and to whom she

is therefore a slave. Their imminent wedding is halted at the discovery that she is a Christian rather than a Muslim, and indeed her father has been in the Sultan's dungeons for the last twenty years. The discovery made, Zaïre is of course (tragically) torn between love and religion, her feelings for Orosmane and her family, represented by her father and brother. In order to submit to her brother's imperative of baptism she delays her marriage: Orosmane, interpreting her note to her brother agreeing to meet as a missive of love, stabs her in a fit of jealous rage. Revelation of the truth is followed by remorse and Orosmane's suicide with the same knife which ended Zaïre's life.

Voltaire needed a success, and found it with this play, which as well as being the most performed play at the Comédie Française was performed and translated across the whole of Europe. First and foremost it is a play about tragic love, doomed as much by family and state *realpolitik* as by a moment of blind jealousy.¹¹ As a renowned and forceful critic of the Catholic Church, Voltaire was fully aware of the military and political implications of the Crusades, had indeed himself written a book on what he saw as a disastrous action of military imperialism: the intransigent brother, Nerestan, is counterpoised to the more congenial Orosmane, who has been Westernised by the play to the point of being willing to give up his harem upon his marriage. Envisaged by its author as a representation of Turkish and Christian manners, the play offers scope for imaginative spectacle: its wealth of historical detail, including characters named after notable French crusading families, is nonetheless subservient to the poetic drama and the requirements of the French classical stage: more than a translation we might say it is a paraphrastic version of events from 1249. In Schleiermacher's terms, rather than take his audience on a journey to the East, Voltaire seeks to domesticate the foreign, embedding it within the conventions of French dramatic genre and audience expectations.

The play was hugely successful not only in France but all over Europe. In Paris, it has to be said, the play spawned two other plays which were quickly produced and played simultaneously - one of them a critical and comical commentary on the more outlandish aspects and coincidences on which the play depends, and one translating it into a lower, less elevated and decidedly more vulgar tone. For a while these two spin-offs were equally as successful as

the original itself. Translations proper were numerous. In Italy there were at least eight: the play was performed all over the peninsula (not yet a country) and was also transmuted into opera *libretti*, including for an unfinished work by Mozart. Other translations appeared in Holland, Scandinavia, Germany, and three in Denmark (1756, 1757 and 1766). In Spain an anonymous translation appears under the title of *Combates de amore y ley* ('Struggles of love and law') in 1765. There is no mention of either author or translator, and the names of the principal characters of the work have also been changed. A second translation into Spanish is by the Peruvian writer Pablo de Olavide: several editions of his *La Zayda* appeared, again naming neither author nor translator. In 1783 Vicente Garcia de La Hierta, basing himself not on Voltaire's original work but on Olavide's efforts, offered a new version called *La Fe triunfante del amor cetro*. This also spawned a parodic version, which like the French parody met with great and parallel success. The play then, in the absence of strict copyright laws, spawned translations, imitations, adaptations, and entered the public consciousness on a European scale.

But if Voltaire was loosely translating the Orient for an avid public eager for the tales of travellers to Eastern lands just beginning to be explored, while equally loose and indeed *louche* translations of the work across the continent fell under what we would now call plagiarism, a second level of translation / plagiarism as intercultural and interlingual exchange was also rousing comment.

In this play Voltaire was self-avowedly attempting to enlarge the scale and scope of French tragedy, challenging the pure Classicism of earlier writers such as Racine.¹² The question of intercultural borrowing becomes a far more heated affair when the two cultures are both neighbours and rivals, as was the case for England and France. Voltaire had spent considerable time in England. Early admiration for Shakespeare, some of whose plays he translated,¹³ shifted as he came to deplore the impact of Shakespeare on the French stage.¹⁴ In the *Lettres philosophiques*, a series of essays resulting from his extensive stays in England between 1722 and 1734, Voltaire comments acerbically that Shakespeare 'créa le théâtre. Il avait un génie plein de forces et de fécondité, de naturel et de sublime, sans la moindre étincelle de bon goût et sans la moindre connaissance des règles.' If Shakespeare has come to be admired for

his plays, the 'si belles scènes', the 'morceaux si grands et si terrible répandus dans ses farces monstrueuses qu'on appelle tragédies', it is because 'le temps qui seul fait la réputation des hommes, rend, à la fin, leurs défauts respectables.'¹⁵

Zaire was written almost contemporaneously with the *Lettres philosophiques*. Voltaire admits being influenced to the extent that he put French history on the stage, naming characters after noble families: that was the extent to which he acknowledged influence. Many commentators, however, were quick to spot the play's apparent similarities with Shakespeare's *Othello*. There were those who denounced the work as plagiarism, a direct translation into French of Shakespearean plot and poetics: the Abbé le Blanc, writing from England back to France, and admiring neither the French nor the English writer, comments indignantly that

Cette pièce pour le fonds n'est autre chose que celle de Shakespeare dont je vous parle. Orosmane est Othello, la vertueuse Zaire est la sage Desdemona. On trouve dans la Pièce de Mr De Voltaire, un apparence des beautés de détail de celle de Shakespear, le nœud de l'une et l'autre Pièce ne vaut pas grand-chose, le dénouement est précisément le même. L'unique différence consiste en ce que le furieux Othello étrangle Desdemona aux yeux des spectateurs. Orosmane plus poli, main non moins cruel se contente de poignarder Zaire.¹⁶

Plagiarism is all, generic and dramatic differences are elided, and cultural difference comes to the fore in the deployment of the rather more sophisticated (French) dagger, rather than bare-knuckled (English) hands, to murder one's wife. Many observers and commentators, including Lessing, agreed with the Abbé, on the question of plagiarism if not the classification of different ways of killing as an index of civilization.¹⁷ For as long as the play was regularly performed, the arguments raged on both sides.¹⁸ There are superficial similarities of plot (love, cultural difference, jealousy and a dead beloved) but, as Besterman comments, '*Othello* is about Othello, *Zaire* is about Zaire.'¹⁹ Corasmin does not tangle with the plot as Iago does; Desdemona plays no part in her own undoing. The question of Voltaire's borrowing from Shakespeare is, finally, undecidable²⁰ and speaks less to our failure to spot

plagiarism than to the intermingling of cultures which refuse the imposed borders of the nation state, made visibly porous by the act of translation. Voltaire's first preface to the play, a dedicatory epistle to Mr Falkener, simultaneously articulates a cultural sense which transcends national frontiers in joint obeisance to antiquity, and humourously sets the author up as judge and instructor of the (Shakespearean) English stage:

You, my dear friend, are an Englishman, and I am a native of France; but lovers of the fine arts are fellow-citizens: men of taste and virtue have pretty nearly the same principles in every country, and form one general commonweal: it is no longer, therefore, matter of astonishment to see a French tragedy dedicated to an Englishman, or an Italian, any more than it would have been, in the days of antiquity, for a citizen of Ephesus, or of Athens, to address his performance to a Grecian of some other city; I lay this tragedy before you, therefore, as my countryman in literature, and my most intimate friend. All I can boast of is that the piece is tolerably simple; a perfection, in my opinion, that is not to be despised. This happy simplicity was one of the distinguishing beauties of learned antiquity: it is a pity you Englishmen don't introduce this novelty on your stage, which is so filled with horror, gibbets, and murders: put more truth into your dramatic performances, and more noble images.²¹

A second preface to the text appears following the highly successful English translation of the play, by Aaron Hill, which established the fortunes of David Garrick at the Drury Lane theatre in London.²² Voltaire acknowledges that the fortune of the play in London was assisted by the performance of the delightful Mrs. Cibber in the title role, but claims this translation of words into performance (interpretation) parallels a shift in English performance aesthetic into the superior French one (imitation): "The same change which Lecouvreur affected on our stage, Mrs. Cibber brought about on yours, in the part of Zaire: how astonishing it is that in every art it should be so long before we arrive at the simple and the natural!"²³ Voltaire comments that Hill's translation has not only demonstrated the superiority of French performance poetics,

but has effected a transformation of the English stage:

You had a strange custom, which even Mr. Addison, the chastest of your writers, adopted, so often does custom get the better of sense and reason; I mean, the ridiculous custom of finishing every act by verses in a different taste from the rest of the piece, which verse usually consisted of a simile. *Phædra*, as she leaves the stage, compares herself to a bitch; *Cato* to a rock, and *Cleopatra* to children that cry themselves asleep. The translator of "*Zaïre*" was the first who dared to maintain the rights of nature against a custom so directly opposite to her. He proscribed this custom, well knowing that passion should always speak its own language, and that the poet should disappear, to make room for the hero.

Zaïre, claims Voltaire, exactly and precisely translated by Hill, seeks not to imitate but to transform the English stage. A Platonic ideal of culture fragments into cultural difference revealed in all its complexity by (linguistic, performative) translation: 'You ought to submit to our rules of the stage, as we submit to your philosophy: we have made as good experiments on the human heart, as you have in physics: the art of pleasing seems to be the art of Frenchmen; the art of thinking is all your own.'²⁴

Theodore Besterman disagrees as to the 'fidelity' of Hill's translation of *Zaïre*: while he does not examine the texts side by side, he comments that 'Hill's *Zara* is not a literal translation of *Zaïre*, for its author has openly tried to make the play as attractive as possible to an English audience. This, he seems to think, means more heroism, more sentiment, more ranting'.²⁵ The first obvious change is the addition of a prologue, in which Hill, usurping the role of author, categorically exalts the play as a kind of *entente cordiale*, fusion of English heart and French mind, English inspiration and I dare say French perspiration. *Zaïre* exhibits, declaims the translator, 'A Racine's judgement, with a Shakespeare's Fire!' Of at least the play exhibits these virtues *in translation*. The borrowing from *Othello* is here assumed, an 'explicitation' that is cultural rather than linguistic: the translation thus becomes a play which has visited France and returned home again from its travels, its prize firmly between its teeth:

From English plays, Zara's French Author fir'd,
 Confess'd his Muse, beyond herself, inspir'd
 From rack'd Othello's Rage, he rais's his Style
 And snatch'd the Brand, that light his Tragick Pile.

The prologue, where we see a primary power struggle between author and translator, England and France, Classicism and the Shakespearean vision, is a moment in which translator damns the writer with gushing praise. Hill is less interested in taking the spectator to an unspecified East as he is in bringing Voltaire 'home', not so much domesticating him as changing his national identity. Translation becomes the battleground for international hegemony which, far from Voltaire's ideally cultured Republic, has decidedly nationalistic overtones.²⁶

Hill's translation is vastly different from that of Cecilia Stazzone. Stazzone published her translation in 1879, but it is likely that it was translated much earlier, possibly in the 1850s²⁷, and for private performance rather than the stage of a capital city. Nothing is known about the play in performance, but my conjecture here is that the play caught Stazzone's attention as one which she may well have seen, which could be literally domesticated within the possibilities of private performance while allowing for an exoticising but helpfully vague staging, and which offered a good part for a female actor – herself perhaps, just as Voltaire had acted the part of Orosmane in private productions, or in later years the part of Zaire's father Lusignan. If in Hill's translation we see a struggle for cultural hegemony which surely refracts political and imperial as well as cultural ambition, in Stazzone's version, by a woman, a Sicilian, in a country that does not yet exist, or in a region which is barely integrated and hostile, we see a different emphasis altogether. In Hill's version Voltaire, himself translator of Shakespeare into French, is turned back into an honorary Englishman in order to prove a point about cultural dominance and the supremacy of a specific form of dramatic writing; in the Italian translation, for private consumption, the nod towards literary historians gives way to a much greater reflection on the private drama of a woman caught between love and duty, the personal and the social, desire and expediency. Voltaire's Eighteenth-century Zaire emerges from a specific yet multiple set of national cultural discourses, is

reappropriated and realigned, turned back on itself in an English translation, to fit a specific cultural model; on the other hand a Sicilian noblewoman, whose own homeland, like that of Zaire herself, is in process of redefinition, explores the emotional and psychic trauma of a woman brought up as a virtual prisoner, on the point of finding liberation from tyranny.

An empirical comparison of specific moments in these two translations with the original text both illustrates and informs these points. At first sight Stazzone's translation exhibits a comparative deficit, a deflationary approach of bathos far removed from Hill's rhetorical flourishes, as Zaire's slave Fatima wonders why her mistress no longer dreams of her country of origin, little suspecting that she has fallen in love:

Extract 1 Act 1

Fatima : Vous ne parlez plus de ces belles contrées,
Où d'un peuple poli les femmes adorées
Reçoivent cet encens que l'on doit à vos yeux ;
Compagnes d'un époux, et reines en tous lieux,
Libres sans déshonneur, et sages sans contrainte,
Et ne devant jamais leurs vertus à la crainte.
Ne soupirez-vous plus pour cette liberté ?
Le sérail d'un soudan, sa triste austérité,
Ce nom d'esclave enfin, n'ont-ils rien qui vous
[gêne ?
Préférez-vous Solyme aux rives de la Seine ?

Selima: You talk no more of that gay nation now,
Where men adore their wives, and woman's
[power
Draws rev'ence from a polish'd people's softness:
Their husbands' equals, and their lovers' queens!
Free from scandal; wise without restraint;
Their virtue due to nature, not to fear.'
Why have you ceas'd to wish this happy change?
A barr'd seraglio! Sad, unsocial life!
Scorn'd, and a slave! All this has lost its terror ;
And Syria rivals, now the banks of Seine!

Fatima: Che vuoi?

While Hill has the same number of lines, there is a greater number of words: not just for explication or interpretation, as is frequently seen to be the case with translations, but for greater emphasis. Selima (Fatima) speaks less to Zaïre than to a more generalized listener, playing to the gallery and opening up an intimate, troubled conversation to declamatory possibility, as articulated by the exclamation marks. The 'che vuoi?' from Stazzone, while a significant loss both qualitative and quantitative, casts a consistent light by contrast on the more hyperbolic English translation.

Extract 2

Z: Au serial des soudans dès l'enfance enfermée,
 Chaque jour ma raison s'y voit accoutumée.
 Le reste de la terre anéanti pour moi,
 M'abandonne au soudan, qui nous tient sous sa
 [loi :

Je ne connais que lui, sa gloire, sa puissance :
 Vivre sous Orosmane est ma seule espérance,
 Le reste est un vain songe

Z: Clos'd from my infancy within this palace,
 Custom has learnt, from time, the power to please.
 I claim no share in the remoter world,
 The sultan's property, his will my law;
 Unknowing all but him, his power, his fame.
 To live his subject is my only hope.
 All else, an empty dream

Z: Un po' per volta mi assuefeci a vivere sotto
 l'Impero di Orosmano; ormai mi sono rassegnata alla mia
 sorte e non desidero nulla sulla terra

While Voltaire, pillar of the French Enlightenment, speaks of Zaïre's somewhat equivocal emotion, a slave's passion for her master, as the result of habit, a consequence of a rational social relativism, Hill would have Zaïre debase herself, sexualize herself

perhaps, with the 'power to please', an addition to the original text. Here again we see a pared-down Italian prose version, melodramatic rather than rhetorical, which perhaps finds itself reluctant to articulate passion of a slave for the master. It might be possible to give Steiner's hermeneutic motion another turn, and see here a female Sicilian translator somewhat at odds with a text that would declare the woman not only a willing slave, but metonym for a conquered people, just as Sicily was effectively colonized by its more powerful neighbours in the process of Unification.

Extract 3

Hill's lexical and syntactical choices as translator demonstrate not only his deep knowledge of Shakespeare, but his desire to dip Voltaire into the same national-linguistic pool.

Z: Mets-toi devant les yeux sa grâce, ses exploits

Z: Place thou
Before thy eyes his merit and his fame

Z: Egli adorno di tanti pregi, vincitore di tanti re!
Pure non è la sua corona che mi attrae, io amo lui, non
il suo trono: se il cielo avesse voluto ch'egli fosse servo
ed io regina, sono sicura che lo avrei amato ugualmente

While Stazzone here follows Voltaire closely, Hill lends him the words and sentiments, if not perhaps here of *Othello* itself, possibly of Shakespeare's sonnet, LXXXVIII:

When thou shalt be disposed to set me light/ And
place my merit in the eye of scorn,
Upon thy side, against myself I'll fight,/ And prove
thee virtuous, though thou art foreswarn

Extract 4

In this extract Voltaire is as it were translating the East, domesticating it for Western consumption, turning Orosmane into a model faithful future husband in a model Christian marriage, denouncing

slavery and polygamy in favour of monogamy and romantic love. Voltaire's line 'Je me croirais haï d'être aimé faiblement,' which could come from Racine or Corneille, is given full rhetorical rein in Hill, who nonetheless feels entitled to make another addition about the 'coldness' of the East, nowhere to be found in Voltaire: an oblique and unconscious comment perhaps on the 'coldness' of classical French poetic drama to English ears, in need of the warmth and passion the translator, imbued with Shakespeare, can provide. Stazzone once again is essential, less rather than more rhetorical in translating Orosmane's speech:

Je n'irai point en proie de lâches amours,
 Aux langueurs d'un sérail abandonner mes jours.
 J'atteste ici la gloire, et Zayre, et ma flamme,
 De ne choisir que vous pour maîtresse et pour
 [femme

De vivre votre ami, votre amant, votre époux,
 De partager mon cœur entre la guerre et vous..
 Je vous aime, Zayre; et j'attends de vôtre âme
 Un amour qui réponde à ma brulante flamme.
 Je l'avouerais. Mon cœur ne veut le tien
 qu'ardemment ;

Je me croirais haï d'être aimé faiblement.
 De tous mes sentiments tel est le caractère.
 Je veux avec excès vous aimer et vous plaire

But Heaven, to blast that unbelieving race,
 Taught me to be a king, by thinking like one..
 Passion, like mine, disdain's my country's
 [customs;

The jealousy, the faintness, the distrust,
 The proud, superior coldness of the east...
 I should believe you hated, had you power
 To love with moderation

Diletta Zaira..Io non mi darò in preda a vili amori
 tra i diletta d'un seraglio; ma a te, vezzosa Zaire, offrirò il
 mio cuore. Giuro di non scegliere altra che te per amante e
 per sposa, dividere il mio cuore tra la guerra e te...Io t'amo,

Zaira, ed esigo che tu corrisponda al mio caldo affetto, mi
crederei odiato, se lo fossi debolmente

Extract 5

This extract suggests the extent to which Hill sees *Zaïre* as step-brother of *Othello*, shading his translation accordingly. As translator Hill exhibits not a Bloomian anxiety of influence, but fratricidal rather than patricidal tendencies. Corasmin and Orosmane, hiding, observe a meeting between Zaïre and the man they begin to suspect of being her lover, though he is in fact her brother. In Voltaire's text, Corasmin attempts to persuade his master of the dangers of acting upon jealous impulse: 'De ce soupçon jaloux écoutez-vous l'erreur?' In Hill's version, the number of exclamation marks betrays the significance he attaches to this moment, a translatorial wink to the audience perhaps, while the 'error' of jealousy is attenuated and the sentence becomes less a piece of sound advice than what sounds like compromised wishful thinking. Stazzone, who has no vested interest whatsoever in making of this piece an undiscovered work of Shakespeare, gives a more fully reasoned account of Orosmane's emotional state: rather than foreground the question of jealousy and make equivocal Corasmin's part in aggravating Orosmane's response, her approach is to – and I can only use the Italian word here – *sdrammatizzare* – de-dramatise:

Or: Corasmin, que veut donc cet esclave infidel?
Il soupirait...ses yeux se sont tournés vers elle.
Les as-tu remarqués ?
Co: Que dites-vous, seigneur ?
De ce soupçon jaloux écoutez-vous l'erreur ?

Didst thou mark th'imperious slave ?
Or: What could he mean? – he sigh'd, and, as he
[went,
Turn'd and look'd back at Zara!
Didst thou mark it?
Co: Alas! My sovereign master! Let not jealousy
Strike high enough to reach your noble heart!
O: Piuttosto io rinunzierei al mio impero, anziché

perderla; ella contracambia l'amore mio ed io sono lieto di averla eletta per Sultana...Per dirtela mi disgustò la temerità ch'egli si ebbe di volgere frequenti gli sguardi sulla mia benamata

C: Sareste voi geloso?

O: Io geloso?...non sono geloso...Chiunque sospetta invita ad essere tradito. Io voglio la mia amata, soggetta al solo amore...s'io lo fossi?! Ah, scacciamo quest'idea molesta...

Extract 6 : Act 2

If a fundamental difference between Voltaire's work and that of Shakespeare, as Besterman has it, is that *Zaïre* is about Zaïre, and *Othello* about Othello, Hill's translation subtly diminishes the role of the female lead, to emphasise the part of the foreign lover, Orosmane, the erstwhile Othello. In Act Two, Zaïre expresses the depths of her passion for Orosmane: as yet unable to tell him why the marriage must be postponed, owing to the intransigence and religious fanaticism not of Orosmane but of her brother Nerestan, she hints at the obstacles to their love. Yet her speech is cut by as much as half in the English version as the translator attempts to wrest Shakespearean drama from the French writer. While the female Italian translator reports the speech intact, in naturalistic prose, and has even added to the melodramatic pathos by specifying at the start of the play that Zaïre is a mere sixteen years old (a detail unstated in Voltaire), Hill cuts the following lines:

Z: A ta loi, Dieu puissant, oui, mon âme est rendue;
 Mais fais que mon amant s'éloigne de ma vue.
 Cher amant ! ce matin l'aurais-je pu prévoir,
 Que je dusse aujourd'hui redouter de le voir ?
 Moi, qui de tant de feux justement possédée,
 N'avais d'autre bonheur, d'autre soin, d'autre
 [idée,
 Que d'entretenir, d'écouter ton amour,
 Te voir, te souhaiter, attendre ton retour ?
 Hélas ! et je t'adore, et t'aimer est un crime

Z : Dio onnipossente! La tua legge assoggetti la mia anima, ma fa che il mio amante stii da me lontano. Mio bene amato ! Avrei mai potuto prevedere ch'io oggi dovea temere la tua presenza? Io, che non avevo altra felicità, altra cura, altra idea che di conversare teco, d'ascoltare il tuo amore, vederti, desiderarti, attendere il tuo ritorno! Ohimè io t'adoro e l'amarti è un delitto!!

Extract 7

Some of the tenderest lines of the French play find themselves transformed and amplified in English but not in the Italian version. More is decidedly less as the anguished repetition of Zaire's name disappears in Hill's account. Powerful emotion which confounds speech (the silent dots are eloquent here) is displaced by high-register language which transforms this delicate moment of desperate love into a declamatory opportunity for Orosmane to demonstrate his rhetorical virtuosity and his adherence to an English dramatic tradition, rather than to display inchoate emotion which should render him speechless:

Zayre, vous pleurez?...
 Zayre, vous m'aimez!...
 Dieu, si je l'aime, hélas !
 Eh bien, vous me quittez, Zayre ?

Alas ! I have no art; not even enough
 To hide this love, and this distress you give me.
 O - New riddles! Speak with plainness.
 What canst thou mean?

Ma Zaira, tu piangi..
 Zaira, dunque mi ami?..
 Z Se io vi amo! Ohimé ! e mel chiedete ?
 Zaira, tu mi lasci ?

We might see the translations of Hill and Stazzone as diacritical and entropic, the one adding emphasis and flourish in order to suture the gap between natural/national text and translation, the

other marking difference through prose rather than poetic rendition, transforming the text not into a product of the Italian cultural tradition but, if anything, into another borrowing from French theatre dominant in the Italian peninsula during the nineteenth century, the melodrama of Sardou and Scribe.

A second triad of texts and translations, one of which is also by the Sicilian Stazzone, casts further light on the question of translation and national identity (textual, translational and cultural) and on the loss of innocence of translators whose texts, far from transparent transpositions, are viewed through the optics of an ideology refracted in time and space.

Translation and Nationalism: Stazzone and Petrettini

Two translations appeared in Italy, twenty years apart, of the letters of Lady Mary Montagu Wortley. Best known now for her correspondence with friends (including her detractor, Alexander Pope), during a voyage to Constantinople in 1716-1717 where her husband was ambassador, Lady Mary was an assiduous writer of letters and social observer from her early youth onwards. She was also one of the first writers to report back about life and customs in the East, particularly with regard to the harems and wash houses, closed to the male officials there to promote the work of military and economic imperialism. In later years, after her separation from her husband, she moved to Italy where she spent another twenty years before her definitive return to England. The two translations, by Maria Petrettini and Cecilia Stazzone, which appeared respectively in 1858 and 1880, (the latter makes no mention of the former, and may not have known of it) differ in some substantial and significant aspects. Petrettini translates a larger number of the letters while Stazzone, herself the author of a piece of travel writing, focuses on the journey to, and sojourn in, Constantinople. Both texts are mediated for their readers by a preface. As much as the translations themselves, the prefaces offers their own Steinerian hermeneutic act, offering the reader an interpretive key to the political and cultural, as well as linguistic, operations on the text operated by the translator.

Petrettini is the author of the *Vita di Cassandra Fedele* (1852).

Cassandra Fedele (1465-1558) Italian (Venetian) Renaissance poet and philosopher, herself a letter-writer to leading intellectual thinkers in both Italy and Spain, who gave her graduation oration in Latin and was highly skilled in the Classics, emerged from the semi-obscure of her marriage to discuss the extent to which women might benefit from the opening up of learning in the Humanities.²⁸ Petretini's preface to her own translation of Lady Mary's letters identifies her as a Corcirese,²⁹ a 'Corfiot', one of the many Italians of Venetian extraction living in Corfu following the Venetian occupation of the island from 1401-1797. Petretini's interest in this text can thus be seen to be multi-faceted: a female pen appealed to a writer and translator interested in a female genealogy of writing; the female form of letter-writing is common to both Lady Mary and Cassandra Fedele, as a way of evading the strictures and shibboleths about female authorship; while the confrontation of cultures, a Westerner visiting the East, was surely of profound interest to a writer brought up on the island of Corfu, a borderline, as was Venice itself, between West and East. Stazzone was from the other end of the peninsula, her cultural reference Sicily rather than Venice, but in a similar or at least parallel cultural cleft. Lady Mary's text is thus translated either side of the Unification of Italy, from opposite ends of the peninsula.

The paratext of Petretini's translation offers a considerable amount of information: these are the 'Lettere di Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, moglie dell'ambasciatore d'Inghilterra presso la Porta Ottomana, durante i suoi primi viaggi in Europa, Asia ed Africa. Tradotte dall'Inglese da Maria Petretini Corcirese.' The 'Prefazione della Traduttrice' immediately foregrounds the self-promoting role and person of the translator herself: already in line 3 the 'viaggio' is 'da me nell'italiana favella traslatato' and in the ensuing series of double negatives the archaizing prose of the translator posits her as offering a service to the students of both languages, English and Italian; to the 'gentil sesso,' and to those unable or unwilling to learn languages but who nonetheless 'si compiacciono de que' buoni libri, da' quali con molto diletto non picciol Tesoro puossi raccogliere d'utili e peregrine cognizioni' (p.3). While she modestly proclaims herself 'lungi dall'immaginar di aver colto in quel segno, a cui ogni non volgar traduttore deve mirare, di conservar, cioè, per quanto è in lui, il carattere originale del suo autore', transla-

tion becomes both travel and dialogue. a way of travelling to lands 'purtroppo al moderno viaggiatore presso che sconosciute' where 'we' can converse with those other than ourselves. While the Corfiot Petrettini regrets some of the Protestant Lady Mary's less than complimentary comments on diverse religious practice, 'se quel suo motteggiar in fatto di religione a buon diritto per noi si condanna' (p.4), she is swift immediately to re-attach her to the prestigious classical tradition, 'quelle scelta erudizione attinta ai migliori fonti antichi e moderni.'

Petrettini defends her excision of all letters between Lady Mary and her husband, and is more interested in Lady Mary's great Italian friend Algarotti, here recalled as he locates his English friend within a rather different female (sexualised) tradition, appropriating Virgil's line on Penthesilia ('Bellatrix audetque viris concurrere virgo'): for Algarotti 'nel drappello delle donne eccellenti non pochi passi innanzi alla Gambara, alla Deshouliere (sic), alla Sevigné, e di pari con la Saffo è da mettersi Lady Maria Montague' (Petrettini, pp.v-vi, sic). After this very subtle hint as to the nature of Lady Mary's sexuality as much as her textuality, Petrettini also recalls the translation of some of Lady Mary's poems the by abbé Conti,³⁰ who 'dopo essersi scagliato contra tutti coloro, che vogliono, a detta d'Orazio, in onta ad Apollo e a Minerva esser tenuti autori originali, gli esorta a studiare invece qualche lingua antica o moderna e a contentarsi del vanto di buoni traduttori' (Petrettini, p.vi).

Agreeing with the abbé Conti's call for the learning of languages, and translations by what they both term 'volgarizzatori', in order to increase our sum of knowledge - 'per lo allargar che faranno i limiti del nostro sapere' (Petrettini, p.vii) - and concurring that there is much more to be learnt from a translation and wider readership of Lady Mary than a learning of language, Petrettini nonetheless offers a mild criticism of the abbé's own translation's of some of Lady Mary's poems: while the abbé regrets wistfully that 'così avessi potuto tradurle con quel brio, e con quella gentilezza di stile che adoperò la Lady', Petrettini comments: 'sembra infatti ch'è siasi accorto d'averè alquanto stemperato in una troppo larga versione il culto e succoso stile dell'Originale'; despite his many years in England and 'il miglior Dizionario Anglo-Italiano che corra tra noi', the abbé was not a 'traduttor molto fedele' (Petrettini viii).

If the abbé's abilities as a translator are suspect, he nonetheless provides a figure of cultural prestige such that her efforts will not be wasted, and that in translating Lady Mary's letters 'non avrei gettata la fatica, come intorno a cosa di tenue pregio' (Petrettini, viii).

Translation, good and faithful ('fedele') translation of a text whose cultural prestige has thus been established, is for Petrettini a means of cultural translation of the self; coming from Corfu, translation is the mechanism by which her cultural status and identity will travel from the margin to the centre. Lady Mary is here translated by 'una donna, la quale, sebbene straniera all'Italia, aspirò tuttavia a venire considerata Italiana per lo stile sin da quando pubblicò altra sua originale operetta' (Petrettini viii). The oxymoronic 'originale operetta' speaks of ambition masked by seemingly modesty, and a shift to the third person marks a further split between author and translator as she expresses her wish that the translation, if 'quel compatimento, che ottenne il suo primo lavoro, accompagnerà il secondo', will carry her into the land of Dante and into full membership of the 'bel paese dove il sì suona.'³¹ The quotation, on the final line of Petrettini's preface, from the final Canto of Dante's *Inferno*, the *bolgia* of the traitors, while it confirms Petrettini's view of translation as cultural passport, hints also, perhaps unwittingly, at the old anxious Italian adage of 'traduttore traditore.' Faithfulness rather than treachery as translator will move Petrettini to the *Paradiso* of full cultural membership of the 'bel paese'.

The preface to the second, partial translation of Lady Mary Montagu's letters, by Cecilia Stazzone,³² is written not by the author/translator but by Paolo Liroy (1834-1911), to whom Stazzone was related by marriage. Liroy, active throughout his whole life as naturalist, man of letters and statesman, himself had a scientific work, *La vita dell'universo* (1859) translated into French. The cover page of Stazzone's version reads: '*Lettere di Lady Montagu. Traduzione libera di Cecilia Stazzone, Marchesa de Gregorio, con prefazione di Paolo Liroy*', with a publication date of 1880. As national politician and cultural figure, Liroy is at pains in this preface to place Stazzone's efforts within a national educative rather than a personal cultural programme, a public rather than private political act. Lady Montagu herself belongs to 'quella classe di ingegni i più acconci alla arguta e fine osservazione, ingegni che sovente accade incontrare nel sesso gentile', and Liroy takes up arms to defend

women against the (implied) charge that in the 'sesso gentile [...] il cuore e il sentimento disgradino sempre la sodezza dei giudizi e l'acume dell'analisi' (Stazzone, 3). Following orthodox thinking, that they are good observers of mind and feelings, women, he states, 'riescono a cogliere nel microcosmo morale mille particolarità che a noi sfuggono': thus the reader is constituted as male, 'us', even if the world is reflected 'nel loro animo' as in a genre painting by Induno.³³ Femininity, bracketed as 'other', is also here relegated to the private sphere: 'la squisita indole della femmineità rarissime volte si manifesta in opere destinate a essere conosciute, poiché il pensiero delle (sic) pubblicità basta a sciuparle, trasformando in obbiettivo ciò ch'è più spiritualmente soggettivo' (Stazzone, 4).

Lady Montagu finds herself exempted from this nexus of exquisite sensibility which vanishes in the bright lights beyond the strictly private and domestic, as does Stazzone as translator, though curiously the translator is never once named. Lady Mary has, according to Lioy, 'una disinvoltura virile' (shades of Penthesilea again); her notable erudition masks the immediacy of observation which is the female gift, and Lady Mary's history as herself a translator and scholar, of Epictetus' *Enchiridion*³⁴ bestows upon her the status of 'la più greca delle scrittrici moderne' (Stazzone, 5). But in Lioy's account the Englishwoman's suspect erudition swiftly gives way to more agreeable personal rather than intellectual qualities, the result of class rather than education, as Lady Mary's letters are compared to 'conversazioni in apparenza leggiere, ma in fatto colte e brillanti; conversazioni delle quali hanno il privilegio le donne amabili, e che si elevano a un livello tanto superiore a quello ove si dibattono i nostri uggiosi affari, le nostre lotte politiche, religiose e sociali' (Stazzone, 5). Once again Lioy damns with faint praise as the 'conversazione' is locked firmly within the salon and kept safely away from social and public affairs.

Lady Mary's captivating personality is also credited with giving her access to the most hidden spaces of the East, the harem.³⁵ Quoting the more recent denunciations of polygamous marriages by Ida Pfeiffer³⁶ and Kibrizli Mehmet,³⁷ and backed up by mention of Herbert Spencer's *Principles of Sociology*,³⁸ Lioy designates Lady Mary as 'artista', and as such unable to recognize the full import of what she saw before her eyes:

Come Teofilo Gauthier e come Edmondo de Amicis, resta troppo spesso abbagliata dagli splendori dei cieli e dagli occhi neri [...], più che non sia offesa dal lezzo di una società putrida, ove la donna non è che un arnese di voluttà, e insieme un ordigno di intrigo, di menzogna e di servitù. (Stazzone, 9)

While Kibrizli Mehmet 'ci mostra l'arem senza veli', Lady Mary 'si arresta innanzi al manto scintillante d'oro e di gemme, e non osa sollevarlo' (Stazzone, 9). Nonetheless, Lioy concludes, this translation by 'un'egregia scrittrice già nota per brillanti lavori originali', together with Kibrizli Mehmet's work and a third book by a woman, Mrs Stenhouse's *A lady life among the Mormons*,³⁹ are mutually complementary - seen here not as works of art but of sociology, revelatory of the 'interessante fenomeno' of polygamy. (Stazzone 13). Lioy's anxiety is that 'codesta influenza [...] distrugge il focolare domestico, annienta la famiglia, e nel posto lasciato vuoto da tutte le virtù domestiche più care e più santé innalza il trono della menzogna' (Stazzone 12-13). His deployment of Catholic and gendered rhetoric attempts to maintain the domestic hearth as the proper place for the woman of the newly united Italy, poised between, and threatened by, both East and West.

One of the most famous episodes related by Lady Mary in the *Letters* is her visit to the bathing house, the *hamman*, the 'bagnio' as she terms it.⁴⁰ Describing the sequence of hot and cold rooms with their raised marble sofas, fountains and streams of sulphur, Lady Mary comments laconically and teasingly that with the heat 'twas impossible to stay there with one's clothes on.' Numerous commentators have remarked on the languid nature of Lady Mary's gaze on the women before her:

...all being in the state of nature, that is, in plain English, stark naked, without any beauty or defect concealed. Yet there was not the least wanton smile or immodest gesture amongst them. They walked and moved with the same majestic grace which Milton describes of our general mother. There were many amongst them as exactly proportioned as ever any goddess was drawn by the pencil of Guido or Titian, and most of their skins shiningly white, only adorned by their beautiful hair divided into many tresses, hanging on their shoulders,

braided either with pearl or ribbon, perfectly representing the figures of the Graces.

I was here convinced of the truth of a reflection I had often made, that if it was the fashion to go naked, the face would be hardly observed. I perceived that the ladies with finest skins and most delicate shapes had the greatest share of my admiration, though their faces were sometimes less beautiful than those of their companions. (*Turkish Embassy Letters*, p.59).

Petrettini is keen to show herself up for the translation challenge, to render a version that is 'fedele' and which exhibits a mastery of syntax and lexis sufficient to mark the translator as a figure of Italian culture. The somewhat archaic forms manifest in her Introduction (the Dantesque 'favella') fit more comfortably with a text more than a hundred years old than in the translator's preface. Her translation has some of the expository and clarificatory expansion seen to be typical of translated texts, and the rhetorical level is, if anything, raised. At the start of the letter, for example, Montagu's 'everything I see appears to me a change of scene' becomes 'ogni cosa, che corre alla vista mi si trasmuta come in una nuova scena' (Petrettini, 114). She is more accurate than Stazzone, who mistakes the wooden lattices on coaches to be the 'lati' or 'sides', while Petrettini has 'gelosie', and Petrettini is similarly more imaginative than Stazzone about the women who 'peep through' these same lattices: for Petrettini 'possono a piacere [...] far capolino' while for Stazzone the shutters enable the 'signore' rather more boldly and less coyly to 'affacciarsi' (Stazzone, 59).

In Petrettini's version, 'plain English' becomes 'buon Inglese' and the pleasing lack of wantonness evident amongst the women in the hamman is shifted from the past to the present tense: 'Pur qui non regna la più piccolo lascivia, non sorriso, non gesto, che sia sconcio, o immodesto [...] Ve ne sono alcune, che hanno le forme stesse della Dea, che il pennello di Guido e di Tiziano ci rappresentano. [...] Onde io qui mi confermai della verità di una mia riflessione, fatta altre volte: cioè che se la costumanza ci fosse d'andare affatto ignude, la faccia sarebbe appena osservata.' The next sentence only very slightly dilutes the implications of Lady Mary's gaze as it rests upon the beautiful bodies before her, though the syntactical contorsions suggests that the translator is herself

slightly nonplussed: 'Perchè io mi feci accorta in quell'istante, che quelle, le quali erano di forme più belle e di carnagione più delicata, gran parte eransi attirata dalla mia ammirazione, come che di volto fossero meno belle delle loro compagne' (Petretini, 116). The lady 'that seemed the most considerable amongst them entreated me to sit by her and would fain have undressed me for the bath' becomes a de-eroticised 'mi fece sedere presso di lei e invitommi a spogliarmi', while Lady Mary's statement that her reluctant decision to leave the women swiftly behind in favour of seeing Justinian's church before having to leave town 'did not afford me so agreeable a prospect as I had left, being little more than a heap of stones' reveals a telling omission in Petretini's translation, as the church 'non produsse in me sensazione aggradevole; anzi una contraria, altro non offerendo alla vista, che un mucchio di sassi' (Petretini, 117). The comparison, and thus an oblique light cast on Lady Mary's complex sexual preferences, is lost.

A brief elision in Petretini's text becomes wholesale censorship in Stazzone's version. Her 'free' translation⁴¹ reveals itself to be constrained by seemliness and what is appropriate for the women in Paolo Liroy's imaginary kitchen. Of the description of the naked women, most of the detail (their shining skin and tresses of hair) disappears, but even more serious is the omission of the entire paragraph which proclaims Lady Mary's pleasure in observing the female form. With an abrupt 'sembravano le grazie!' she places the red pen of national gendered Catholic rhetoric through the rest of the paragraph. She also ends her translation of the letter at the point where, finally persuaded to open her shirt to the curious women, they see her stays ('busto'). The final section of the letter, which expresses her wish that she had stayed longer with the women as there was more to see, has gone. And in translating Lady Mary's moment of self-revelation, another perhaps unconscious choice is made, as she reveals the device they assume to be some sort of chastity belt imposed by her husband not to 'them', as in the original, but to 'her': 'Ciò la soddisfece pienamente, perchè credeva ch'io fossi rinchiusa in una corazza che non si potesse aprire senza l'intervento del marito tiranno!...' (Stazzone, 61, emphasis added): while the strange garment may excite interest and provide amusement for the contemporary reader eager for an unsolicited glimpse of the writer herself, the shift from the many to the one, from profligacy

to privacy, is perhaps a recollection of Lioy's horror of polygamy, of sexuality rather than marriage, of the wanton nature of desire here tamed by language. Indeed, it seems to me that Stazzone is so disturbed by this possibility that the date of the next letter is misread, and is incorrectly marked as 1716 rather than 1717.

Homi Bhabha observes that it is 'the "inter" - the cutting edge of translation and renegotiation, the in-between space - that carries the meaning of culture.'⁴² The series of textual, linguistic and cultural negotiations, elisions, shifts and censorship outlined in this paper suggest that the role of the translator is considerably more than being trained 'to choose from among the available options to express the nuances of the message.'⁴³ Whether Hill's aim of cultural hegemony, Petrettini's desire for admittance into a dominant culture, Stazzone's resistance to classical French in favour of melodramatic (also French) models, close reading of translations themselves, whether into diverse languages or multiple translations into the same target language, tells a complex tale of cultural transmission and cultural domination, of insertion of text and translator alike into a wider cultural systems, of a Derridean proliferation of meanings as each translation follows its own triadic hermeneutic pact between author, translator and reader. Lawrence Venuti comments that 'translation is no longer a phenomenon whose nature and borders are given once and for all, but an activity dependent on the relations within a certain cultural system' (Venuti, 204). Each translation, the work of cultural manipulation across both time and space, carries inscribed within it the contexts and conditions of its own making, a servant of multiple masters and cultures. Polygamous rather than monogamous perhaps, translation is certainly not an innocent art.

Notes

1. George Steiner, *After Babel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), p.31.
2. Lawrence Venuti, *The Translation Studies Reader* (Routledge: London 2000), p.334.
3. Cecilia Stazzone (1830-1893), For an account of her plays, see Sharon Wood, 'Cecilia Stazzone and Sicilian Theatre' in *With a pen in her hand: Women and writing in Italy in the nineteenth century and beyond*, eds. Verina R. Jones and Laura Lepschy, *SIS Occasional papers* 2000. Stazzone's own dramatic production shows a range of styles, influences. Melodramatic

pieces about lost inheritance and difficult families can be traced back to Scribe and Sardou, hugely popular across the Italian peninsula in the mid Nineteenth century. Some plays explore the state of contemporary Sicily, newly part of the unified nation state: one, *Il candidato*, is a political farce about corruption at local, regional and national level, a vanished prototype for Dario Fo.

4. Voltaire, *Zaïre* in *Oeuvres complètes de Voltaire : vol.vii* (Gallimard: Paris 2010).

5. Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, *The Turkish Embassy Letters* (Virago: London 1994). Stazzone translated these as *Zaïre* (Pietro Montaina & Co.: Palermo 1879) and *Lettere di Lady Montagu* (Pietro Montaina & Co.: Palermo 1880).

6. Cecilia Stazzone, *Rimembranze di un viaggietto in Italia*, ed. Ricciarda Ricorda (Il Poligrafo: Venice 2009).

7. Aaron Hill, *Zara* (1735). Accessed on Google Books.

8. Maria Petrettini, *Le lettere di Lady Mary Wortley Montagu* (Venice: 1858)

9. Susan Bassnett and Harish Trivedi (eds), *Postcolonial Translation. Theory and practice* (Routledge: London 1999), pp. 2,6.

10. Voltaire reports that it took him just over three weeks: 'La tragédie était faite. Elle ne m'a coûté que vingt-deux jours'. Quoted in *Voltaire 1731-1732* ed. Theodore Besterman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965), p.285.

11. Voltaire despised the representation of love on the French stage. His own work is designated as being about 'amour' rather than trivial and superficial 'galanterie'. See Besterman, *cit.*, p.288.

12. Of dramatic tragedy, Voltaire writes that : 'La France n'est pas le seul pays où l'on fasse des tragédies; et notre goût, ou plutôt notre habitude de ne mettre sur le théâtre, que de longue conversations d'amour, ne plaît pas chez les autres nations. Notre théâtre est vide d'action et de grands intérêts, pour l'ordinaire [...] Si vous aviez vu jouer la scène entière de Shakespeare, telle que je l'ai vue et telle que je l'ai à peu près traduite, nos déclarations d'amour et nos confidantes vous paraîtraient de pauvres choses auprès' (Quoted in Besterman, *cit.*, p.279). Racine's *Bajazet* (1672), similarly set in an Eastern harem, has also been seen as a possible intertext for *Zaïre*.

13. Voltaire translated *Julius Caesar* and *Anthony and Cleopatra*. See Philip E. Cranston "'Rome en anglais se prononce Roum...": Shakespeare version by Voltaire.' *MLN* 1975 (809-837).

14. See for example Voltaire's *Lettres philosophiques* ed F.A.Taylor (Blackwell : Oxford 1976) for an account of Voltaire's volte-face with regard to Shakespearean drama.

15. Voltaire, 'Sur la tragédie : dix-huitième lettre' in *Lettres philos-*

ophiques (cit.), pp.68-72.

16. Abbé le Blanc, quoted in H. Monod-Cassidy, *Un voyageur-philosophe au XVIII siècle* (Cambridge 1941), p.289.

17. See *Voltaire* vol.8, 17-32, ed T.Besterman, pp.304-5.

18. F.C. Green, for example, stated that 'Zaire, far from revealing Shakespearean influence on Voltaire, is convincing proof of the impossibility of any real *rapprochement*, let alone a fusion of the two types of tragedy, English and French.' *Minuet: a critical survey of French and English literary ideas in the eighteenth century* (London 1935).

19. Besterman, *op.cit.*, p.306

20. See Voltaire's own rejection of the charge in his preface to the play: 'Many an inexorable critic has carped at and slashed me, and many a remorseless jester has pretended that I only filched an improbable Romance, which I had not the sense to improve; that I have lamed and spoiled the subject' Quoted in Besterman, *cit.*, p. 302.

21. Voltaire, *Oeuvres complètes (cit.)*, p.41.

22. Hill's was not in fact the first translation. Besterman notes the existence of a translation by a writer called Johnson, mentioned in the *Gentleman's Magazine*. Besterman, *cit.*, p.290.

23. Besterman, *cit.*, p.302

24. Besterman, *cit.*, p.304

25. Besterman, *cit.*, p.291

26. The Prologue begins: The French, how'er mercurial they seem,/ Extinguish half their fire, by critic phlegm;/ While English writers Nature's Freedom claim,/ And warm their scenes with an ungobern'd flame.

27. There were numerous performances of the play in Venice, Rome and Naples throughout these years, cities which Stazzone recalls visiting in her *Rimembranze*. For an account of performances of Voltaire's plays in Italy in the Nineteenth century, see L. Ferrari, *Le Traduzioni italiane del teatro tragico francese nei secoli CVII e XVIII* (Paris 1925). I am grateful to Dr Rita Wilson of Monash University, Australia, for providing information from this book.

28. See *Cassandra Fedele, Letters and Orations* edited and translated Diana Maury Robin (University of Chicago Press, 2000).

29. Corfu was widely known as Kerkra, the 'Door of Venice'. Other writers defined themselves as 'Corcirese', for example the writer and poet Marios Pieris (1776-1852).

30. Abbé Antonio Conti (1677-1748), friend of Lady Mary and recipient of a number of her letters. The Abbé Conti translated some of Lady Mary's poetry, together with the Rape of the Lock by Alexander Pope.

31. 'Ahi Pisa, vituperio de le genti / del bel paese là dove 'l sì suona'. Dante Alighieri, *Inferno*, Canto XXXIII lines 79-80.

32. I wish to thank the *Biblioteca delle donne* of Bologna for providing

a digital copy of this very rare book.

33. Lioy here refers to Domenico Induno (1815-1878). After following both Neoclassicism and Romanticism, Induno became best known for his portraits of daily life in Milan.

34. Epictetus, AD55-AD135, Stoic philosopher and author of the *Enchiridion* and *Discourses*.

35. 'Le ricche e sontuose carceri ove vivevano le grandi dame e le favorite accoglievano contro ogni uso codesta europea simpatica, elegante, seduttrice, che nei frivoli colloqui rapiva i segreti galanti, svelava gl'intrighi, esplorava i costumi che doveano rendere così piacevole la lettura delle pagine ove mano a mano veniva dipingendoli' (Stazzone, 6).

36. Ida Laura Pfeiffer, *A visit to the Holy Land, Egypt and Italy*, trans. H.W.Dulcken (1846)

37. Malik-Khanam, *Thirty years in the harem* Malik Khanam was the wife of H.H. Kabrizli-Mehmet-Pacha. The book was translated into English, German, French and Swedish, but not Italian. Lioy references the French translation.

38. Herbert Spencer, *Principles of Sociology* (London, 1855)

39. Mrs T.B.H. Stenhouse, *A lady life among the mormons* (Russel: New York 1872). The book details the writer's experience as one of the wives of a Mormon elder over a period of twenty years.

40. The letter, to the unidentified Lady __ (possibly Lady Rich) was written from Adrianople, 1 April 1717. Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, *The Turkish Embassy Letters* pp.57-60.

41. We might recall Nabokov's comment that the term "free translation" smacks of knavery and tyranny. It is when the translator sets out to render the "spirit" – not the textual sense – that he begins to traduce his author. The clumsiest literal translation is a thousand times more useful than the prettiest paraphrase.' Vladimir Nabokov, 'Problems of translation: Onegin in English', reprinted in Lawrence Venuti (*cit.*), pp. 115-127 (p.115).

42. Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (1994).

43. Jeremy Munday, *Introducing Translation Studies: Theories and Applications* (Routledge: London 2001), p.59.

Translations

La donna e l'opinione

by Anna Maria Mozzoni

*Translated by Susan Amatangelo, Alexandra Bruzzese, and
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Anna Maria Mozzoni (1837-1920) was one of Italy's most influential feminists. Politically, she began as a Mazzinian and later helped to found the Italian Socialist Party, with whom she eventually parted ways. In 1864, Mozzoni wrote her first work on the emancipation of women, a series of essays entitled *La donna e i suoi rapporti sociali* (Woman and Her Social Relationships). She continued to write feminist essays throughout her career and also translated John Stuart Mills' *The Subjection of Women* in 1870. Mozzoni was renowned not only as a writer and translator, but also as a founder of women's rights groups and an Italian representative at international conferences. Above all, she is remembered for her singular devotion to the cause of women's suffrage, a dream that would not become reality until after her death, nearly a century after she began her fight.

Mozzoni wrote *La donna e i suoi rapporti sociali* (Woman and Her Social Relationships), a series of eight essays, to protest the revision of Italian Civil Code, which denied women their civil rights and limited their authority within the family. The collection was first circulated by the Genovese newspaper *Il dovere*, as a gift to its subscribers, then published as a volume by Tipografia Sociale in Milan.

The historian Franca Pieroni Bortolotti rediscovered Mozzoni in the 1970s, publishing all of her most important writings in *Anna Maria Mozzoni. La liberazione della donna* (Milano: Mazzotta, 1975).

“La donna e l’opinione” (Woman and Opinion) is the first essay in the series. The translators used Pieroni Bortolotti’s published and excerpted version of the essay, the only one currently available.

1. La donna e l'opinione

«Anima che per biasmo si dibassa
 O per lode s'innalza è debil canna
 Cui move a scherzo il venticel che passa.»

Molti e molti parlarono della donna, i quali anche pretesero parlame seriamente, ma io non istimo che il difficile problema che ella presenta, all'uomo, alla famiglia, alla società, svolto sì dottamente e finalmente da tanti, in epoche diverse, in svariate località, abbia tutti interi raccolti i dati onde completi ne risultano i criterii; oserei anzi asserire che niun scrittore forse trovossi, parmi, fin qui che, se uomo, sapesse appieno dimenticare le passioni, se donna, gl'interessi, onde sarei per dire desiderabile cosa nell'ardua tesi un criterio neutro affatto che, non punto interessato ad esagerare i vizii o i pregi del sesso femminile, né a coprirli, ce ne desse la pittura imparziale e con essa i dati e gli estremi ove basare un solido raziocinio, a derivarne poi analoghe ed assennate le istituzioni che debbono moderarne le condizioni e gl'interessi.

Dissi vizii o pregi, se pur tali possono esattamente chiamarsi le attribuzioni, o meglio, i naturali elementi, costituenti in un complesso logico, ed omogeneo, una natura ordinata ad un dato scopo, elementi tutti concomitanti e necessari a far della donna un essere essenzialmente distinto dall'uomo, ed in pari tempo destinato a vivergli a fianco sempre utile e necessario, a somministrargli i proprii mezzi arricchendolo così d'un'altra potenza senza sommarsi con lui, identificarsi nelle sue viste e ne' suoi interessi per modo da essergli un *alter ego* senza cessare d'esser da lui distintissimo a perpetuare quella simpatica attrazione, che distingue i rapporti dell'uomo colla donna e li fa così soavi sopra ogni altro vincolo sociale, e che sparirebbero in una completa fusione.

G.G. Rousseau considerò la donna in natura; Balzac ne disse dal punto di vista degli interessi virili; La Bruyère l'assoggettò a fina analisi senza che da questa si curasse poi derivarne riforma alcuna in lei od attorno a lei; Madame Necker non la vide che dal punto di vista di istituzioni locali, facenti spesso a pugni colla vera natura degli esseri e delle cose. Nessuno, fra tanti, studiò di proposito l'influenza delle istituzioni sul suo carattere e sulle sue condizioni.¹

1. Woman and Opinion

"Anima che per biasmo si dibassa

O per lode s'innalza è debil canna

*Cui move a scherzo il venticel che passa"*¹

So very many have discussed Woman, and have even claimed to discuss the subject seriously; but, in my estimation, the difficult problem it presents to men, family, and society – studied so expertly and finely, by so many, in different times and various places – has not been examined so completely as to produce a complete set of standards. Rather, I would dare to assert that perhaps no writer so far has been found (it seems to me) who, if a man, has known how to forget his passions and, if a woman, her interests. So that I would call it a wholly desirable thing, in this demanding thesis, to put forth a neutral analysis that – not at all interested in exaggerating the vices or merits of the female sex, nor in hiding them – would paint for us an unbiased portrait of Woman, and with it, provide data and details upon which to base a solid reasoning. One could then derive from it analogous and judicious institutions whose duty it would be to moderate Woman's condition and interests.

I said vices and merits, although they can more accurately be called attributions; or better, the natural elements that in a coherent and homogenous whole constitute an ordered nature with a given goal. Such elements are all present and necessary to make Woman a being essentially quite different from Man, and, at the same time, destined to live by his side, always useful and necessary, and to give him her own resources, thus enriching him with another energy without merging with him. She identifies with his views and interests in order to become his alter ego, without ceasing to be drastically different from him, so as to perpetuate the charming attraction that distinguishes Man's relationship with Woman and makes it gentler than all other social bonds; a quality that would disappear in a complete fusion of their identities.

J. J. Rousseau considered Woman in the context of nature; Balzac discussed her from the point of view of male interests; La Bruyère subjected Woman to a precise analysis without caring to draw any sort of reform from it; Madame Necker (sic) saw her only from the point of view of local institutions, which are often at odds with the true nature of people and things.² None among them

Tutti i poeti, dai grandi ai piccoli, dagli immortali ai *pria morti che nati*, la cantarono in ogni tono, e in ogni metro, vedendola ora colle traveggole del delirio amoroso, ora coi lividi occhiali dell'orgoglio e dell'odio per affetti incorrisposti od incompresi.

Tutte le filosofie, tutti i sistemi se ne occuparono e tutti i legislatori. E chi pretese esser ella la pura e semplice femmina dell'uomo, e non dover egli perciò conservarla che nei soli interessi della generazione, deplorando di non poter precorrere il tempo del suo sviluppo e non disfarsene dappoi. Altri considerando invece che la donna non è atta alla generazione che in una fase relativamente avanzata della sua vita, e vedendola sopravvivere tanto tempo al disimpegno delle materne cure ne derivarono, non fosse con quelle la sua missione esaurita, e pensarono potesse nelle cose del mondo portare la sua influenza, ed intervenire siccome essere intelligente e volitivo, potente di mezzi proprii. Di qui la gelosa insistenza di tutte le leggi sovente ad impedire, e sempre a sfavorire implicitamente sì, ma non meno potentemente, il sapere ed i mezzi del sapere alla donna.

Molti scrittori capirono il programma di convenienza del sesso virile, raccolsero al volo la segreta parola, e maestri dalle cattedre, oratori dal pergami, giudici dal tribunale dell'opinione, ganimedi dagli eleganti e voluttuosi gabinetti, padri con affettuosi sermoni, predicarono quotidianamente alla donna non convenirle la scienza.

Tu non sei capace di lunghi e severi studii, le disse lo scienziato, e le dimostrava, come due e due fanno quattro, che la conformazione del suo cervello, la delicatezza de' suoi tessuti, la debolezza della sua fibra, la molteplicità de' suoi bisogni, la dimostrano irrecusabilmente non nata alla scienza; ed ella si volse alla teologia. Non ti è lecito, rispose questa, sta contro te l'opinione della sacra serie dei più illustri padri della Chiesa cominciando da S. Paolo fino al sacrosanto Concilio Tridentino. D'altronde, qual bisogno hai tu di sapere? Credi ciò ch'io ti dico, e basta; la debolezza della tua mente non s'attenti di fissar lo sguardo nelle sacre cose; astienti anzi del tutto anche dalle profane *et non plus sapere quam oportet*. Ed ella si volse all'opinione. Questa, simile alla liquida massa dell'Oceano, ora spinge i suoi flutti come adamantini proi-

specifically studied the influence of institutions on her character and her condition. All poets, from the greatest to the lesser known, from the immortals to the *pria morti che nati*,³ sang of her in every pitch, and in every meter, seeing her, at times, through the lens of romantic delirium, and, at others, with the livid glasses of pride and hate because of unrequited and misunderstood affections.

All of the philosophies, all of the systems, and all of the legislators busied themselves with defining Woman's nature. And some claimed that she was Man's pure and simple female, and that he, therefore, did not have to cherish her except in the sole interest of the propagation of the species, deploring that he was not able to control the time of its development nor free himself from her afterwards. Others considered, instead, that Woman is capable of propagation only in a relatively condensed stage of her life, and seeing her survive for so long afterward, free of her maternal duties, concluded that her mission was not complete with those duties, and thought that she could bring her influence into worldly matters and intervene, since she is intelligent and determined, powerful by her own means. From here springs the jealous insistence of all the laws, often quick to impede and always to dislike – implicitly, yes, but not less powerfully – Woman's knowing and means of knowing.

Many writers have understood the convenient plan of the male sex: they grasped the secret message immediately, and teachers from their desks, orators from their stages, judges from the court of opinion, gallant young men from their elegant and luxurious rooms, priests with their affectionate sermons, preached daily to Woman that knowledge is not beneficial to her.

"You are not capable of long, arduous studies," the learned man told her, showing her that, as logically as two plus two is four, the development of the female brain, the delicacy of her tissues, the weakness of her constitution, and the multiplicity of her needs demonstrate that she is irrefutably not born for knowledge. And so Woman turns to theology. "You do not have the right," theology responded, "the opinion of the sacred series of the most celebrated fathers of the Church, beginning with Saint Paul until the sacred Council of Trent, is against you."⁴ Nevertheless, what need do you have of knowledge? Believe what I tell you, and that will suffice; the weakness of your mind should not attempt to look into sacred matters; rather, you should abstain completely, even from secular

ettili sino al cielo, ora li preme fino all'abisso; fluttuante sempre, è determinata dai più, ed è sempre indipendente da ogni pressione che non sia numero. Le sue risposte sono categoriche; ella non si crede in dovere di motivare, non si dà pena di far analisi, di stabilir confronti, non si cura di premesse, non pensa a conseguenze, ed ella rispose alla donna, non voglio, non mi piace. Ed ella si volse a chi l'amava, ed egli le rispose: Come! Tu dunque disconosci tanto i vezzi di che ti fornì natura da voler andar in cerca d'altri meno attraenti? Lascia ad una bocca mena piccola della tua la difficile articolazione di barbari paroloni, e non voler annuvolare il liscio marmo della tua fronte colle rughe dei calcoli, né voler perdere il tuo celeste sorriso fra le gravi meditazioni, né impallidir le rose del viso fra le veglie prolungate. Natura t'informò con tale studio, e di tal predilezione ti amò, che fece in te pregio l'ignoranza, e tu tutta sai, nulla sapendo. Era quasi convinta, pur s'attentò a scartabellar qualche volume della paterna biblioteca; ed ecco radunarsi a grave consiglio la famiglia ed il suo capo decidere che, consultata la religione, il costume e l'opinione, che esser debbono e sono, con ragione o senza, i tre padroni assoluti sotto i quali la donna stupida od intelligente, volente o non volente, deve piegare la testa; tutti ad unanimità decisero che la donna, se povera all'ago, se ricca all'ozio, passi la vita, ed altro scopo alla sua esistenza non cerchi oltre quello della *femmina*; che se poi s'annoiasse, libero a lei di sbadigliare a tutto suo agio.

Esclusa dal sapere, la donna, rimaneva esclusa eziandio dal potere; ed eccola ridotta a passività assoluta, *cosa* e non *essere*, di maggiore o minor valore relativo, di nessun valore intrinseco, orba d'ogni coscienza di sé, ch'è la prima ragione d'ogni forza.

Sostituitosi, collo stabilimento del cristianesimo, il regno della intelligenza a quello della forza bruta, la donna divenne strumento tuttora vitale e poderoso alla politica sacerdotale.

I religiosi terrori, certi affetti artificiali, specie di aberrazioni, di sovreccitazioni nervose, ibride creazioni del misticismo, furono allora poste in opera dai ministri di religione per averla piedi e mani legate, cieco e docile strumento ad ogni esorbitanza. E, per mezzo suo, Stati e famiglie posti a soqquadro, fatalmente compromessi e scalzati dalle radici rimangono nella storia a documento imperituro del quanto

ones, *et non plus sapere quam oportet*.”⁵ And so, she turned to opinion. This opinion, similar to the liquid mass of the ocean, sometimes pushes its waves like clear missiles towards the sky, other times it presses them down into the abyss. Constantly in flux, it is determined by the majority, always independent of every pressure that is not a number. Opinion’s responses are categorical: she does not believe that it is her duty to motivate; she does not take pains to make analyses or draw comparisons; she pays no mind to premises and she does not consider consequences. She responded to Woman, “I do not want to, I do not like it.” And so Woman turned to Man, the one she loved, who replied to her: “What! You so disregard the inclinations given to you by nature that you go in search of other, less appealing ones? Leave the difficult articulation of long foreign words to a less petite mouth than your own, and do not cloud the smooth marble of your forehead with wrinkles left by calculations, nor lose your celestial smile amongst such serious meditations, nor pale the rosiness of your face with long vigils. Nature shaped you with such care, and I loved you for that very predilection that made ignorance one of your gifts: you know everything, knowing nothing.” Woman was almost convinced, but still attempted to leaf through a few volumes from her father’s library; and so the family and its head gathered together in stern council. They consulted religion, custom, and opinion, which must be and are, rightly so or not, the three absolute fathers under which Woman, whether stupid or intelligent, willing or unwilling, must bow her head. Then everyone unanimously decided that, if she is poor, Woman must spend her life with the needle, and if she is wealthy, she must spend it in leisure; and any greater goal of her existence she need not seek beyond that of being female. Then, if she then finds herself bored, she is free to yawn all she pleases.

Excluded from knowledge, Woman remained excluded from power, as well; and here she is, reduced to absolute passivity, a thing rather than a being, of greater or lesser relative value, with no intrinsic value, blind to any consciousness of herself, which is the main reason for one’s every strength. With the establishment of Christianity, the reign of intelligence having been substituted by brute force, Woman became a still vital and powerful instrument to priestly politics. Ministers of religion conjured up religious terrors and certain false affections – kinds of aberrations, of nervous

siano funeste la ignoranza e la morale passività nella donna.

E sgraziatamente eravamo al punto in cui questa ignoranza e passività, non più un puro fatto era, ma era sistema. L'uomo aveva riescito a convincerla non esserle lecito formare il minimo criterio, né possibile formarne alcuno assennato, in base a che, avea ella abbandonato ogni studio siccome a lei improba quanto vana fatica; e questa estrema risultanza dello egoismo d'un sesso e dell'ignoranza dell'altro, diveniva alfine la pubblica opinione, assicurando al primo un tranquillo dominio.

Ma ecco ai nostri tempi sorgere col programma di tutte le possibili libertà anche alla donna un'era novella, ed in mezzo ad assennate e serie riforme affacciarsi le umoristiche esorbitanze inseparabili da ogni epoca di transizione; e tornar in campo, sublime per idealismo siccome venerata per vetustà di concetto, la repubblica platoniana. Ed ecco che, mentre l'orientalismo proclama la donna puro stromento di piacere, il cattolicismo la vuole serva rispettata, la cavalleria scopo delle imprese e premio dei tornei, la teologia, come il vasaio colla sua creta, ne fa vasi d'onore e d'obbrobrio,² la poesia il bersaglio a tutte le sue esagerazioni, il nostro secolo un'addizione al sesso virile; che fa la donna? La donna, siccome un attore che si orna per la scena, deve chiedersi ogni giorno qual commedia si rappresenti e davanti a qual pubblico, per sapere qual più le s'addica di tutti i costumi di che si vorrebbe coperta. Nessuna lusinga per lei d'uscirne coll'unanime aggradimento. Condannata ad esser relativa ai tempi, ai costumi, ai luoghi, agli individui, curva sotto il ponderoso fardello dei pregiudizii sociali, portando sola, la pena della licenza e degli errori dell'altro sesso, è, e sarà, finché non si desti alla coscienza di sé, il *paria* fra gli esseri viventi.

Ma ecco il tempo di domandarci la ragione di sì svariati giudizi sulla donna, mentre i rapporti, che la accostano all'uomo, sono semplici, sono costanti. Il senno e la buona fede, che alcuni scrittori usarono scrivendo di lei, pare avrebbero dovuto condurli a conclusioni più assennate e meno ingenerose. Ciò accusa una viziatura di sistema forse più che non passione di dominio o gelosia di proprietà: ed il secolo, che aspira al conquista d'ogni ragionevole libertà, non troverà esorbitante che la donna cerchi e studii il modo per dove iniziare la propria...

overexcitement—hybrid creations of mysticism, in an effort to have her feet and hands tied, a blind and docile instrument to use at will. As a result, States and families that were turned upside down, fatally compromised and pulled out by the roots, remain in history as an eternal document of how destructive Woman's ignorance and moral passivity are.

And, unfortunately, we were at the point in which this ignorance and passivity were no longer considered a pure fact, but a system. Man had succeeded in convincing Woman that it was not right for her to form the slightest principle, nor was it possible for her to form any judicious one; for this reason, she had foregone all her studies, since it is, for her, as exhausting as it is vain an effort. And this extreme consequence, of the selfishness of one sex and the ignorance of the other, became, in the end, public opinion, assuring its peaceful reign.

But now, in our times, a new era dawns, with the plan of giving all possible liberties even to Woman, and in the middle of judicious and serious reforms, confronts the humorous excesses inseparable from every epoch of transition. Thus, the Platonic Republic, made sublime through idealism since it is venerated for being ancient in concept, is once again in the limelight. And so now, while Orientalism proclaims Woman to be a pure instrument of pleasure,⁶ Catholicism wants her to be a respected servant; knightly tradition wants her to be the goal of quests and prize of tournaments; theology, like the potter with his clay, makes her into vases of honor and disgrace; poetry makes her the target of all its exaggerations; and our century makes her an addition to the male gender. What does Woman do? Woman, like a performer who dresses for a scene, must ask herself each day which play she wants to perform and for which audience, in order to know which of all her costumes is the most appropriate with which she would like herself covered. There is no hope for her to free herself from this situation with unanimous acclaim. Condemned to be subject to the times, to customs, places, and individuals, curved underneath the ponderous weight of social prejudices, carrying alone the penalty of the immorality and of the errors of the other sex, she is, and will be, until she awakens to a consciousness of herself, a pariah among living beings.

But now is the time to ask ourselves the reason why there exist so many varied judgments on Woman, while the relationship

... Tale è la legge fatale del progresso, legge che non mai tanto apparve come a dì nostri per la portentosa facilità delle comunicazioni, ed il generale sviluppo della vigente generazione sensibile, operosa e concitata...

... Se all'ignoranza delle verità morali e speculative avvien che si aggiunga la ignoranza della storia e degli usi e costumi di tutti i popoli (che maggior estensione suol dare alle idee, e maggior quantità di dati presenta all'esattezza del giudizio come per lo più nelle masse), allora l'opinione pubblica diviene non già organo d'intelligenza, ma misura d'ignoranza.

Basta la più leggiera tinta di storia per provarci quanto siano fluttuanti e precarie le opinioni, che non si fondano sui semplici e sovrani emanati della ragione; e siccome di assai poche verità assiomatiche trovasi l'uomo in possesso, così veggiamo lo spirito d'un secolo e d'una generazione differire enormemente dalle antecedenti e dalle susseguenti, adottarsi e ripudiarsi i sistemi, modificarsi assiduamente usi, costumi, ed istituzioni ormeggiando lente, ma indefesse il progressivo sviluppo dei popoli, il quale, attraverso a queste molteplici e svariate gradazioni morali, per legge fatale di natura e di provvidenza, sempre sale verso il meglio.

Da tutto il fin qui detto emerge che questo formidabile fantasma della opinione vuol essere guardato in faccia senza timore, e ben disquisito vuol essere, ed analizzato prima di accettarlo ed inchinarcelgli siccome a supremo arbitrato. Esaminiamo se le forme solenni, che assume, siano per avventura il puntello di interessi parziali, la tonaca lunga ed affibbiata dell'ipocrisia, la legge caduca della forza, o il semplicissimo *così faceva mio padre*, tanto potente sulle masse incolte che un bello spirito non chiamava senza ragione animal d'abitudine. Ben sovente ci accadrà di trovarci di fronte ad un colosso dal piè d'argilla; e le mie parole vi si appaleseranno ben vere, se riflettiate un istante ad un fatto gigante, che veggiamo svolgersi sotto late dimensioni nella nostra Italia in un solo quinquennio di libera vita.

Ché se a' pii esercizi rivolgerai l'animo a pietà inchinevole, sarai tosto nello spirito del volgo ipocrita o bigotta; se agli studii addestrar vorrai lo innato ingegno, sarai pedante; se alla tavoletta intenta le lunghe ore ogni cura adopreri ad esser bella, sarai tosto

that draws her close to man is simple and constant. The wisdom and good faith that some writers have used when writing about her seem to have led them to more judicious and more generous conclusions. Such writing blames a corruption of the system, perhaps more than a passion for dominion or possessiveness. And the century that aspires to the conquest of every reasonable freedom will not find it excessive that Woman seeks and studies the means by which she will initiate her own ...

... Such is progress's fatal law, a law that has never appeared like in our days, due to the phenomenal ease of communication and the general development of the current generation, which is sensitive, industrious, and passionate ...

... But if one adds to the ignorance of the moral and speculative truths the ignorance of history (which typically gives greater breadth to ideas, and submits a greater quantity of data to the exactness of judgment, as is usually the case in the masses) and of the practices and customs of all peoples, then public opinion becomes not an organ of intelligence, but a measure of ignorance.

One needs only the slightest taste of history to prove to us how fluctuating and precarious opinions are, which do not base themselves on simple and sovereign conclusions. And since man finds himself in possession of very few axiomatic truths, so we see the spirit of a century and of a generation differ greatly from the preceding and subsequent ones: they adopt and repudiate the systems, assiduously modify the practices, customs, and institutions, approaching slowly but tirelessly the progressive development of peoples, which, through these multiple and various moral gradations, by the fatal law of nature and providence, always strives for the best.

From all that has been said so far, it comes to light that this formidable ghost of opinion wants to be looked at in the face without fear, and wants to be well discussed and analyzed before we accept it and bow ourselves to it, as if to a supreme judgment. Let us examine the solemn forms that opinion assumes, whether they be, by chance: the fulcrum of partial interests, the long and buckled robe of hypocrisy, the transient law of force, or the extremely simple this is what my father did, so influential to the unlearned masses whom wit did not call creatures of habit without reason. Very often, it will happen that we find ourselves in front of a giant with clay

leggiera e vanerella; se del moto o del passeggio bisognosa ed amante, di spirito ozioso e svagato avrai la fama; se società raccogli nelle tue interne sale e di frequente sarai nei teatri vista, mille, più o men veri, galanti aneddoti circoleran sul conto tuo; se, della prole amante e del consorte, trarrai oscura e laboriosa vita fra domestici affetti e doveri, non mancherà chi a difetto di spirito e d'attrattiva la volontaria solitudine attribuisca. Se, bella essendo e corteggiata, sarai costretta per genio o per dovere a chi il cuore negare, a chi la mano, di superba o di fiera t'acquisterai rinomanza. Se natura avesti matrigna e di bellezza manchi e d'attrattive, per ciò solo d'imperdonabile delitto sei già rea, e la grazia sarà per te affettazione, la dignità pretesa, smodato sfarzo la decenza, ogni virtù ti scemerà di pregio, ed ogni neo salirà fino a deformità mostruosa.

Laonde, a premunire dalla ingiusta e dolorosa pressione di sí sventati e crudeli giudizi, la donna, che per la natia timidezza dell'animo già li soffre e li teme (e per la sua debolezza è ben già di soverchio esposta agli oltraggi) ben lunge dal curvarle vieppiù la testa sotto il giogo ingeneroso, che il filosofo ginevrino si affatica a premerle sul collo, io le fo coraggio e le ripeto:

“ Anima che per biasmo si dibassa
E per lode s'innalza è debil canna
Cui muove a scherzo il venticel che passa.”

Epperò informata alle imprescrittibili leggi della morale, non d'altri schiava che del principio che a guida togliesti del tuo operare, coll'occhio fiso al nobile fine che programma facesti della tua vita, l'occhio e l'orecchio chiudi alle migliaia che tutti importisi vorrebbero a legislatori e tiranni, e fa

“Come il Villan che posto in mezz
Al rumor delle stridule cicale
Senza curare il rauco strido loro
Segue tranquillamente il suo lavoro.”

¹ Parecchi moderni scrittori, propugnatori della redenzione della

feet; and my words will reveal themselves to be quite true to you if you reflect for a moment on a gigantic fact that we see unfold to a great extent in our Italy, in just five years of free life.

Because, Woman, if you direct your soul, inclined to piety, to pious exercises, you will be immediately viewed in the spirit of the hypocritical or bigoted people. If you wish to dedicate your innate intelligence to studies, you will be considered pedantic. If you spend long hours at your dressing table, focused on employing every method to be beautiful, you will immediately be called vain and silly. If you need, and love, to move or stroll, you will have the reputation of a dawdling and absent-minded character. If you welcome society into your parlors and are frequently seen in the theaters, a thousand (more or less true) gallant anecdotes will circulate about you. If you love your children and spouse, and you cultivate a dark and laborious life from domestic sentiments and duties, there will always be someone who ascribes your voluntary solitude to a defect in character and looks. If, being beautiful and courted, you will be constrained by taste or by duty to deny someone's heart, or someone's hand, you will acquire the renown of being proud or haughty. If you have nature for a stepmother and are lacking in beauty or appeal, for that unforgivable crime alone you are already guilty, and any grace will be considered for you an affectation; dignity will be viewed as pretense, moderate showiness as propriety. Every virtue will diminish your merit, and every mole will be exaggerated to the point of a monstrous deformity.

Whereupon, to protect her from the unjust and painful pressure of such careless and cruel judgments, to Woman — who because of the innate timidity of her soul already suffers and fears them (and because of her weakness is already excessively exposed to offenses) — far from bowing her head still more under the heavy yoke, which the Genevan philosopher strives to press upon her neck, I give courage and repeat:

*“Anima che per biasmo si dibassa
O per lode s’innalza è debil canna
Cui move a scherzo il venticel che passa.”*⁷

For this reason, having been informed of the imprescriptible laws of morality — not a slave to others, but to the principle that

donna, studiarono anche l'influenza delle istituzioni sul suo carattere, ma le loro idee non sono per anco volgarizzate.

²Mentre la donna riscuote nella cattolica canonizzazione l'onore degli altari, e nella persona della Vergine Maria è divinizzata (*Deipara*), St. Pier Damiani scrive esser le donne "Dulpamenta diaboli, virus mentium, aconita bibentium, gineceoe hostis antiqui, upupoe, ululae, sanguisugae, scorta, prostibula, volutabra porcorum pinguium, cubilia spirituum immundorum, nymphae, sirenae, lamiae, diana, ecc., ecc."

you took as the guide to your activity – with your eye fixed on the noble purpose that you made your life's plan, close your eyes and ears to the thousands of plans that everyone would like to impose on you, legislators and tyrants alike, and say:

“Come il Villan che posto in mezzo
Al rumor delle stridule cicale
Senza curare il rauco strido loro
Segue tranquillamente il suo lavoro.”⁸

¹ The phrase refers to poets who never achieved greatness, though its source is unclear.

² The verses that Mozzoni cites as her epigraph come from a poem by Angelo Mazza (1741-1817), entitled “Per Santa Cecilia”: “The soul that debases itself because of blame/Or that exalts itself because of praise is a weak reed/That the passing breeze moves playfully.” *Poesie di Angelo Mazza parmigiano* (Presso N. Capurro: 1816), 103.

³ The writers to which Mozzoni refers are: Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778), one of the principle figures of the Enlightenment; Honoré de Balzac (1799-1850), a French Realist writer; Jean de la Bruyère (1645-1696), a French moralist and essayist; and Suzanne Curchod (1737-1794), also known as Madame Necker, a Swiss literary figure and writer.

⁴ The Council of Trent opened in December 1545 and closed in December 1563.

⁵ “. . . not to be more wise than it behooves to be wise . . .” (Romans 12:3).

⁶ Mozzoni's comment refers, perhaps, to the influence of the Orient on the arts in nineteenth-century Europe, which translated into the representation of women as erotic objects.

⁷ The Genevan philosopher mentioned by Mozzoni is Jean-Jacques Rousseau. For the source of the verses she cites, which repeat those of the epigraph, see note one.

⁸ Lorenzo Pignotti (1793-1812) is the author of these verses, which actually begin “E fo come . . .”: “Like the farmer who when placed in the middle/Of the noise of the strident cicadas/Without caring about their hoarse screeching/Continues his work peacefully.” *Favole e novelle del dottore Lorenzo Pignotti* (Cazin: 1786), 179.



Aspra.

Excerpt from *Il Marchese di Roccaverdina* by Luigi Capuana

Translated by Santi Buscemi

Santi Buscemi is the son of immigrants from Agrigento, Sicily. His translation of Luigi Capuana's *C'era Una Volta* was published as *Sicilian Tales* by Dante University of America Press in 2009. This bilingual edition includes twenty fairy tales and an introduction to Sicilian literature by the translator. Buscemi teaches English at Middlesex County College in Edison, NJ.

He has also published a translation of *The Interrogation*, one of Capuana's Sicilian plays, in the *Journal of Italian Translation*. In February 2012, the play was presented as a dramatic reading at the Italian-American Writers Association. Other works include "Finding Sicily" in *Primo* magazine, and several translations of Capuana's fairy tales in *Italica*, the *Journal of Italian Translation*, and *Forum Italicum*. He is currently seeking a publisher for his translation of *Il Marchese di Roccaverdina* in its entirety.

Chapter 19

Published in 1901, *Il Marchese di Roccaverdina* is Luigi Capuana's masterpiece and one of the most important works of verismo, the literary movement whose most famous writers were Capuana, Verga, and di Roberto. A compelling study of passion, murder, regret, guilt, and madness, *Il Marchese* ranks among the best European novels of the twentieth century.

Shortly after the novel begins, we learn that the Marchese, the only child of a wealthy Sicilian family, had pursued a ten-year affair with Agrippina Solmo, his beautiful house maid. When pressed to take a wife from his own class, he marries Agrippina off to Rocco Criscione, the foreman of his country estate. First, however, he makes Agrippina and Rocco promise that they will never

consummate the marriage and that she is to remain the Marchese's mistress. Not long after they wed, Rocco is murdered. An innocent man is convicted of the crime and sentenced to life imprisonment. Meanwhile, the real killer walks free along the streets of Ràbbato, the city in which the novel is set. Later, Agrippina marries a shepherd and moves away.

Chapter 19, which follows, opens with a vision of storm clouds that promise to end a long draught that has brought famine to eastern Sicily and that threatens the new wine cooperative at Margitello in which Marchese has just invested. Earlier, the Marchese became engaged to Zòsima Mugnos, a spinster from a noble but impoverished family, who agreed to wait until the drought was over before setting a date for the wedding.



Catania, Piazza Duomo.

Capitolo 19

E una mattina dietro, dietro i colli di Barrese, si erano affacciate le nuvole, lentamente, quasi non avessero viso di mostrarsi dopo di essersi fatte desiderare diciotto mesi, o quasi non riconoscessero più la strada da percorrere per andare verso Ràbbato. Si erano affacciate lungo un gran tratto, addensandosi una dietro all'altra, spingendosi una su l'altra; poi, si erano fermate.

Dalle finestre, dai balconi che guardavano verso Barrese, uomini, donne, ragazzi protendevano le mani, invocandole, chiamandole come persone vive capaci di udire e d'intendere. E dalle casupole rasente il ciglione, dai vicoli, dalle vie la gente sbucava, affluiva nei punti da dove avrebbe potuto accertarsi coi propri occhi che la voce corsa rapidamente attorno: «Le nuvole! Le nuvole!», non fosse stato un perfido scherzo di qualche cattivo burlone.

La spianata del Castello formicolava di persone d'ogni classe accorse ad osservarle come spettacolo nuovo e inatteso. Sarebbero rimaste ferme là? Si sarebbero disperse? Che attendevano ormai per farsi avanti e dirompersi in pioggia?

Dense, nerastre, bianchicce agli orli, esse si distendevano, si avvolgevano, si allungavano, si confondevano insieme, formando un cupo velario sul fil dei colli di Barrese.

«Non si muovono; hanno paura di noi che stiamo a guardarle», disse un vecchio contadino; e rise.

Ma nessuno rise con lui. Tutti erano intenti a seguire con occhi ansiosi le instabili forme che, lente lente, si andavano mutando, agglomerandosi qua, assottigliandosi là; e le labbra mormoravano preghiere, voti, esortazioni a le capricciose che non si decidevano a prendere il volo per venire a spargere il lor fecondo tesoro di pioggia su quelle terre laggiù, languenti di sete, invocanti dalle mille fenditure, simili a bocche riarse, il refrigerio di qualche stilla d'acqua e da lunghi mesi, incessantemente.

Poi, una delle nuvole più lievi si staccò, si avviò come nave di avanguardia, subito seguita da un'altra e da una terza; e le palpebre di quegli occhi che stavano a spiare ogni movimento cominciarono a battere frequenti dalla profonda commozione; e quei cuori, tremanti per la dubbiosa aspettativa, palpitarono di gioia vedendole venire avanti, non più una dietro all'altra, ma insieme, silenziosamente, e invadere il cielo azzurro e oscurarlo, abbassandosi verso

Chapter 19

And one morning, behind the hills of Barrese, the clouds appeared, slowly, as if they lacked the courage to show themselves after having been absent for eighteen months or as if they no longer recognized the road to Ràbbato. They appeared in a long line, gathering one behind the other, rolling over one another; then they stopped.

From the windows, from the balconies that faced Barrese, men, women, children stretched out their hands, invoking them, calling them as if they were living beings able to hear and understand. And from humble cottages near the embankment, from alley ways, from the streets, the people emerged flocking to places where they could be certain that the voices being heard swirling about and crying, "The clouds! The clouds!" were not the malevolent joke of an evil fool.

The esplanade of the castle resembled an anthill overrun by people of every class running to observe them, as if they were some new and unknown spectacle.

Would the clouds remain motionless there? Would they disperse? Why were they still waiting to come ahead and explode in rain? Dense, dark, whitish at the edges, they spread out, wrapped themselves around each other, merged, forming a misty darkness over the line of the hills of Baresse.

"They won't move; they're afraid of us looking at them," said an old peasant; and then he laughed. But no one laughed with him. Everyone was intent upon following with anxious eyes the unstable forms that, very slowly, continued to change, growing large here, thinning out there; and lips murmured prayers, vows, exhortations to these conscious beings not to take flight and, instead, to spread their life-giving treasure of rain on the dying land below, which had for several long months invoked the comfort of a droplet of water through thousands of cracks, like thirsty human mouths.

Then, one of the lighter clouds broke away and started off like an advanced guard, immediately followed by another, and by a third; and the eyes that were watching every movement began to blink frequently with emotion. And those hearts, trembling in doubtful anticipation started to beat faster with joy over seeing the clouds advance no longer one after the other, but together, silently,

terra quasi appesantite dal carico che portavano in seno.

E, dietro i colli di Barrese, altre già ne spuntavano più cupe, più scure che salivano su spinte dal vento di levante messosi a spirare tutt'a un tratto, impregnato di umidore; e non appena queste si eran liberate nell'aria uscite fuori dalla linea curva dei colli, altre si affacciavano, sormontavano lo spazio, incalzando le precedenti che affrettavano la corsa verso Ràbbato, coprendo con la loro ombra le campagne, le vallate illuminate dal sole, quasi ne divorassero lo splendore dorato di mano in mano che s'inoltravano verso le braccia tese incontro a loro, benedicenti quelle di esse già arrivate su Ràbbato e che passavano avanti frettolose.

E alle prime gocce di pioggia rare e stentate: «Viva! Viva la divina Provvidenza!». Non lo gridava soltanto quel centinaio di persone che parevano impazzite dalla gioia su la spianata del Castello, ma tutte le campane delle chiese squillanti a distesa, ma Ràbbato intera dai balconi, dalle finestre, dalle vie, dalle piazze dove la gente si era riversata per inebriarsi dello spettacolo della pioggia fina, fitta, e che ancora sembrava incredibile.

Nessuno pensava a scansarsi, tutti volevano sentirsela sbattere su le teste scoperte, su le facce sporte indietro, su le mani levate in alto con le palme riunite a mo' di coppa per raccogliere quella grazia di Dio, che irrompeva con impeto, rumoreggiando su le tegole, riversandosi dai canali, formando rigagnoli e gore dove si gonfiavano e scoppiavano mille bollicine, quasi l'acqua ribollisse.

E, sotto la pioggia, parecchi erano tornati prima di sera lassù, a osservare dalla spianata del Castello le campagne sottostanti che bevevano, bevevano, bevevano e non riuscivano a saziarsi. Le viottole però, i sentieri, le carraie luccicavano, segnando una gran rete argentata su i terreni scuriti; e luccicava il fiume ingrossato, che serpeggiava lambendo il piè delle colline; e luccicavano i rigagnoli rovesciantisi su la pianura dai dossi rocciosi delle colline che non sapevano che farsi dell'acqua e la rimandavano a chi più ne aveva bisogno.

E la pioggia continuava, fitta, uguale, senza tregua, stendendo un immenso velo che nascondeva le linee; i contorni, i colori, sfumando le masse delle colline e delle montagne, facendo quasi scomparire l'Etna, da farlo supporre una nuvola scioglientesi in pioggia anch'essa, laggiù, lontano.

Il cavaliere Pergola, riparato dall'ombrello, cercava con gli oc-

to invade and darken the blue sky, descending toward the earth as if weighed down by the load they carried in their wombs.

And behind the hills of Baresse, darker and more somber clouds appeared, which rose, spurred on by the west wind that, all of a sudden, began to blow, impregnated with moisture; and just as these were hovering in the air coming from the curved line of hills, others appeared, overflowing the space, following closely behind those that came before them, which rushed toward Ràbbato, covering the countryside with their shadows. Slowly they penetrated the valley, still bathed in sunshine, as if to devour its golden splendor. They were greeted by arms outstretched, blessing those that had already arrived over Ràbbato and that were moving ahead quickly.

And at the first drops of rain, which were forced and sporadic, people shouted: "Glory, glory to God!" They were greeted not only by the hundreds of people mad with joy and screaming from the esplanade of the castle, but also by all the bells of the churches ringing at full peal. And inside Ràbbato, from balconies, from windows, from the streets, from the squares, people poured out to inebriate themselves in the spectacle of the blessed heavy rain, which still seemed incredible.

No one thought about avoiding the rain. Everyone wanted to feel it fall on their uncovered heads, on their faces lifted upward, on their hands with their palms joined in the shape of a cup to collect that gift from God, which fell violently, rumbling on rooftops, pouring into the channels, forming rivulets and ponds filled with thousands of bursting bubbles, as if the water was in rebellion.

And in the rain, many people returned to the castle before evening, to observe from the esplanade the countryside below, which drank, drank, and drank but was never satisfied. However, the paths, the lanes, the carriageways glistened, stretching a great silvery net over the darkened land, as did the swollen river, which moved like a serpent licking at the feet of the hills; and the rivulets sparkled, overflowing the plain from the rocky humps of the hills that did not know what to do with the water and sent it back to those who needed it most.

And the rain continued, heavy, unchanged without respite, extending an immense veil that hid the shapes, edges, and colors of the hills and the mountains, enveloping them in a kind of smoke

chi i suoi piccoli fondi che si distinguevano appena, uno a diritta, uno a sinistra, un terzo più giù: e guardava anche verso Margitello, dove l'edificio della Società Agricola biancheggiava tra il bruno dei terreni inzuppati di acqua, e con le buche nere delle finestre senza imposte e con le mura senza tetto sembrava lo scheletro di un grande animale buttato a marcire colà.

«Anche voi qui, compare Santi? Ora non avete più niente da venire a vedere da questo lato.»

«Vengo a guardare quel che non ho più, dice bene voscenza. La roba mia se la gode il marchese di Roccaverdina!»

«Ve l'ha pagata.»

«Chi lo nega? Ma se l'è presa quasi di prepotenza; ed io ho dovuto appollaiarmi su le rampe delle Pietrenere, che sono rampe maledette!»

«Con questa pioggia però...»

«Là, a Margitello, era la pupilla dei miei occhi! Lo sa voscenza com'è stato? Volevano impigliarmi nel processo... perché era corsa qualche parola di rabbia tra Rocco del marchese e me, pel limite di ponente. Rocco (il Signore gliel'avrà perdonato) faceva gli interessi del padrone a dritto e a torto; a torto per quel che mi riguardava.»

«Ne parlate ancora?»

«Ne riparlerò sempre, finché avrò fiato!»

«Vedrete; con questa pioggia anche le rampe delle Pietrenere produrranno. Non le avete scelte male quelle rampe; vi lagnate d'una gamba sana, per non perdere il mal vezzo.»

«Eh, già! Noi poveretti abbiamo sempre torto!»

«Tempo chiuso, cavaliere! Ogni goccia è un pezzo di oro che casca dal cielo!»

«Proprio così, don Stefano!»

«Sant'Isidoro finalmente ci ha fatto la grazia!»

«Voi, don Giuseppe, s'intende, tirate l'acqua al vostro mulino; non siete sagrestano per nulla!»

Si aggruppavano imperterriti, senza curarsi che gli ombrelli li riparassero male; e, per uno che andava via, due, tre ne sopraggiungevano, quasi non potessero contentarsi di sentir scrosciare i canali e veder gonfiare i rigagnoli per le vie; volevano godersi la vista delle campagne che bevevano, bevevano, bevevano e non arrivavano a saziarsi! Ah, quella pioggia avrebbe dovuto durare

and nearly causing Etna to disappear, suggesting that, far away, a cloud had dissolved over her as well.

Cavaliere Pergola, protected by an umbrella, tried to spot his small tracts of land, which could hardly be distinguished, one to the right, one to the left, and a third farther down. And he also looked toward Margitello, where the building of the Agricultural Association shone white against the brown earth soaked with water; and with the black holes of the windows without shutters and with walls without a roof, it seemed like the skeleton of some large animal dumped there to rot.

"Are you here too, compare Santi? Now you have nothing to come and see on this side!"

"You are right, Excellency; I have come up here to look at what I no longer have. The Marchese di Roccaverdina now enjoys my property."

"He paid you for it."

"Who's denying that? But he took it almost by force; and I've had to perch on the slopes of Pietrenere, whose hills have been cursed."

"With this rain, however...!"

"The land there, at Margitello, was the apple of my eye! Do you know, Excellency, how it happened? They wanted to entangle me... because some angry words had passed between the Marchese's Rocco and me, over the western boundary. Rocco (the Lord forgive him) worked in the interests of his boss, right or wrong; but he was in the wrong about that which concerned me."

"Are you still talking about that?"

"I'll always talk about it, as long as I have breath!"

"Look, with the rain, even the slopes of Pietrenere will bear fruit. They weren't a bad choice; you complain about nothing, just to have something to complain about."

"Oh, of course. We poor folk are always wrong!"

"What's in the past is in the past, Cavaliere! Each drop is a piece of gold that falls from the sky!" said another man who had come to observe.

"So it is, don Stefano!"

"Saint Isidore has finally answered our prayers!"

"You, don Giuseppe, we understand, explain things as you see them. You're not a sacristan for nothing!"

una settimana, senza smettere un solo momento! Ci volevano pei terreni almeno tre palmi di tempera!

Da una finestra di Margitello l'ingegnere additava al marchese la gente che stava a guardare su la spianata del Castello. Non ostante il velo steso dalla pioggia, si distinguevano le macchiette nere che apparivano, cangiavano posto, si diradavano, tornavano a radunarsi.

Era giunto fin laggiù lo scampanio di tutte le chiese alle prime gocce di pioggia. E colà, contadini e lavoranti si erano abbandonati a una frenesia di grida, di salti di gioia nel cortile, mentre i ragazzi si divertivano a pestare coi piedi nelle pozze e a sbruffarsi in faccia, l'uno a l'altro, l'acqua raccolta nelle palme.

Ora, affacciati alle porte delle stanze a pianterreno, si davano spintoni per buttarsi fuori a vicenda a prendere un'insaccata di quella che veniva più fitta quasi la rovesciassero con gli orci.

«Ehi, ragazzi!... Finitela!», gridò il marchese sporgendosi dal davanzale.

Eppure tutta quell'allegria avrebbe dovuto fargli piacere!

La pioggia tanto desiderata e tanto invocata, gli aveva messo addosso, al contrario, un senso di tristezza; gli scherzi dei ragazzi lo irritavano.

Aveva ripetuto anche ultimamente a Zòsima: «Non piove! Vedete? Non piove», e la risposta di lei: «Non c'è fretta!», gli aveva fatto una cattiva impressione, che però si era subito dileguata appena ella aveva soggiunto: «Margitello non vi lascia pensare ad altro!». E ora che la pioggia era venuta, e che pioggia! ora che il solo lieve ostacolo frapposto tra loro due era già rimosso, egli non solamente non ne sentiva gioia, ma stava là, davanti a quella finestra, con gli occhi fissi su gli eucalitti grondanti acqua dai rami curvi e dalle lunghe vecchie foglie lavate dallo strato di polvere che le aveva fatte ingiallire e inaridire; stava là, con gli occhi fissi, quasi il sogno che avrebbe dovuto presto avverarsi si allontanasse rapidamente, ed egli non potesse far nulla per arrestarlo o richiamarlo.

E quel senso di tristezza che gl'invadeva il cuore era tanto più penoso e vivo, quanto meno egli scorgesse occasioni e circostanze da doverlo indurre a pensare così.

La casa, rinnovata, era pronta; il voto di Zòsima esaudito. Che altro gli occorreva di fare, all'infuori di andare a prendere lei per mano, condurla davanti al sindaco e poi davanti al parroco, in

The people gathered unperturbed, without caring that the umbrellas did not protect them. For each one who left, two or three others arrived, as if they could not get enough of hearing the roar of the streams and to see the gutters fill up in the streets; they wanted to enjoy the sight of the fields, drinking, drinking, drinking, and not ever being satisfied. Oh, if that rain would last a week, without ceasing for a single moment! The fields needed at least six inches of rain to get back to normal.

From a window in Margitello, the engineer mentioned to the Marchese that people were watching from the esplanade of the castle. Despite the curtain hung by the rain, one could distinguish the black figures that appeared, changed places, dispersed, then came together again. The sound of the bells of all the churches had reached there after the first drops of rain had fallen. And with that, the peasants and laborers had abandoned themselves in a frenzy of shouting, leaping with joy in the courtyards, while children enjoyed themselves by stomping on puddles with their feet and splashing each other in the face with water collected in the palms of their hands. Now and then, looking out the doors of ground-floor residences, they shoved and pushed each other outside, and they splashed the heavy rain on each other as if they were pouring it from pitchers.

"Hey, kids! Stop it!" yelled the Marchese, sticking his head out the window. And yet, all of this happiness should have pleased him. The rain, so needed and so prayed for, had, on the contrary, imposed upon him a sadness; the shenanigans of the children irritated him. He had recently told Zòsima once again: "It's not raining; see? It's not raining." And her response: "There's no hurry" had left him with a bad feeling, which, however, was quickly dispelled as soon as she added: "Margitello doesn't allow you to think about anything else!" And now that the rain had come, and what rain! Now that the only minor obstacle coming between the two of them had been removed, not only did he not feel happy, but he stood there before that window, with his eyes fixed on the eucalyptus plants dripping water from their curved branches and along old leaves that were being cleaned of a layer of dust that had made them turn yellow and wither. He stayed there with his eyes fixed, as if the dream that should have soon come true distanced itself rapidly, and he could do nothing to stop it or call it back.

riprova del proverbio citato spesso dalla zia baronessa: Matrimoni e vescovati dal cielo son destinati? In quel momento però gli sembrava che la riprova, sì, sarebbe avvenuta, ma nel modo opposto a quel che egli credeva e si aspettavano tutti.

E, appunto, quasi gli avesse letto nel pensiero, l'ingegnere gli diceva:

«La signorina Mugnos dev'essere lietissima oggi. Per dire la verità, essa si merita la fortuna di diventare marchesa di Roccaverdina; ma credo che se qualcuno, mesi addietro, glielo avesse predetto, la signorina si sarebbe fatto il segno della santa croce, come suol dirsi, quasi per scacciare una tentazione.»

«Forse... anch'io!», disse il marchese.

«Il mondo va così, per salti. Non c'è mai niente di sicuro per nessuno. Agrippina Solmo... per esempio... chi sa che cosa si era immaginato di dover raggiungere!... Ed è finita, prima in un modo, poi moglie di un pecoraio di Modica, che forse le farà desiderare fin il pane...»

«No; anzi la tratta come una signora.»

«Gliel'ha fatto scrivere lei? Brava ragazza!», continuò l'ingegnere. «Non è facile trovarne, nella sua condizione, una uguale. Qualunque altra, padrona, com'era qui lei, di ogni cosa, avrebbe pensato ai casi suoi, si sarebbe fatto il gruzzoletto. Essa, niente! Ammirevole anche per la modestia. Avea voluto rimanere quella che era, fin nell'apparenza. Non smise mai la mantellina, e avrebbe potuto portare, meglio di tant'altre, lo scialle che ora portano tutte le popolane, anche se più miserabili. E poi, bocca serrata!... Anche dopo, quando non poteva più lusingarsi con nessuna speranza, mai, mai una parola di dispetto o di sdegno. Dinanzi a lei, il marchese di Roccaverdina era Dio! E se qualcuno, per commiserarla o per stuzzicarla e provarla, le diceva: «Il marchese avrebbe dovuto comportarsi meglio con voi!... E qua!... E là!», sa come sono certe persone! essa non lo lasciava finir di parlare: «Il marchese ha fatto bene! Ha fatto più di quel che doveva! Dio solo glielo può rendere!». Me l'ha raccontato mia moglie, che l'ha sentito proprio con i suoi orecchi, senza esser vista... Insomma, lei, marchese, è fortunato con le donne... L'una meglio dell'altra!... Se lo faccia dire dal notaio Mazza che cosa significhi incappar male!»

Il marchese avrebbe voluto interromperlo subito, appena pronunciato il nome di Agrippina Solmo; ma, nella gran tristezza che

And the sadness that pierced his heart was so painful and vivid that at least he should have realized the circumstances and events that induced him to think this way.

Renovated, the house was now ready; Zòsima's wish had been granted. What else was there to be done, except to take her by the hand and bring her before the mayor and the priest, so as to confirm the proverb often cited by his aunt: "Marriages and bishoprics are made in heaven"? At that moment, however, it seemed to him that it had been confirmed, yes, but not in the way in which he and everyone else expected. As if he had read his mind, the engineer said:

"Signorina Mugnos ought to be happy today! To tell the truth, she deserves the good fortune of becoming the Marchesa of Roccaverdina. But I believe that had someone predicted it, months ago, the signorina would have made the sign of the cross, as if to banish any temptation."

"Perhaps...even I," said the Marchese.

"That's the way of the world, for certain. No one can be sure of anything. Agrippina Solmo...for example....who knows how high she had imagined she would reach! And she ended up, first in one way, then as the wife of a shepherd from Modica, who'll probably let her starve to death."

"No; in fact, he treats her like a lady."

"She wrote to you? Good girl!" continued the engineer. "It's not easy to find an equal in her situation. Some other woman, mistress of everything as she was here, would have looked after herself, would have saved up a nest egg. But she, nothing. Admirable even for her modesty. She wanted to remain that which she was, even in her appearance. She never took off the mantilla, and she would have been able to wear, better than so many others, the shawls that all women wear nowadays, even the poorest. And then always quiet! Even after she could no longer deceive herself with any hope, never, never, a spiteful or disdainful word. For her, the Marchese of Roccaverdina was God! And if anyone – to comfort, or to prod or provoke her – had said: 'The Marchese should have treated you better! And this and that!' You know how certain people are! She would have let him finish talking, and then: 'The Marchese has done well by me. He's done more than he should have! Only God can repay him!' My wife told me this; she overheard it with her own ears, without even having been noticed. In short, you,

gl'infondeva la pioggia, quello spiraglio sul passato aperto dalle parole dell'ingegnere, quell'evocazione inaspettata lo avevano un po' commosso, spingendolo a ricordare tante e tant'altre cose con lieve senso di rimpianto. Perché, infine, la colpa era stata tutta sua. Per vanità di casta, per premunirsi contro se stesso, egli aveva dato marito alla Solmo, con quel tirannico patto, senza punto riflettere alle sue possibili conseguenze.

L'ingegnere, vedendo che il marchese taceva, e supponendo che gli accenni al passato gli fossero dispiaciuti, tratto di tasca un sigaro e accesolo, si era messo a fumare e a passeggiare per la stanza, stirandosi le fedine.

Il marchese intanto, tenendo ancora fissi gli occhi su gli eucalitti grondanti d'acqua, rincorreva col pensiero una figura bianca, con le trecce nere sotto la mantellina di panno blu cupo; e rincorrendola per luoghi da lui visti anni addietro, tra casupole arrampicate a la roccia quasi ad accovacciarvisi al riparo del vento, sentiva un sordo impeto di gelosia diversa assai di quella sentita una volta... Poteva forse dubitare ora? Poteva forse indignarsi?... Non era egli stato contento che colei fosse andata ad abitare in quella lontana città mezza rannicchiata nell'insenatura di una roccia, in una di quelle casupole arrampicate su pei fianchi di essa quasi per accovacciarvisi al riparo del vento?

E si voltò bruscamente verso l'ingegnere, che passeggiava su e giù col sigaro in bocca stirandosi le fedine, in atto di dirgli: «Ma perché mi avete rimestato nel petto queste ceneri ancora calde?». Come se la tristezza che lo aveva invaso gliel'avesse soffiata addosso colui, come se gli avesse messo lui sotto gli occhi la visione di Zòsima malinconicamente rassegnata e che diceva con voce dolente: «Non c'è fretta. Margitello non vi lascia pensare ad altro!».

Ed era vero!

Marchese, are lucky with women. One better than the other! Mazza, the notary, can tell you what it means to find a bad one."

The Marchese wanted to interrupt him just when he had uttered Agrippina Solmo's name, but in the great sadness with which the rain had infused him, this glimmer into the past, opened by the words of the engineer, this unexpected evocation, had affected him, had caused him to remember many, many things with a slight sense of regret. After all, in the end, the fault had been all his own. Pride of class, the attempt to protect himself from himself, had caused him to give la Solmo a husband in that tyrannical pact, without a bit of reflection over the possible consequences.

Seeing that the Marchese remained silent and realizing that references to the past had, perhaps, displeased him, the engineer lit a cigar he had pulled out of his pocket and began to smoke it while waking around the room stroking his whiskers.

Meanwhile the Marchese, continuing to stare at the eucalyptus dripping with water, pursued with his thoughts a white figure with black hair under dark blue mantilla, chasing her through places seen years ago, among shacks that climbed on rocky cliffs, that crouched against the hills as if trying to shelter themselves from the wind. He felt a secret surge of jealousy much different from the one he had felt before. Could he now be having doubts? Regrets? Had he not been satisfied that she had gone to live in that distant city, half squatting in the hollow of a mountain, in one of those shacks crouching on the sides of the cliffs as if trying to shelter themselves from the wind? And he turned abruptly toward the engineer, who was walking up and down with the cigar in his mouth, stroking his whiskers, as if to say: "But why have you put back into my heart these ashes that are still burning?" As if the sadness that had invaded him had whispered to him, as if it had brought before his eyes the vision of Zòsima sadly resigned and saying with a sorrowful voice: "There's no hurry. Margitello doesn't allow you to think of anything else!"

And it was true!

Poems by Francesca Pellegrino

Translated by Adria Bernardi

Adria Bernardi received the 2007 Raiziss/de Palchi Translation Award to complete *Small Talk*, a translation of poetry in the romagnole dialect by Raffaello Baldini. Her translations include *Siren's Song*, prose and poetry of Rinaldo Caddeo; *Adventures in Africa*, a work of nonfiction by Gianni Celati; and *Abandoned Places*, the poetry of screenwriter Tonino Guerra. She is the author of two novels, *Openwork* and *The Day Laid on the Altar*, and a collection of short stories, *In the Gathering Woods*.

Francesca Pellegrino was born in Taranto, where she currently lives. Her publications include *Chernobylove – il giorno dopo il vento* (Chernobylove – the day after the wind) (Kimerik, 2010); *Dimentico sempre di dare l'acqua ai sogni* (I always forget to water the dreams) (Kimerik, 2009); and *Niente di personale* (Nothing Personal) (Samizdat/Biblioteca Clandestina Errabonda, 2009). In 2008, a chapbook, *L'enunciato* (Enunciation) was selected for inclusion in the series *Donne in poesia*, edited by Elisa Davoglio. Her work has appeared in various literary magazines, including *La Clessidra* and *La Mosca di Milano*. Francesca Pellegrino is a coordinator of the literary magazine *LibrAria*.

Remarkable for a compression of form and the multiplicity of meanings that emanate from those few short lines, the poems of Francesca Pellegrino survey and inhabit a terrain that is contemporary Italy – its excesses and its silences, in poems whose language ricochets with the internal and external pressures of those who live internal lives and actively navigate in a contemporary world. Each of her four collections reflects, and, indeed, has traveled in tandem with, a course of wider cultural crisis. On one level, we can read her poems as externalized versions of the crises of today's headlines, including the economic and financial crises of Italy and the corruption of its institutions.

In the poems of her most recent collection, *Chernobylove - Il giorno dopo il vento* (Chernobylove - the day after the wind) (2010), the consideration of love is twinned with the concept of catastrophe. These five poems each appear in the second (of five) section of *Chernobylove* - which is titled "A Mai" (To M(a)y Nevermore). As with her other poems, the language of consumerism - both product itself and the language of advertising - is invoked, in what is often an investigation of excess and the forms of absence. She is a writer who has been active in internet publishing and discourse. She is an editor at the literary website *LibrAria*.

Extralite

Sto moderatamente allegra
considerato che la felicità
è una fame che costa amore e lacrime
e il mio ventre
non ha più gli occhi per piangere.
Quindi, apparecchio un pezzo di tavola
un piatto di plastica, una forchetta
e bevo il vuoto della metà sbagliata
nel bicchiere. Per dimagrire.

Nouvelle cuisine

Ho lasciato a macerare nell'aceto
un sogno
e aspetto di vedere come volano
~~se volano~~
le farfalle in agrodolce.
Nell'attesa, mi finisco l'unghia
dell'mano sinistra
messo sotto sale e lacrime
il giusto tempo, il tempo
giusto a renderla squisita.
E innaffierò di vino fino
a marcire silenzi
in crosta di pane.

Prima vera è una parola scomposta

So fare almeno mille cose
contemporaneamente
mille cose.
So la differenza che passa
tra un muro che sostiene
e un altro che nasconde.
Preparare il sugo con la carne
curare le ferite di mio figlio con due baci
ed avvitare le ore con la testa a croce

Extralite

I am moderately content
considering that happiness
is a hunger that comes at the price
of love and tears and that my inner
locus no longer has eyes
that cry. So then, I set down a piece
of a place-setting, a plastic plate,
a fork, and I drink the empty part
of the mistaken half inside the glass to lose weight.

Nouvelle cuisine

I left a dream steeping
in vinegar
and waited to see how butterflies
~~if butterflies~~
fly bitter-sweetened.
While waiting, I finished the fingernail
of my left hand
soaked in salt tears
the appropriate length of time, just
the right time to render it exquisite.
And I'll water with wine
until eating away silences baked inside
a crust of bread.

Spring-time is a word undone

I know how to do at least a thousand things
contemporaneously –
a thousand things.
I know about the difference
between a load-bearing wall
and a wall that conceals.
Making a meat sauce
healing my son's wounds with two kisses
cinching the hours with the testacroce

su ogni tipo di ripiano.
E riconoscere anche l'esatto istante
quando arriva, il digiuno
a riempirmi la bocca di mosche morte
dopo l'ultima primavera incolta.

L'uomo del monte ha detto sì

C'era il basilico nel vaso
seccosecco.
Una sete di foglie
da lasciarci gli occhi
per il dispiacere.
Non profumava neanche più.
C'è che bisogna che piova
talvolta.
Pregando che faccia silenzio.

Toglietemi tutto ma non il mio Breil

Deve essere andato storto qualcosa.
Forse un ingranaggio
che non avvitava più
le ore avanzate sul tavolo.
Ogni briciola era comunque rimasta
al suo posto. In bellissima mostra.
E si fece ugualmente ora tarda
il mio sbadiglio.

from *Chernobylove - Il giorno dopo il vento*. Casa Editrice
Kimerik, 2010. ©2010 Francesca Pellegrino. ©Translations Adria
Bernardi

mechanism resting atop various modes of shelving.
And, recognizing, even, the exact instant
it arrives, fasting,
in order to fill my mouth with dead flies
after the last uncouth spring.

The Man from del monte says Yes

There was basil in a flower-pot.
Dry. Extremely dry.
The leaves with a thirst
to turn eyes aside
in displeasure.
Neither did it perfume either anymore.
There was a need for there to be rain
sometimes.
Praying it would make silence.

Don't Touch My Breil

Something must have gotten twisted.
Perhaps a gear
not cognizing round the hours
advancing on the table anymore.
Each crumb however remained
in place. In beautiful display.
And it made late hour equal
my yawn.

Umberto Saba's *Ernesto* - Third Episode

Translated by Estelle Gilson

Estelle Gilson is a writer and translator. Her translations from Italian include *The Stories and Recollection of Umberto Saba* (completed under an NEA grant) which won both the Italo Calvino and Renato Poggioli awards while in manuscript and the MLA's first Scaglione award in 1994. She has translated four works by magic realist, Massimo Bontempelli: *The Chess Set in the Mirror*, the story collection, *The Faithful Lover*, and the novels, *The Boy with Two Mothers* and *The Life and Death of Adria and Her Children*, which appeared together in a volume titled *Separations*; Ms. Gilson translated Giacomo Debenedetti's *October 16, 1943*, and *Eight Jews*, as well as short fiction by Antonio Debenedetti. Among her other published translations are *To Be Recorded*, translations of the Hebrew poetry of Gabriel Preil, and *The Jew*, a French novella by Stendhal. Her version of Juvenal's *Third Satire* appears in Penguin's *Juvenal in English*.

Ms. Gilson's fiction and nonfiction have appeared in a variety of journals and periodicals. Her essays on translation were published in the *Boston Globe*. She is a member of ALTA and of PEN's translation committee.

Umberto Saba. The most salient experiences of Umberto Saba's life are available to his readers: his early childhood, infatuations, loves, military service, marriage, family, depressions, breakdowns, and his beloved native city, Trieste, were all subjects of his poetry and prose. When he died at age 74, Saba left very little unexplored.

The traumas and conflicts which served as material for Saba's writing and even affected his choice of identity, began at birth. He was born Umberto Poli in Trieste, Italy on March 9, 1883, of a Jewish mother, Felicità Rachele Coen, and a non-Jewish father, Ugo Edoardo Poli, who deserted Saba's mother before her child was born. The depressed and agitated mother left the infant with a nursemaid, Giuseppina Sabar, a young Slovenian Catholic woman,

to whom the boy became deeply attached. When he began writing poetry, young Poli used various pseudonyms before finally settling on the name Saba. According to his daughter, Linuccia, in a letter to me, he took the name "after many trials when he suddenly recalled the beloved person of his earliest years, his nursemaid Sabar."

After attending the Dante Alighieri School in Trieste, Saba entered the Imperial Merchant Marine Academy, but left after four months to take a job as a clerk with a commercial firm. He was then sixteen years old. This is where we pick him up in *Ernesto*. Many years later he purchased a second hand book store on via Nicolò in Trieste with money he inherited from his aunt - the old aunt you will meet in *Ernesto*. The shop is still at the same location and now serves as a Saba museum as well.

Not until he was in his mid forties and analyzed by Edoardo Weiss, an early Freudian who practiced in Trieste, was Saba able to unravel the complicated emotions of his early life. Still, the nervous ailments and depressions of his youth continued to plague him and worsened with age. He spent his last years in and out of sanatoria. In his final years, addicted to morphine, subject to fits and falls, and living alone in a room cluttered with clothes and books, littered with cigar stubs and ashes, Saba turned to prose to reexamine his youth. He rewrote *The Jews*, a series of early sketches set in the Triestine Ghetto* and began *Ernesto*. He died in August 1957.

Saba produced nearly one thousand pages of prose: articles, recollections, short fiction, critical essays and the brilliant *Shortcuts*, all of which have begun to engage translators and literary critics.

*(*The Jews* and excerpts of *Shortcuts*, appear in the *The Stories and Recollections of Umberto Saba*.)

The Importance of Reading *Ernesto*

Ernesto, poet Umberto Saba's autobiographical novel centers in an adolescent boy's first homosexual and heterosexual experiences. Though its place in literature is assured as Saba's only lengthy work of fiction, Saba, one of Italy's major poets of the last century, never planned to publish it. He began the work in 1952 when in his seventies, fully aware that its frankness and honesty would appall Italian readers. Although he considered some passages to be his best writing, and read the work aloud to friends and family as it progressed, he repeatedly admonished his daughter, Linuccia, and her companion, writer and artist Carlo Levi, to destroy their copies of the manuscript. The work was not included in the 1964 volume of Saba's collected prose. It appeared in a separate volume in 1975, nearly twenty years after Saba's death. Four years later, it was made into a movie by director Salvatore Samperi. With the passing of time and the change in social mores the book has become a landmark in Italian and international homosexual literature. Among other citations, the *GLBT Encyclopedia*, notes "Saba should also be included in the canon of significant gay writers of the modernist period."

The novel is set in 1898 in Trieste when Saba was fifteen years old and Trieste was a tumultuous commercial center under the rule of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Though Trieste had a polyglot population from nearby European, Adriatic and Mediterranean territories, its heart, like Saba's, was Italian. The exotic sights, sounds and people of Trieste, omnipresent in Saba's poetry, are as vivid a presence in *Ernesto*.

The boy, Ernesto is a sixteen year old clerk at a commercial firm, who writes poetry and plays the violin. He is willingly seduced by the twenty-eight year old, uneducated stevedore (never named in the book) whose work Ernesto supervises. Their surreptitious trysts at work continue until the boy impetuously decides to have his first relations with a woman. He cautiously chooses a particular prostitute. Subsequently, wishing to escape the man, Ernesto cruelly engineers his own dismissal from the firm. Still later, he is attracted to a fifteen year old boy, a violinist, very much like his younger self.

Beyond its importance as a work on homosexuality in that

era, *Ernesto's* nuanced voicing qualify it to stand as a work of art. In a tightly compressed style animated with flashes of poetic insight, Saba's prose achieves the directness, clarity and honesty that characterize his poetry. As narrator, he reveals *Ernesto's* concerns, his fears and passions; as an elderly and much wiser "*Ernesto*", he comments and reflects on those concerns, fears and passions through the constant stream of witty, sardonic and emotion-laden parenthetical asides. Discussing his own style in his *Scorciatoie* (*Shortcuts*), Saba wrote. "I am full of parentheses, of 'between dashes' of 'quotation marks'of exclamation points and question marks. May my typesetter and my reader forgive me. I don't know how to speak without being brief. And there was no other way I could be brief."

On translating *Ernesto*

It is a difficult decision for any translator to omit an element in a translation. It was particularly difficult for me in the case of Saba whose prose I've translated in the past and for whom I have a particular affection, not to translate the dialect of his beloved Trieste into a comparable dialect in English. This candid, almost innocent work on homosexuality reflects what I love about Saba: his openness, his lucid style, his parenthetical mind, his unique acceptance of people's foibles and failings, (irascible and irritating as he was in his personal relationships). *Ernesto* is not much known to the world. It was never issued in North America. I wanted my translation to be as close as possible to what I thought were Saba's intentions for it.

Much of the dialogue in the early chapters of *Ernesto* is in Triestino, the local speech of Trieste and the adjacent Friuli section of Italy, a dialect so remote in sound and orthography from the standard language that it is in essence a foreign language to other Italians.

After beginning the novel with such a dialogue Saba characteristically and parenthetically, pauses to tell his Italian readers that he has modified that dialogue and all that follow it, in the hope that potential readers will be able to translate them on their own. (So much for burn the manuscript, dear daughter).

The Triestine dialect, like all Italian regional dialects in the late

19th century, was not a matter of a peculiar accent, a lengthened vowel, or a dropped consonant, which perhaps could be imitated in a target language. It was not jargon or street slang. Nor was it related to social hierarchy. It was the language of all of the city's residents. Italo Svevo, Trieste's other great writer, was heavily criticized, and in fact, not taken seriously by the Italian literary establishment, because of the Triestine influences they discerned in his Italian. And no wonder. He spoke it every day. While lower class Triestinos spoke only dialect, our fictional Ernesto, his friends and his family, like Saba's and Svevo's friends and family, and even Svevo's English teacher, James Joyce's Triestine friends and family, spoke dialect in daily life. No matter their differences in social class, any two Triestino speakers were equals in terms of direct communication.

There is a rich and growing literature addressed to translators on how to translate dialect into a target language. It ranges from the extreme of Gregory Rabassa's "invent one" (not a quote) to that of Clifford E. Landers' "don't" (a direct quote). But each translator and work make a unique pair, and as usual in life, every situation must find its own solution. Much depends on how the dialect is used within the text: whether it is assigned to one or more characters, whether it occurs in a specific era or geographic place within the work, or whether as in Camillieri's Montalbano novels, it is an intrinsic aspect of style. Works completely in dialect can perhaps be most happily translated if the translator can define the essence of a work and find a rhythmically and vocally compatible style in the target language.

Most of the dialogues in dialect in *Ernesto* take place between Ernesto and the characters who move the sexual elements of the story forward. These dialogues tend to be lengthy, tension laden and emotional both for the characters and the reader. But even as they are taking place, seventy year old narrator, Umberto Saba is filling his reader's head with analysis and commentary in Italian. Italian readers experience an extraordinary flow in and out of dialect - in and out of Ernesto's mind. Sadly, there is no English language dialect - at least none that I could find (or invent) - that can function as the Triestine does in *Ernesto*. Absent the availability of such a dialect, I have tried to reproduce this essential interplay of voices in English, in as compelling and coherent a way as possible.

A British edition of *Ernesto*, translated by Mark Thompson in 1987, is out of date and out of print. Neither Mr. Thompson nor French translators, Jean-Marie Roche in 1978 and René de Ceccatty in 2010, translated Triestino into dialect in their respective target languages.

This translation is based on the critical Italian edition of *Ernesto* edited by Antonietta Grignani and issued in 1995.

ERNESTO
di Umberto Saba

Terzo episodio

«È ora che ti faccia accorciare i capelli» disse una mattina ad Ernesto sua madre. «Così non ti voglio più vedere. Prima di pranzo, passa da Bernardo. Eccoti i soldi». Bernardo era un barbiere che aveva la bottega in faccia alla casa di Ernesto.

Da più di un mese la signora Celestina pregava Ernesto di farsi fare quella piccola operazione. Molto amante dell'ordine, non poteva vedere suo figlio andare in giro come un selvaggio, o un figlio di nessuno. Ma Ernesto non amava perdere nulla della sua persona, nemmeno di quelle parti di essa destinate a ricrescere. Quando, piccolo bambino, stava, in casa della sua balia, uno dei motivi per cui questa «gliele dava» era la resistenza che il suo allievo opponeva a lasciarsi tagliare le unghie. Come si avvicinava il momento temuto, e vedeva la donna con le forbici in mano, egli — docile agli altri suoi comandi - scappava qua e là per la cameretta, si nascondeva perfino sotto il letto. Era difficile cavarlo fuori da quel nascondiglio e, qualche volta, la giovane donna, che gli voleva bene come fosse stato suo figlio (il suo era morto appena nato), ma aveva molte altre faccende da sbrigare, perdeva la pazienza.

«Da Bernardo, da mio padre?» disse Ernesto.

«Se ripeti un'altra volta quest'infamia - gli rispose (come sempre) la signora Celestina - racconto ogni cosa allo zio Giovanni. Egli saprà bene come metterti a posto, ed insegnarti a rispettare tua madre». E (come sempre) si mise a piangere. Si trattava di una vecchia calunnia. Il barbiere chiamato Bernardo e la madre di Ernesto avevano, quando questa teneva ancora un negozio di mobili, le botteghe una vicina all'altra e, nelle pause del lavoro, si scambiavano dalla porta quattro chiacchiere. Questo era tutto. Ma la strada era piena di gente pettegola, e quelle chiacchiere sul tempo che faceva, lo strano matrimonio della signora Celestina, seguito, a così breve distanza, dalla separazione legale (di cui le vere cause erano sempre rimaste oscure) fecero il resto. Due anni prima che si inizi questo racconto, un cugino, un coetaneo di Ernesto, che doveva, nello stesso giorno, spiegargli come si fanno e come nascono i bambini (cose sulle quali il ragazzo aveva solo idee

ERNESTO

By Umberto Saba

Third Episode

"It's time you got your hair cut," Ernesto's mother said to him one morning. "I can't stand looking at you any more. Here's the money. Stop at Bernardo's before lunch." Bernardo owned the barbershop across the street.

Signora Celestina had been pleading with Ernesto for over a month to have this bit of surgery done. Much given to neatness, she couldn't bear seeing her son going around looking like a savage or an orphan. However, Ernesto didn't like relinquishing any part of his body, not even those parts that inevitably grow back. When, as a toddler, he was at his nursemaid's home, one of the reasons for which the young woman would spank him was his resistance to having his nails cut. At the fearful moment that he'd see her approaching scissors in hand - though obedient to her other commands - he'd dash wildly about her small room and finally hide under the bed. It was difficult for her to pry him out from there and at times the woman, who loved him as if he were her own child (her son had died shortly after birth), and who had much more work to do, would lose her temper.

"Stop at Bernardo's, my father's?" said Ernesto

"If I hear that disgraceful talk from you once more," Signora Celestina responded (as she always did), "I'll tell Uncle Giovanni. He'll put you in your place. He'll teach you to respect your mother." And (as she always did) she burst into tears.

It had to do with slanderous old gossip. When Ernesto's mother had owned a furniture store, her shop and Bernardo's were next to each other's, and at times when neither had customers, they would chat from their doorways. That was all. But the street was full of busybodies, and what with Signora Celestina's strange marriage followed so quickly by a legal separation (the reasons for which were never made clear), those chats about the weather did the rest. Two years earlier a cousin of Ernesto's, a boy his own age, who had undertaken to tell him how babies are made and how they're born, (about which Ernesto had only the vaguest notion), added, as a sort of sequel to the first lesson, that

vaghe ed inesatte), gli raccontava, quasi un corollario alla lezione precedente, che, a casa sua, tutti dicevano che il suo vero padre era Bernardo, e che questo era stato il motivo (che non si doveva né sapere né dire) della separazione fra i genitori (uno dei quali solo presunto) di Ernesto. Ernesto, tutto allegro ed eccitato, sia per la rivelazione sui misteri della generazione, sia per la sua discendenza clandestina da Bernardo, corse anelante a casa, per raccontare a sua madre una novità e l'altra. Alla prima, la donna si oscurò in volto, e già apriva la bocca per inveite contro il cugino corruttore; alla seconda cadde svenuta per terra. Ernesto, pieno di un acuto rimorso (vedeva già sua madre morta, e morta per colpa sua) non sapeva cosa fare. Avrebbe perfino strozzato il merlo che, ignaro, cantava alla finestra. Pareva anzi che non avesse mai fischiato così forte e così bene. Poi, una cartina di bromuro mise, per il momento, le cose a posto. Ma tutte le volte che sua madre lo incitava a recarsi dal barbiere (due o tre all'anno) il ragazzo ripeteva, per vendicarsi, quella vecchia storia; sebbene sapesse ormai anche lui che si trattava di una vera e propria calunnia. E, ogni volta, sua madre si offendeva e arrabbiava; lo minacciava di denunciarlo, per un castigo, allo zio Giovanni. Ernesto, per conto suo, oltre ad avere la consolante certezza che sua madre minacciava invano, non avrebbe trovato niente di male ad essere figlio di Bernardo.

Bernardo era un uomo grasso, già anziano, coi capelli tutti bianchi ed il viso bonario. Faceva sempre buona accoglienza ad Ernesto; un giorno gli aveva perfino prestato qualche soldo, che il ragazzo spese da un nuovo pasticciere, di cui tutti in città dicevano meraviglie, e restituì puntualmente sul regalo settimanale dello zio tutore. Lo conosceva e serviva fin da piccolo; era stato il primo, dopo la sua balia, a tagliargli i capelli, e sperava di essere lui a fargli la prima barba. Faceva delle previsioni brillanti sull'avvenire del fanciullo (destinato, in ogni caso - così almeno pensava Bernardo - a diventare un giorno, per alcune eredità che gli spettavano quasi di diritto, un uomo ricco); ed ebbe una prima delusione quando Ernesto lasciò la scuola per un impiego. Apparteneva - si vede - a quella categoria di persone, molto numerose, che non immaginano una carriera brillante se non preceduta da una laurea. Però non espresse mai la sua delusione ad Ernesto, che la intuì ugualmente. Avrebbe potuto cambiare barbiere; ma gli sarebbe sembrato di commettere un piccolo tradimento verso una persona che era sempre

in his home everyone said that Bernardo was Ernesto's real father, and that had been the reason (though one wasn't supposed to know or talk about it) for which his parents (one of them, merely alleged) had separated. Thrilled and exhilarated by the revelations of the mysteries of procreation and of his hidden relationship to Bernardo, Ernesto had raced home to recount both these exciting bits of news to his mother. On hearing the first, the woman's face darkened and she immediately began inveighing against the corrupting cousin. On hearing the second, she fainted and fell to the ground. Stricken with remorse (he imagined his mother dead, dead because of him), Ernesto couldn't think what to do. He could have throttled his blackbird singing away obliviously at the window. It seemed in fact, to be singing louder and better than ever before.

A dose of bromide eventually set things right. Nevertheless, every time his mother pressed him go to the barber (two, perhaps three times a year) the boy would get back at her with the old tale, though by then he, too, knew that it was complete and utter rubbish. And every time she would get insulted and angry and threaten to punish him by telling his Uncle Giovanni. As far as Ernesto was concerned, beyond the comforting certainty that his mother wouldn't carry out her threat, he didn't see anything so terrible about being Bernardo's son.

Bernardo was a heavy, fairly elderly man with completely white hair and a kind face. He always welcomed Ernesto warmly, had even lent him money once which the boy spent at a new bakery that everyone in town was raving about, and which he repaid punctually from the weekly allowance he got from his uncle. Bernardo had waited on him since childhood. He had been the first person to cut his hair after he'd left his nursemaid's care, and hoped it would be he, to give him his first shave. He used to predict a brilliant future for the boy (destined, one way or another by some legacy, a kind of birthright, at least in Bernardo's mind, to become rich some day). And he suffered his first disappointment when Ernesto left school to take a job. It seems that Bernardo belonged to that very large group of people who cannot imagine a brilliant career not preceded by an academic degree. Although he never expressed his disappointment to Ernesto, the boy sensed it. He could have changed barbers, but that would have seemed to him a kind of betrayal of a person who had always been kind

stata gentile ed affettuosa con lui. Per questo, e per non sentire a tavola i rimproveri della madre, si recò anche questa volta a farsi accorciare i capelli; ed entrò risoluto nella sua bottega.

Bernardo volle servirlo di persona. Tolse l'asciugamano di mano al lavorante, che stava per infilarglielo al collo, si fece dare le forbici, e si accinse a compiere il suo lavoro. Ernesto, una volta accomodato sulla sedia girevole, e completamente in balia del suo inconscio torturatore, si rassegnò a farsi tagliare i capelli, come ad una necessità, sia pure sgradevole, della dolce vita. (Più tardi, quando gli si fece ostile e difficile, l'avrebbe chiamata «calda»). Raccomandò solo a Bernardo di non tagliare troppo, e rispose di buon animo a tutte le sue domande.

Il barbiere gli chiese, come prima cosa, notizie della sua salute (sapeva che Ernesto era stato ammalato e ci teneva a fargli sapere che lo sapeva), di quella della signora Celestina e della vecchissima zia. Poi gli raccontò che, il giorno prima, il signor Giovanni era stato a trovarlo, per farsi aggiustare la barba. (Pareva se ne vantasse). Gli disse che lo zio gli aveva parlato di lui, lamentandosi che fosse sempre socialista. I socialisti diceva lo zio - sono in odio a tutti, e non sono destinati a far carriera nel mondo. «Sè vero - gli chiese - quel che disi de ti tuo zio? » (Bernardo gli dava ora del lei, ora del tu: aveva incominciato a dargli del lei quando il ragazzo era entrato la prima volta nella sua bottega coi calzoni lunghi; ma ricadeva, a tratti, nell'antica abitudine. Ernesto, che conosceva Bernardo da sempre, la preferiva).

« Sí- gli rispose - son sempre socialista. Ma no son iscritto al partito; son ancora tropo giovine. I socialisti gà ragion - aggiunse; -ma mi sario con lori in ogni caso; se no altro, per farghe dispeto a mio zio ».

Bernardo rise. Conosceva abbastanza Ernesto per dare troppo peso alle sue parole. Il ragazzo (e Bernardo lo sapeva) non odiava lo zio tutore (non odiava ancora nessuno): ne aveva solo paura. Sentiva che questi non lo amava (almeno eccessivamente) e, soprattutto, non lo approvava. (Forse sospettava nel nipote qualcosa di strano e di proibito). Ed uno dei tratti del carattere di Ernesto era il bisogno di essere approvato ed amato.

«El me gà dito anca che ti sè poeta. Sè vero?»

Il ragazzo arrossí. « Mio zio - rispose - el sè mato. El me gaverà visto leger qualche libro scritto in versi; e allora el conta in giro che son poeta ».

and affectionate to him. With these thoughts in mind, and so that he could escape his mother's meal time reproaches, once again he returned to Bernardo's to have his hair cut. He walked resolutely into the shop.

Bernardo wanted to take care of him personally. He took the towel his assistant was about to tuck around the boy's neck, asked for the scissors and set about his work. Once seated in the revolving chair and completely at the mercy of his unwitting torturer, Ernesto resigned himself to having his hair cut as a necessity, however unpleasant, of the good life. (Later, when life became hostile and difficult to him, he'd term it "scalding"). All he said to Bernardo was not to cut his hair too short, and answered all his questions cheerfully.

The first thing the barber inquired about was his health (he knew that Ernesto had been ill and wanted him to know that he knew it). After that he asked after the health of Signora Celeste and of his very old Aunt. Then he told him that just the previous day Signor Giovanni had been in to have his beard trimmed. (He seemed to take pride in this.) He added that his uncle had spoken about Ernesto, lamenting that he was still a socialist. Socialists, his uncle had said, were hated by everyone and would never amount to anything in the world. "Is what your uncle said about you true?" the barber asked using the familiar *tu*. (Sometimes he used it, sometimes the more formal *lei*. He'd begun to use the formal address the first time the boy came into the shop wearing long pants. Occasionally he'd lapse into the old way, which Ernesto, who knew Bernardo forever, preferred).

"Yes, I'm still a socialist," he answered. "But I'm not a party member. I'm not old enough yet. But the Socialists have it right," he added. "Anyway, I'd side with them even if they didn't, just to spite my uncle."

Bernardo laughed. He knew Ernesto well enough not to take him seriously. The boy (as Bernardo knew) didn't hate his uncle (he didn't hate anyone yet). He was just afraid of him. He felt that his uncle didn't love him (at least not a very much) but moreover, that he didn't approve of him (perhaps he suspected something strange and forbidden about his nephew). And one aspect of Ernesto's nature was a need to be appreciated and loved.

"He also told me that you're a poet. Is that true?"

«El violin però ti lo soni sempre» disse Bernardo, toccando un'altra piaga di Ernesto. «Mi te sento de qua. E allora ghe digo subito a Giacomìn (il lavorante), «Ecco el nostro Ernesto che studia el violin».

Ernesto si attendeva ad un elogio: avrebbe dato non so cosa per riceverlo. Ma sapeva egli stesso di non meritarglielo. Il violino era stato un suo capriccio, nel quale poi si era ostinato. Sentendo parlare di violino e di violinisti (era allora di passaggio a Trieste un celebre concertista boemo) il ragazzo (che aveva a quel tempo quindici anni compiuti) vendette, senza dir nulla a nessuno, l'album di francobolli; aggiunse qualche corona alle cinque che ricavò da quella svendita, e si comperò un violino. Il maestro se lo pagava da solo, sul fiorino settimanale che riceveva già allora dallo zio tutore, e su qualche regaletto, che estorceva, con moine e promesse, alla vecchia zia. Ma, a parte che non aveva orecchio, era già troppo tardi - così almeno gli dicevano tutti - per incominciare lo studio di un istrumento, che andava iniziato nella primissima infanzia.

Sua madre, quando se lo vide arrivare a casa col violino sotto il braccio, alzò le spalle, ed espresse la sua disapprovazione con una frase che parve ad Ernesto di cattivo augurio. Lo zio poi odiava in linea generale i violini e, in modo particolare, quello del nipote. Diceva che, di violinisti veri, ce n'era stato uno solo: Paganini; e quando voleva far disperare Ernesto, lo chiamava, ridendo: «Paganini in erba». (L'ironia che lo zio tutore metteva in queste parole era, per il ragazzo, piú pungente di uno schiaffo). La sola persona non del tutto sfavorevole all'esperimento era la vecchia zia. Diceva che non ci sono difficoltà che non si vincano con la pazienza e con la buona volontà, che anche l'orecchio si acquista con l'esercizio, e che forse un giorno Ernesto avrebbe potuto suonare in orchestra, e guadagnare qualcosa, come un soprappiú al suo stipendio d'impiegato. Ma la zia, oltre che vecchia, era un pò sorda; ed il solo lavoro che la signora Celestina le lasciasse fare era quello di pulire il radicchio, di cui si faceva, in casa, grande consumo. Intanto il giovanetto s'era ostinato a proseguire, sebbene con scarso esito, lo studio del suo odiato-amato violino; qualche volta sognava perfino di diventare concertista e di emulare col tempo in celebrità il violinista boemo, del quale aveva letto, e leggeva, nei giornali i trionfi, e che aveva fatto nascere in lui - come diceva suo zio - quel « capriccio de muli». Era, su questo argomento, intrattabile: e fa

The boy blushed. "My uncle's crazy," he said. "He probably saw me reading a book of poems, so now he goes around saying I'm a poet."

"But you still play the violin." Bernardo said, touching another of Ernesto's sore points. "I hear you over here and right away I say to Giacomini (his assistant) that's our Ernesto practicing the violin."

Ernesto was hoping for a word of praise. He would have given anything for it, though he knew he didn't deserve it. Playing the violin had begun as one of his whims, but one in which he subsequently persisted. Having heard talk about violins and violinists (a famous Bohemian virtuoso was performing in Trieste then), the boy (fifteen years old at the time) had sold his stamp album without telling anyone, added some crowns to the five he'd received for it, and had bought a violin. He paid a teacher from the weekly allowance that he received from his Uncle, and from the small sums he extorted with wheedling and promises from his old aunt. Aside from the fact that he had no ear for music, it was already too late (at least that's what everyone told him) to begin studying an instrument that should be begun in earliest childhood.

When his mother saw him arriving home with the violin under his arm, she'd shrugged her shoulders and aired her disapproval in words that sounded ominous to the boy. His uncle, it turned out, disliked violins in general and his nephew's in particular. He said that there was only one great violinist in the world: Paganini. And when he wanted to discourage Ernesto, he would laughingly call him "a fledgling Paganini". (The derision with which his Uncle delivered these words stung the boy more deeply than a slap in the face). The only person who was not completely disapproving of the experiment was his old aunt. She would say that there were no difficulties that couldn't be overcome with patience and with a will - that one can even acquire an ear for music with practice. And that perhaps one day Ernesto would play in an orchestra and earn a little something to supplement his clerk's salary. But his aunt, in addition to being old, was a little deaf. And the only work that signora Celeste let her do at home was to wash the radicchio which they ate in large amounts. Despite his meager progress, the boy persisted in studying his loved-and-hated violin. Sometime he even dreamed of becoming a concert artist, of becoming as famous as the Bohemian violinist whose triumphs he still followed

solo per un miracolo se, chiacchierino com'era, non ne aveva mai parlato all'uomo.

Adesso desiderava che Bernardo si spicciasse. Il vecchio barbiere non mostrava invece nessuna fretta: si sarebbe detto che provasse piacere a prolungare al massimo quello che, per Ernesto, era un supplizio. Chi sa - chi potrà mai sapere - se erano giunte alle sue orecchie le dicerie che facevano del giovanetto al quale stava, con cura particolare, aggiustando i capelli, un suo figliolo?

«Tuo zio - disse - noi poi tinir coi socialisti. El guadagna tropo ben; e po, de giovine, el sè stà con Garibaldi».

« Garibaldi - ribatté Ernesto - se fosse vivo oggi, sarebbe socialista ». La frase non era sua; l'aveva letta recentemente nel «Lavoratore»; ma gli era piaciuta e se l'era appropriata. Bernardo non voleva contraddirlo troppo; del resto aveva già quasi terminato. Quando tutto fu - o parve - compiuto, presentò al suo giovane cliente uno specchio, affinché potesse giudicare del suo lavoro e dichiararsene soddisfatto. Ernesto vi gettò appena uno sguardo; poi chiuse gli occhi per non vedersi così - egli pensava - peggiorato. Sentiva al collo, dove il barbiere aveva fatto passare il rasoio, una spiacevole sensazione di freddo.

«Va benissimo - disse; - grazie». E già si apprestava ad alzarsi ed uscire (aveva, oltre il resto, una gran fame), quando Bernardo gli fece scorrere lievemente il dorso della mano sulla guancia.

« El speti un momento - gli disse; - sento qua un poco de barba. Se el gà un fià de pazienza, ghe la cavo in un momento».

A Ernesto mancò il coraggio di ribellarsi. In realtà, non si trattava ancora di una vera e propria barba, ma solo di una lieve peluria, quale avrebbe potuto benissimo rimanere sulle guancie, fino a quel momento intonse, del ragazzo. Il suo movimento istintivo sarebbe stato di alzarsi e scappare; ma, timidezza a parte, avrebbe dovuto dare delle spiegazioni; e, o non le trovava, o non poteva esibirle. Gli passò per la mente - un attimo l'uomo; lo vide, lontano, come se piangesse. Intanto Bernardo, che ignorava i conflitti del suo paziente, gli aveva già insaponate le guancie e passato sopra, appena appena, il ferro. Era, oltre a tutto, il suo mestiere: se non ci fossero state barbe, Bernardo le avrebbe inventate.

Ernesto finalmente fu lasciato libero, e si alzò. Nessuno si accorse che aveva le lacrime agli occhi. «Grazie» disse ancora una volta; ed uscì dalla bottega, dimenticandosi - cosa questa che

in newspapers, and who had kindled in him what his uncle called "that fool notion." But Ernesto was resolute on the subject. It was a miracle that, chatterbox that he was, he had never said a word about it to the man.¹

By now, he was wishing that Bernardo would hurry up and get done, but the old barber showed no signs of hurry. He seemed to enjoy dragging out the process, which was a torture to Ernesto. And who's to say - who will ever know - whether all that old gossip he too might have heard, hadn't transformed the boy whose hair he was now cutting with special care, into his son.

"Your uncle can't stand socialists," he said. "He's got too much money. Anyway, , when he was young, he was for Garibaldi."

"If Garibaldi were alive today he'd be a socialist," Ernesto retorted. The idea wasn't his. He'd recently read it in the Worker, had liked it and appropriated it for himself. Bernardo didn't feel like contradicting him. Besides, he was almost done. When he did finish, or was just about to, he handed his young customer a mirror so that he could assess the barber's handiwork and express his satisfaction. Ernesto barely glanced at it, then shut his eyes so as not to see himself looking worse, so he thought, than before. His neck, which the barber had shaved, felt unpleasantly chilled.

"It's very good, thanks" he said, and had already risen to rush out of the chair (among other things, he was very hungry), when Bernardo brushed the back of his hand lightly across his cheek.

"Hold on," he said, "I feel a little beard here. "If you wait a minute, I'll have it off in a jiffy."

Ernesto didn't have the courage to refuse. The truth is - he didn't really have a beard, just some light fuzz, which could very well have remained on his still unshaven cheeks. His intuitive reaction would have been to get up and get out of there. But aside from being timid, he would have had to have some excuse and he didn't have one, couldn't even think of one. Then suddenly, he thought of the man; saw him, off in the distance, looking as if he were weeping.

¹The day laborer with whom Ernesto has been having a homosexual relationship. He is never named in the book.

In the meantime, Bernardo, unaware of his customer's inner

non gli accadeva mai - di pagare. Bernardo sorrideva contento e, ripiegando l'asciugamano, guardava Ernesto che attraversava la strada, per fuggire a casa. Il lavorante (che sperava la mancia) gli fece presente la dimenticanza di Ernesto; ma Bernardo non pensò certo a richiamarlo.

«El pagherà - disse - un'altra volta. E, se anca nol me paga, fa lo stesso».

Un lieve venticello che si era alzato dal mare rendeva più molesta la sensazione di freddo che Ernesto provava al collo e alle guancie. Gli pareva di essere rimasto nudo, e non vedeva l'ora di essere a casa. Sperava - pur sapendo che la sua speranza era vana - che sua madre avrebbe saputo confortarlo.

«Mama, Bernardo me gà fata la barba» disse, come la donna gli aperse la porta. E lo disse col tuono con cui avrebbe annunciata una grande sventura che gli fosse occorsa. La madre, che non capì l'angoscia del figlio, non pensò né di dirgli una parola d'augurio, né - meglio ancora - di dargli un bacio sulla guancia rasata per la prima volta.

«Hai l'età - disse - che ai giovanotti incomincia a crescere la barba. Bernardo ha fatto bene a tagliartela. Fa vedere...»

La parola « giovanotto » finì di urtare, e disperare Ernesto. Quando aveva tredici-quattordici anni desiderava molto di essere, di passare per un uomo fatto, e tormentava sua madre perché gli comperasse un gilè (come lo aveva a scuola il suo compagno di banco); ora invece era contento se, leggendo la cronaca dei giornali, un giovane della sua età era chiamato ancora ragazzo. Così, se sua madre, invece di dire «giovanotti» avesse detto «ragazzi», le avrebbe perdonata prima la sua incomprendimento.

«A tradimento - disse - el me la gà fata a tradimento; senza domandarme prima se la volevo o no».

«Adesso - continuò sua madre - cambiati giacca, e vieni subito a mangiare. Ti ho fatte le "fugazette"; ed anch'io e tua zia abbiamo fame. Ti aspettiamo da più di mezz'ora».

Le « fugazette » di sua madre erano (dopo i dolci) il piatto preferito di Ernesto. Composte di carne di bue tritata, la signora Celestina le faceva macerare nell'olio per un giorno e una notte, dopo averle lardellate di spicchi d'aglio. Lasciavano nell'olio in cui erano state immerse delle macchioline di sangue. Poi le friggeva in quello stesso olio. Erano, insomma, una specie di polpette, ma

turmoil, had already soaped his cheeks and had very, very lightly drawn the razor over them. It was, after all, his profession. If there were no such things as beards, he would have invented them.

Ernesto was finally free and got up from the chair. No one noticed the tears in his eyes. "Thank you," he said once again and left the shop, forgetting - as he never had before - to pay. Bernardo smiling contentedly and folding his towel, watched Ernesto cross the street as he fled home. His assistant (hoping for a tip) mentioned Ernesto's forgetfulness, but Bernardo was clearly not going to call him back.

"He'll pay another time," he said, "And if he doesn't, so what?"

A light breeze that had come up from the sea made the sensation of cold at the back of Ernesto's neck and on his cheeks even more unpleasant. He felt as if he'd been left naked and he couldn't wait to be back home. He was hoping, even as he knew it was in vain, that his mother would comfort him.

"Mamma," he said, sounding as if a great tragedy had befallen him, the moment his mother opened the door, "Bernardo shaved me." But the woman didn't perceive his distress, and it never occurred to her to utter a word of greeting, much less to kiss her son's newly razored cheek.

"Young men your age begin to grow beards," she said. "It's good that Bernardo shaved it. Let me see."

The words "young men" irked and depressed Ernesto. When he had been about thirteen or fourteen years old, he would have liked to be taken for a grown man, and had badgered his mother to buy him a vest (like one a boy in his class had). Now, however, reading newspapers, he was pleased if a youth of his age was still referred to as a boy. If, instead of saying "young men" his mother had said "boys", he would have forgiven her insensitivity.

"He was sneaky," he said. "He tricked me - didn't ask me if I wanted him to do it or not."

"Well, change your jacket now," his mother went on, "and come right back and eat. I've made you fugazette. Auntie and I are hungry. We've been waiting for you for over half an hour."

Not counting sweets, his mother's fugazette were Ernesto's favorite food. They were rounds of minced beef that signora Celestina larded with slivers of garlic, then soaked in oil for twenty-

piatte, e doveva entrare nella loro composizione un segreto; infatti Ernesto, dopo morta sua madre, non ritrovò mai più il loro sapore, sebbene la signora Celestina avesse, in un momento di tregua, e poco prima di morire, confidato quel segreto alla nuora.

Fino ai tredici anni ne riceveva una; poi due, e della stessa grandezza di prima. Il ragazzo ne avrebbe mangiate tre, anche quattro: ma quel giorno non sentiva quasi il gusto dei cibi. Mangiò in silenzio; poi si ritirò subito nella sua stanza - l'unica della casa che avesse il tetto spiovente - e si buttò sopra il letto d'ottone, a covare malinconie. Il merlo, uso a quell'ora di essere liberato e fare il bagno, saltava inquieto da uno stecco all'altro, e chiamava il suo amico perché gli aprisse la gabbia.

«Se mi sverginessi, oggi, adesso, subito!» fu la conclusione a cui giunsero le meditazioni e le melanconie di Ernesto. Aveva dimenticato la promessa fatta a sé stesso di non andare dalle donne prima dei diciotto-diecinove anni compiuti. Ricordò, con una specie di rimorso, che molti suoi compagni c'erano già stati; e, parlando con lui, se ne vantavano. Davano tutti gli insegnamenti del caso, ed abbondavano in particolari. Anche il cugino coetaneo (non coetaneo del tutto: aveva tre mesi più di Ernesto) c'era già stato; ed anche, a credergli, più di una volta.

«Perché lui sí e io no?» pensò Ernesto. Quello che aveva fatto con l'uomo non contava: la vita, in questo senso, incominciava il giorno nel quale un ragazzo andava per la prima volta con una donna. C'erano certo le malattie (anche di quelle i suoi compagni gli avevano parlato: uno di questi si faceva bello di averne già contratta una); ma Ernesto non temeva, in quel momento almeno, le malattie; in nessun caso quelle che si possono prendere dalle donne. Se mai, c'era stato un periodo in cui si era fissato di essere destinato a morire tifico, prima dei vent'anni: questa era stata per lui la conseguenza di una «campagna» che facevano allora i giornali contro «il male che non perdona», spaventando i lettori, specialmente giovani, e suggerendo precauzioni e rimedi a cui solo i ricchi potevano, nella società del tempo, ricorrere. Tutti gli altri (ed Ernesto si collocava fra gli altri) dovevano crepare. La fissazione durò due o tre mesi; poi Ernesto non ci pensò più; fu il violino - le preoccupazioni che gli dava il violino - a guarirlo. E, dopo, l'amicizia con l'uomo.

La difficoltà era un'altra. Egli si sapeva incapace di dire di no, specialmente ad una donna. Ora, se entrava in un postribolo,

fours hours. They left specks of blood in the oil, and she would then fry them in the same oil. They were in fact, meat balls, though flattened, but they must have contained a secret ingredient. They never tasted the same to Ernesto after his mother's death, although shortly before she passed away, during a period of truce, Signora Celestina had given her daughter-in-law the recipe.

Until he was thirteen years old, Ernesto had been served only one, later, he got a second, as large as the first. He could eat three, perhaps even four, but that day he could barely taste any of his food. He ate in silence, then immediately withdrew to his room, the only one in the house with a sloping roof, where he threw himself down on the brass bed to brood on his unhappiness. The blackbird, accustomed to being released and to having its bath at that time of day, began hopping restlessly from perch to perch, and calling to Ernesto to open the cage.

"If only I could lose my virginity today, right now, immediately!" was the conclusion of Ernesto's melancholy brooding. Gone was the promise he'd made to himself not to have women before he was eighteen or nineteen. With a sense of regret he recalled all the friends who had already done so; and had bragged about it to him. They had told him all they knew on the subject and were lavish with details. Even a cousin his own age (well, not exactly, he was three months older than Ernesto) had already done it - more than once, if you could believe him.

"Why him and not me?" Ernesto thought. What he had done with the man didn't count. Life, in that sense, began the day a boy had a woman for the first time. True, there were certain kinds of diseases (his friends had told him about them too - one of the boys even boasted that he'd already contracted one). But Ernesto wasn't afraid of diseases at that moment, at least those that you can get from women. However, there had been a time when he was convinced that he would die of tuberculosis before he got to be twenty. It was the result of a campaign newspapers were running against "the merciless evil" that terrified readers, especially young ones, by suggesting precautions and treatments to which only the wealthy had recourse in that era. Everyone else (and Ernesto counted himself among those others) was going to die. The obsession lasted two or three months. Then he stopped thinking about it. It was the violin - his preoccupation with the violin that

avrebbe dovuto, come conseguenza di tale sua incapacità, accettare la prima donna che gli si fosse offerta. E se non gli fosse piaciuta? Se ne avesse preferita un'altra? Come osare di infliggere ad una disgraziata («Il Lavoratore» gli aveva insegnato che tutte le prostitute erano delle disgraziate, vittime dei pregiudizi della società borghese) l'onta di un rifiuto? Ernesto non era nell'età estetica (doveva arrivarci in breve, ma attraverso altre vie e per altri oggetti); le sue preferenze gli erano dettate unicamente dalla sensualità del momento; ed era una sensualità molto variabile; incerta perfino - come si è visto - per quanto riguardava la mèta. Non si era mai chiesto, per esempio, se l'uomo era bello o brutto; lo aveva ascoltato per ragioni estranee all'estetica: desiderava di essere amato, e l'uomo l'amava. (C'erano, naturalmente, altre cause, e più profonde, ma il ragazzo le ignorava). Ora una prostituta non poteva - ed egli lo sapeva - amarlo; se andava con lui era per i soldi: gli avrebbe preferito un vecchio, il signor Wilder, o un altro come lui, dal quale poteva ricevere, o almeno sperare di ricevere, una buona mancia. Questa della scelta (o meglio della non scelta) era una grossa difficoltà, ancorata nel suo carattere.

Ma il destino doveva essergli, anche questa volta, favorevole. C'era, in città vecchia, una donna, che esercitava il mestiere da sola (forse clandestinamente; senza cioè l'autorizzazione della polizia): Ernesto l'aveva veduta spesso alla finestra: un giorno gli era parso perfino che gli sorridesse. Abitava al primo piano di una vecchia casa, nel quartiere dove si aprivano i postriboli: un conoscente gli aveva anche detto la sua tariffa (costava anche lei un fiorino); ma Ernesto non sapeva come trovare la porta alla quale avrebbe dovuto battere. Se avesse battuto ad una porta sbagliata, cosa avrebbe detto a chi gli fosse venuto ad aprire? Immaginava - chi sa perché - una vecchia, con in mano una scopa, che, appena avesse capito cosa cercava, lo avrebbe inseguito per la via, gridandogli dietro ingiurie, e svergognandolo in mezzo alla gente. Per di più, i negozi dello zio tutore (che, temendo per il nipote i vizi solitari, gli dava quel regalo settimanale a quel preciso scopo, ahimè sottaciuto) non erano molto lontani dal quartiere dei postriboli: erano in una via laterale. Se egli fosse passato di là in quel momento, e avesse assistito alla scena? Era capace di tirargli una sberla in pubblico; e poi accompagnarlo a casa, tenendolo, perché non gli scappasse, per un braccio, e raccontare subito ogni cosa a sua madre che - Ernesto non ne dubitava - si sarebbe messa subito a piangere; forse anche

cured him. And after that, his friendship with the man.

He had another problem too. He knew he was incapable of saying no, especially to a woman. Consequently, if he went to a brothel he would have to say yes to the first woman offered him. What if she didn't appeal to him? If he'd rather have someone else? How would he have the nerve to afflict a poor, unfortunate woman (The Worker had taught him that prostitutes were poor unfortunate victims of bourgeois prejudice) with the shame of a refusal? Ernesto had not yet reached the age of aesthetic sensibility (he would reach it shortly - but by other ways and other means). His preferences were dictated solely by his sensuality at a given moment. And as we've seen, this sensuality was very changeable - even uncertain in terms of its objectives. For example, it never occurred to him to wonder whether the man was handsome or ugly. He had responded to him for reasons that had nothing to do with aesthetics. He wanted to be loved and the man loved him. (Of course, there were other reasons too, deeper ones, but the boy wasn't aware of them.) True, a prostitute wasn't going to love him. He knew that. If she went with him, it was for the money. And she'd prefer an old man, someone like Signor Wilder from whom she could get, or at least hope for, a good tip. This matter of making a choice (or rather of not making one) was a major difficulty rooted in his character.

But fate was once again to favor him. There was a woman in the old city who practiced the profession on her own (perhaps secretly, meaning without police authorization). Ernesto had seen her often at her window. One day he even thought she'd smiled at him. She lived on the first floor of an old building in a part of town where brothels were permitted. A friend had told him her price (a florin). But Ernesto didn't know which door was hers. If he knocked at the wrong door, what would he say to whoever opened it? He imagined - who knows why - an old woman holding a broom, who, on hearing what he wanted, would chase him into the street shrieking insults and humiliating him in front of everybody. Worse, his uncle, (who, fearing solitary vices in his nephew, was giving him weekly gifts for just this purpose though alas, without actually stating his reason), owned shops on a street not far from the brothels. What if his uncle happened to pass by and witness the scene? He was capable of smacking Ernesto in public, grabbing

sarebbe svenuta, morta addirittura, per la vergogna di avere un figlio fatto a quel modo.

Fra il sí e il no, fra il desiderio di provare che involontariamente gli aveva messo addosso Bernardo, facendogli quella barba intempestiva e precoce: Ernesto decise di abbandonarsi al caso: sarebbe passato per la via dove abitava la donna; ci sarebbe passato tre volte; se in una di queste la donna si fosse affacciata alla finestra, gli avrebbe fatto un cenno e sarebbe salito; nel caso contrario sarebbe tornato indietro. Il pomeriggio era, virtualmente, suo: non doveva recarsi in ufficio, ma in giro per alcune commissioni (non c'erano, quel giorno, carri da caricare e scaricare): doveva solo ritornarci la sera, per chiudere e rendere i conti all'esatto signor Wilder. C'era dunque tempo. Sapeva che dalle prostitute si andava solo di sera e di nascosto; ma non si sentiva di rimandare: preferiva affrontare il tutto per tutto, subito, in pieno giorno. (Era anche un giorno di grande sole). A pensarci su, avrebbe perso il poco coraggio che gli rimaneva.

La donna era alla finestra; e vide subito il suo cenno. Col cuore in gola, Ernesto salí la scala, e la trovò sulla porta, che l'aspettava. Gli parve un pò meno giovane di quanto gli fosse sembrata dalla strada; ma il particolare non aveva grande importanza; anzi un istinto lo avvertí che, per lui, era forse meglio cosí. Piuttosto notò che, alle labbra, le cresceva una leggera peluria. «Che sia, - pensò, - perseguitado dai mustaci? » Questo pensiero lo divertí e gli dette un pò piú d'animo.

Entrò in una stanzetta, di cui lo colpí l'odore. Era un odore di biancheria nuova, appena tagliata; lo stesso che gli piaceva tanto nella casa della sua balia. Questa, che aveva il marito ammalato, e doveva guadagnare la vita per lui e per lei, cuciva a macchina tutti i pomeriggi capi di biancheria diversi, che la mattina vendeva, o cercava di vendere, in Piazza del Ponterosso. Ma non aveva la licenza (come forse non l'aveva la donna da cui era salito Ernesto) e poteva vendere solo camminando. (Molte volte, quando Ernesto, di ritorno dal Ginnasio Dante Alighieri, passava per quella piazza, voleva fermarsi a salutare la sua «seconda madre», raccontarle magari i suoi successi scolastici; ma quella lo mandava presto via: temeva della guardia. Nessuno poteva, regnando Francesco Giuseppe, impedirle di camminare con della biancheria sotto il braccio; ma, se trovava una cliente, s'intendevano subito con uno

his arm so that he couldn't escape, then dragging him home, and telling his mother everything right off. Ernesto had no doubt she would immediately start crying, maybe faint, or even die right there with the shame of having such a son.

Yes or no? Wanting to experience the feelings that Bernardo had inadvertently activated in him with that ill timed, premature shave, Ernesto decided to surrender to fate. He would walk down the street where the woman lived. He would walk by three times. If one of those times she was at the window he would signal to her and go up. If it didn't work out, he'd go home. His afternoon was essentially free. He didn't have to be back at the office as there were no carts to load or unload that day. He just had to get some errands done and be back there in the evening to settle the day's accounts with penny pinching Signor Wilder. So he had plenty of time. He knew that people usually went to prostitutes secretly and at night, but he didn't feel like putting it off. He wanted to experience everything head on, immediately, in broad daylight. (It was even a bright sunny day.) If he stopped to think about it, he would lose what little courage he had.

The woman was at the window and immediately noticed his nod. His heart beating in his throat, Ernesto climbed the steps and found her waiting at her door. She didn't look quite as young as she'd looked from the street. But it didn't matter. In fact, he had the feeling that things might work out better for him this way. What he did notice was a light growth of hair over her upper lip. "How about that? Is she going to sprout a mustache?" he wondered. The thought amused and cheered him.

As he entered the small room, he was struck by its odor, the odor of freshly trimmed linen, the very same that he had liked so much in his nursemaid's home. The nursemaid, who had a sick husband and had to earn a living for both of them, would sit at her sewing machine every afternoon making various articles of linen which she sold, or attempted to sell, mornings in Piazza del Ponterosso. But she didn't have a permit (just as the woman Ernesto was visiting probably didn't) so she could only sell while walking about. (Many times when Ernesto, walking through the Piazza on his way back from the Dante Alighieri school, wanted to stop and talk to his "second mother", to at least tell her about his scholastic successes. But she would chase him off immediately. She was afraid

sguardo, e sparivano entrambe in un portone, dove la compratrice approfittava della clandestinità della povera donna per avere la merce a minor prezzo.) Anche la donna di Ernesto cuciva della biancheria; ma lo faceva per sé e per i suoi clienti: ci teneva molto alla pulizia. Forse era anche una buona donna, con repressi istinti materni. Quello strano cliente, che gli era capitato in pieno giorno, e mostrava ancora più giovane della sua età, pareva fatto apposta per tirar(g)li fuori, nel caso li avesse avuti. Un'altra cosa che colpì Ernesto, e gli ricordò di nuovo la casa della balia, fu un lumino che ardeva sotto un'immagine della Madonna, poco lontano dal letto grande (matrimoniale) con le lenzuola fresche di bucato.

«Scometo che ti sè ancora putel de mama?» disse la donna, accorgendosi dell'imbarazzo di Ernesto, che né si spogliava, né faceva atto di accostarla. Ernesto capì e non capì la domanda.

«Sè la prima volta - confessò - che vado de una dona».

«Oh, caro!» pensò e disse la donna. E guardò meglio Ernesto. Gli parve un bel ragazzo, e poi così diverso dai soliti clienti che venivano da lei la sera! Certo non capì tutto; ma qualcosa intuì: sentì che, quel pomeriggio, il destino le faceva uno strano inaspettato regalo.

«No sta aver paura - gli disse - fazo tuto mi. Ti intanto spoite».

E, così dicendo, la donna incominciò, per conto suo, a spogliarsi. Ernesto l'imitò.

«Devo cavarme anche le calze?» gli chiese, umile. Ernesto fece un gesto vago, come per dire che la cosa gli era indifferente. La donna non se le tolse.

La timidezza di Ernesto era tanta che la donna pensò, per un momento, che fosse ammalato d'impotenza giovanile. Ma si accorse ad un'occhiata - e della scoperta fu lieta - di aver sbagliato diagnosi. Ernesto, dopo essersi spogliato, s'era levato in piedi, e rimaneva, nudo e con le braccia pendenti, davanti a lei, seduta sul letto.

«Perché no ti te distiri sul letto, vizin de mi?» gli chiese la donna. Poi si pentì, e fermò con un gesto il ragazzo, che si accingeva ad obbedirle.

«No- disse - faremo in quell'altra maniera. Sarà più facile per ti, se sè vero che, per ti, sè la prima volta».

Qualcosa nell'aspetto di Ernesto le confermò che il ragazzo non le aveva detto una bugia. Perché, del resto, avrebbe dovuto mentire? I giovani tengono a mostrarsi piuttosto «navigati» che

of the police. Under Franz Joseph², no one could stop her from walking around with linen under her arm. But the moment she and a customer spotted each other, the two would have to disappear into a door way, where the customer would exploit the woman's need for stealth to obtain the item cheaply. This woman too, was sewing linen, but she was doing it for herself and for her clients. She was particular about cleanliness. Perhaps she, too, was a kind woman with suppressed maternal instincts. If so, this strange customer who had dropped in on her in broad daylight and who acted less mature than he looked, would seem to be particularly fashioned to draw them out. Another thing which struck Ernesto and recalled his nursemaid's home once more, was the small lamp burning under an image of the Madonna not far from the large double bed with its freshly laundered sheets.

"I'll bet that you're still your mamma's little boy," said the woman, perceiving Ernesto's discomfort. He was neither undressing nor approaching her.

He understood yet didn't understand what she meant.

"This'll be my first time with a woman," he confessed.

"Oh, my darling," the woman blurted. And she looked more closely at Ernesto. He was a good looking boy, so different from the men who regularly visited her at night. Of course, she didn't understand all the circumstances, but she sensed something. She sensed that on that afternoon, fate had bestowed a strange and unexpected gift upon her.

"Well, don't be scared," she told him, "I'll take care of everything. You just get yourself undressed."

And as she spoke, the woman began undressing. Ernesto did so too.

"Should I take off my stockings?" she asked submissively. Ernesto gestured vaguely, as if it was matter of indifference to him. The woman did not remove them.

He was so timid, that for a moment, the woman wondered if he'd been stricken with juvenile impotence. But one glance - and the discovery pleased her - told her her diagnosis had been incorrect. After having undressed, Ernesto got to his feet, and completely

²Trieste was part of the Austro Hungarian Empire until after World War I. naked, his arms dangling at his sides, stood before the woman,

inesperti. E tanto piú si mostrano la prima, quanto piú sono la seconda cosa. Ma Ernesto era fatto diversamente. La sua forza e la sua debolezza stavano nel mostrarsi, fin dove possibile, quale veramente era. Non si trattava di un calcolo, ma di un modo di essere - di difendersi - che valeva quanto, o piú, dell'altro; ma che, per valere, non doveva essere simulato. Il ragazzo amava, come tutti i suoi coetanei, le lodi; ma, a differenza di questi, doveva sentire di meritarsele. Qualche volta si tormentava per i suoi rapporti con l'uomo: se la gente - pensava - che sapeva contraria a quelle cose, che ne faceva un termine d'ingiuria, ne fosse venuta a conoscenza, molti che adesso gli volevano bene, non gliene avrebbero piú voluto. Gli pareva di «usurpare affetti», e spesso la sua giovane sensibilità ne soffriva.

Intanto la donna incominciò, per eccitarlo, a fargli delle carezze. Gli sembrava, cosí nudo, poco piú di un bambino; e la sua mano gli accarezzò, come ad un bambino, le natiche. Erano cosí liscie e gentili che v'indugiò un momento. Ma quel momento bastò per richiamare alla memoria d'Ernesto l'uomo: la sua immagine gli appariva, in quel luogo, minacciosa. « Che la la gabi anche ela col mio culo?» pensò.

« Ti sè assai bel e assai cocolo - gli disse la donna; - ma un poco ancora tropo putel. No importa: ti me piasi de piú cussí. Come ti te ciami?»

Le prostitute non domandano mai agli uomini che le frequentano il loro nome. E, se danno il loro, non è mai quello vero. Ma Ernesto non era un cliente comune.

« Ernesto » rispose Ernesto. E fece seguire al nome il cognome. La donna sorrise.

« Mi me ciamo Tanda » - disse. « Quando che stavo a casa mia (non disse dove) e che iero come tute le altre, i me ciamava Nataschia ». Evidentemente, la donna era una slovena del Territorio. Era un'altra somiglianza fra lei e la balia di Ernesto: queste coincidenze accrescevano, forse, il suo imbarazzo.

« Vien » gli disse la donna. E si arrovsciò sul letto, a sponda. « Per ti sè meio cussí ». Ed attirò a sé il ragazzo.

Ernesto provò un grande piacere, ma che non gli riuscì nuovo. Gli parve di averlo provato già altre volte, di saperlo da sempre, da prima ancora della sua nascita. Si sentiva come un uomo che, dopo un viaggio avventuroso, ritorna nella sua casa, di cui conosce

who was seated on the bed.

"Why don't you lie down here on the bed next to me?" The woman asked, then changed her mind and gestured to stop the boy, who was about to do as she'd asked. "No," she went on, "we'll do it a different way. It will be easier, if this is really your first time."

Something about Ernesto's manner convinced her that the boy hadn't lied to her. Why, in fact, should he have? Youngsters generally try to pass themselves off as sophisticated rather than inexperienced. And the harder they pretend to be the former, the more likely they are to be the latter. But that was not Ernesto's way. His strength and his weakness lay in trying as much as possible to present himself as he really was. It wasn't a deliberate decision, it was the way he was, his way of protecting himself - and it was just as effective, perhaps even more so, than the opposite approach, except that to be effective, it had to be genuine. Like all boys his age he liked praise, but unlike most others, he had to feel he merited it. There were times his relationship with the man was a torment to him. It would occur to him that if people whom he knew, who were repelled by such behavior and used insulting terms for it, were to learn what he had done, many who now liked him would no longer do so. His young soul suffered at the thought that he was "stealing affection" under false pretenses.

Meanwhile, to arouse him, the woman had begun caressing him. Completely nude, he seemed to her not more than a child. And as if he were a child, her hand stroked his buttocks. They were soft and tender and her hand lingered there for a moment. But that moment was enough for Ernesto to recall the man. And his image there, in that place, was frightening. "What could she want with my ass?" he thought.

"You're pretty good looking, cute," the woman said, "But still too much like a kid. It don't matter. I like you better this way. What's your name?"

Prostitutes don't ever ask their client's names. And if they give their own, it's never the real one. But Ernesto wasn't an ordinary client.

"Ernesto," he replied and added his surname as well. The woman smiled.

"Mine's Tanda," she said, "Back when I lived at home (she didn't say where) and was like other girls, it was Natasha". Clearly,

e ritrova tutto: la collocazione dei mobili, i ripostigli; ogni cosa insomma. Quando si alzò, rinfrancato, la donna prese un catino, vi versò dentro prima dell'acqua, poi un liquido che la colorò leggermente di rosa, e lavò la virilità mortificata di Ernesto. Era un rito, ed anche una precauzione «post factum» contro le malattie, che i clienti aggradivano ed esigevano. Ernesto che, ora, non temeva più di sé stesso, chiese informazioni.

«Sè per la pulizia» gli rispose la donna. «Mi no gò certe malatie; se no, te lo gavessi dito. O, almeno, te gavessi regalà un goldon (preservativo). Ma i omini vol cussí e mi, se voio viver, devo contentar tuti. Ma de darte una malatia a ti me sentirio un'assasina».

«No gò paura de le malatie» rispose Ernesto. E - come desiderava andarsene (pensare in pace a quanto gli era accaduto) - mise la mano in tasca, per prendere fuori il denaro e pagare la donna. Era il primo del mese e il primo giorno della settimana: Ernesto era ricco. Dette alla donna (che costava solo un fiorino) tutto, o quasi, quello che possedeva, compreso quanto aveva dimenticato di dare a Bernardo.

«Ti me dà tropo» disse questa, stupita della generosità del ragazzo. (Cosí pagavano solo i vecchi o gli impotenti; ed il piacere, non tanto fisico, che aveva cavato da lui, sarebbe piú che bastato a pagarla). Voleva rendergli una parte del denaro; ma Ernesto non volle.

«Se ti voi tornar de mi - gli disse, quando Ernesto era già sulla soglia - torna, anca se quel giorno no ti gà soldi. Ricordite che me ciamo Tanda, e sta atento a no sbagliar de porta. De là stà una brutta dona, che proprio no te la consìglio. Ricordite che un mulo come ti no gà sempre bisogno de pagar. Mi gaverò sempre gusto de véderte, gratis o no». Era quasi commossa, e volentieri gli avrebbe dato un bacio. Ma vide che Ernesto aveva fretta di uscire (conosceva quella fretta degli uomini), e non osò.

Due cose tormentavano Ernesto, mentre si avviava ad eseguire le commissioni per il signor Wilder: non riusciva a sciogliere la matassa un pò arruffata dei suoi pensieri, e soffriva di una grande sete. La matassa doveva attendere molti anni per incominciare appena a dipanarla; la sete invece (che, per ragioni fisiologiche, affligge tutti gli uomini dopo il coito con una prostituta) poteva soddisfarla subito. Ma avrebbe desiderato estinguerla con un frambua (lampone), ed aveva dati tanti soldi alla donna che, fatti i conti, non gliene rimanevano abbastanza per entrare in una pasticceria, anche

she was a Slovenian from the Territory, another thing she had in common with his nursemaid. It's possible these coincidences were adding to his discomfort.

"Come on, it'll be better for you this way," the woman said. And falling back at the edge of the bed, she drew the boy towards her.

Ernesto experienced great pleasure, but one that didn't seem new to him. It seemed to him that he had experienced it before, even before his birth. He felt like a man who, after a long, adventurous journey, returns home where he knows and recognizes everything: the way the furniture is set out, the way the closets are arranged, that is, every little thing. When he stood up, feeling brighter, the woman filled a basin with water, added a liquid which tinted it pink and washed Ernesto's abashed member. It was a "post facto" practice, a precaution against disease which her clients enjoyed and expected. Ernesto, no longer worried about himself, inquired about it.

"It's a disinfectant," the woman answered. "I don't have any of those diseases. If I did, I'd have told you. Or I'd have given you a condom. But men, they want me to do it, and if I want to make a living, I've got to keep them happy. If I got you sick with anything, I'd feel like a murderer."

"Well, I'm not afraid of getting sick" Ernesto answered. And, as he was anxious to get away (to think quietly about what he had just experienced), he reached into his pocket for money. It was the first of the month, the first of the week. He was rich. He gave the woman (who charged only a florin) everything or almost everything he had, including the money he'd forgotten to give Bernardo.

"That's too much," she said, stunned by the boy's generosity. (It was what only the old or impotent paid. Besides, the pleasure she'd had in the boy, though not so much physical, was more than enough payment.) She offered to give him some money back, but he refused.

"If you feel like seeing me again," she said, when Ernesto was already at the door, "come back even if you don't have money that day. Just remember my name is Tanda, and be careful not to go to the wrong door. She's a nasty one next door, stay away from her. And remember, a kid like you don't always have to pay. I'd be glad to see you anytime, money or no." Carried away by emotion she felt like kissing him, but perceiving his eagerness to leave (she

rinunciando alle paste, e volendosi limitare alla sola bibita che, per accrescere il suo supplizio, sognava agghiacciata. Non gli restava quindi che bere ad una fontana pubblica. La trovò in un sobborgo. Era un sobborgo molto popolato; la città s'ingrandiva dalle sue parti: vecchie casupole che Ernesto conosceva dalle passeggiate dell'infanzia ed immaginava dovessero durare eterne, crollavano per far posto a nuovi edifici; il fumaiolo d'una fabbrica emetteva un denso fumo, e l'aria intorno n'era impregnata. Già alcuni operai uscivano dagli stabilimenti, in doppia fila, con la gamella del pranzo in mano. «Tutti compagni, tutti socialisti» pensò Ernesto, che avrebbe voluto essere uno di loro. Ma la loro vista lo rese anche accorto di essere in ritardo. Gli prese un'insolita nostalgia dell'ufficio e, perfino, del signor Wilder. L'uomo non ci poteva essere: non c'era stato lavoro per lui quel giorno; ed Ernesto era quasi contento di non doverlo rivedere al ritorno. Per affrettarlo, decise di prendere, coi pochi centesimi che gli rimanevano, il tram. Lo avrebbe poi messo in conto al parsimonioso signor Wilder.

La fontanella sorgeva nel mezzo d'un prato alberato, fra una caserma ed una chiesa, dipinte entrambe di giallo. Molte donne, la maggior parte giovani, alcune ancora bambine, attendevano il loro turno. Portavano sulla testa mastelli, brocche, recipienti diversi per fare la provvista d'acqua, che allora mancava quasi in tutte le case (averla a domicilio era considerato un grande lusso). Ernesto, malgrado la sete che lo tormentava, si era messo pazientemente in coda; ed avrebbe dovuto attendere chissà quanto, se una donna, già anziana e coi capelli tutti bianchi, non avesse gridato alle sue compagne d'attesa: «Ma lassè dunque beber sto povero fio de mama. No vedè che el mori de sede?»

Era, circa, la frase che aveva udita dalla prostituta: la nuova coincidenza lo sorprese. Le donne si scostarono pronte, ed Ernesto, dopo ringraziata la vecchia, si avvicinò alla fontana. Dovette, per bere a garganella, piegare in due la persona: quell'atto suscitò in lui, per la posizione del corpo, un ricordo importuno. In quel punto, udì intorno a sé delle risa.

«Le sà tuto - pensò - le sà de l'omo, le sà de che logò che vegno: devo aver scritto in faccia qualcosa de strano; e sè per questo che le ridi de mi». Smise di bere, prima ancora di aver estinta interamente la sete, e si allontanò arrossendo. Il suo turbamento era così grande che non s'accorse che quasi tutte le donne che ridevano (non di lui,

knew that eagerness of men) and didn't dare.

Two problems were troubling Ernesto as he set off to do his errands for Signor Wilder. He was unable to undo the twisted tangle of his thoughts, and he was very thirsty. It would be many years before he could even begin to undo the tangle. However, the thirst (which, for physiological reasons, afflicts all men after coitus with a prostitute) could be satisfied immediately. He would have liked a raspberry crush, but had given so much of his money to the woman that after counting it up, he didn't have enough to enter a sweet shop even if he forswore pastries and restricted himself to a drink, which, to intensify his sufferings, he was imagining as ice cold. So there was nothing else to do, but drink at a public fountain. He found one in an outlying area, a highly populated outskirts of the city, which had been growing in every direction. Ancient hovels that Ernesto knew from childhood, and which he thought would surely last forever, were being razed to make way for new buildings.

The chimney of a nearby factory was emitting thick smoke that permeated the air. Workers, walking double file, lunch boxes in hand, were already leaving their building. "Comrades, all socialists," thought Ernesto, wishing he were one of them. But seeing them reminded him that he was late. Suddenly, he felt a strange nostalgia for the office, even for Signor Wilder. There hadn't been any work for the man that day, so he wouldn't be there. Ernesto was almost pleased that he wouldn't have to see him. To get back sooner, he decided he would use the remainder of his money to take the tram back and bill it to miserly Signor Wilder.

The fountain rose in the middle of a tree-lined field between a barracks and a church, both painted yellow. Many women, most of them young, some still merely girls, were waiting their turn. They bore basins, pitchers and various other water receptacles on their heads, as most houses had no water supply (to have it in one's home then, was considered a great luxury). Despite his desperate thirst, Ernesto waited patiently in line. Who knows how long he might have waited there if a white haired old woman hadn't shouted out to the others in line, "Let this darling boy get a drink. Can't you see he's dying of thirst?"

It reminded him of what the prostitute had called him – this new association startled him. The women moved away quickly and

ma per lui) erano molto giovani; alcune anche assai carine. Fissavano Ernesto, che teneva gli occhi a terra, e cercava di allontanarsi il piú presto possibile dalla disgraziata fontanella.

Ernesto si giudicava male. Non c'era nulla nella sua persona che potesse suscitare il riso: nulla poi di effeminato. Le giovani donne ridevano perché avevano, circa, la stessa età di Ernesto, e nessun altro modo per attirarsi una sua occhiata. Non ce n'era forse una che non avrebbe accettato per buono un complimento; custodito in cuore, per qualche giorno o qualche ora, un, anche minimo, segno di attenzionatne. Ma Ernesto interpretò diversamente quel ridere somnesso. La giornata, incominciata con la barba fatta a tradimento da Bernardo, finiva, così, male. Gli pareva fosse passato non so quanto tempo da quando era stato per la prima volta da una donna... Un'intera epoca poi lo divideva da quando aveva iniziata quella strana amicizia con un bracciante avventizio, che - di questo almeno era sicuro - tradimento da Bernardo, finiva, così, male. Gli pareva fosse passato non so quanto tempo da quando era stato per la prima volta da una donna... Un'intera epoca poi lo divideva da quando aveva iniziata quella strana amicizia con un bracciante avventizio, che - di questo almeno era sicuro - l'aveva (a modo suo) amato; e, forse (se egli l'avesse voluto) l'avrebbe amato ancora... E non era passato che un mese

after thanking the old woman Ernesto approached the fountain. He had to bend his body almost in half to reach the spout. The movement and resulting position of his body roused an intrusive memory. At just that moment, he heard laughter all around him.

They know everything, he thought. They know about the man, they know where I just came from. There must be something weird about my looks that's making them laugh at me. He stopped drinking before his thirst was satisfied and blushing, began walking away. His agitation was so overwhelming that he didn't realize that almost all the women who were laughing (not at him but for him), were very young, some even very pretty. They continued staring at Ernesto, who, with his eyes to the ground, was trying to escape the wretched fountain as quickly as he could.

Ernesto was misjudging himself badly. There was nothing about his appearance to induce laughter. Nothing effeminate. The young women were laughing because they were about Ernesto's age and had no other way of attracting his attention. There probably wasn't one, who wouldn't have been happy to receive a compliment, even the smallest indication of his interest to store in her heart for a few days or a few hours. But Ernesto interpreted their subdued laughter very differently. This is how the day, begun with Bernardo's deceitful shave, was finishing; badly. It seemed to Ernesto as if an incalculable amount of time had passed since his first experience with a woman. And an entire epoch separated him from the time he had begun his strange relationship with the laborer, who - he was at least sure about this - had (in his own way) loved him. And perhaps (if Ernesto had wanted him to) would still have loved him. And only one month had gone by.



Cefalù.

Poems by Giovanni Raboni

Translated by Antonello Borra

Antonello Borra is Associate Professor of Italian at the University of Vermont. His volumes of poetry are *Frammenti di tormenti (prima parte)* (Longo: 2000), *Frammenti di tormenti (seconda parte)* (Lietocolle: 2006), *Alfabestiario* (Lietocolle: 2009), and the bilingual *Alphabetabestiario* (Fomite: 2012) with English translations by Blossom S. Kirschenbaum and illustrations by Delia Robinson. Translations of his poetry have appeared in English and Catalan, and are being prepared in German. He translated into Italian poems of W.S. Merwin and Greg Delanty from English, of Erich Fried from German, and of Roberto Sosa and José Watanabe from Spanish. He co-translated from German two autobiographical novels of Johannes Hoesle and is a regular contributor to magazines and journals in both Italy and the U.S. His other publications are books and articles on literary criticism and language pedagogy.

Giovanni Raboni (1932-2004) is arguably one of the greatest Italian poets of the second half of the twentieth century. Born in Milan of an affluent middleclass family he gave up a career in law to become a journalist, translator and literary critic. He translated into Italian works by Flaubert, Apollinaire, Baudelaire, and Racine, as well as Proust's *In Search of Lost Time* in its entirety. Among his collections are *Le case della Vetra*, (1966), *Cadenza d'inganno*, (1975), *Nel grave sogno* (1982), *Ogni terzo pensiero*, (1993), and *Quare tristis* (1998). He was awarded all the most prestigious Italian poetry prizes, including the Viareggio and the Librex Montale. The poems presented here were published posthumously in 2006 as part of *Ultimi versi* with an afterword in verse by his wife and poet Patrizia Valduga. They are now included in the Meridiano Mondadori *Opera poetica* with the rest of his poetry, a selection of his essays, and works for the theatre.

da Giovanni Raboni, *Ultimi versi*

Canzone della nuova era

Bisognerà riabituarsi
a contarli per numeri romani
(di sicuro qualcuno
si ricorda ancora come si fa)
gli anni che son passati
e quelli ahinoi che passeranno
in questa nuova era
della nostra tragicomica storia.
Il problema è da dove, esattamente,
far partire il conteggio:
dalla discesa in campo
o dall'ascesa al trono,
dalla prima vittoria elettorale
o dall'ultima, quella
che ha segnato di sé il nuovo millennio?
O sarà invece il caso
d'andare più indietro, molto più indietro,
per esempio all'ingresso nella loggia
o a quando la coscienza del paese
ha cominciato a modellarsi
sui palinsesti di canale cinque?
Sarebbe già più d'un ventennio, allora,
più di un ventennio...

Canzone dell'unico vantaggio

È vero, la sinistra non c'è più,
c'è un profluvio di destre
d'ogni tipo, formato e sfumatura
e in tanta oscena abbondanza decidere
sarebbe a dir poco difficile
se spuntato verso il crepuscolo
della verminosa fermentazione
dei rimasugli della guerra fredda
e dei rifiuti dell'ancien régime
a capo di una non ci fosse lui,

From Giovanni Raboni, *Ultimi versi*

Song of the New Era

We will have to re-acustom ourselves
to counting by roman numerals
(surely, someone
still remembers how to do it)
the years that passed
and those that, alas, will pass
in this new era
of our tragicomic history.
The problem is from where, exactly,
to start the counting:
from the descent "onto the field"
or from the ascent to the throne,
from the first electoral victory
or from the latest, the one that
marked the new millennium?
Or will it be the case
of going further back, much further back,
for example to the entry of the lodge
or to when the conscience of the country
started to model itself
after the programs of channel five?
That would already be more than twenty years, then,
more than "those" twenty years...

Song of the One Advantage

It's true, the left is no longer there,
there's a flood of right wings
of every type, shape, and nuance,
and in such obscene abundance deciding
would be difficult, to say the least,
if sprouted at dusk
from the verminous fermentation
of remnants of the Cold War
and waste of the Ancien Régime
at the head of one we didn't find him,

il palazzinaro centuplicato
 da venerabili benevolenze,
 l'imbrogliatore da mercato rionale
 trasformato a furor di video
 in unto del Signore.
 Finché, mi dico, Dio ce lo conserva
 e i suoi squadristi in doppiopetto o blazer
 ce lo lasciano fare
 sapremo sempre contro chi votare.

Canzone del danno e della beffa

Stillicidio di delitti, terribile:
 si distruggono vite,
 si distruggono posti di lavoro,
 si distrugge la giustizia, il decoro
 della convivenza civile.
 E intanto l'imprenditore del nulla,
 il venditore di aria fritta,
 forte coi miserabili
 delle sue inindagabili ricchezze,
 sorride a tutto schermo
 negando ogni evidenza, promettendo
 il già invano promesso e l'impossibile,
 spacciando per paterno
 il suo osceno frasario da piazzista.
 Mai così in basso, così simile
 (non solo dirlo, anche pensarlo duole)
 alle odiose caricature
 che da sempre ci infangano e sfigurano...
 Anche altrove, lo so,
 si santifica il crimine, anche altrove
 si celebrano i riti
 del privilegio e dell'impunità
 trasformati in dottrina dello stato.
 Ma solo a noi, già fradici
 di antiche colpe e remissioni,
 a noi prima untori e poi vittime
 della peste del secolo
 è toccata, con il danno, la beffa,
 una farsa in aggiunta alla sventura.

the building speculator multiplied a hundred times
by venerable benevolences,
the local-market-type swindler
transformed by television acclaim
into the Anointed of the Lord.
Until, I say to myself, God preserves him
and his squads in double-breasted suits or blazers
leave him be,
we will always know whom to vote against.

Song of Harm and Mockery

Unrelenting flow of crimes, terrible:
lives are destroyed,
jobs are destroyed,
justice is destroyed, the decorum
of civil society.
Meanwhile, the entrepreneur of nothing,
the peddler of fried air,
strong with the miserable
thanks to his unfathomed wealth,
smiles screen-wide
denying all evidence, promising
the promised already in vain and the impossible,
selling for fatherly
his obscene salesman's rhetoric.
Never so low, so similar
(not only saying it, even thinking it hurts)
to the heinous caricatures
that have always sullied and disfigured us...
In other places as well, I know,
they sanctify crime, in other places as well
they celebrate rites
of privilege and impunity
transformed into doctrine of the state.
But only to us, soaked already
in ancient sins and pardons,
to us first agents and later victims
of the plague of the century,
was allotted, with the harm, the mockery,
a farce in addition to ill fate.

Canzone dei rischi che si corrono

Un'ossessione? Certo che lo è.
 Come potrebbe non ossessionarci
 la continua reiterazione
 degli stereotipi più osceni,
 l'alluvione di falsità e soprusi,
 la suprema pornografia
 dell'astuzia fatta oggetto di culto,
 della prepotenza fatta valore,
 della spudoratezza fatta icona?
 Andiamo a dormire pensandoci,
 ci svegliamo con questo fiele in bocca
 e c'è chi ha il coraggio di chiederci
 d'essere più pacati e costruttivi,
 d'avere più distacco, più ironia...
 Sia detto, amici, una volta per tutte:
 a correre rischi non è soltanto
 la credibilità della nazione
 o l'incerta, dubitabile essenza
 che chiamiamo democrazia,
 qui in gioco c'è la storia che ci resta,
 il poco che manca da qui alla morte.

Antonello Borra

And all the students of *Italian Poetry: Love, etc.* Fall 2011

Justin Baldassare, Stefan Boas, Melina Chaouch, Robert
 Coutu, Baldwin Delgado, Sheila Dhaskali, Emily Gennari, Han-
 nah Jansen, Ryan Peterson, Caroline Pohlmann, Emily Rampone,
 Maria Russen, Joseph Sussman, Mara Zocco.

Song of the Risks We All Run

An obsession? Of course it is.
How could we not be obsessed
with the continuous reiteration
of the most obscene stereotypes,
the flood of falsity and arrogance,
the supreme pornography
of cunning made object of worship,
of bullying made valor,
of impudence made icon?
We go to bed thinking about it,
we wake up with this gall in our mouths,
and there're some who dare ask us
to be calmer and more constructive,
to have greater detachment, more irony...
Let it be said once and for all, my friends:
to run risks is not only
the credibility of the nation,
or the uncertain, doubtful essence
we call democracy,
here in play is the history that remains,
that little that is left from here to death.

Inferno: Canto X

Translated by Peter D'Epiro

Peter D'Epiro received a BA and MA in English at Queens College and his PhD in English from Yale University. He is the author of a book on Ezra Pound's "Malatesta Cantos" and co-author of a bilingual translation of one hundred poems by Black American poets into Italian (1977). His other books are *What Are the Seven Wonders of the World? and 100 Other Great Cultural Lists* (1998), *Sprezzatura: 50 Ways Italian Genius Shaped the World* (2001), and *The Book of Firsts: 150 World-Changing People and Events from Caesar Augustus to the Internet* (2010). His journal publications include translations into English terza rima of Cantos II and IX of Dante's *Inferno*. He is currently working on a memoir of his Italian childhood in the Bronx.

Note on the translation

As an undergraduate at Queens College (1968-72), I took several courses on Dante's *Commedia* in which I read the work in Italian. I also began looking at various translations into English terza rima to see whether any had managed to capture the ineffable power and beauty of Dante's verse. I was disappointed with the existing versions I examined — those of Laurence Binyon, Melville Best Anderson, G. L. Bickersteth, and Dorothy Sayers. (John Ciardi's popular version rhymed only the first and third line of each tercet, with no "braiding" of the second line's rhyme into the next stanza.)

Of the two terza rima translations most commonly used in courses at the time, Binyon's version, though praised by Ezra Pound, suffered from the *thee* and *thou* and *doth* and *wouldst* syndrome. It also featured archaisms like *o'ercrow*, *hap*, *plaining*, *yon*, *amort*, *afeared*, *twixt*, and *scaur*, but the most conspicuous blemish of Binyon's version was its overabundance of inversions: object before verb, noun before adjective. Much worse, Dorothy Sayers's translation provided a cartoon version of Dante, with locutions like

blether, shramming, champaign, girning, this bold jack, Loo! loo!, marsh, minishing, meseems, prithe, aby, birling, nay, living wight, levin, eterne, guerdon due, and gash (adjective).

At age twenty I thus embarked on a foolhardy venture to avoid the most egregious faults of these most established terza rima versions. My goal was to produce a translation of the *Inferno* in the rhyme scheme of the original that would be modern in diction without excessive colloquialism and that would avoid, as much as possible, radical inversions of natural English word order, keep padding and paraphrase to a minimum, adhere as closely as possible to the end-stopped phrasing of most of Dante's lines and tercets, conform to a basic iambic pentameter pattern, and eschew (as Dante does) slant or eye rhymes – in short, to present the matter and form of Dante's poem in an easy-to-read modern American English translation.

Six years later, under the guidance of Professor Daniel Donno, I submitted my annotated terza rima translation of the first nine cantos of the *Inferno* as my thesis requirement for an MA in English at Queens College. I continued my Dante studies while pursuing a doctorate in English at Yale and produced three more cantos for a total of twelve. Then, after ten years of work on my version, my day-job responsibilities compelled me to declare an end to the project in 1980, though I have continued to revise my entire text every few years since then.

In the meantime several terza rima versions of the *Inferno* have appeared, most notably that of Michael Palma, and the number of other Dante translations has proliferated at an astonishing rate. I offer my translation of the canto of those old heretics, Farinata and Cavalcanti, as an illustration of the qualities of Dante's poem that I was trying to capture during a decade of almost-daily struggle with that masterpiece.

Dante Alighieri**Inferno: Canto X**

Ora sen va per un secreto calle,
tra 'l muro de la terra e li martiri,
lo mio maestro, e io dopo le spalle.
"O virtù somma, che per li empì giri
mi volvi," cominciài, "com' a te piace,
parlami, e sodisfammi a' miei disiri.
La gente che per li sepolcri giace
potrebbe si veder? già son levati
tutt' i coperchi, e nessun guardia face."
E quelli a me: "Tutti saran serrati
quando di Iosafat qui torneranno
coi corpi che là sù hanno lasciati.
Suo cimitero da questa parte hanno
con Epicuro tutti suoi seguaci,
che l' anima col corpo morta fanno.
Però a la dimanda che mi faci
quinc' entro satisfatto sarò tosto,
e al disio ancor che tu mi taci."
E io: "Buon duca, non tegno riposto
a te mio cor se non per dicer poco,
e tu m' hai non pur mo a ciò disposto."
"O Tosco che per la città del foco
vivo ten vai così parlando onesto,
piacciati di restare in questo loco.
La tua loquela ti fa manifesto
di quella nobil patria natio,
a la qual forse fui troppo molesto."
Subitamente questo suono uscìo
d' una de l' arche; però m' accostai,
temendo, un poco più al duca mio.
Ed el mi disse: "Volgiti! Che fai?
Vedi là Farinata che s' è dritto:
da la cintola in sù tutto 'l vedrai."
Io avea già il mio viso nel suo fitto;
ed el s' ergea col petto e con la fronte
com' avesse l' inferno a gran dispitto.
E l' animose man del duca e pronte
mi pinser tra le sepulture a lui,
dicendo: "Le parole tue sien conte."

Dante Alighieri

Inferno: Canto X

And now my master, by a hidden track
 Between the city's ramparts and its woe,
 Moves on ahead, and I close at his back.
"O height of virtue—you who, leading, show
 Me round these wicked circles—please," said I,
 "Speak and appease my great desire to know:
The suffering people here who occupy
 These tombs—may they be seen? for everywhere
 The lids are raised, and no guard's standing by."
He said: "All shall be shut tight when they fare
 Back from Jehoshaphat, no more to rise,
 Clad in the bodies that they left up there.
Within this graveyard Epicurus lies
 With all his followers in heresy,
 Who say the spirit with the body dies.
The question that you ask shall presently
 Be answered here, nor shall you be forbidden
 That wish of yours which you conceal from me."
And I: "Dear guide, my heart is never hidden
 From you, unless it be when I aspire
 To brevity, as you yourself have bidden."
"O Tuscan who go through the city of fire
 Alive, and speaking with such modesty,
 Stop here awhile, if such be your desire.
Your language clearly makes you out to be
 A native of that noble fatherland
 Which I, perhaps, have harmed too grievously."
All of a sudden a coffer near at hand
 Sent forth this sound, at which I felt such dread
 I drew back where I saw my leader stand.
"Turn round! what's this you're doing now?" he said.
 "See, Farinata rises: You will gain
 A view of all of him, from waist to head."
My eyes, both fixed on his, had made it plain
 That while he rose he threw back brow and chest
 As if he held all Hell in great disdain.
Pushing, my guide's bold hands gave me no rest
 Till down that grave-strewn path to him I'd wended.
 "Use fitting words with him" was his behest.

Com'io al piè de la sua tomba fui,
 guardommi un poco, e poi, quasi sdegnoso,
 mi dimandò: "Chi fuor li maggior tui?"
 Io ch'era d'ubidir disideroso,
 non gliel celai, ma tutto gliel'apersi;
 ond'ei levò le ciglia un poco in suso;
 poi disse: "Fieramente furo avversi
 a me e a miei primi e a mia parte,
 sì che per due fiata li dispersi."
 "S'ei fur cacciati, ei tornar d'ogne parte,"
 rispuos'io lui, "l'una e l'altra fiata;
 ma i vostri non appreser ben quell'arte."
 Allor surse a la vista scoperchiata
 un'ombra, lungo questa, infino al mento:
 credo che s'era in ginocchie levata.
 Dintorno mi guardò, come talento
 avesse di veder s'altri era meco;
 e poi che 'l sospecciar fu tutto spento,
 piangendo disse: "Se per questo cieco
 carcere vai per altezza d'ingegno,
 mio figlio ov'è? e perché non è teco?"
 E io a lui: "Da me stesso non vegno:
 colui ch'attende là, per qui mi mena
 forse cui Guido vostro ebbe a disdegno."
 Le sue parole e 'l modo de la pena
 m'avean di costui già letto il nome;
 però fu la risposta così piena.
 Di sùbito drizzato gridò: "Come?
 dicesti 'elli ebbe'? non viv'elli ancora?
 non fiere li occhi suoi lo dolce lume?"
 Quando s'accorse d'alcuna dimora
 ch'io facëa dinanzi a la risposta,
 supin ricadde e più non parve fora.
 Ma quell'altro magnanimo, a cui posta
 restato m'era, non mutò aspetto,
 né mosse collo, né piegò sua costa;
 e sé continüando al primo detto,
 "S'elli han quell'arte," disse, "male appresa,
 ciò mi tormenta più che questo letto.
 Ma non cinquanta volte fia raccesa
 la faccia de la donna che qui regge,
 che tu saprai quanto quell'arte pesa.
 E se tu mai nel dolce mondo regge,

And when my short walk to his tomb was ended,
 He scanned my face, then, in a haughty way,
 He asked of me: "From whom are you descended?"
 And I, who was quite eager to obey,
 Hid nothing, setting all before his sight.
 This made him arch his brows a bit and say:
 "They were fierce foes of mine and gave us fight
 Wherever I, my clan, or party turned,
 So that two times I put them all to flight."
 "Though they were driven out, they all returned
 Both times from every quarter," I replied;
 "But that's an art *your* people never learned."
 Then there arose to view, at this one's side,
 A shade whose chin just cleared the monument:
 He must have been upon his knees inside.
 He looked around at first, as though he meant
 To see if someone else were with me too,
 But when his expectations were all spent,
 Weeping, he said to me: "If you go through
 This sightless prison by the lofty height
 Of genius, where's my son — why not with you?"
 "I do not come," I said, "in my own right:
 That one who waits leads me through this domain —
 For whom, perhaps, your Guido felt despite."
 His question and the nature of his pain
 Had helped me learn his name and recognize
 His face, and thus I answered in that vein.
 Suddenly standing, "What did you say?" he cries;
 "His *felt*? why *felt*? Is he not living then?
 Does not the sun's sweet light still strike his eyes?"
 I did not answer instantly, and when
 He thought he knew just what this signified,
 He fell back down, nor was he seen again.
 But that great soul, whose wish I'd satisfied
 In stopping there, kept facing straight ahead,
 Nor did he change his look or bend his side.
 "If they have never learned that art," he said,
 Resuming our first talk without delay,
 "That fact torments me much more than this bed.
 But before that lady's face who here holds sway
 Rekindles fifty times, you shall begin
 To learn firsthand how much that art can weigh.
 Now tell me — as you sometime hope to win

dimmi: perché quel popolo è sì empio
 incontr' a' miei in ciascuna sua legge?"
 Ond' io a lui: "Lo strazio e 'l grande scempio
 che fece l'Arbia colorata in rosso,
 tal orazion fa far nel nostro tempio."
 Poi ch'ebbe sospirando il capo mosso,
 "A ciò non fu' io sol," disse, "né certo
 senza cagion con li altri sarei mosso.
 Ma fu' io solo, là dove sofferto
 fu per ciascun di tòrre via Fiorenza,
 colui che la difesi a viso aperto."
 "Deh, se riposi mai vostra semenza,"
 prega' io lui, "solvetemi quel nodo
 che qui ha 'nviluppata mia sentenza.
 El par che voi veggiate, se ben odo,
 dinanzi quel che 'l tempo seco adduce,
 e nel presente tenete altro modo."
 "Noi veggiam, come quei c' ha mala luce,
 le cose," disse, "che ne son lontano;
 cotanto ancor ne splende il sommo duce.
 Quando s'appressano o son, tutto è vano
 nostro intelletto; e s'altri non ci apporta,
 nulla sapem di vostro stato umano.
 Però comprender puoi che tutta morta
 fia nostra conoscenza da quel punto
 che del futuro fia chiusa la porta."
 Allor, come di mia colpa compunto,
 dissi: "Or direte dunque a quel caduto
 che 'l suo nato è co' vivi ancor congiunto;
 e s'í fui, dianzi, a la risposta muto,
 fate i saper che 'l fei perché pensava
 già ne l'error che m'avete soluto."
 E già 'l maestro mio mi richiamava;
 per ch'í pregai lo spirto più avaccio
 che mi dicesse chi con lu' istava.
 Dissemi: "Qui con più di mille giaccio:
 qua dentro è 'l secondo Federico
 e 'l Cardinale; e de li altri mi taccio."
 Indi s'ascose; e io inver' l'antico
 poeta volsi i passi, ripensando
 a quel parlar che mi pareva nemico.
 Elli si mosse; e poi, così andando,
 mi disse: "Perché se' tu sì smarrito?"

That lovely world again – what makes that nation
So fierce, in all its laws, against my kin?"
And I: "The slaughter and great devastation
That dyed the Arbia red are reasons why
Such prayers are said within our congregation."
Shaking his head, he answered with a sigh:
"Not I alone did that, nor certainly
Would I have stirred without good cause, but I
Stood all alone when they did all agree
To do away with Florence – I declined,
Defending her before them openly."
"But now, so may your seed at some time find
Repose," I begged of him, "undo for me
The knot which has entangled here my mind.
It seems that – if I hear aright – you see,
Beforehand, things that time will bring to light,
But with the present, you fare differently."
"We see, like someone who has faulty sight,
Those things," he answered, "which are far away –
This much the Sovereign Leader still makes bright;
When they approach, or are, our minds convey
Nothing, and if by no one else revealed,
We have no knowledge of your mortal day.
Therefore, you see, all things will be concealed
From us, and all our knowledge will be dead
When the door of the future shall be sealed."
And then, remorseful for my fault, I said:
"Now will you say to him who just now fell
That, from the living, his son has not yet fled?
And that if I was mute and did not tell
What he would know, it was because my thought
Was on that problem you have solved so well."
My guide was calling me, so I besought
That spirit hastily to specify
What other shades were with him there distraught.
He said: "Here with a thousand souls I lie.
Here Frederick and the Cardinal are found –
And of the rest, I make you no reply."
With that he hid himself. I turned around
And walked back toward that poet of long ago,
Reflecting on those words of hostile sound.
He said to me, as we began to go
Upon our way again: "Why this dismay?"

E io li sodisfeci al suo dimando.

“La mente tua conservi quel ch’udito
hai contra te,” mi comandò quel saggio;

“e ora attendi qui,” e drizzò ’l dito:

“quando sarai dinanzi al dolce raggio
di quella il cui bell’occhio tutto vede,
da lei saprai di tua vita il viaggio.”

Appresso mosse a man sinistra il piede:

lasciammo il muro e gimmo inver’ lo mezzo
per un sentier ch’a una valle fiede,
che ’nfin là sù facea spiacer suo lezzo.

And so I told him what he wished to know.
“What has been said against you, store away
 Within your mind,” that sage commanded me,
 Then raised his finger, “but mark well what I say:
When face to face with that sweet radiancy –
 With her, I mean, whose lovely eyes see all –
 You’ll learn what your life’s journeying will be.”
He then turned left. Departing from the wall,
 We made our way on toward the circle’s brink
 Along a path that we perceived to fall
Into a valley noisome for its stink.

Excerpts from Dante's *Inferno*

Translated by Lawrence J. Lujan

Lawrence J. Lujan lives in Belmont, California, twenty-five miles south of San Francisco. He has a doctorate in English from the University of California at Berkeley, and for forty-seven years has taught composition and literature, humanities, speech and film, history and political science, philosophy, and religious studies at various colleges in the Bay Area; he is currently at Notre Dame de Namur University. He was named the University of San Francisco's Teacher of the Year in 2000, he has edited the *Experiential Learning Quarterly*, and has had his poetry published in *Modern Haiku*. He has led five school tours to Italy; his mother's family came from Chiavari, just south of Genoa (Columbus' home), and he grew up on good Ligurian cooking.

When I was in the sixth grade, a Chilean classmate invited me to his home and showed me a treasured book in his family library, a copy of Dante with the Doré illustrations. Growing up in the Mission, a working-class (albeit richly multicultural) neighborhood in San Francisco, I had heard only vaguely of Dante before then, but I was powerfully impressed. While in high school I read through the whole of the *Commedia* on my own, and wrote a careful summary. In graduate school at U.C. Berkeley, I took a wonderful class on the Medieval Mind from Charles W. Jones, in which we went through the *Commedia* canto by canto. Since then, in classes and in school tours to Italy, I have taught parts of the *Commedia* many times.

I now have neither the energy nor the expertise to translate the entire poem, but there are many individual passages, especially in the *Inferno*, that I have pondered over often and deeply enough to have some sense of how they ought to go in English. The previous translations that I have found most helpful have been those by John D. Sinclair and Charles S. Singleton in prose, Lawrence Grant White, Mark Musa, the Hollanders, and Anthony Esolen in verse.

In my translations I have made no effort to duplicate Dante's difficult rhyme scheme; those who have attempted rhyming ver-

sions — most notably Lawrence Binyon, Dorothy Sayers, John Ciardi, and Geoffrey Bickersteth — have been forced to use too many obscure words, twisted sentence structures, and paraphrases. So intensely concentrated and concise is Dante's language that I just don't think it's possible to produce a reliable but readable English translation in rhyming verse. Rather, I have written my versions in blank verse. Nearly ninety-eight percent of my lines have ten syllables in a predominantly iambic pattern; the exceptions occurred when it was simply impossible to get ten syllables into a line without either leaving out something essential or padding the line with long phrases that have no textual justification ("che la diritta via era smarrita: where the straight way was lost" — only six syllables, but anything more would be obvious stuffing). The language I have used is fairly formal (no slang or contractions in these passages, though there are other places in Dante where they would be appropriate, such as Cantos XXI-XXII) without being archaic (no "ere" or "yore," and "thou" only when addressing Farinata). Everywhere I have striven for simplicity, clarity, and accuracy more than for originality; there's enough of that in Dante himself.

LA SELVA OSCURA (*Inferno*, Canto I, 1-12)

Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita
 Mi ritrovai per una selva oscura
 Che la diritta via era smarrita.
 Ah quanto a dir qual era è cosa dura
 Esta selva selvaggia e aspra e forte
 Che nel pensier rinova la paura!
 Tant' è amara che poco è piu morte;
 Ma per trattar del ben ch'io vi trovai,
 Dirò dell'altre cose ch'í' v'ho scorte.
 Io non so ben ridir com' io v'entrai,
 Tant'era pieno di sonno a quell punto
 Che la verace via abbandonai.

LA PORTA DELL'INFERNO(*Inferno*, Canto III, 1-57, 82-96)

PER ME SI VA NELLA CITTÀ DOLENTE,
 PER ME SI VA NELL' ETTERNO DOLORE,
 PER ME SI VA TRA LA PERDUTA GENTE.
 GIUSTIZIA MOSSE IL MIO ALTO FATTORE:
 FECEMI LA DIVINA POTESTATE,
 LA SOMMA SAPIENZA E 'L PRIMO AMORE.
 DINANZI A ME NON FUOR COSE CREATE
 SE NON ETTERNE, E IO ETERNA DURO.
 LASCIATE OGNI SPERANZA, VOI CH' ENTRATE.
 Queste parole di colore oscuro
 Vid' io scritte al sommo d'una porta;
 Per ch' io: "Maestro, il senso lor m' è duro."
 Ed elli a me, come persona accorta:
 "Qui si convien lasciare ogni sospetto;
 Ogni viltà convien che qui sia morta.
 Noi siam venuti al loco ov' io t' ho detto
 Chet tu vedrai le genti dolorose
 C' hanno perduto il ben dell' intelletto."
 E poi che la sua mano alla mia pose
 Con lieto volto, ond' io mi confortai,
 Mi mise dentro alle segrete cose.
 Quivi sospiri, pianti e alti guai
 Risonavan per l'aere senza stelle,
 Per ch' io al cominciar ne lagrimai.

THE DARK WOOD (*Inferno*, Canto I, ll. 1-12)

In the middle of the journey of our life
 I came to myself within a dark wood
 Where the straight way was lost.
 Ah me, how hard a thing it is to tell
 Of that wood, savage and harsh and stubborn,
 The very thought of which renews my fear!
 So bitter is it, death is scarcely more;
 But to treat of the good that I found there,
 I will tell of the other things I saw.
 I cannot rightly say how I got there,
 I was so full of sleep at the moment
 When I first abandoned the path of truth.

THE GATE OF HELL (*Inferno*, Canto III, ll. 1-57, 82-96)

THROUGH ME THE WAY TO THE WOEFUL CITY,
 THROUGH ME THE WAY INTO ETERNAL PAIN,
 THROUGH ME THE WAY AMONG THE LOST PEOPLE,
 JUSTICE IT WAS THAT MOVED MY HIGH MAKER:
 DIVINE OMNIPOTENCE CREATED ME,
 THE SUPREME WISDOM AND THE PRIMAL LOVE.
 BEFORE ME NOTHING WAS CREATED BUT
 ETERNAL THINGS; ETERNAL I ENDURE.
 ABANDON EVERY HOPE, WHO ENTER HERE.
 These words I beheld inscribed in color
 Obscure above a gateway; so I said.
 "Master, their sense is difficult for me."
 And he to me, as one experienced:
 "Here must every distrust be left behind;
 Here must all cowardice be left for dead.
 We have come to the place where you shall see
 The sorrowful people I told you of,
 Who have lost the good of the intellect."
 And after he had placed his hand on mine,
 With a cheerful look, that gave me comfort,
 He led me in among the secret things.
 Here sighs, lamentations, and loud wailings
 Reverberated through the starless air
 So that at first it made me weep to hear.
 Various tongues, horrible languages,

Diverse lingue, orribili favelle,
 Parole di dolore, accenti d'ira,
 Voci alte e fioche, e suon di man con elle
 Facevano un tumulto, il qual s'aggira
 Sempre in quell'aura senza tempo tinta,
 Come la rene quando turbo spira.
 E io, ch'avea d'orror la testa cinta,
 Dissi: "Maestro, che è quell ch' i' odo?
 E che gent' è che par nel duol sì vinta?"
 Ed elli a me: "Questo misero modo
 Tengon l'anime triste di coloro
 Che visser senza infamia e senza lodo.
 Mischiate sono a quell cattivo coro
 Delli angeli che non furon ribelli
 Nè lo profondo inferno li riceve,
 Ch'alcuna Gloria i rei avrebber d'elli."
 E io: "Maestro, che è tanto greve
 A lor, che lamentar li fa sì forte?"
 Rispuose: "Dicerolti molto breve.
 Questi non hanno speranza di morte,
 E la lor cieca vita è tanto bassa,
 Ch'avidiosi son d'ogni altra sorte.
 Fama di loro il mondo esser non lassa;
 Misericordia e giustizia li sdegna:
 Non ragioniam di lor, ma guarda e passa."
 E io, che riguardai, vidi una indegna
 Che girando correva tanto ratta,
 Che d'ogni posa mi pareva sdegna;
 E dietro le venìa sì lunga tratta
 Di gente, ch'io non avrei creduto
 Che morte tanta n'avesse disfatta.

Ed ecco verso noi venir per nave
 Un vecchio, bianco per antico pelo,
 Gridando: "Guai a voi, anime prave!
 Non isperate mai veder lo cielo:
 I' vegno per menarvi all'altra riva,
 Nelle tenebre eterne, in caldo e 'n gelo.
 E tu che se' costi, anima viva,
 Pàrtiti da cotesti che son morti."
 Ma poi che vide ch'io non mi partiva,
 Disse: "Per altra via, per altri porti
 Verrai a piaggia, non qui, per passare:

Words of agony, accents of anger,
Voices shrill and hoarse, with the sound of hands,
Were making a tumult that is turning
Forever through that dark and timeless air,
Like sand when it eddies in a whirlwind.
And I, my head encircled with horror,
Said: "Master, what is this I hear, and who
Are these people so mastered by their pain?"
And he to me: "This miserable state
Is endured by the wretched souls of those
Who lived without disgrace yet without praise.
They are commingled with that wicked choir
Of angels who were neither rebellious
Nor faithful to God, but were for themselves.
Heaven drove them forth, not to be less fair,
Nor yet will the depth of hell receive them,
Lest the sinners have glory over them."
And I: "Master, what is it so grievous
To them, that makes them lament so loudly?"
He answered: "I can tell you in few words.
They have no hope that they will ever die,
And this blind life of theirs is so abject,
That they then envy every other lot.
The world permits no report of them to be;
Mercy and justice both disdain them:
Let us not talk of them, but look and pass."
And I looked and saw a whirling banner
That ran on so swiftly that it appeared
As if it might never take any rest;
And behind it came so great a multitude
Of people, I should never have believed
That death could have overcome so many.

And behold, coming toward us in a boat,
An ancient man, his hair snow-white with age,
Crying: "Woe to you, you wicked spirits!
Do not hope ever to see the heavens;
I come to lead you to the other shore,
To eternal darkness, to fire and ice.
And you there, who are still a living soul,
Depart from those who are already dead."
But when he saw I made no move to go,
He said: "By other ways, by other ports,

Più lieve legno convien che ti porti.
 E 'l duca lui: "Caron, non ti crucciare:
 Vuolsi così colà dove si puote
 Ciò che si vuole, e più non dimandare."

PAOLO E FRANCESCA (*Inferno*, Canto V, 28-142)

Io venni in luogo d'ogni luce muto,
 Che mugghia come fa mar per tempesta,
 Se da contrari venti è combattuto.
 La bufera infernal, che mai non resta,
 Mena li spirti con la sua rapina:
 Voltando e percotendo li molesta.
 Quando giungon davanti alla ruina,
 Quivi le strida, il compianto, il lamento;
 Bestemmian quivi la virtù divina.
 Intesi ch'a così fatto tormento
 Enno dannati i peccator carnali,
 Che la ragion sommettono al talento.
 E come li stornei ne portan l'ali
 Nel freddo tempo a schiera larga e piena,
 Così quel fiato li spiriti mali.
 Di qua, di là, di giù, di su li mena;
 Nulla speranza li conforta mai,
 Non che di posa, ma di minor pena.
 E come i gru van cantando lor lai,
 Faccendo in aere, di sè lunga riga,
 Così vidi venir, traendo guai,
 Ombre portate dalla detta briga:
 Per ch' i' dissi: "Maestro, chi son quelle
 Genti che l'aura nera sì gastiga?"
 "La prima di color di cui novelle
 Tu vuo' saper' mi disse quelli allotta,
 'Fu imperadrice di molte favelle.
 A vizzio di lussuria fu sì rotta,
 Che libito fè licito in sua legge
 Per tòrre il biasmo in che era condotta.
 Ell' è Semiramis, di cui si legge
 Che succedette a Nino e fu sua sposa:
 Tenne la terra che 'l Soldan corregge.
 L'altra è colei cui s'ancise amorosa,

Not here, you shall come to the shore and pass:
 A lighter bark than this must carry you."
 And my leader: "Charon, do not vex yourself:
 It is so willed there where there is power
 To do that which is willed, and ask no more."

PAOLO AND FRANCESCA (*Inferno*, Canto V, ll. 28-142)

I came to a place where all light is mute,
 Where there is bellowing like a sea in
 Tempest, which is battered by warring winds.
 The infernal blizzard, which never rests,
 Sweeps the spirits onward before its blast:
 Whirling and striking, it torments them still.
 When they arrive in front of the ruin,
 There are shrieks, wailings, and lamentations;
 They blaspheme against the divine power.
 I understood that unto such torment
 Are condemned all the sinners of the flesh,
 Who subject their reason to appetite.
 And as their wings bear the starlings along
 In the cold season in a wide, dense flock,
 So does that wind drive the evil spirits.
 Now here, now there, now downward, now upward,
 It takes them; no hope ever comforts them,
 Not of repose, or even of less pain.
 And just as the cranes go chanting their lays,
 Making themselves a long line in the air,
 So I saw approach, uttering loud cries,
 Shadows borne along by the tempest's strife:
 Wherefore I said: "O master, who are these
 People whom the black air so castigates?"
 "The first of those of whom you would have news,"
 He said to me then, "was once an Empress
 Over lands where many tongues were spoken.
 She was so corrupted by sensual vice
 That she gave all lust licence in her laws
 To take away the blame she had incurred.
 She is Semiramis, of whom we read
 That she succeeded Ninus, being his wife:
 She held that land where now the Sultan rules.
 The next is she who slew herself for love,

E ruppe fede al cener di Sicheo;
 Poi è Cleopatràs lussuriosa.
 Elena vedi, per cui tanto reo
 Tempo si volse, e vedi il grande Achille,
 Che con amore al fine combattèo.
 Vedi Paris, Tristano; e più di mille
 Ombre mostrommi e nominommi a dito,
 Ch'amor di nostra vita dipartille.
 Poscia ch' io ebbi il mio dottore udito
 Nomar le donne antiche e' cavalieri,
 Pietà mi giunse, e fui quasi smarrito,
 I' cominciai: "Poeta, volontieri
 Parlerei a quei due che 'nsieme vanno,
 E paion sì al vento esser leggieri."
 Ed elli a me: "Vedrai quando saranno
 Più presso a noi; e tu allor li priega
 Per quello amor che i mena, ed ei verranno."
 Sì tosto come il vento a noi li piega,
 Mossi la voce: "O anime affannate,
 Venite a noi parlar, s'altri nol niega!"
 Quali colombe, dal disio chiamate,
 Con l'ali alzate e ferme al dolce nido
 Vegnon per l'aere dal voler portate;
 Cotali uscir della schiera ov' è Dido,
 A noi venendo per l'aere maligno,
 Sì forte fu l'affettüoso grido.
 "O animal grazioso e benigno
 Che visitando vai per l'aere perso
 Noi che tignemmo il mondo di sanguigno,
 Se fosse amico il re dell'universo,
 Noi pregheremmo lui della tua pace,
 Poi c' hai pietà del nostro mal perverso.
 Di quel che udire e che parlar vi piace
 Noi udiremo e parleremo a vui,
 Mentre che 'l vento, come fa, si tace.
 Siede la terra dove nata fui
 Su la marina dove 'l Po discende
 Per aver pace co' seguaci sui.
 Amor, ch'el cor gentil ratto s'apprende,
 Prese costui della bella persona
 Che mi fu tolta; e 'l modo ancor m'offende.
 Amor, ch'a nullo amato amar perdona,
 Mi prese del costui piacer sì forte,

And broke faith with Sichaeus' ashes;
And then the lustful Cleopatra.
See Helen, for whose sake so many years
Of ill passed, and see the great Achilles,
Who battled at the last with love, and lost.
See Paris, Tristan" — more than a thousand
Shadows he showed me, pointing them out and
Naming them, whom love had cut from our life.
After I had listened to my teacher
Name the ladies and knights of antique times,
Pity came on, and I was bewildered.
I began: "Poet, willingly would I
Speak with those two there who go together,
And seem to float so light upon the wind."
And he to me: "You shall see when they are
Nearer to us; and if you entreat them
By that love that leads them on, they will come."
As soon as the wind bent their course to us,
I raised my voice: "O wearied souls, come speak
With us, if Another deny it not!"
As doves, called by desire, return on wings
Uplifted and steady to their sweet nest,
Borne by their volition through the air,
Just so these left the troop where Dido is,
Coming to us through the malignant air,
Such power had my affectionate cry.
"O living creature, gracious and benign,
Who make your way here through the darkened air,
Visiting us who stained the world with blood,
If the King of the universe were our friend,
We would pray to Him that He grant you peace,
Since you have pity on our perverse ill.
Of what it pleases you to hear and speak
We two will hear and we will speak with you,
While the wind, as it is now, is silent.
The land where I was born lies on the shore
Where the Po, with all its attendant streams,
Descends to seek its final resting place.
Love, quickly kindled in the gentle heart,
Seized this one for the beauty of my form,
Torn from me; the manner offends me still.
Love, which absolves no loved one from loving,
Seized me so strongly with delight in him,

Che, come vedi, ancor non m'abbandona.
Amor condusse noi ad una morte:
Caina attende chi vita ci spense."
Queste parole da lor ci fur porte.
Quand' io intesi quell'anime offense,
China' il viso, e tanto il tenni basso,
Fin che 'l poeta mi disse: "Che pense?"
Quando rispuosi, cominciai: "Oh lasso,
Quanti dolci pensier, quanto disio
Menò costoro al doloroso passo?"
Poi mi rivolsi a loro e parla' io,
E cominciai: "Francesca, i tuoi martiri
A lacrimar mi fanno tristo e pio.
Ma dimmi: al tempo de' dolci sospiri,
A che e come concedette amore
Che conosceste i dubbiosi disiri?"
E quella a me: "Nessun maggior dolore
Che ricordarsi del tempo felice
Nella miseria; e ciò sa 'l tuo dottore.
Ma s' a conoscer la prima radice
Del nostro amor tu hai cotanto affetto,
Dirò come colui che piange e dice.
Noi leggiavamo un giorno per diletto
Di Lancialotto come amor lo strinse:
Soli eravamo e senza alcun sospetto.
Per più fiate li occhi ci sospinse
Quella lettura, e scolorocci il viso;
Ma solo un punto fu quel che ci vinse.
Quando leggemmo il disiato riso
Esser baciato da cotanto amante,
Questi, che mai da me non fia diviso,
La bocca mi baciò tutto tremante.
Galeotto fu il libro e chi lo scrisse:
Quel giorno più non vi leggemmo avante."
Mentre che l'uno spirto questo disse,
L'altro piangea, sì che di pietade
Io venni men così com' io morisse;
E caddi come corpo morto cade.

That, as you see, it does not leave me yet.
Love led us to one death: Caina awaits
The one who extinguished our life." These were
The words that were offered by them to us.
When I understood those offended souls,
I bowed my face and kept it bowed until
The poet said: "What are you thinking of?"
And when I answered, I began: "Alas,
How many sweet thoughts, how great desire
Has brought them down to the dolorous pass!"
Then I turned once more toward them to speak,
And I began: "Francesca, your torments
Move me to weeping for grief and pity.
But tell me, at the time of your sweet sighs,
How and by what signs did love allow you
To recognize your dubious desires?"
And she to me: "There is no greater pain
Than to remember the happier time
In misery: and this your teacher knows.
But if you have so great a wish to know
The first root of our love, I shall tell you
Even as one who weeps in the telling.
We were reading one day, for our pleasure,
Of Lancelot, and of how love seized him:
We were alone and with no suspicion.
Many times our eyes were brought together
By that reading, and our faces turned pale;
But just one point it was that mastered us.
When we were reading how the longed-for smile
Was kissed by so great a lover, this one
Here, who shall nevermore be divided
From me, kissed me on the mouth, all trembling.
A Galeotto was the book, and he
Who wrote it: that day we read no further."
While one of the spirits uttered these words,
The other did weep, so that for pity
I fainted, as if I had been dying,
And fell headlong, like a dead body falls.

FARINATA (*Inferno*, Canto X, 22-123)

“O Tosco che per la città del foco
 Vivo ten vai così parlando onesto,
 Piacciati di restare in questo loco.
 La tua loquela ti fa manifesto
 Di quella nobil patria natio
 Alla qual forse fui troppo molesto.”
 Subitamente questo suono uscìo
 D’una dell’arche; però m’accostai,
 Temendo, un poco più al duca mio.
 Ed el mi disse: “Volgiti: che fai?
 Vedi là Farinata che s’è dritto:
 Dalla cintola in su tutto ‘l vedrai.”
 Io avea già il mio viso nel suo fitto;
 Ed el s’ergea col petto e con la fronte
 Com’avesse l’ inferno in gran dispetto.
 E l’animose man del duca e pronte
 Mi pinser tra la sepulture e lui,
 Dicendo: “Le parole tue sien conte.”
 Com’ io al piè della sua tomba fui,
 Guardommi un poco, e poi, quasi sdegnoso,
 Mi dimandò: “Chi fuor li maggior tui?”
 Io ch’era d’ubidir disideroso,
 Non lil celai, ma tutto lil’apersi;
 Ond’ei levò le ciglia un poco in soso,
 Poi disse: “Fieramente furo avversi
 A me e a miei primi e a mia parte,
 Sì che per due fiata li dispersi.”
 “S’ei fur cacciati, eì tornar d’ogni parte”
 Rispuosi lui “l’una e l’altra fiata;
 Ma i vostri non appreser ben quell’arte.”
 Allor surse alla vista scoperchiata
 Un’ombra lungo questa infino al mento:
 Credo che s’era in ginocchie levata.
 Dintorno mi guardò, come talento
 Avesse di veder s’altri era meco;
 E poi che il sospettar fu tutto spento,
 Piangendo disse: “Se per questo cieco
 Carcere vai per altezza d’ingegno,
 Mio figlio ov’ è? perchè non è ei teco?”
 E io a lui: “Da me stesso non vegno:
 Colui ch’attende là per qui mi mena,

FARINATA (*Inferno*, Canto X, ll. 22-123)

“O Tuscan who through the city of fire
Go alive and speaking so modestly,
May it please you to tarry at this point:
Your mode of speech makes manifest that you
Are native to that noble fatherland
To which perhaps I once did too much harm.”
Suddenly this sound issued from one of
The tombs; so that I, becoming fearful,
Drew a little closer to my leader.
And he to me: “Turn round: what are you doing?
See there Farinata who has risen:
From the waist upward you will see him all.”
I already had my eyes fixed on his;
And he was raising up his chest and brow
As if he entertained great scorn of hell.
The bold and ready hand of my leader
Pushed me between the tombs to him, and he
Said: “Be sure to choose your words precisely.”
When I had come to the foot of his tomb,
He looked at me a moment, then, as if
In disdain, asked, “Who were your ancestors?”
And I, who was desirous to obey,
Concealed nothing, but made all plain to him;
At which he raised his eyebrows a little,
Then said: “They were fiercely adverse to me
And to my forebears and to my party,
So twice over I had to scatter them.”
“If they were driven out, they soon returned,”
I replied, “the first time and the other;
But thy side did not rightly learn that art.”
Then there rose to sight alongside of him
A shade showing just as far as the chin;
I think he lifted himself on his knees.
He looked round about me, as if he had
Desire to see if someone was with me;
But when his expectation was all spent,
He said, weeping: “If you go through this blind
Prison by reason of high genius,
Where is my son? why is he not with you?”
And I to him: “I come not on my own:
He who waits yonder is guiding me here,

Forse cui Guido vostro ebbe a disdegno."
 Le sue parole e 'l modo della pena
 M'avean di costui già letto il nome;
 Però fu la risposta così piena.
 Di subito drizzato gridò: "Come
 Dicesti? 'Egli ebbe'? non viv'elli ancora?
 Non fiere li occhi suoi il dolce lome?"
 Quando s'accorse d'alcuna dimora
 Ch' io facea dinanzi alla risposta,
 Supin ricadde e più non parve fora.
 Ma quell'altro magnanimo a cui posta
 Restato m'era, non mutò aspetto,
 Nè mosse collo, nè piegò sua costa;
 E sé continuando al primo detto,
 "S'elli han quell'arte" disse "male appresa,
 Ciò mi tormenta più che questo letto.
 Ma non cinquanta volte fia raccesa
 La faccia della donna che qui regge,
 Che tu saprai quanto quell'arte pesa.
 E se tu mai nel dolce mondo regge,
 Dimmi perchè quel popolo è sì empio
 Incontr'a' miei in ciascuna sua legge?"
 Ond' io a lui: "Lo strazio e 'l grande scempio
 Che fece l'Arbia colorata in rosso,
 Tali orazion fa far nel nostro tempio."
 Poi ch'ebbe sospirato e 'l capo scosso,
 "A ciò non fu' io sol," disse "nè certo
 Senza cagion con li altri sarei mosso.
 Ma fu' io solo, là dove sofferto
 Fu per ciascun di torre via Fiorenza,
 Colui che la difesi a viso aperto."
 "Deh, se riposi mai vostra semenza,"
 Prega' io lui "solvete mi quel nodo
 Che qui ha involupata mia sentenza.
 El par che voi veggiate, e ben odo,
 Dinanzi quel che 'l tempo seco adduce,
 E nel presente tenete altro modo."
 "No veggiam, come quei c'ha mala luce,
 Le cose" disse "che ne son lontano;
 Cotanto ancor ne splende il sommo duce.
 Quando s'appressano o son, tutto è vano
 Nostro intelletto; e s'altri non ci apporta,
 Nulla sapem di vostro stato umano.

Whom perhaps thy Guido held in disdain."
His words and the mode of his punishment
Had already revealed his name to me,
So that I could make my reply thus full.
Suddenly straightening up, he cried: "How
Did you say: 'He held'? does he not still live?
Does not the sweet light of day strike his eyes?"
When he perceived that I made some delay
Before replying, he fell back supine
Again, and he showed himself no longer.
But that other, great soul at whose request
I had stopped, did not change his countenance,
Nor move his head, nor even bend his side;
And continuing with his first discourse,
He said: "If they have badly learned that art,
That torments me more than this bed of fire.
But not fifty times will the face of the
Lady who rules here be relit before
You learn for yourself how much that art weighs.
And, so you may return some time to the
Sweet world, tell me why your people are so
Pitiless against mine in all their laws?"
I answered: "The rout and the great slaughter
That stained the waters of the Arbia
Red caused such devotions in our temples."
He sighed and sadly shook his head, then said:
"In that I was not alone, nor surely
Without cause would I have moved with the rest.
But I was alone, there where everyone
Agreed to do away with your Florence,
The one who defended her openly."
"And now, so may thy seed find rest some time,"
I said to him, "pray thou resolve for me
A knot that has entangled my judgment.
It seems, if I have heard correctly, that
Thou seest beforehand what time brings with it,
But with the present have a different mode."
"We see, like those who have faulty vision,"
He said, "the things that are distant from us;
So much light the supreme lord still grants us.
When they are near or present, our vision
Wholly fails; unless others bring us word,
We can know nothing of your human state.

Però comprender puoi che tutta morta
 Fia nostra cononscenza da quel punto
 Che del futuro fia chiusa la porta."
 Allor, come di mia colpa compunto,
 Dissi: "Or direte dunque a quel caduto
 Che 'l suo nato è co' vivi ancor congiunto;
 E s' i fui, dianzi, alla risposta muto,
 Fate i saper che 'l feci che pensava
 Già nell'error che m'avete soluto."
 E già il maestro mio mi richiamava;
 Per ch' i' pregai lo spirito più avaccio
 Che mi dicesse chi con lu' istava.
 Disse mi: "Qui con più di mille giaccio:
 Qua dentro è 'l secondo Federico,
 E 'l Cardinale; e delli altri mi taccio."
 Indi s'ascose; ed io inver l'antico
 Poeta volsi i passi, ripensando
 A quel parlar che mi pareva nemico.

PIER DELLA VIGNA (*Inferno*, Canto XIII, 58-78)

"Io son colui che tenni ambo le chiavi
 Del cor di Federigo, e che le volsi,
 Serrando e diserrando, sì soavi,
 Che dal secreto suo quasi ogn'uom tolsi:
 Fede portai al glorioso offizio,
 Tanto ch' i' ne perde' li sonni e' polsi.
 La meretrice che mai dall'ospizio
 Di Cesare non torse li occhi putti,
 Morte commune, delle corti vizio,
 Infiammò contra me li animi tutti
 E li 'nfiammati infiammar sì Augusto,
 Che' lieti onor tornaro in tristi lutti.
 L'animo mio, per disdegnoso gusto,
 Credendo col morir fuggir disdegno,
 Ingiusto fece me contra me giusto.
 Per le nove radici d'esto legno
 Vi giuro che già mai non ruppi fede
 Al mio signor, che fu d'onor sì degno.
 E se di voi alcun nel mondo riede,
 Conforti la memoria mia, che giace
 Ancor del colpo che 'nvidia le diede."

Therefore you can understand that all of
 Our knowledge will be dead from the moment
 When the portal of the future is closed."
 Then, being moved by regret for my fault,
 I said, "Will thou now tell him who fell back
 That his son is still among the living?
 And let him know that, if I was silent
 Before, it is because I was already
 Thinking of the doubt thou hast solved for me."
 And now my master was recalling me;
 Therefore with more haste I begged the spirit
 To tell me who were in the tombs with him.
 He said to me: "I lie here with thousands;
 With me are the second Frederick, and
 The Cardinal; of the others I speak not."
 With that he hid himself; and I turned my
 Steps to the ancient poet, reflecting
 On that saying that seemed hostile to me.

PIER DELLA VIGNA (*Inferno*, Canto XIII, ll. 58-78)

"I am the one who held both of the keys
 To Frederick's heart, and who turned them both,
 Locking and unlocking, so softly, that
 I kept nearly all men from his secrets:
 So true was I to my glorious office
 That for it I lost both sleep and life's blood.
 That harlot who never turned away her
 Whorish eyes from ogling Caesar's household,
 The common death and vice of every court,
 Did inflame the minds of all against me
 And they, inflamed, so inflamed Augustus
 That happy honors turned to dismal woes.
 My mind, in a scornful fit of temper,
 Thinking by dying to escape from scorn,
 Made me, the just, unjust against myself.
 By the new roots of this my tree I swear
 To you that never did I break faith with
 My lord, who was so worthy of honor.
 And if one of you returns to the world,
 Let him comfort my memory, which still
 Lies prostrate from the blow envy gave it."

ULISSE (*Inferno*, Canto XXVI, 25-142)

Quante il villan ch'al poggio si riposa,
 Nel tempo che colui che 'l mondo schiara
 La faccia sua a noi tien meno ascosa,
 Come la mosca cede a la zanzara,
 Vede lucciole giù per la vallea,
 Forse colà dov' e' vendemmia ed ara;
 Di tante fiamme tutta risplendea
 L'ottava bolgia, si com' io m'accorsi
 Tosto che fui là 've 'l fondo pareo.
 E qual colui che si vengìo con li orsi
 Vide 'l carro d'Elia al dipartire,
 Quando i cavalli al cielo erti levorsi,
 Che nol potea sì con li occhi seguire,
 Ch'el vedesse altro che la fiamma sola,
 Sì come nuvoletta, in su salire;
 Tal si move ciascuna per la gola
 Del fosso, chè nessuna mostra il furto,
 E ogni fiamma un peccatore invola.
 Io stava sovra 'l ponte a veder surto,
 Sì che s' io non avessi un ronchion preso,
 Caduto sarei giù sanz'esser urto.
 E 'l duca, che mi vide tanto atteso,
 Disse: "Dentro dai fuochi son li spiriti;
 Ciascun si fascia di quel ch'elli è inceso."
 "Maestro mio," rispuos' io "per udirti
 Son io più certo; ma già m'era avviso
 Che così fosse, e già voleva dirti:
 Chi è in quel foco che vien sì diviso
 Di sopra, che par surger della pira
 Dov' Eteòcle col frater fu miso?"
 Rispuose a me: "Là dentro si martira
 Ulisse e Diomede, e così insieme
 Alla vendetta vanno come all' ira;
 E dentro dalla lor fiamma si geme
 L'agguato del caval che fè la porta
 Onde uscì de' Romani il gentil seme.
 Piangevisi entro l'arte per che, morta,
 Deïdamia ancor si duol d'Achille,
 E del Palladio pena vi si porta."
 "S'ei posson dentro da quelle faville
 Parlar," diss' io "maestro, assai ten priego

ULYSSES (*Inferno*, Canto XXVI, ll. 25-142)

As many as the fireflies the peasant
 Resting on the hill, in the time when He
 Who lights the world least hides His face from us,
 When the fly gives place to the mosquito,
 Sees down along the valley, perhaps, there
 Where he gathers the grapes and tills the soil;
 With so many flames the eighth ditch was all
 Gleaming, as I perceived just as soon as
 I came to where the bottom could be seen.
 And as he who was avenged by bears saw
 Elijah's chariot at his parting,
 When the horses rode straight up to heaven,
 Who could not follow it with his eyes so
 As to see anything but the flame alone,
 Like a little cloud ascending upward;
 Just so each one moves along the gullet
 Of the ditch, for none of them shows its theft,
 And every flame steals away a sinner.
 I was standing on the bridge, risen up
 To see, so if I had not grasped a rock
 I would have fallen down without a push.
 And my leader, who saw me so intent,
 Explained: "Within the flames are the spirits;
 Each one is swathed close in that which burns him."
 "My master," I replied, "from hearing you
 I am more certain, but already thought
 It so, already wanted to ask you.
 Who is in that fire so divided at
 The top that it seems to rise from the pyre
 Where Eteocles lay with his brother?"
 He answered me: "Within are tormented
 Ulysses and Diomed; together
 They go under vengeance as once in wrath;
 And within the flame they lament for the
 Ambush of the horse that made the gate whence
 Issued the noble seed of the Romans.
 They lament within it the craft by which
 Deidamia, dead, still mourns Achilles,
 And there they pay for the Palladium."
 "If they can speak within those sparks," I said,
 "Master, I earnestly pray you, and replay,

E ripriego, che il priego vaglia mille,
Che non mi facci dell'attender niego
Fin che la fiamma cornuta qua vegna:
Vedi che del disio ver lei mi piego!"
Ed elli a me: "La tua preghiera è degna
Di molta loda, e io però l'acchetto;
Ma fa che la tua lingua si sostegna.
Lascia parlare a me, ch' i' ho concetto
Ciò che tu vuoi; ch'ei sarebbero schivi,
Perchè fuor greci, forse del tuo detto."
Poi che la fiamma fu venuta quivi
Dove parve al mio duca tempo e loco,
In questa forma lui parlare audivi:
"O voi che siete due dentro ad un foco,
S' io meritai di voi mentre ch' io vissi,
S' io meritai di voi assai o poco
Quando nel mondo li alti versi scrissi,
Non vi movete; ma l' un di voi dica
Dove per lui perduto a morir gissi."
Lo maggior corno della fiamma antica
Cominciò a crollarsi mormorando
Pur come quella cui vento affatica;
Indi la cima qua e là menando,
Come fosse la lingua che parlasse,
Gittò voce di fuori, e disse: "Quando
Mi dipartì da Circe, che sottrasse
Me più d'un anno là presso a Gaeta,
Prima che s' Enea la nomasse,
Nè dolcezza di figlio, nè la pietà
Del vecchio padre, nè 'l debito amore
Lo qual dovea Penelopè far lieta,
Vincer poter dentro a me l'ardore
Ch' i' ebbi a divenir del mondo esperto,
E delli vizi umani e del valore;
Ma misi me per l'alto mare aperto
Sol con un legno e con quella compagna
Picciola dalla qual non fui disertò.
L' un lito e l'altro vidi infin la Spagna,
Fin nel Morrocco, e l' isola de' Sardi,
E l'altre che quel mare intorno bagna.
Io e' compagni eravam vecchi e tardi
Quando venimmo a quella foce stretta
Dov' Ercule segnò li suoi riguardi,

That my prayer may be worth a thousandfold,
That you do not forbid me to stay here
Until the two-horned flame comes near to us:
You see how I bend toward it with desire!"
And he to me: "Your prayer deserves much praise,
And therefore I shall gladly accept it;
But do you restrain your tongue from speaking.
Leave it to me to speak to them, for I
Understand what you desire; and perhaps,
Since they were Greeks, they might disdain your words.
After the flame had come to where it seemed
To my leader the fitting time and place,
I heard him speak to it in this manner:
"O you who are two souls within one fire,
If I deserved well of you when I lived,
If I deserved of you much or little,
When in the world I wrote my lofty lines,
Do not move on; but let one of you tell
Where, having lost yourself, you went to die."
The greater horn of that most ancient flame
Then began to sway about and murmur,
Just as if it were beaten by the wind;
When it was waving its tip to and fro,
As if it were the tongue itself that spoke,
The flame threw out a voice and said, "When I
Departed from Circe, who had detained
Me more than a year there near to Gaeta,
Before Aeneas had so named the place,
Not fondness for my son, nor reverence
For my aged father, nor the love owed
Penelope, which should have gladdened her,
Could overcome in me the passion I
Had to gain experience of the world,
And of the vices and the worth of men;
So I set out on the deep, open sea
With only one ship, and with that little
Company who had not deserted me.
I saw the both shores, as far as Spain, as
Far as Morocco, and Sardinia
And the other islands the sea bathes round.
I and my companions were old and slow
When we came before that narrow outlet
Where Hercules had set up his landmarks,

Acciò che l'uom più oltre non si metta;
Dalla man destra mi lasciai Sibia,
Dall'altra già m'avea lasciata Setta.
'O frati,' dissi 'che per cento milia
Perigli siete giunti all'occidente,
A questa tanto picciola vigilia
De' nostri sensi ch'è del rimanente,
Non vogliate negar l'esperienza,
Di retro al sol, del mondo senza gente.
Considerate la vostra semenza:
Fatti non foste a viver come bruti,
Ma per seguir virtute e canoscenza.'
Li miei compagni fec' io sì aguti,
Con questa orazion picciola, al cammino,
Che a pena poscia li avrei ritenuti;
E volta nostra poppa nel mattino,
Dei remi facemmo ali al folle volo,
Sempre acquistando dal lato mancino.
Tutte le stelle già dell'altro polo
Vede la notte, e 'l nostro tanto basso
Che non surgea fuor del marin suolo.
Cinque volte raccesso e tante casso
Lo lume era di sotto dalla luna,
Poi che 'ntrati eravam nell'alto passo,
Quando n'apparve una montagna, bruna
Per la distanza, e parvemi alta tanto
Quanto veduta non avea alcuna.
Noi ci allegrammo, e tosto tornò in pianto;
Chè della nova terra un turbo nacque,
E percosse del legno il primo canto.
Tre volte il fè girar con tutte l'acque:
Alla quarta levar le poppa in suso
E la prora ire in giù, com'altrui piacque,
Infin che 'l mar fu sopra noi richiuso."

So that men might not pass beyond that point:
On my right had I left behind Seville,
On the other hand had left Ceuta.
'O brothers,' I said, 'who through a hundred
Thousand perils have made your way to reach
The west, during this so brief vigil of
Our senses that still remains to us, choose
Not to deny yourself experience
Of that unpeopled world beyond the sun.
Consider well the seed from which you spring:
You were not made to live your lives like brutes,
But to follow after virtue and knowledge.'
My companions I made so eager for
The voyage, with this little oration,
That then I could have hardly have held them back;
And with our stern turned toward the morning,
We made of our oars wings, for the mad flight,
Steadily gaining on the left hand side.
That night already showed all the strange stars
Of the other pole, and our own so low
They did not rise above the ocean floor.
Full five times the light had been rekindled
And as often quenched underneath the moon,
Since we had entered on the deep passage,
When there appeared to us a mountain, dark
By distance, and it seemed of such a height
As I had never seen the like before.
We were gladdened, but soon turned to weeping;
For from the new land a whirlwind arose,
And struck upon the forepart of the ship.
Three times it whirled round with all the waters:
The fourth time it lifted the stern aloft
And plunged the prow down, as Another willed,
Until the sea closed again over us."



Casolare etneo.

Poems by Valerio Magrelli

Translated by Paul D'Agostino

Paul D'Agostino is an artist, writer and translator living in Bushwick, Brooklyn, where he also curates art exhibits at Centotto Gallery. He holds a Ph.D. in Italian Literature and is Adjunct Assistant Professor of Italian at CUNY Brooklyn College, where he also works in the Art Department. He writes in and translates among a number of different languages, primarily Italian, German, French, Spanish and English, and he is Contributing Editor at *The L Magazine*, Assistant Editor of *Journal of Italian Translation*, and co-founder of an art blog, *After Vasari*.

Roman poet **Valerio Magrelli** is Professor of French Literature at the University of Cassino. His publications embrace a number of different writing modes and include volumes of poetry, prose, translations and critical texts. Most renowned for his verses, Magrelli has won the Mondello Prize, the Viareggio Prize for Poetry and the Montale Prize. His most recent publications are *Addio al calcio* (2010), a collection of 90 'minute long' short stories, and *Il sessantotto realizzato da Mediaset* (2011), a work of sociopolitical import. His most recent collection of poetry, *Disturbi del sistema binario* (2006), is the text from which the following poems were extracted and translated.

Translator's Note: Mi capitò per le mani lo snello volume *Disturbi del sistema binario*, l'ultima e piuttosto recente raccolta di poesie di Valerio Magrelli. Non conoscevo il poeta, il titolo mi interessava, i versi in copertina mi piacevano, cominciai a leggerlo. Lessi il primo testo, "La guace," e mi colpì. Poi il secondo, "L'ombra," uguale. Poi uguale per tutto il volume. Alla fine mi sono sentito obbligato a tradurne qualche testo, tanto per immergermi di nuovo e in modo più profondo. Ecco allora i risultati di un piacevole processo che iniziò con un libro trovato a casaccio.

da *Disturbi del sistema binario*, Einaudi, 2006

La guace

I.

Acqua salmastra, né dolce né salata,
bensí salata e dolce.
È quanto accade quando i fiumi
della guerra e della pace
si gettano in un unico acquitrino,
in una stagnazione della vita
infestata di morte,
in una effervescenza della morte
inquinata di vita.

II.

La porta del Tempio di Giano
è diventata quella di Duchamp,
aperta e chiusa insieme:
non serve piú a tenere fuori i mostri,
ma nemmeno ad accoglierli.

Nota: Dicesi 'guace' la confusa mescolanza di guerra e pace caratteristica della nostra epoca.

L'ombra

Domenica mattina,
mi risveglia la voce
di mia figlia che gridando
dalla cucina chiede
a suo fratello
se davvero la Bomba,
quando scoppia,
lascia l'ombra
dell'uomo sopra il muro.
(Non di "un uomo":
"dell'uomo," dice). Lui
annuisce,
io mi giro dentro al letto.

from *Disturbi del sistema binario*, Einaudi, 2006

La guace

I.

Salted water, neither salty nor sweet,
indeed both sweet and salty.
So it goes when the rivers
of war and peace
feed into the same marsh,
a stagnation of life
infested by death,
an effervescence of death
polluted by life.

II.

The door to the Temple of Janus
has now become Duchamp's,
open and closed at once:
it no longer serves to keep the monsters out,
yet neither is it there to welcome them.

Note: One might use the term 'guace' to convey the strange mixture of 'guerra,' war, and 'pace,' peace, so characteristic of our era.

The Shadow

Sunday morning,
I'm awoken by my daughter's
voice as she shouts
from the kitchen to ask
her brother if,
really, when the Bomb
explodes, it
leaves the shadow
of man on the wall.
(Not of "a man":
"of man," she says.)
He nods,
I turn in my bed.

Elegia

*L'uomo passa all'uomo penuria.
 Si approfondisce come un'insenatura.
 Esci prima che puoi,
 e non aver figli tuoi.
 Philip Larkin*

Se tutto ciò che cresce e brucia è brace,
 amore è visione del rogo.
 Pensa all'estate,
 che nasce dissanguandosi
 in una sorridente emorragia di luce.
 Ciò che ti è caro muore, ciò che muore
 ti è caro, se qualcosa ti è caro,
 è perché muore. Ed ecco il corollario:
 "Ciò che ti è caro, è solo la sua morte."
 È sera, nella stanza dei miei figli.
 Disteso accanto a loro, li ascolto cinguettare.
 Un bosco al buio. Posano
 sui miei rami il peso caldo e vivo della voce,
 un peso-volo trepidante.
 O devo credere che siano solo le punte
 incandescenti di un fuoco mezzo spento,
 crollato, mezzo freddo, di un tizzone
 già nero e muto, già muto,
 mezzo morto?

Su un paesaggio di Milena Barberis

visto attraverso il Polpo di Apollinaire

*Verso i cieli lancia il suo inchiostro,
 succhia il sangue di ciò che ama,
 lo trova un balsamo. Questo mostro,
 col mio stesso nome si chiama.*

Quel nero che monta dal basso
 non sta nel quadro
 ma nell'osservatore.
 Sono io la seppia che imbratta
 di nero l'immagine dell'autore,

Elegy

*Man hands on misery to man.
It deepens like a coastal shelf.
Get out as early as you can,
And don't have any kids yourself.
Philip Larkin*

If all that grows and burns goes to embers,
then to love is to glimpse the stake.
Think of summer,
how it begins by shedding its blood
in a smiling hemorrhaging of light.
That which is dear to you dies, that which dies
is dear, if something is dear to you
it's because it dies. So here's the corollary:
"That which is dear to you is only its death."
It is evening in my children's room.
I lie beside them and listen to their chatter.
A darkened wood. Resting
on my branches is the warm living weight of their warbling,
an anxious weight-flight.
Or should I believe it's just the tips
of a half-spent blaze,
crumbled, half-cooled, the coals
already black and mute, already mute,
half dead?

On a Landscape by Milena Barberis

Seen Through Apollinaire's Octopus

*To the heavens it throws its ink,
sucks the blood of that which it loves,
this is its balm. This monster,
it bears my very same name.*

That black mass rising from the depths
is not in the painting
but in the observer.
I am the cuttlefish smearing
ink on the author's image,

io il peccatore e insieme il ritrattista
che fa di ogni dipinto il proprio specchio.
Sono io l'artista che porta
sull'opera uno sguardo macchiato
e così facendo firma
l'assegno in bianco del proprio peccato.

Ottica

Possibile che in tutto questo tempo
abbia fissato il disegno dell'anatra
senza vedere la lepre?
Provavo a spiegare il concetto d'inganno
in termini morali,
mentre ero vittima di un paradosso visivo.
Mi accanivo sull'Etica,
quando il problema riguardava l'Ottica.

In realtà lo dimezzano

Esseri doppi popolano il mondo.
Sembra che lo raddoppino,
in realtà lo dimezzano.

I'm the sinner as well as the portraitist
who makes of every painting a mirror of the self.
I am the artist who carries
into the work the taint of his gaze,
signing thereby
the blank check of his own sin.

Optics

Is it possible that in all this time
I've looked at the drawing of the duck
without seeing the hare?
I was trying to explain the concept of deceit
in moral terms
while falling victim to a visual paradox.
I had fixed my focus on Ethics,
yet the problem was one of Optics.

In Reality They Split It in Half

Double beings populate the world.
It would seem that they double it, too,
but in reality they split it in half.

Classics Revisited

Carlo Porta

Translated by Joseph Tusiani



Mare.

La nomina del Cappellan by Carlo Porta

Translated by Joseph Tusiani

Carlo Porta (1775-1821)

The greatest poet who ever wrote in the Milanese dialect was born in Milan, studied at a Jesuits' school in Monza, was a seminarian for a few years, tried his luck in Venice, and finally settled in his native city where he was named General Accountant for the "Monte dello Stato," a title which he held until his death. A very close friend of Manzoni, who admired him highly, he wrote exclusively in Milanese. The greatness of his poetic exuberance, however, transcends the boundaries of its local idiom. Like Giachino Belli, Porta depicted the life of a city; but, unlike his Roman counterpart, he insisted on fewer aspects of the society he chastised. He is at his best in several anticlerical satires, of which *The Selection of the Chaplain* is the most irresistible and unforgettable. The Congress of Vienna with its sad implications found in this poet its most powerful voice.

J.T.

LA NOMINA DEL CAPPELLAN

Alla Marchesa Paola Cangiasa,
 vuna di primm damazz de Lombardia,
 gh'era mort don Gliceri, el pret de casa,
 in grazia d'ona peripneumonia
 che la gh'ha faa quistà in del sforaggiass
 a mennagh sul mezz di la Lilla a spass.

L'eva la Lilla ona cagna maltesa
 tutta goss, tutta pel e tutta lard,
 e in cà Cangiasa, dopo la Marchesa,
 l'eva la bestia de maggior riguard,
 de moeud che guaja al ciel falla sguagni,
 guaja sbeffalla, guaja a dagh del ti.

El l'ha savuda el pover don Galdin,
 che in de la truscia de l'elevazion
 avendegh insci in fall schisciaa el covin
 gh'è toccaa lì a l'altar del pret cojon,
 e el sò bon tibi, appenna in sacrestia,
 de mett giò la pianeda e trottà via.

In mezz a questa appenna don Gliceri
 l'ha comenzaa a giugà a l'amora el fiaa,
 è cors da tutt i part on diavoleri
 de reverendi di busecch schisciaa
 per vede de ottegni la bona sort
 de slargaj foeura in loeugh e stat del mort.

Chè infin di fin, se in cà de donna Pavola
 no gh'era per i pret on gran rispet,et,
 almanca gh'era on fioretton de tavola
 de fà sarà sù on oeucc su sto difett
 minga domá a on gallupp de on cappellan,
 ma a paricc di teologh de Milan.

Gh'era de gionta la soa brava messa
 a trenta borr, senza manutenzion,
 allogg in cà, lavandaria, soppressa,
 ciccolatt, acqua sporca a colazion,
 bona campagna, palpiroeu a Natal,
 sicché, se corren, cazz, l'è natural!

THE SELECTION OF THE CHAPLAIN

Marchioness Paola Travasa, one
of the first ladies of all Lombardy,
has lost her private chaplain Don Gliceri
because of a pneumonia he caught,
too overzealous in his daily role
of taking Lilla for a mid-day stroll.

Lila, all goitre and all fur and fat,
is a Maltese old female dog that, after
the Marchioness, in the Travasa home
happens to be the most respected beast,
so that it is a crime, that all should fear,
to make her bark or treat her as a peer.

Poor Don Galdin knows well about it, who
was at the altar called a filthy swine
for having, as he raised the holy host,
stepped on her tender tail, and, as he reached
the sacristy, was on the spot dismissed
and, chasuble laid down, flew quick as mist.

So then: now that poor Don Gliceri's breathed
his very last and lives on earth no more,
a very long parade of Reverend Priests,
famished and gaunt, arrive from everywhere,
hoping to God to give their skin a boost
by filling their dead colleague's envied post.

For, after all, albeit any priest
in Lady Paola's house is deemed a dunce,
there is a lavish table ever set
that makes one close an eye on such a lack –
a boon that lures, instead of only one,
one third the theologians of Milan.

Besides the thirty lire for the Mass,
not counting what is needed for its pomp,
there is free lodging, laundry, ironing,
chocolate, juice at breakfast, and, add this,
days in the country and a Christmas bonus:
no wonder priests exclaim: "May this fall on us!"

Ma la Marchesa che no la voreva
 seccass la scuffia con la furugada
 l'ha faa savè a tucc quij che concorreva
 che dovessen vegnì la tal giornada,
 che dopo avej veduu e parlaa con tutt
 l'avria poi fatt ciò che le foss piaciutt.

Ecco che riva intant la gran mattina,
 ecco el palazz tutt quant in moviment,
 pret in cort, pret suj scal, pret in cusina,
 pienn i anticamer de l'appartament,
 gh'è i pret di feud, el gh'è i Còrs, gh'è i nost,
 par on vol de scorbatt che vaga a post.

El gran rembomb di vòlt, el cattabuj
 de la mormorazion che ghe fan sott,
 el strusament di pee, di ferr de muj
 che gh'han sott ai sciaivatt quij sacerdot,
 fan tutt insemma on ghatt, on sbragalismo,
 ch'el par che coppen el Romanticismo.

Baja la Lilla, baja la Marchesa
 tutt e dò dessedaa del gran baccan;
 i pret che hin solit a sbraggià anca in gesa
 ghe la dan dent senza rispett uman,
 quand on camerleccaj dolz come on ors
 el corr a strozzagh lì tucc i discors.

Semm in piazza, per Dio, o indove semm?
 Sangue de dì, che discrezion l'è questa!
 Alto là, citto: quij duu in fond... andemm...
 ché la Marchesa la gh'ha tant de testa!
 Hin mò anch grand e gross, e on poo de quella,
 per Dio sacrato, el sarav temp de avella!

Dopo quell poo de citto natural
 che ven de seguit d'ona intemerada,
 vedend sto ambassador del temporal
 che nol gh'ha intorna on'anima che fiada,
 el muda vos, el morbidiss la ciera,
 e el seguita el discors in sta manera.

The Marchioness, however, who disdains
the least encounter with the lowly crowd,
has notified the scores of candidates
that, when they come on the appointed day
to be examined, with her graceful voice
she'll deign to let them know her final choice.

So the great morning finally has come,
and now the palace is one sounding stir:
priests in the courtyard, priests along the stairs,
priests in the kitchen, priests throughout the house.
Corsica, country, city, every region
it represented with a crow or pigeon.

The great reverberation of the roofs,
the din of all the murmurings below,
the pattering of feet and iron hooves –
I mean the solid boots of all these priests –
make such a noise around, and such a schism,
they seem to crucify Romanticism.

Lilla is barking, Marchioness is screaming,
both of them wakened by the great confusion.
Accustomed, as they are, to shout in church,
with no consideration for mankind
they're talking talking when, sweet as a bear,
a butler comes to freeze all murmur there:

"Heavens, what's this? Have you no manners yet
or do you think you're in a public square?
Quiet . . . those two in the last row, be still . . .
the Marchioness has such a splitting headache.
By God! You're big and fat and old enough
to know you should not be so rude and rough."

During the bit of silence that, we know,
after a scolding naturally comes,
that butler, nay, ambassador of weather,
seeing that not one soul around is breathing,
with a new tone of voice and sudden phlegm
continues in this way to talk to them:

“Se poeù anch de prima de parlà con lee
 di voeult gh’avessen gènni de senti
 quaa hin i obbligazion del sò mestee,
 senza fà tante ciaccer, ecco chì;
 inscì chi voeur stà stà, chi no voeur stà
 el ghe fà grazia a desfesciagh la cà.

Punt primm: in quant a l’obbligh de la messa
 o festa o nò gh’è mai or fiss de dilla;
 chi è via a servì n’occor che l’abbia pressa;
 i or hin quij che lee la voeur sentilla:
 se je fass stà paraa dò, trè, quattr’or,
 amen, pascienza, offrighela al Signor.

La messa poeù, s’intend, puttost curtina...
 on quardoretta, vint minutt al pù:
 dò voeult la settimana la dottrina
 per i donzell e per la servitù,
 de sira semper la soa terza part,
 men che al tarocch no ghe callas el quart.”

Chi mò, sentend che on patt inscì essenzial
 l’eva quell che savè giugà a tarocch,
 ghe n’è staa cinqu o ses che han ciappaa i scal,
 e tra i olter (peccaa) on certo don Rocch,
 gran primerista fina de bagaj
 ch’el giuga i esequi on mes prima de faj.

(E quell el tira innanz) Portà bigliett,
 fà imbassad, fà provist, toeuss anca adree
 di voeult on quaj fagott, on quaj pacchett,
 corr dal sart, daj madamm, al perucchee,
 mennà a spass la cagnetta e se l’occor
 scriv on cunt, ona lettera al fattor.

Anca chì el n’è sblusciaa de on sett o vott,
 vun per quella reson de la cagnetta,
 on segond per reson de quij fagott,
 e i olter cinqu o ses han faa spazzetta
 per no infesciass coj penn, coj carimaa,
 e ris’cià de sporcà i dit consacraa.

“Well, if, before you see Her Ladyship,
you want to hear right now, long in advance,
the duties you’re expected to perform,
whether or not you like them, here they are.
And those of you who do not wish to hear
may leave the house at once and disappear.

“First, with regard to saying here your Mass,
feast or no feast, you’ll say it if and when
she pleases. Those who serve must patient be:
so say it when she cares to come to one.
And if she makes you wait two hours and twice,
offer to God, amen, your sacrifice.

“Second, you must not make your Mass too long –
say, fifteen minutes, twenty at the most.
For children and for servants twice a week
a bit of catechism should be taught;
and then one third of Rosary each night
if tarots’ time can make it quite all right.”

Now five or six of all the present priests,
hearing it is essential to know well
the art of tarots, nimbly take the stairs.
Don Rocco (what a shame!) is one of them:
he on primero, against one and all,
would stake the cost of his own funeral.

The butler now proceeds: “This you must do:
go marketing, run errands here and there,
carry a bundle or a suit at times,
check with dressmakers and hairdressers too,
take for a walk the dog and, what is better,
write our factotum a new bill or letter.”

At this, seven or eight leave fast the house –
one on account of that demanding dog,
another for that bundle or that suit;
and five or six decide to slip away
lest they should have to do with ink and pen
and soil the fingers of anointed men.

In tra sti ultem che han veduu a andà via
 gh'è staa on certo don Giorg de Zuccoirin,
 maester de eloquenza e poesia
 del famoso sur Carlo Gherardin
 e autor d'on codez de beccopulenza
 stampaa da Isepp Forlan de Porta Renza.

(E quell el tira innanz) Quant al disnà
 de solit el gh'è el post con la patrona,
 via giust che no vegna a capità
 on disnà de etichetta, o ona persona
 d'alto bordo o de impegn, ché in sto cas chi
 mangem tra nun, cont i donzell e mi.

In campagna poeù el cas l'è different:
 vegniss el Pappa, disnen tucc con lee.
 Là la se adatta anch con la bassa gent,
 magari la va a brazz col cangelee;
 tutt quell de pesc che là ghe possa occor
 l'è quell de lassass god d'on sojador.

Del rest, rid e fà el ciall, no contraddi,
 no passà la stacchetta in del rispond,
 a tavola che s'è lassass servì,
 no fà l'ingord, no slongà i man suj tond,
 no sbatt la bocca, no desgargaralla,
 né mettes a parlà denanz vojalla.

Tegnì giò i gombet, no fà pan moin,
 no rugass in di dent cont i cortij,
 no sugass el sudor cont el mantin,
 infin nessuna affatt di porcarij
 che hin tant fazil lor sciori a lassà corr,
 come el mond el fudess tutt sò de lor.

Chì, vedend quell balloss d'on camarer
 che quij bon religios stan lì quacc quacc
 senza dà el minim segn de disparer
 via de quaj reffign, de quaj modacc,
 d'on salt el passa al fin de l'orazion
 cont el recciocch de stà perorazion.

Among these last ones seen to go away
there is one Reverend George of Zuccoirin,
teacher of eloquence and poetry
to the well-known Sir Carlo Gherardin,
and author of a tome of cuckold-science,
printed by Joe Forlan of Porta Rience.

Still further he proceeds: "At dinner time
you'll sit most often with Her Ladyship
except, of course, at meals of protocol
when dignitaries are her special guests:
in all such cases, all of you will be
allowed to eat with servants and with me.

"But in our country house there's no such rule:
we all dine with her, were the Pope to come.
There she endures the lowly, humble crowd,
and even takes the farmer by the arm:
the worst that there can happen to Her Grace
is to hear someone joking in her face.

"Well then, laugh and be clownish as you wish,
but never contradict when you reply.
Once you're at table, wait till you are served,
do not be greedy, do not reach for plates,
don't open your big mouths for any noise,
and, while the food is in it, check your voice.

"Keep elbows down, and dip no bread in wine,
don't use the knife to scour or scrub your teeth,
and with the napkin never wipe your brows:
in brief, do none of those barbaric things
that you, my lords, so easily condone
as though the world were yours, and yours alone."

Our roguish butler, seeing at this point
all those good priests around him sad and dumb,
unable in the least to disagree
save for some turned-up nose or some grimace,
brings to an end his wonderful prolusion
by adding this most deeply felt conclusion:

Quell che ghe raccomanddi pù che poss
 l'è quella polizia benedetta,
 che se regorden che col tanf indoss
 de sudor de sott sella e de soletta,
 e con quij ong con l'orlo de vellù,
 se quistaran del porch e nient de pù.

Certe lenden suj spall, cert collarin
 che paren faa de foeudra de salamm,
 certi coll de camis, de gipponin,
 hin minga coss de portà innanz ai damm;
 omm visaa, se soeul di, l'è mezz difes,
 hoo parlaa ciar, e m'avaràn intes.

Stremii, sbattuu, inlochii come tappon
 quij pover pret s'hin miss tra lor in croeucc,
 e infin, fassel mò effett de la session,
 o d'on specc che gh'avessen sott i oeucc,
 fatto stà che de on trenta amalappenna
 el se n'è fermata li mezza donzenna.

A sto pont ona gran scampanellada
 la partezipa a tucc che Soa Eccellenza
 donna Pavola infin la s'è levada
 e che l'è sul prozint de dà udienza;
 el camarer allora el corr, el truscia,
 e i pret fan toilett con la baussia.

La Marchesa Cangiasa, in gran scuffion
 fada a la Pompadour tutta a fioritt,
 coj sò duu bravi ciccolattinon
 de taftà negher sora di polsitt
 e duu gran barbison color tanè,
 l'eva in sala a specciaj sul canapè.

Ma la Lilla, che l'eva arent a lee
 quattada giò cont on sciall noeuv de Franza,
 appena che la sent quij dodes pee
 la salta in terra, scovand giò per stanza
 el sciall noeuv e bojand a pò no poss
 con tutt e quant el fiaa di sò trii goss.

“The thing you must remember most of all
is that you wash yourselves each blessed day.
Bear this in mind: with all your awful smell
of armpits and forever sweating feet,
and with your fingernails, so black all o’er,
you’ll gain the name of pigs and nothing more.

“That grease over your shoulders, I conclude,
those collars that seem made of sausage skin,
and then those shirts no longer cloth but dirt—
these are not things a lady’s eyes should see.
When one’s forewarned one is forearmed, you know:
have I been clear? Behave therefore or go.”

Undone and vanquished, and as blind as moles,
all those poor priests now make a smaller group,
and, whether this hard speech has been too strong
or they in a big mirror see themselves,
the fact remains that half a dozen stay
of all the thirty priests that came today.

This is the moment: a loud-ringing bell
makes all them know that Donna Paola,
Her Excellency, has left her bed at last,
and is about to grant them audience.
While the quick butler to each corner races
the priests with their saliva clean their faces.

Great Marchioness Travasa, look!, appears
wearing a bonnet a la Pompadour,
with blossoms and with two brave hanging curls
of taffeta dark-playing on her brow:
her brown moustache quite visible and tall,
she’s on her sofa, waiting for them all.

But Lilla, who is sitting next to her,
all-covered with the newest scarf from France,
as soon as she hears those twelve vulgar feet,
jumps to her paws and drags along the room
her new-made mantle, barking loud and wide
with all the breath that her three goitres hide.

E boja e boja e rognà e mostra i dent,
 don Malacchia che l'è on poo fogos,
 vedendes saraa in bocca el compliment,
 el perd la flemma e el ghe dà su la vos,
 e menter el ghe dà de la seccada
 el fa l'att de mollagh ona pesciada.

On'orsa (come disen i poetta),
 che la se veda toeù da on cacciador,
 o ferì on orsettin sott a la tetta,
 no la van in tanta rabbia, in tant furor,
 come la va Sustrissima a vedè
 don Malacchia cont in aria el pè.

Per fortuna del ciel che la Lillin,
 con quell intendiment che l'è tutt sò,
 l'ha savuu schivà el colp in del sesin
 col tira arent la cova e scrusciass giò,
 del restant se no gh'era sta risorsa
 vattel a pesca cossa fa quell'orsa.

Schivaa el colp, descasciaa don Malacchia,
 even i coss asquasi quiettaa;
 già la dondava la cappellania
 su i ceregh de quij pocch cinqu candidaa,
 quand on olter bordell, on olter cas
 el ne manda anmò on para in santa pas.

E l'è che l'illustrissima patrona,
 menter la va a cuu indree sul canapè
 per met in statu quoniam la persona
 stada in disordin per l'affar del pè,
 in del lassas andà, cajan, cajan,
 la soppressa col sedes la Lillin.

Don Tellesfor e don Spiridion,
 duu gingella che riden per nient,
 dan foera tutt duu a on bott in d'on s'cioppon
 de rid insci cilapp, insci indecent,
 che la Marchesa infin scandalizzata
 la dà foera anca lee con sta filada.

She barks and barks and growls and shows her teeth.
 Don Malacchia, an ill-tempered priest,
 seeing his greetings frozen in his mouth,
 loses his calmness, raises now his voice,
 and, making his resentment manifest,
 lifts up his foot to strike the howling pest.

A mother bear (a poet so would say),
 seeing a small cub snatched from underneath
 or wounded by a hunter ruthlessly,
 would never turn so wrathful or so mad
 as Her Great Ladyship appears to you,
 seeing Don Malacchia's lifted shoe.

Luckily, little Lilla, thanks to that
 wonderful *savoir faire* that is her gift,
 has smartly shunned the blow on her *derriere*
 by squatting down and thrusting up her tail:
 luckily, yes, or nobody can know
 what that wild bear might do at such a blow.

The blow is shunned, Don Malacchia's fired,
 and everything is peaceful as before.
 Thus on the tonsure of five candidates
 the post of chaplain, look!, is dangling now.
 But, oh, another din, another roar
 causes the quick dismissal of two more.

Her Most Illustrious Ladyship — that's why —
 as she's about to sit and rest upon
 the sofa her old body's solemn weight,
 still in a state of shock for that raised boot,
 sinks into it and there — alas! alas! —
 crushes poor Lilla with her awesome mass.

Don Tellesfor and Don Spiridion,
 two clowns who laugh for nothing, at this sight
 burst into such a raucous, roaring laugh —
 a most indecorous, unheard-of thing —
 that, finally upset, the Marchionness
 begins the two old priests thus to address:

“Avria suppost che essendo sacerdot
 avesser un pò più d’educazion,
 o che i modi, al più pegg, le fosser nott
 de trattar con i damm de condizion;
 m’accorgo invece in questa circostanza
 che non han garbo, modi, né creanza.

Però poi che l’Altissim el ci ha post
 in questo grado, e siamm ciò che siamm,
 certissimament è dover nost
 il farci rispettar come dobbiam;
 saria mancar a Noi, poi al Signor
 passarci sopra, e specialment con lor.

Quanto a lor due, o malizios o sempi
 che sia el lor fall, basta così: che vadan!
 Quanto agli altri, me giova che l’esempi
 je faccia cauti e me ne persuadan.
 Così è: Serva loro: adesso poi...
 (Lillin? quietta!!)... veniamo a noi. “

La Cagnetta che fina a quell punt là
 l’eva stada ona pesta indiavolada
 l’ha comenzaa a fà truscia, a trepillà,
 a fà intorno la frigna e l’inviziada,
 e a rampegà suj gamb a don Ventura,
 on pretocol brutt brutt che fa pagura.

Don Ventura, che l’era in tra quij trii
 el pussee bisognos del benefizzi,
 el stava lì drizz drizz, stremii stremii,
 per pagura de fass on pregiudizzi;
 el sentiva a slissass quij pocch colzett,
 eppur, pascienza, el stava lì quiett.

Ma la Marchesa, che con compiacenza
 la dava d’oeucc a quella simpatia,
 sebben che la gh’avess a la presenza
 duu pret de maggior garb e polizia,
 vada todos, premura per premura,
 l’ha dezis el sò vôt per don Ventura.

'I thought that, being priests, you would behave with better manners than you have revealed, or that, at least, you had already learned how to respect aristocratic Dames. Instead, in this occasion I can see that you have never known civility.

"But since our Lord has placed us in this rank, and we are what we are, undoubtedly it is our solemn, very solemn task to make ourselves revered by men like you. It would be going 'gainst ourselves and God to close an eye on people of low blood.

"As far as you're concerned, the two of you, whate'er your sin may be, you are dismissed. Let this example warn the others too, if they have yet some basic tact to learn. And this is it . . . good-bye . . . And now let's see . . . (Quiet, Lillin! . . .) Who will our chaplain be?"

The gentle dog, who until now has been a pest unleashed out of the deepest hell, begins to leap most daintily about, luring and light, and spinning sweet and spoiled, and now on Don Ventura's legs she fares — a priest whose ugliness all people's scares.

Of those three Priests, our Don Ventura is to one who needs this good employment most. Look! Rigid and astounded, there he is, afraid to compromise his final luck. He feels his poor old stockings being ripped yet for the job he's patient and tight-lipped.

The Marchioness, aware, oh, well aware of Lilla's unexpected preference, despite the fact she in her presence sees a more intelligent and cleaner priest, inspired by Lilla's taste, and rendered surer, casts finally her vow for Don Ventura.

Appenna s'è savuu dalla famiglia
che l'eva deventaa el sò cappellan,
se sbattezzaven tucc de meraviglia,
no podend concepi come on giavan,
on bacilla d'on pret, on goff, on ciall
l'avess trovaa el secrett de deventall.

Col temp poeù s'è savuu che el gran secret
l'eva staa nient olter, finalment,
che l'avegh avuu adoss trè o quatter fett
de salamm de basletta involtaa dent
in la Risposta de Madamm Bibin
de quell'olter salamm d'on Gherardin.

As soon as the whole family and house
know the new chaplain's name, in every place
everyone's seized with endless wonderment,
for it is hard to guess how such a priest –
a stupid, idiotic, utmost fool –
has ever learnt the secret of the rule.

Eventually, however, everyone
is told the mystery of the affair –
that Don Ventura, hidden underneath
his cassock, had a pound of sausage skin,
wrapped with the pages of *Madame Bibin*,
whose author is a ham called Gherardin.



Papaveri.

Re-Creations:
American Poets in Translation

Edited by Michael Palma

Re-Creations: American Poets in Italian Translation

Edited by Michael Palma

Dana Gioia was born in Los Angeles in 1950. For fifteen years he worked for General Foods Corporation, rising to the rank of vice president before resigning in 1992 to pursue a full-time literary career. He has published four volumes of poetry: *Daily Horoscope* (1986), *The Gods of Winter* (1991), *Interrogations at Noon* (2001, winner of the American Book Award), and *Pity the Beautiful* (2012). His three collections of essays are *Can Poetry Matter?* (1991), whose title piece, originally published in the *Atlantic*, occasioned more response than any other article in the history of the magazine; *The Barrier of a Common Language* (2003); and *Disappearing Ink* (2004). He has also composed two opera libretti, *Nosferatu* and *Tony Caruso's Last Broadcast*, and published translations of Montale's *Mottetti* and Seneca's *Hercules Furens*, as well as co-editing fifteen anthologies. From 2003 to 2009 he served as Chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts, and he is presently the Judge Widney Professor of Poetry and Public Culture at the University of Southern California.

Wallace Stevens (1879-1955) was born in Reading, Pennsylvania. He took a law degree and made a career in the insurance industry, ultimately becoming a vice president of the Hartford Accident and Indemnity Company. His first book of poems, *Harmonium* (from which all of our selections are drawn), was published in 1923, when he was forty-four. Its imaginative daring, elegant sensibility, and often gaudy phrasing marked it as one of the most unusual first books ever published by an American poet. It remained his only published volume until his late fifties, after which he issued frequent collections of new verse — *Ideas of Order* (1936), *The Man with the Blue Guitar* (1937), *Parts of a World* (1942), *Transport to Summer* (1947), and *The Auroras of Autumn* (1950) — as well as *The Necessary Angel* (1951), essays. His *Collected Poems*, which appeared on his seventy-fifth birthday, won both the Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Award. He is universally regarded as one of the greatest of American poets.

Insomnia

Now you hear what the house has to say.
Pipes clanking, water running in the dark,
the mortgaged walls shifting in discomfort,
and voices mounting in an endless drone
of small complaints like the sounds of a family
that year by year you've learned how to ignore.

But now you must listen to the things you own,
all that you've worked for these past years,
the murmur of property, of things in disrepair,
the moving parts about to come undone,
and twisting in the sheets remember all
the faces you could not bring yourself to love.

How many voices have escaped you until now,
the venting furnace, the floorboards underfoot,
the steady accusations of the clock
numbering the minutes no one will mark.
The terrible clarity this moment brings,
the useless insight, the unbroken dark.

Sunday Night in Santa Rosa

The carnival is over. The high tents,
the palaces of light, are folded flat
and trucked away. A three-time loser yanks
the Wheel of Fortune off the wall. Mice
pick through the garbage by the popcorn stand.
A drunken giant falls asleep beside
the juggler, and the Dog-Faced Boy sneaks off
to join the Serpent Lady for the night.
Wind sweeps ticket stubs along the walk.
The Dead Man loads his coffin on a truck.
Off in a trailer by the parking lot
the radio predicts tomorrow's weather
while a clown stares in a dressing mirror,
takes out a box, and peels away his face.

Translated by Luigi Bonaffini

Insonnia

Adesso senti quello che la casa ha da dire.
Il fragore dei tubi, l'acqua che scorre nel buio,
le pareti ipotecate che si muovono a disagio,
e voci che salgono con un interminabile ronzio
di piccole lagnanze come i rumori di una famiglia
che anno dopo anno hai imparato a ignorare.

Ma ora devi ascoltare le cose che possiedi,
tutto quello per cui hai lavorato negli anni passati,
il mormorio dei beni, delle cose in rovina,
i pezzi in movimento che stanno per disfarsi,
e torcendoti tra le lenzuola ricordare tutti
i volti che non sei mai riuscito ad amare.

Quante voci ti sono sfuggite finora,
la caldaia a ventilazione, le assi del pavimento,
le costanti accuse dell'orologio
che numera i minuti che nessuno segnerà.
La terribile chiarezza che porta questo momento,
l'inutile intuizione, l'oscurità ininterrotta.

Domenica sera a Santa Rosa

La fiera è finita. Le alte tende,
i palazzi di luce, vengono riavvolti a terra
e messi nei camion. Un tipo tre volte perdente
strappa la Ruota della Fortuna dalla parete. I topi
sbirciano tra la spazzatura presso la bancarella del popcorn.
Un gigante ubriaco s'addormenta accanto
al giocoliere, e il Ragazzo Musodicane se la fila
per passare la notte con la Donna Serpente.
Il vento spazza via i biglietti sul marciapiede.
Il Morto carica la sua bara su un camion.
In una roulotte vicino al parcheggio
la radio dice che tempo farà domani
mentre un pagliaccio si guarda in uno specchietto,
tira fuori una scatola, e si pela la faccia.

The Litany

This is a litany of lost things,
a canon of possessions dispossessed,
a photograph, an old address, a key.
It is a list of words to memorize
or to forget—of *amo, amas, amat*,
the conjugations of a dead tongue
in which the final sentence has been spoken.

This is the liturgy of rain,
falling on mountain, field, and ocean—
indifferent, anonymous, complete—
of water infinitesimally slow,
sifting through rock, pooling in darkness,
gathering in springs, then rising without our agency,
only to dissolve in mist or cloud or dew.

This is a prayer to unbelief,
to candles guttering and darkness undivided,
to incense drifting into emptiness.
It is the smile of a stone Madonna
and the silent fury of the consecrated wine,
a benediction on the death of a young god,
brave and beautiful, rotting on a tree.

This is a litany to earth and ashes,
to the dust of roads and vacant rooms,
to the fine silt circling in a shaft of sun,
settling indifferently on books and beds.
This is a prayer to praise what we become,
“Dust thou art, to dust thou shalt return.”
Savor its taste—the bitterness of earth and ashes.

This is a prayer, inchoate and unfinished,
for you, my love, my loss, my lesion,
a rosary of words to count out time’s
illusions, all the minutes, hours, days
the calendar compounds as if the past
existed somewhere—like an inheritance
still waiting to be claimed.

La litania

Questa è una litania di cose perdute,
un canone di proprietà espropriata,
una fotografia, un vecchio indirizzo, una chiave.
È una lista di parole da memorizzare
o dimenticare - di *amo, amas, amat*,
la coniugazione di una lingua morta
in cui è stata detta l'ultima frase.

Questa è una liturgia di pioggia,
che cade su montagna, campo, oceano -
indifferente, anonima, completa -
di acqua infinitesimalmente lenta,
che filtra nella roccia, forma pozze nel buio,
si raccoglie in sorgenti, poi s'alza e non per opera nostra,
solo per dissolversi in nebbia o nuvola o rugiada.

Questa è una preghiera alla miscredenza,
alle candele tremolanti e all'oscurità indivisa,
all'incenso vagante verso il vuoto.
È il sorriso di una Madonna di pietra
e la furia muta del vino consacrato,
una benedizione sulla morte di un giovane dio,
coraggioso e bello, che marcisce su un albero.

Questa è una litania alla morte e alle ceneri,
alla polvere delle strade e delle camere vuote,
al sottile pulviscolo che vortica in un raggio di sole,
adagiandosi indifferentemente su libri e letti.
Questa è una preghiera in lode di ciò che diventiamo,
"Polvere sei e polvere tornerai".
Gustane il sapore - l'amaro di terra e cenere.

Questa è una preghiera, confusa e incompleta,
per te, amore mio, perdita mia, lesione mia,
un rosario di parole per contare le illusioni
del tempo, tutti i minuti, le ore, i giorni
che il calendario combina come se il passato
esistesse in qualche luogo - come un'eredità
ancora in attesa di essere reclamata.

Until at last it is our litany, *mon vieux*,
 my reader, my voyeur, as if the mist
 steaming from the gorge, this pure paradox,
 the shattered river rising as it falls –
 splintering the light, swirling it skyward,
 neither transparent nor opaque but luminous,
 even as it vanishes – were not our life.

Words

The world does not need words. It articulates itself
 in sunlight, leaves, and shadows. The stones on the path
 are no less real for lying uncatalogued and uncounted.
 The fluent leaves speak only the dialect of pure being.
 The kiss is still fully itself though no words were spoken.

And one word transforms it into something less or other –
illicit, chaste, perfunctory, conjugal, covert.
 Even calling it a *kiss* betrays the fluster of hands
 glancing the skin or gripping a shoulder, the slow
 arching of neck or knee, the silent touching of tongues.

Yet the stones remain less real to those who cannot
 name them, or read the mute syllables graven in silica.
 To see a red stone is less than seeing it as jasper –
 metamorphic quartz, cousin to the flint the Kiowa
 carved as arrowheads. To name is to know and remember.

The sunlight needs no praise piercing the rainclouds,
 painting the rocks and leaves with light, then dissolving
 each lucent droplet back into the clouds that engendered it.
 The daylight needs no praise, and so we praise it always –
 greater than ourselves and all the airy words we summon.

Finché alla fine è la nostra litania, *mon vieux*,
 mio lettore, mio voyeur, come se la foschia
 fumante dalla forra, questo puro paradosso,
 il fiume infranto che si alza mentre cade -
 frantumando la luce, facendola turbinare verso l'alto,
 né trasparente né opaca ma luminosa,
 anche quando scompare - non fosse la nostra vita.

Parole

Il mondo non ha bisogno di parole. Si articola
 in luce, foglie e ombre. Le pietre sul sentiero non sono
 meno vere perché giacciono non catalogate e non contate.
 Le fluide foglie parlano solo il dialetto dell'essere puro.
 Il bacio è sempre se stesso anche se non si è detta parola.

E una parola lo trasforma in qualcosa di meno o di altro -
illecito, casto, sbrigativo, coniugale, furtivo.
 Anche chiamarlo *bacio* tradisce l'agitazione delle mani
 che sfiorano la pelle o stringono una spalla, il lento inarcarsi
 del collo o del ginocchio, il toccarsi silenzioso delle lingue.

Eppure le pietre rimangono meno vere per chi non può
 nominarle, o leggere le mute sillabe incise nella silice.
 Vedere una pietra rossa è meno che vederla come diaspro -
 quarzo metamorfico, cugino della selce che i Kiowa
 intagliavano a punte di freccia. Nominare è sapere e
 [ricordare.

La luce del sole non ha bisogno di lode squarciando i nubi,
 dipingendo di luce rocce e foglie, poi dissolvendo di nuovo
 ogni fulgida gocciolina nelle nuvole che l'hanno generata.
 La luce del giorno non ha bisogno di lode, e così la lodiamo
 [sempre -
 più grande di noi stessi e di tutte le parole d'aria che
 [invochiamo.

The Apple Orchard

You won't remember it – the apple orchard
 We wandered through one April afternoon,
 Climbing the hill behind the empty farm.

A city boy, I'd never seen a grove
 Burst in full flower or breathed the bittersweet
 Perfume of blossoms mingled with the dust.

A quarter mile of trees in fragrant rows
 Arching above us. We walked the aisle,
 Alone in spring's ephemeral cathedral.

We had the luck, if you can call it that,
 Of having been in love but never lovers –
 The bright flame burning, fed by pure desire.

Nothing consumed, such secrets brought to light!
 There was a moment when I stood behind you,
 Reached out to spin you toward me . . . but I stopped.

What more could I have wanted from that day?
 Everything, of course. Perhaps that was the point –
 To learn that what we will not grasp is lost.

Prayer at Winter Solstice

Blessed is the road that keeps us homeless.
 Blessed is the mountain that blocks our way.

Blessed are hunger and thirst, loneliness and all forms of
 [desire.
 Blessed is the labor that exhausts us without end.

Blessed are the night and the darkness that blinds us.
 Blessed is the cold that teaches us to feel.

Blessed are the cat, the child, the cricket, and the crow.
 Blessed is the hawk devouring the hare.

Il meleto

Tu non ricordi - il meleto
In cui abbiamo gironzolato un pomeriggio d'aprile,
Salendo sulla collina dietro la fattoria vuota.

Ragazzo di città, non avevo mai visto un frutteto
Erompere in piena fioritura né respirato il dolceamaro
Profumo dei fiori misto alla polvere.

Quattrocento metri di alberi in file fragranti
Che s'inarcavano su di noi. Abbiamo camminato tra i filari,
Soli nell'efemera cattedrale della primavera.

Avemmo la fortuna, se così si può chiamare,
Di essere stati innamorati ma mai amanti -
La vivida fiamma che bruciava, alimentata dal puro desiderio.

Niente consumato, tanti segreti portati alla luce!
C'è stato un momento quando ero dietro di te,
Ho allungato la mano per farti girare...ma mi sono fermato.

Cos'altro avrei potuto chiedere a quel giorno?
Tutto, naturalmente. Forse il punto era quello -
Capire che ciò che non afferriamo è perso.

Preghiera durante il solstizio d'inverno

Beata è la strada che ci mantiene senza casa.
Beata è la montagna che ci sbarra la via.

Beati sono la fame e la sete, la solitudine ed ogni forma di
[desiderio.

Beato è il lavoro che ci strema senza fine.

Beate sono la notte e l'oscurità che ci accecano.
Beato è il freddo che c'insegna a sentire.

Beati sono il gatto, il bambino, il grillo e il corvo.
Beato è il falco che divora la lepre.

Blessed are the saint and the sinner who redeem each other.
Blessed are the dead, calm in their perfection.

Blessed is the pain that humbles us.
Blessed is the distance that bars our joy.

Blessed is this shortest day that makes us long for light.
Blessed is the love that in losing we discover.

Pity the Beautiful

Pity the beautiful,
the dolls, and the dishes,
the babes with big daddies
granting their wishes.

Pity the pretty boys,
the hunks, and Apollos,
the golden lads whom
success always follows,

The hotties, the knock-outs,
the tens out of ten,
the drop-dead gorgeous,
the great leading men.

Pity the faded,
the bloated, the blowsy,
the paunchy Adonis
whose luck's gone lousy.

Pity the gods,
no longer divine.
Pity the night
the stars lose their shine.

Beati sono il santo e il peccatore che si redimono a vicenda.
Beati sono i morti, calmi nella loro perfezione.

Beato è il dolore che ci mortifica.
Beata è la distanza che preclude la nostra gioia.

Beato è questo giorno più corto che ci fa agognare la luce.
Beato è l'amore che scopriamo perdendolo.

Compatite i belli

Compatite le persone belle,
le bambole, i bei bocconcini,
le pupe con tutti i desideri
soddisfatti dai gran paparini.

Compatite i bei ragazzotti,
gli Apolli, i giovani d'oro,
i fusti che non mancano mai
di portarsi a casa l'alloro.

Le grandi fiche, le donne da schianto,
tutti coloro a punteggi mai visti,
le bellezze che ti fanno morire,
i grandi attori protagonisti.

Compatite i gonfi,
gli sciatti e sbiaditi,
gli Adoni panciuti
da fortuna traditi.

Compatite gli dei,
che hanno perso il divino.
Compatite la notte
in cui le stelle non brillino.

Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird
by Wallace Stevens

I

Among twenty snowy mountains,
The only moving thing
Was the eye of the blackbird.

II

I was of three minds,
Like a tree
In which there are three blackbirds.

III

The blackbird whirled in the autumn winds.
It was a small part of the pantomime.

IV

A man and a woman
Are one.
A man and a woman and a blackbird
Are one.

V

I do not know which to prefer,
The beauty of inflections
Or the beauty of innuendoes,
The blackbird whistling
Or just after.

VI

Icicles filled the long window
With barbaric glass.
The shadow of the blackbird
Crossed it, to and fro.

Translated by Gianluca Rizzo

**Tredici modi di guardare il merlo
di Wallace Stevens**

I

Fra venti montagne innevate,
Si muove soltanto
L'occhio del merlo.

II

Avevo tre cuori,
Come un albero
Su cui si sono posati tre merli.

III

Il merlo mulinava fra i venti autunnali.
Era una piccola parte della pantomima.

IV

Un uomo e una donna
Sono una cosa sola.
Un uomo una donna e un merlo
Sono una cosa sola.

V

Non so cosa preferire,
Se la bellezza degli accenti
O la bellezza dei sottintesi,
Il fischio del merlo
O quello che viene dopo.

VI

I ghiaccioli riempivano la lunga finestra
D'una vetrata barbarica.
L'ombra del merlo
L'attraversava, avanti e indietro.

The mood
Traced in the shadow
An indecipherable cause.

VII

O thin men of Haddam,
Why do you imagine golden birds?
Do you not see how the blackbird
Walks around the feet
Of the women about you?

VIII

I know noble accents
And lucid, inescapable rhythms;
But I know, too,
That the blackbird is involved
In what I know.

IX

When the blackbird flew out of sight,
It marked the edge
Of one of many circles.

X

At the sight of blackbirds
Flying in a green light,
Even the bawds of euphony
Would cry out sharply.

XI

He rode over Connecticut
In a glass coach.
Once, a fear pierced him,
In that he mistook
The shadow of his equipage
For blackbirds.

L'umore
Proiettava sull'ombra
Una causa indecifrabile.

VII

Oh, smunti uomini di Haddam,
Perché v'immaginate uccelli dorati?
Non vedete come il merlo
Cammina fra i piedi
Delle donne che vi stanno intorno?

VIII

Conosco accenti nobili
E ritmi lucidi, ineluttabili;
Ma so anche
Che il merlo c'entra
In tutto quello che so.

IX

Quando il merlo se ne volò via,
Segnò il confine
Di uno dei tanti cerchi.

X

Alla vista dei merli
In volo attraverso una luce verde,
Perfino la mezzana dell'eufonia
Si lascerebbe sfuggire un grido.

XI

Si fece portare in Connecticut
In una carrozza di vetro.
A un tratto lo colse un timore,
Aveva scambiato
L'ombra del suo lacchè
Per uno stormo di merli.

XII

The river is moving,
The blackbird must be flying.

XIII

It was evening all afternoon.
It was snowing
And it was going to snow.
The blackbird sat
In the cedar-limbs.

Disillusionment of Ten O'Clock

The houses are haunted
By white night-gowns.
None are green,
Or purple with green rings,
Or green with yellow rings,
Or yellow with blue rings.
None of them are strange,
With socks of lace
And beaded ceintures.
People are not going
To dream of baboons and periwinkles.
Only, here and there, an old sailor,
Drunk and asleep in his boots,
Catches tigers
In red weather.

Anecdote of the Jar

I placed a jar in Tennessee,
And round it was, upon a hill.
It made the slovenly wilderness
Surround that hill.

The wilderness rose up to it,
And sprawled around, no longer wild.

XII

Il fiume si muove.
Il merlo dev'essere in volo.

XIII

Era tutto il pomeriggio che imbruniva.
Nevicava.
E avrebbe continuato a nevicare.
Il merlo si appollaiò
Fra i rami del cedro.

Disinganno delle dieci in punto

Le case sono infestate
Da bianche camicie da notte.
Non ce ne sono di verdi,
O viola cerchiare di verde,
O verdi cerchiare di giallo,
O gialle cerchiare di blu.
Non ce ne sono di strane,
Coi calzini di merletto
E le cinture di perline.
La gente non si troverà
A sognare babbuini e pervinche.
Soltanto, qua e là, un vecchio marinaio,
Ubriaco, addormentatosi con gli stivali addosso,
Acchiappa tigri
Al rosso di sera.

Aneddoto del vasetto

Ho messo un vasetto in Tennessee,
Bello tondo, sopra una collina.
Ha convinto la landa scarmigliata
A circondare quella collina.

La landa ci si è arrampicata,
Facendogli corona, non più selvaggia.

The jar was round upon the ground
 And tall and of a port in air.

It took dominion everywhere.
 The jar was gray and bare.
 It did not give of bird or bush,
 Like nothing else in Tennessee.

Peter Quince at the Clavier

I

Just as my fingers on these keys
 Make music, so the self-same sounds
 On my spirit make a music, too.

Music is feeling, then, not sound;
 And thus it is that what I feel,
 Here in this room, desiring you,

Thinking of your blue-shadowed silk,
 Is music. It is like the strain
 Waked in the elders by Susanna;

Of a green evening, clear and warm,
 She bathed in her still garden, while
 The red-eyed elders, watching, felt

The basses of their beings throb
 In witching chords, and their thin blood
 Pulse pizzicati of Hosanna.

II

In the green water, clear and warm,
 Susanna lay.
 She searched
 The touch of springs,
 And found
 Concealed imaginings.
 She sighed,

Il vasetto tondo posato per terra
Alto e come un approdo in aria.

Ha soggiogato tutto quanto.
Il vasetto era grigio e spoglio.
Non sapeva né d'uccello né di cespuglio,
Come nient'altro in Tennessee.

Peter Quince alla tastiera

I

Come le mie dita su questi tasti
Producono musica, così quei suoni
Producono nel mio spirito una musica.

La musica, allora, è sentimento, non suono;
E quindi quello che sento,
Qui in questa stanza, desiderandoti,

Pensando alla tua seta ombrata d'azzurro,
È musica. È come la corda che
Susanna ha svegliato negli anziani;

Una sera verde, chiara e calda,
S'è bagnata nella calma del giardino, mentre
Gli anziani dagli occhi rossi, guardando, sentirono

Pulsare i bassi del loro essere
In accordi affatturati, e il loro sangue pallido
Vibrare come se pizzicasse un Osanna.

II

Nell'acqua verde, chiara e calda,
Giaceva Susanna.
Cercava
La carezza delle fonti,
E trovò
Fantasie nascoste.
Sospirò

For so much melody.

Upon the bank, she stood
In the cool
Of spent emotions.
She felt, among the leaves,
The dew
Of old devotions.

She walked upon the grass,
Still quavering.
The winds were like her maids,
On timid feet,
Fetching her woven scarves,
Yet wavering.

A breath upon her hand
Muted the night.
She turned —
A cymbal crashed,
And roaring horns.

III

Soon, with a noise like tambourines,
Came her attendant Byzantines.

They wondered why Susanna cried
Against the elders by her side;

And as they whispered, the refrain
Was like a willow swept by rain.

Anon, their lamps' uplifted flame
Revealed Susanna and her shame.

And then, the simpering Byzantines
Fled, with a noise like tambourines.

Per tanta melodia.

Sulla riva, si fermò
Al fresco
Di passate emozioni.
Senti, fra le foglie,
La rugiada
Di vecchie devozioni.

Camminò sull'erba,
Ancora tremante.
I venti erano come le sue ancelle,
Su piedi timidi,
Le portavano sciarpe intessute,
Ancora vacillanti.

Un soffio sulla sua mano
Ammutolì la notte.
Si voltò –
S'infranse un cimbalò,
E i corni ruggenti.

III

Presto, come al suono di tamburini,
Accorsero i suoi servi bizantini.

Si chiedevano perché Susanna piangesse tanto
Con tutti gli anziani che le stavano accanto;

E mentre sussurravano, il ritornello pare
Un salice percosso da un temporale.

Infine, le lampade dall'alta fiamma
Rivelarono la vergogna di Susanna.

E allora gli smorfiosetti bizantini
Fuggirono, come al suono di tamburini.

IV

Beauty is momentary in the mind –
 The fitful tracing of a portal;
 But in the flesh it is immortal.

The body dies; the body's beauty lives.
 So evenings die, in their green going,
 A wave, interminably flowing.
 So gardens die, their meek breath scenting
 The cowl of winter, done repenting.
 So maidens die, to the auroral
 Celebration of a maiden's choral.

Susanna's music touched the bawdy strings
 Of those white elders; but, escaping,
 Left only Death's ironic scraping.
 Now, in its immortality, it plays
 On the clear viol of her memory,
 And makes a constant sacrament of praise.

Domination of Black

At night, by the fire,
 The colors of the bushes
 And of the fallen leaves,
 Repeating themselves,
 Turned in the room,
 Like the leaves themselves
 Turning in the wind.
 Yes: but the color of the heavy hemlocks
 Came striding.
 And I remembered the cry of the peacocks.

The colors of their tails
 Were like the leaves themselves
 Turning in the wind,
 In the twilight wind.
 They swept over the room,
 Just as they flew from the boughs of the hemlocks
 Down to the ground.
 I heard them cry – the peacocks.

IV

La bellezza nella mente è momentanea —
La traccia febbrile di un portale;
Nella carne, invece, è immortale.

Il corpo muore; la bellezza del corpo vive.
Così muoiono le sere, nel loro verde partire,
Un'ondata, nell'incessante rifluire.
Così muoiono i giardini, profumando con alito mite
Il saio dell'inverno, che ormai s'è già pentito.
Così muoiono le vergini, nella festa
Aurorale di un coro virginale.

La musica di Susanna toccò corde indecenti
In quei canuti anziani; ma dell'evasione
Non sono rimasti che gli accordi ironici della morte.
Ora, nella sua immortalità, suona
Sulla chiara viola della memoria,
Facendone una sacra, costante benedizione.

La dominazione del nero

Di notte, accanto al fuoco,
I colori dei cespugli
E delle foglie morte,
Continuavano a ripetersi,
Girando nella stanza,
Come le foglie
Che girano nel vento.
Sì: ma il colore dei pesanti abeti
S'avanzò a grandi passi.
E mi ricordai delle strida dei pavoni.

I colori delle loro code
Assomigliavano alle foglie
Che girano nel vento,
Nel vento del crepuscolo.
Piombarono sulla stanza,
Proprio com'erano volati dai rami degli abeti
Giù fino a terra.
Li sentii stridere — i pavoni.

Was it a cry against the twilight
Or against the leaves themselves
Turning in the wind,
Turning as the flames
Turned in the fire,
Turning as the tails of the peacocks
Turned in the loud fire,
Loud as the hemlocks
Full of the cry of the peacocks?
Or was it a cry against the hemlocks?

Out of the window,
I saw how the planets gathered
Like the leaves themselves
Turning in the wind.
I saw how the night came,
Came striding like the color of the heavy hemlocks.
I felt afraid.
And I remembered the cry of the peacocks.

Erano strida contro il crepuscolo
O contro le foglie
Che girano nel vento,
Che girano come le fiamme
Girarono nel fuoco,
Che girano come le code dei pavoni
Girarono nel fuoco rumoroso,
Rumoroso come gli abeti
Carichi delle strida dei pavoni?
O forse era un grido contro gli abeti?

Fuori dalla finestra,
Vidi come i pianeti si radunavano
Come le foglie
Che girano nel vento.
Vidi come calò la notte,
S'avanzò a grandi passi come il colore dei pesanti abeti.
Mi spaventai.
E mi ricordai delle strida dei pavoni.



Nassaro.

**Voices in English
from Europe to New Zealand**

edited by

Marco Sonzogni

Poems by Joseph Lennon

Translated by Marco Sottocorona and Marco Sonzogni

Marco Mohamed Riswan Sottocorona (1982) was born in Sri-Lanka and grew up in Italy. He is a graduate of the University of Roma Tre (BA and MA) and of the University of Pisa (Level 2 Postgraduate Master Course: Translation of Postcolonial Texts in English: Literature, Essays, Theatre and Cinema). He has worked on Sri-Lankan writer Romesh Gunesequera and on the Australian poet Les Murray, and he is currently working on New Zealand Maori novelist Patricia Grace at Victoria University of Wellington, where he has just completed a teaching and research assistance exchange.

Marco Sonzogni (1971) holds degrees from the University of Pavia (BA), University College Dublin (MA), Trinity College Dublin (PhD), Victoria University of Wellington (MA) and the University of Auckland (MLitt). He is a Senior Lecturer in the School of Languages and Cultures at Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand, where he is also the Director of the New Zealand Centre for Literary Translation. A widely published academic and an award-winning editor, literary translator and poet, he has just completed a book on book cover design as intersemiotic translation.

Joseph Lennon was born in Newport, Rhode Island, and grew up in Rochester, a small town in central Illinois. He has lived in Ireland and Italy and travelled throughout India. He is the Director of Irish Studies at Villanova University, where he is an Associate Professor in the English Department. He also lectures at the Notre Dame Irish Seminar in Dublin in June and previously taught at Manhattan College in New York for a decade. His book of poems *Fell Hunger* (Salmon Poetry 2011) was published last summer. He has also published poetry, essays, and articles in periodicals such as *Poetry Ireland*, *New Hibernia Review*, *TLS*, *Denver Quarterly*, and *The Recorder*. His book *Irish Orientalism: A Literary and Intellectual History* (2004, 2008) won the ACIS's Donald J. Murphy First Book Prize in 2004. Author photo: Doug Keith

THE SERENDIPITOUS BEAUTY OF THE ORDINARY:
THE RENEWING POETRY OF JOSEPH LENNON

“Don’t judge a book by its cover” can be a meaningless cliché. This is the case when we consider the cover and the text of Joseph Lennon’s masterful debut collection of poems, *Fell Hunger* (Salmon Press, 2011, 73pp).

The small oil-on-canvas — an *ex voto* painting attributed to Giovanni Antonio Vanoni (1810-1886), owned by the parish of San Fedele a Verscio in Canton Ticino, Switzerland — captures in an elusive yet believable way the heart of Lennon’s poetics. Enthroned in the golden light of heaven that breaks through the ominous grey of the earthly sky, the Virgin Mary and Baby Jesus look down mercifully on an unfolding domestic tragedy. Their compassionate intervention will redress and renew the reality of things. This is the mission of Lennon’s poetry.

In the closing couplet of the last poem in the book, ‘Bethesda’, Lennon argues that “even small ascensions / beat waiting for heaven.” So as readers we are invited to follow the ascending and descending curves of the poet’s journey through the everyday mysteries of life. The reword waits round the corners of the mind and of the soul: each word, each line, each stanza is a step towards the serendipitous beauty of the ordinary.

In life and in death; in sickness and in health; in sadness and in joy; in darkness and in light, at home and away, Lennon is able to listen to, retrieve and replay the music of what happens. The hidden score of his melodies is the sonnet form. As Lennon himself puts it, poetic ignition comes to him with the “swelling of a sonnet”:

The sonnet is a form that won me over when I was small. My father (an English professor) and grandmother read to us sonnets from Shakespeare, Wordsworth, Yeats, and Edna St. Vincent Millay, or as often as not, recited them from memory. The short poems of Emily Dickinson, Robert Frost, Elizabeth Bishop, and W.B. Yeats, as well as those of Patrick Kavanagh, Thomas Hardy, Marianne Moore, Wallace Stevens, T.S. Eliot, and William Carlos Williams found their way into my ears as a young boy. The rhythms, cadences, and ironies and, most importantly,

the turns of the poems mattered to me. I love that they end with new beginnings, in a sense, new meanings.

There is no doubt that *Fell Hunger* is a modern *canzoniere*, linguistically and thematically: a songbook where the author plays his personal variations on the structural theme of the Elizabethan sonnet. Reading the book feels like listening to Glenn Gould playing Bach's *Goldberg Variations* — and sitting not too far from the pianist's chair.

And the concern that so many and so high a poetic frequency may interfere with the author's own voice is quickly dissipated, even at a cursory reading of a handful of poems like those presented here. Lennon's voice can in fact be distinctly heard and comes through clearly even where the echo of intertextual references is loud enough to turn the reader's ear to other poetic sounds.

Two, in particular, come to mind when ex-raying Lennon's remarkable body of work: Gerard Manley Hopkins and Eamon Grennan. Like them, Lennon stretches the linguistic and semantic frontiers of language and of poetry, achieving narrative nuances that test the reader's own experiences and emotions, leaving one at once challenged and comforted; questioned and absolved; engaged and excused: in other words, renewed and rehabilitated.

Fell Hunger testifies to two decades of all this: of the author's renewed and renewing efforts to understand our human condition in all its aspects, manifestations and relationships. By sharing his experiences and reflections Lennon takes those who care to hear what he has to say as close to the source of things as verbally possible. This is an act "of witness and illumination," in the words of Catherine Phil MacCarthy; an act of renovation that — just like a miracle — transcends the logic dynamics of spatiotemporal coordinates and socio-cultural conventions.

Each poem therefore, whether located in the US, Ireland, Italy, India or elsewhere, is offered by the poet as a sincere response to the physical and emotional makeup of its setting; as a reliable compass to navigate the intricate map of the psyche and of the body; as an essential piece in the narrative jigsaw of our haunted humanity.

The translators can only hope to have been as trustworthy.



Ten Thousand (Lobsters) Saw I

that summer as they flapped their tails
one by one, fluttering prone on their backs.
I held them down, laid my blade like a sail
along the red seam in the ventral crack,

pressed clean through meat, pointed the knife
to the backs of their bodies, levered the length
of thorax with steel. Opaque gelatinous life
slumped into blue exoskeletons.

Their black eye stalks tossed as I scooped inward,
cracked claws, slit tails, and forked to the grill
bodies turning to meat, red hooks, searing curd.
I plucked their ochre hearts, pumping still,

freed from bodies that swam backward,
nestled beneath crags, claws outward.

(Newport, Rhode Island)

Diecimila (aragoste) vidi io

quell'estate mentre sbattevano la coda
ad una ad una, palpitando prone sul dorsale.
Le tenevo ferme, come una vela posai la mia spada
lungo il segno rosso nella crepa ventrale,

una pressione netta nella carne, la lama puntata
sul dorso, facendo leva
lungo il torace con l'acciaio. Gelatinosa opaca vita
sprofondata in esoscheletro blu.

I peduncoli neri si scossero mentre scavavo all'interno,
chele crepate, code tagliate, e sulla griglia inforcate
corpi che si fanno carne, ganci rossi, caglio d'inferno.
Estrassi il cuore ocra, ancora pulsante,

liberato da un corpo che all'indietro nuotava,
sotto le rocce, a chele spianate se ne stava.

(Newport, Rhode Island)

Hitching Tuam Road*for Seamus Heaney*

I found a rhythm of walking today
on a rare Illinois road in Ireland,
hefting my pack between lifts
on a thirty-mile stretch till Tuam.

Beneath a crow teetering on a line
I stopped and on my thumb
balanced the wavering road, splitting
the oncoming from the passed.

The sun came to *Maigh Eo* today
dancing on car roofs, flecking the blue.
I turned my year tracing those gleams
into constellations, known and new.

I marked the year as the land,
one sun hitching open expanse.

(Co. Mayo, August 5th, 1995)

Facendo l'autostop lungo Tuam Road

per Seamus Heaney

Oggi ho trovato un ritmo di marcia
su una rara strada dell'Illinois in Irlanda,
issando lo zaino fra un passaggio e l'altro
su un tratto di trenta miglia fino a Tuam.

Sotto un corvo che oscillava su un cavo
mi sono fermato e sul pollice
ho soppesato la strada vacillante, dividendo
chi s'avvicinava da chi era passato.

Il sole è arrivato a *Maigh Eo* oggi
danzando sui tetti delle auto, punteggiando il blu.
Ho svoltato il mio anno inseguendo quei barlumi
in costellazioni, conosciute e nuove.

Ho segnato l'anno come la terra,
un sol che imbocca una distesa aperta.

(Co. Mayo, 5 agosto, 1995)

Making Change

How fast she counts, her long aqua nails
flashing over the till. A wonder
she doesn't break them more often.

My turn, I take my full, red-leather
coin purse. A small pleasure
to hand her the precise amount,

exact change being the best kind.
If only it was as easy to keep open
the purse, pursed inside.

I want to handle possibility
slide out, sift change from worn
repetitions, exchanges.

When I count coins, I sluice nickels,
dimes, quarters, pennies into my palm,
tabulate as I pick them,

fast double-check the sum,
place or push them over the counter.
Making change, I know,

isn't just about counting,
it's about trusting what adds up
is in your hands.

Quel che resta dopo un cambio

Come conta veloce, le unghie lunghe verde acqua
scintillanti sulla cassa. Un miracolo
che non se le rompa più spesso.

Tocca a me, prendo il borsellino
di pelle rossa, pieno. Una piccola gioia
porle la somma precisa,

l'ideale è il denaro contato.
Se solo fosse così facile tener aperto
il borsellino, arricciato all'interno.

Voglio maneggiare la possibilità,
scivolare fuori, setacciare spiccioli da logore
ripetizioni, scambi.

Quando conto le monete, faccio scorrere sul palmo
i cinque e dieci centesimi, i quarti di dollaro, i penny,
le ordino mentre le prendo,

ricontrollo rapidamente la somma,
le pongo o faccio sfilare sul bancone.
Quel che resta dopo un cambio, lo so,

non è solo questione di conti,
è credere che ciò che conta
ce l'hai in mano.

Above Rapallo in the Sun

for our son Nicholas

“This is for the birds,” you say, strewing
strands of your chestnut hair into the *maestro*.
You hold your red comb, without irony
in your voice, and pull hairs that will glow

as filaments when your fingers wave
them over the walk in the wind.

What doesn't matter, here above
Rapallo in the sun, safe with friends,
is how you might mean two things
but do not. What matters is the nonchalant
hope you seem to have, wondering

whether your strands might soften
some swallow's nest, alongside
some mother's feathers.

(August 10th, 2007)

Sopra Rapallo al sole

per nostro figlio Nicholas

“Questa è buona per i merli,” dici tu, spargendo
ciocche dei tuoi capelli castani nel *maestro*.
Tieni il tuo pettine rosso, senza ironia
nella voce, e ti tiri i capelli che luccicheranno

come filamenti quando le tue dita li faranno
ondeggiare camminando nel vento.

Quello che non importa, qui sopra
a Rapallo al sole, al sicuro tra amici,
è come potresti intendere due cose
ma non lo fai. Quello che importa è la disinvolta
speranza che sembri avere, chiedendoti

se le tue ciocche possano ammorbidire
qualche nido di rondine, insieme
ad alcune piume di chioccia.

(10 agosto, 2007)

Cleaning the Pool*for my brother Stephen*

Before you or others rose, I stirred
the brocade of leaves, fallen petals
and seeds that floated in the pool.
Hatched lattices of yellow light

in the robin-shell pool after the storm.
You, just back from Pakistan's
tribal areas, distinguish here
and there, but I don't know enough.

I skim with a long pole, draw
a mouth of clotted leaves in the net.
I wonder how the water runs through mountains
in regions where empires have killed decades,

militaries unravelled in stone, where dust
barters tanks, what irrigation schemes can change.

A rug you carried home — red, black, and blue thread,
woven into bombs, bullets, tanks, grenades —

was patiently dyed, Afghan wool looped
into icons, now in our parents' home.
Your son and wife miss you
when you fly to foreign homelands.

Sleep, hunker this morning;
I'll skim from the pool
take what has fallen,
and mound it by the stairs.

Last night we argued about rewriting
the past. This morning is
numinous, blue, white, no
swimmers touching bottom.

Pulendo la piscina

per mio fratello Stephen

Prima che tu o gli altri vi alzaste, ho mescolato
il broccato di foglie, petali caduti
e semi che galleggiava sulla piscina.
Schiusi reticoli di luce gialla

nella piscina d'uovo di pettirosso dopo la tempesta.
Tu, di ritorno dalle zone tribali
del Pakistan, che fai distinzioni qui
e là, ma io non ne so abbastanza.

Scremo con un lungo palo, estraggo
una bocca di foglie rapprese nel retino.
Mi chiedo come scorra l'acqua tra le montagne
in regioni dove imperi hanno ucciso decenni,

soldati districati nella roccia, dove la polvere
si baratta con carri armati, cosa possono cambiare piani
[d'irrigazione.

Un tappeto che hai portato a casa - a trama rossa, nera e blu
ordita in bombe, proiettili, carri armati, granate -

fu pazientemente tinto, lana afghana avvolta
in icone, ora a casa dei nostri genitori.
Manchi a tuo figlio e a tua moglie
quando voli in patrie straniere.

Dormi, rannicchiati questa mattina
Scremerò dalla piscina,
raccoglierò ciò che è caduto,
e lo ammuccierò vicino alle scale.

La scorsa notte abbiamo discusso sul riscrivere
il passato. Questo mattino è
numinoso, azzurro, bianco, non ci sono
natanti che arrivano in fondo.

Home Body Home*for Susan*

We can learn from a tree about ecstasy,
watching it writhe or whip in the wind.
Oaks and elms out the window, elementary,
show us how deep we can bend.

Diagnosis seems like a promise:
life will change, begin again to plan.
But across thresholds of premises,
hope swings and closes to the jambs.

Still, we knock on oak doors and linger,
tap lightly for rot, for veneers, and mind
panes painted shut, then slide fingers
into wall cracks to let in air at thirty-nine.

Just so, a body opens, unrehearsed –
When you listen to hurts, hinges burst.

Casa Corpo Casa

per Susan

Da un albero dell'estasi si può imparare,
guardandolo torcersi e sbattere al vento.
Querce e olmi fuori dalla finestra, elementare,
mostrano fino a che punto ci si può piegare.

La diagnosi sembra come una promessa:
la vita cambierà, si ricomincia a far progetti.
Ma al di là della soglia delle premesse,
la speranza oscilla per chiudersi agli stipiti.

Eppure si tocca legno di quercia e s'indugia,
si picchietta per carie, impiallacciati, e si sta attenti
ai vetri bloccati dalla vernice, poi le dita si fan scivolare
nelle crepe del muro così che l'aria a trentanove entri.

Proprio così, un corpo s'apre, spontaneo -
Quando ascolti le ferite, i cardini cedono.



Reti, Aspra.

Poets Laureate of the United States

W. S. Merwin
2010-2011

Edited by Luigi Bonaffini

Five Poems from W. S. Merwin's *Shadow of Sirius*

Translated by Luigi Bonaffini

Appointed United States Poet Laureate by the Library of Congress in 2010, William Stanley Merwin has a career that has spanned six decades. A poet, translator, gardener and environmental activist, Merwin has become one of the most widely read and honored poets in America.

Born September 30, 1927, in New York City, William Stanley Merwin was the son of a Presbyterian minister, for whom he began writing hymns at the age of five. He was raised in New York, Pennsylvania and New Jersey and attended Princeton University on a scholarship. As a young man, Merwin went to Europe and developed a love of languages that led to work as a literary translator. Over the years, his poetic voice has moved from the more formal to a more distinctly American voice. As the *Atlantic Monthly* says, "The intentions of Merwin's poetry are as broad as the biosphere yet as intimate as a whisper. He conveys in the sweet simplicity of grounded language a sense of the self where it belongs, floating between heaven, earth, and the underground." He has lived in Majorca, London, France and Mexico and several places in the United States, as well as Boston and New York. In 1976, Merwin moved to Hawaii to study with Robert Aitken, a Zen Buddhist teacher. He married Paula Dunaway, in 1983, and settled on Maui. For nearly 30 years, they have lived in a home that he designed and helped build, surrounded by acres of land once devastated and depleted from years of erosion, logging and toxic agricultural practices. Merwin has painstakingly restored the land into one of the most comprehensive palm forests in the world. He continues to live, write and garden in Hawaii.

Bibliography

His first book, *A Mask for Janus*, was chosen by W.H. Auden in 1952 for the Yale Younger Poets series. His book of poems *The Carrier of Ladders* was awarded the Pulitzer Prize in 1970. His other books of poems include *The Drunk in the Furnace*, *The Moving Target*, *The Lice*, *Flower & Hand*, *The Compass Flower*, *Feathers from the Hill*, *Opening the Hand*, *The Rain in the Trees*, *Travels*, *The Vixen*, *The Lost Upland*, *Unframed Originals*, *The Folding Cliffs*, *The River Sound*, *The Pupil*, a translation of Dante's *Purgatorio* and his critically-lauded translation of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. His prose includes *The Mays of Ventadorn*, as part of the National Geographic Directions series, *The Ends of the Earth* (essays), and a memoir entitled *Summer Doorways* (Shoemaker & Hoard). Recent reissues of his books include *The First Four Books of Poems*, *Spanish Ballads* (Copper Canyon Press), his translations of Jean Follain's poems *Transparence of the World*, and Antonio Porchia's *Voices*, as well as *The Book of Fables* (Copper Canyon), a reissue of two previously published books, *The Miner's Pale Children* and *Houses & Travelers*. His most recent poetry collections include *Present Company* (Copper Canyon), which won the Rebekah Johnson Bobbitt National Prize for Poetry, *Migration: Selected Poems 1951-2001* (Copper Canyon), which won the National Book Award, and *The Shadow of Sirius* (Copper Canyon), which was awarded the Pulitzer Prize (his second Pulitzer).

From <http://www.merwinconservancy.org/about-w-s-merwin/>

From *Shadows of Sirius*, Copper Canyon Press 2008

The Nomad Flute

You that sang to me once sing to me now
let me hear your long lifted note
survive with me
the star is fading
I can think farther than that but I forget
do you hear me

do you still hear me
does your air
remember you
oh breath of morning
night song morning song
I have with me
all that I do not know
I have lost none of it

but I know better now
than to ask you
where you learned that music
where any of it came from
once there were lions in China

I will listen until the flute stops
and the light is old again

At The Bend

I look for you my curl of sleep
my breathing wave on the night shore
my star in the fog of morning
I think you can always find me

I call to you under my breath
I whisper to you through the hours
all your names my ear of shadow
I think you can always hear me

Il flauto nomade

Tu che una volta hai cantato per me
fammi sentire la tua lunga nota in levare
sopravvivere con me
la stella sbiadisce
riesco a pensare oltre ma dimentico
mi senti

mi senti ancora
ti ricorda
la tua aria
o respiro del mattino
canto della notte canto del mattino
ho con me
tutto quello che non so
non ne ho perso niente

ma adesso capisco
che è meglio non chiederti
dove hai imparato quella musica
da dove è venuta ogni sua parte
un volta c' erano leoni in Cina

starò in ascolto finché non tacerà il flauto
e la luce sarà di nuovo antica

Alla curva

Ti cerco mia voluta di sonno
onda mia che respiri sulla riva della notte
mia stella nella nebbia del mattino
penso che puoi sempre trovarmi

ti chiamo a voce bassa
ti sussurro attraverso le ore
tutti i tuoi nomi mio orecchio d'ombra
penso che puoi sempre sentirmi

I wait for you my promised day
my time again my homecoming
my being where you wait for me
I think always of you waiting

Blueberries After Dark

So this is the way the night tastes
one at a time
not early or late

my mother told me
that I was not afraid of the dark
and when I looked it was true

how did she know
so long ago

with her father dead
almost before she could remember
and her mother following him
not long after
and then her grandmother
who had brought her up
and a little later
her only brother
and then her firstborn
gone as soon
as he was born
she knew

By Dark

When it is time I follow the black dog
into the darkness that is the mind of day

I can see nothing but the black dog
the dog I know going ahead of me

not looking back oh it is the black dog
I trust now in my turn after the years

ti aspetto mio giorno promesso
mio tempo ancora mio ritorno a casa
mio essere dove tu mi attendi
ti penso sempre in attesa

Mirtilli quando scende la notte

Dunque è questo il sapore della notte
uno alla volta
né presto né tardi

mia madre mi disse
che non avevo paura del buio
e quando ho guardato era vero

come faceva a saperlo
tanto tempo fa

con il padre morto
quasi prima che potesse ricordare
a sua madre che lo seguiva
poco tempo dopo
e poi sua nonna
che l'aveva cresciuta
e dopo un po'
il suo unico fratello
e poi il suo primogenito
andatosene
appena nato
lei sapeva

Nel buio

Quando è ora seguo il cane nero
nell'oscurità che è la mente del giorno

non vedo altro che il cane nero
il cane che so mi sta andando davanti

senza guardare indietro oh è il cane nero
di cui mi fido ora a mia volta dopo gli anni

when I had all the trust of the black dog
through an age of brightness and through shadow

on into the blindness of the black dog
where the rooms of the dark were already known

and had no fear in them for the black dog
leading me carefully up the blind stairs.

Rain Light

All day the stars watch from long ago
my mother said I am going now
when you are alone you will be all right
whether or not you know you will know
look at the old house in the dawn rain
all the flowers are forms of water
the sun reminds them through a white cloud
touches the patchwork spread on the hill
the washed colors of the afterlife
that lived there long before you were born
see how they wake without a question
even though the whole world is burning

quando avevo tutta la fiducia del cane nero
attraverso un'età di fulgore e attraverso le tenebre

per entrare nella cecità del cane nero
dove si conoscevano già le stanze del buio

e in esse non sentivo paura per il cane nero
che mi guidava cautamente su per scale cieche

Luce di pioggia

Tutto il giorno le stelle guardano da tanto tempo fa
mia madre disse ora vado
ti troverai bene quando sei solo
che tu lo sappia o no lo saprai
guarda la vecchia casa nella pioggia dell'alba
tutti i fiori sono una forma d'acqua
il sole glielo ricorda attraverso una nuvola bianca
tocca il mosaico sparso sul colle
i colori lavati dell'aldilà
che esistevano lì molto prima che tu nascessi
vedi come si svegliano senza una domanda
anche se tutto il mondo brucia



Spagliatura.

Poets of the Italian Diaspora

Venezuela

Edited by Michele Castelli

Poets of the Italian Diaspora: Venezuela

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Vittorio Fioravanti was born in Taranto on April 13, 1936, the first child of Remo Fioravanti, an officer in the Italian Air Force, and Clara Grasso Fioravanti, an elementary school teacher. His wife, Marlene Müller Velasquez Fioravanti, is Venezuelan. After living in several cities and in Germany, Fioravanti settled in Venezuela where he has been residing since 1966. His background is varied. He pursued studies in scientific fields, including nautical studies, but never completed his university degree. Instead he accumulated ample experience in graphic design, radio and television production, and has been assistant director for a multicultural magazine, *Incontri (Meetings)*, as well as for radio and television agencies including *Radio Deportes (Sports Radio)* and *Venevisión*.

Fioravanti has had a number of leadership positions and significant political posts. He is active in sports organizations, a promoter of Italo-Venezuelan sport centers, founder of the Apulian Association in Caracas, and representative of the Venezuelan Italian Emigration group in Buenos Aires, Argentina. He is also the Venezuelan representative to Italian Information in Sao Paulo, in Brazil. He is also the recipient of several honorary titles and medals such as *The Cavaliere dell'Ordine della Repubblica Italiana (Knight of the Italian Republic)*, and he has won several literary prizes, including first place in "Nuestra Libertad" in Valencia in 1986, and first place in the International Competition "Italia Mia," sponsored by the Ministry of Italians in the World. He has also been recognized as one of the major graphic artists in Venezuela and has published works in numerous literary magazines.

Poems translated by Elizabeth Pallitto

Valeriano Garbin was born in Schio, in the Veneto region, in 1937, and now resides in Venezuela. His first collection of poems was published in 1970 with the title *Il Batticuore (The Excitement)*, which was featured in the prestigious "Premio Bergamo" poetry prize competition. In 1974, Garbin published *Gli occhi della Civetta (The Owl's Eyes)*, a collection that was illustrated by Emilio Crivelato. A year later Garbin published another book of poems called

Amori (Loves), illustrated with the works of a well known lithographer, Pio Penzo. After Garbin moved to Venezuela in 1976, he published *La calida vida (The Warm Life)* with photos by Pietro Mattioli. *Tierras vivas (Living Earths)* came out in 1978 and contained illustrations of sculptures by Giorgio Sferra, and 1979 is the year of *El viento, la luna, el sol y el agua (The Wind, the Moon, the Sun and the Water)*, featuring twelve original drawings by the great master Braulio Salazar, winner of a national prize in Venezuela. In 2000 Garbin published *Venezuela Enamorada (Venezuela in Love)*, illustrated by Dileyde Vásquez Sánchez, who also contributed nine drawings to *Raises Entregadas (Transferred Roots)*. In 2001 Garbin participated in the 49th art show in Venice with some poems, and in 2004 he edited the volume *Petrarca in Venezuela (Petrarch in Venezuela)*.

Poems translated by John DuVal

M. C.

Vittorio Fioravanti**Razza mediterranea**

Siamo il seme disperso
frammenti d'una diaspora estesa
Siamo gli scampati oltre il muro
dell'orto franatoci intorno

Razza bastarda
fuggiamo da sempre
lungo i sentieri più incerti
delle patrie scelte soffrendo
sui biglietti d'un viaggio
ormai senza ritorno

Sopravviviamo
forti del dolce coraggio
d'una donna incontrata
quasi per caso
appena all'angolo di un'ora
della nostra vita

Sopravviviamo
forti anche dei figli
del nostro esilio

Razza testarda
ci cerchiamo con gli occhi
l'alito d'aglio
le mani stanche e sporche
ripulite ogni sera
e quelle poche parole restate

Siamo un'Italia antica
copia sbiadita d'una fotografia
l'ombra del campanile
che attraversa a tentoni la piazza
lungo le stesse pietre
le foglie frementi sull'albero
di una strada di periferia
l'acqua rossa dell'unico fosso
Siamo in quel grido allo stadio

Vittorio Fioravanti
Translated by Elizabeth Pallitto

Mediterranean Race

We are a seed dispersed
the fragments of a far-flung diaspora
We are the ones who have escaped beyond the walls
of the garden that crumpled around us

A bastard race,
we are always fleeing
along paths paths more and more uncertain,
suffering in chosen homelands
on one-way tickets for a voyage
without return

We survive
made strong by the gentle courage
of a woman met
almost by chance
in the corner of an hour
of our life
We survive
strong through the children
of our exile

A headstrong race
seeking each other with our eyes,
garlic on the breath,
our hands tired and dirty
re-washed every evening,
and these few words that remain

We are an ancient Italy
a faded copy of a photograph
the shadow of a belltower
that gropes through the same piazza
over the same stones
the leaves quivering on the tree
in a peripheral street
the red water from a common ditch
We are there in the cry of the stadium

la stessa gente

Siamo un'Italia remota
l'eco di quel violento '45
Siamo i reduci dei due fronti
la rivincita d'una guerra persa
 Qui siamo l'emigrazione
le rimesse e i risparmi
l'eco di quel grido allo stadio
un'immagine fatta e disfatta
d'arduo lavoro e di sacrifici
di scontri e nemici
Siamo un volto rassegnato
uno sguardo rivolto al buio
dell'integrazione

C'è una voglia in noi
crescente come la spuma
d'una calda mareggiata
morbida come il volo lento
d'un gabbiano steso nel vento
 le ali aperte
sul fragore della risacca
 C'è in noi violento
il rimpianto di quelle scogliere
nostalgie di filari di viti
di tristi ulivi contorti
di case bianche di gesso
d'una preghiera resa in coro
nel segno della croce
nel lancio d'un pallone di cuoio
calciato al centro dell'oratorio
e c'è il sapore delle domeniche
e la tua giovane voce
il tuo pianto Mamma

Sangue mediterraneo
ci abbracciamo in incontri
concertati per crederci uniti
 strette di mano
tra i brindisi accesi e le risa
la pasta ancora fumante
 bandiere spente

the same people

We are a remote Italy
the echo of that violent '45
We are the veterans, surviving on two fronts
the revenge of a lost war

Here we are the emigration
the money sent back and the money saved
the echo of that cry in the stadium
an image made and unmade
of arduous work and sacrifice
of clashes and enemies
We are a resigned face
a glance turned toward the darkness
of integration

There is a will in us
crested like the wave
of a warm and heavy sea
smooth like the slow flight
of a seagull stretched out in the wind
its wings spread
in the roar of the sea-spray

It is violent in us,
the regret of those cliffs
the nostalgia for the rows of grapevines
for the sad, contorted olive trees,
for the houses white with gesso
for a prayer rendered in unison
in the sign of the cross
in the pitch of a leather soccer ball
kicked into the center of the oratory
and this is the flavor of Sundays
and your youthful voice
and your cry, Mama

Mediterranean blood
we embrace in matches
in meetings
organized as a means of believing ourselves united
a clasp of hands
among the bright toasts and the laughter

e un canto assonnato
un sospiro d' assurdo

E in fondo al salone
col tricolore appeso
 intanto
di là della vetrata aperta
oltre la vallata e i monti
al di là di tutta quell' acqua
che ci divide dal passato
c'è un'Italia diversa
 così cambiata
vibrante e moderna
perversa nei suoi nuovi costumi
 quasi straniera
che oramai ci ignora

Andarsene via

Pietre immobili
cerchiate di strida d' uccelli
la torre dell' orologio
fermo nel tempo
d' una vendemmia sfumata

Andarsene via
dalla dura sventura
di non trovare un padrone
con tutti quegli anni
persi in attese umilianti
tenuti a bada dai cani
senza un impiego onesto
la parte più forte
di tutta una vita
lasciata lungo i muri
d' una fabbrica chiusa
dietro le scritte
della nostra rabbia
gli stivali della legge

and the pasta still steaming hot
extinct flags
and a sleepy song
an absurd sigh

And in the back of the room
the tricolor hanging
in the meantime
beyond the panes of the glass door
beyond the valley and the mountains
far beyond all that water
which divides us from the past
there is a different Italy
so changed
vibrant and modern
so perverse in its new customs
almost foreign
that now it ignores us.

To Go Away

Unmoved stones
encircled by the cries of birds
the clock tower
fixed in the time of
a disappearing harvest

To go away
from the harsh misfortune
of not finding a patron
with all these years
lost through humiliating delays
kept at a distance by dogs
without honest employment
the greater part
of an entire lifetime
left along the walls
of a closed factory
behind the writings
of our rage
the boot of the law

e ancora i cani

Andarsene via
dall'avversa disgrazia
di non essere mai nessuno
di non trovare ascolto
di passare ormai inosservati
sotto gli occhi di chi
non ti ha mai guardato

Andarsene
lontano dalle finestre aperte
senza più madre
senza più donne
via dalla piazza di casa
dall'orologio fermo nel tempo
dal ballo del santo
che non ti ha protetto
via dai ciottoli del paese
dagli alberi visti crescere
dal sole oltre il colle
via dai tuoi morti
con una croce segnata
in fretta sulla tua fronte
via dalle pietre immobili
da quelle strida d'uccelli
via dalle frane e dai fossi
oltre il fango ed il pianto
via da casa
lontano
oltre il rimorso

Andarsene via
prima di cadere innocenti
tra le strette di certa gente
che ti manda con uno sguardo
gli occhi negli occhi
e ti ritrovi con un'arma
tra le dita che hanno cercato
invano un lavoro
muto in agguato
per uccidere un uomo

and the dogs, again

To go away
from the unfortunate disgrace
of not being anyone, anymore
of not being listened to
to pass unobserved, all the while
under the eyes of one
who has never looked at you

Go
far from the open windows
 without a mother any longer
 without any more women
go from the piazza of the house
from the clock fixed in time
from the dance of the saint
who has not protected you
go from the cobblestones of the town
from the trees you watched growing
from the sun beyond the hills
go, away from your dead
with the sign of the cross, made in haste
across your forehead and chest
go from the unmoved stones
from the cries of birds
from the landslides and the graves
beyond the mud and the lament
go from the house
 far
beyond remorse

Go away
before falling innocently
in the grasp of certain people
who send you with a look
eyes in the eyes
and find you with a weapon
clasped in your fingers that have
looked in vain for work
mute in ambush
to kill a man

Valeriano Garbin**Le ceneri di Lia**

Le ceneri di mia moglie sono disperse
 nelle serene, dolci, calde, acque del Caribe
 onde libere e incontaminate da mille colori
 dove i gabbiani grandi come alianti
 volano girando intorno al giorno,
 fenicotteri sfrecciano penetrando l'universo,
 magiche rosse garze accendono l'aurora e il tramonto
 per garantire il sogno d'eternità
 e la visione interiore di Dio
 e dove i cormorani si lanciano come meteoriti
 in tuffi di mistero.

Le ceneri della madre di Stefano, Sabrina e Andrea
 scintillano con il loro canto di stelle
 tra i vergini coralli e il silenzio di arcobaleni.

Fu il giorno dei Re Magi
 generosa forza del bello, del degno d'essere generosi
 dell'offerta, giorno simbolo
 di sacrificio e dolcezza, delicatezza e vigore:

personalità convinta, fresche vene di Lia
 combattiva energia sorridente
 creatrice di vite degne d'essere vissute.
 Trasformata in altare
 la barca si muoveva lentamente
 come sciolta gondola in laguna.
 Con le bandiere e gli inni

il "Va, pensiero sull'ali dorate"
 per una meditazione, per l'esistere
 per l'avvenire
 per purificare il mondo e le persone
 penetrò i solchi di smeraldo e turchese
 per i piccolissimi luminosi soli
 protetti da tropicali petali e danzanti rose
 memorie, sentimenti, sacrifici, generosità.

Valeriano Garbin
Translated by John DuVal

Lia's Ashes

My wife's ashes are scattered
in calm, sweet, warm Caribbean waters,
free and unpolluted waves of a thousand colors
where seagulls large as gliders
fly circling around the day,
flamingos burst like arrows through the universe,
magic red herons climb the sunrise and the sunset,
vouchsafing the dream of eternity
and the inner eye of God,
and where cormorants hurl like shooting stars
into whirlpools of mystery.
The ashes of the mother of
Stephano, Sabrina, Andrea
sparkle with the song of the stars
among the virgin corals and the silence of rainbows.

It was the feast of the Three Kings
and the generous strength of beauty,
the dignity of being generous,
the feast of the Gift, the day that is symbol
for sacrifice and sweetness, tact and vigor.

The fresh veins of Lia, a woman with conviction,
combative, smiling, energetic,
who created lives worthy to be lived....
Transformed into an altar,
the boat moved slowly
like a gondola undocked in a laguna.
With banners and hymns—

Va, pensiero, Go, thought, on golden wing,
for a meditation, for existence,
for the future
to make the world and its people pure,
it drifted through furrows of emerald and turquoise
through minuscule luminescent suns,
protected by tropical petals and dancing roses,
memories, feelings, sacrifices, generosity.

Le valli di Caracas

Valli come stelle filanti
 s'intrecciano sotto l'imponente Avila
 colorate, esuberanti, primaverili
 contraddittorie, eclettiche, felici
 e guardano indifferenti colline
 di suggestione scottante
 e accecanti verità,
 ardui simbolismi
 di sopravvivenze e attese deluse.
 Valli come avvenimenti
 guardinghe a Caracas
 per nuovi pericoli
 d'inconcludenti promesse
 giovani valli che corrono su e giù
 benedicendo la natura
 invocando l'uomo e il futuro.
 Primaverili valli di cemento e ranchitos
 tra tristi ostinati colli
 che non lasciano cadere le speranze
 contro la rinuncia, contro la fuga.
 La notte trasforma tutto
 in pacifico presepio d'amore.

Svegliati

Aspettando e sperando, un altro anno è fuggito
 con violente raffiche di minuti come rapidi treni:
 delusioni, utopie, ingiustizie. Morte.
 L'immensa umanità nuota sopra barche affondate
 cammina su sentieri insanguinati
 vola tra nuvole che incendiano roveti di spine.
 Non ha pane né risaie né vigneti
 non ha canna da zucchero né frutteti
 la sempre più povera e numerosa gente.
 Non ha più nemmeno la sua ombra
 le case con finestre arrampicate una su l'altra
 sulle colline senza panorama.
 Nessuna emozione, né sorriso in Santa Chiara.
 Un altro anno si è sgretolato
 con la stagione delle piogge

Caracas Valleys

Valleys like ranks of stars
 crisscrossing under the great Avila
 colored, exuberant, springtime,
 contradictory, eclectic, happy –
 they look up at the indifferent hills
 with their hints of conflagrations
 and blinding truths
 and harsh symbols
 of survival and disappointed waiting.
 Valleys like events
 in Caracas are wary and watch
 for new dangers and
 vague promises.
 Young valleys running up and down,
 blessing nature,
 invoking Man and The Future.
 Springtime valleys of concrete and *ranchitos*
 among the stubborn hills,
 whose hopes do not fail
 against surrender and flight.
 Night transforms everything
 into peaceful creche of love.

Awake

Waiting and hoping, another year has fled.
 Minutes squall by like rapid trains:
 illusions, utopias, injustices. Death.
 All of humanity is drowning over sunken ships,
 walking on bloody trails,
 or flying through a burning bramble patch of clouds.
 No bread, no rice fields or vineyards,
 no sugar cane, no orchards
 for the always poorer always more plentiful people.
 Windowed houses with nothing to look out on,
 piled one atop another,
 no longer own even their shadows.
 No excitement, no smiles in Santa Chiara.
 Another year dissolves
 in another rainy season.

nudi i piedi pazienti come tombe
della gente imbrogliata, spaventata
soffocata, abbagliata, stordita
anche dai fuochi artificiali
della sagra della Misericordia.
La terra non è più la terra
e la rosa non è più la rosa né i sogni i sogni.
Solo l'inutile morte, per la povera gente
è ancora l'inutile morte e i giorni un fiume
che gioca a cascare di gradino in gradino
di corsa come schiuma di versi.
Svegliati!, svegliati!, creatura, abbandonata umanità,
scalda il tuo cuore addormentato
aprilo al sole
e scuoti l'albero del tuo corpo
carico di desideri e speranze
e vibra amore amore amore.

The feet are bare, patient as graves
for confused and frightened people,
smothered, blinded, stunned
by even the Santa Misericordia
celebration fireworks.

The land is no longer the land,
nor a rose a rose, nor are dreams dreams.

Only useless death, for the poor,
still has some use. The days are a river
tripping swiftly from slab
to slab like a the froth of verses.

Wake up, wake up! Forsaken creature, poor humanity,
warm your sluggish heart
and open it to the sun.

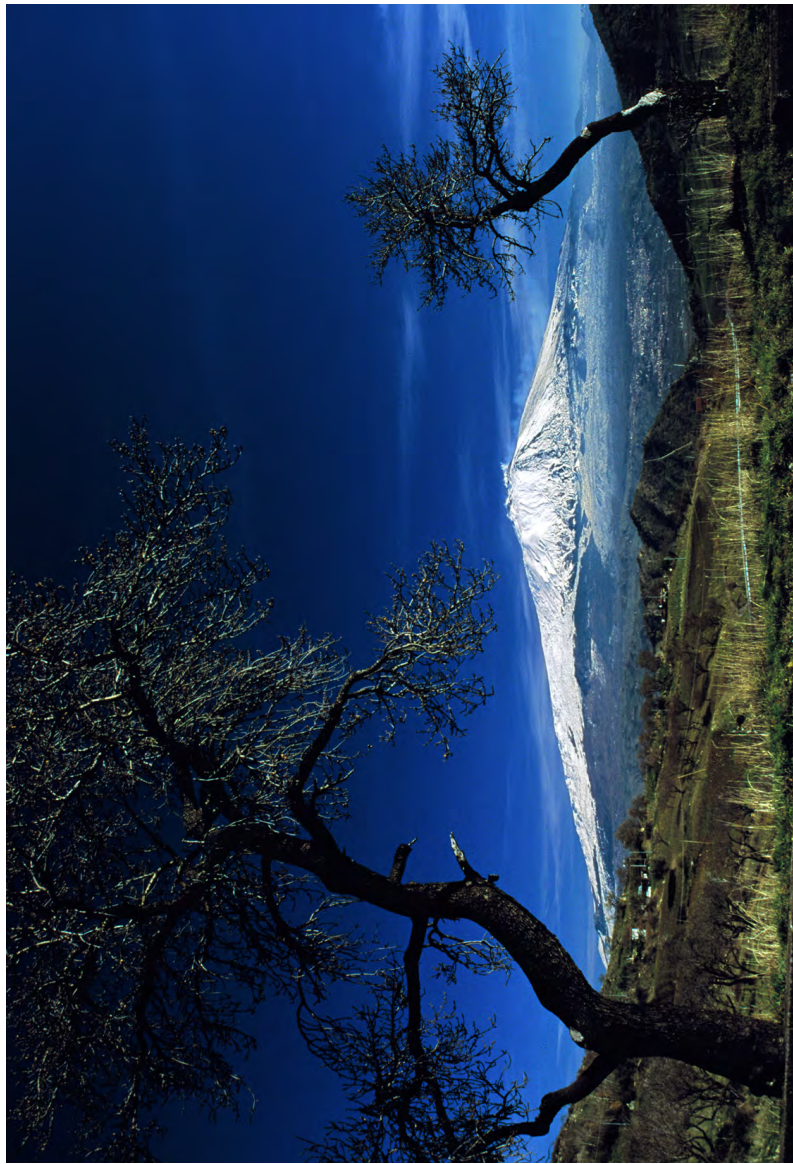
Shake your body like a tree
laden with hopes and desires.

Set love a-quiver, amore, amore, amore.

Le altre lingue

*Rassegna di poesia dialettale
a cura di*

Achille Serrao



L'Etna vista da Cesarò

Franca Ronchi Francardi

Poems in the Eugubino dialect

Translated by Justin Vitiello

Born in Gubbio in 1923, she has published a few volumes of poetry in her native dialect, the most significant being *Lutta de foco*, 1957. Francardi experiments with the archaic, rustic dialect of her native city and this aspect already underscores her ambition to use a linguistic medium far removed from the puristic abuse of dialect of the early twentieth century. The setting of her poetry remains nevertheless her town and the surrounding countryside, but with “dark shadows,” at times with disturbing presences (absent in the poetry of her contemporaries) and signs that remind us of the brevity of life and make us reflect on the values of existence. The wind, always present in Francardi’s poems, is the voice of sorrow and disquiet, echo of dark natural omens, but also a breath of melancholy for a distant past no longer reachable.

Essential Bibliography

La lotta de foco (1957); *Robbe migne* (1960); *La canzone del cuore* (1962)

Nostalgia

Quanno che se fa scuro
 'ni cosa 'ntorno, 'ntorno par vestita
 de nero e d'ombra fitta.
 I lumi de sta strède
 s'aguardano de logne
 e, ntra du' lumi, passan l'ombre scure;
 ma 'l còre mio nco'
 ce passa e ce s'aferma
 quanno che tal paese mio arpenso,
 si 'l chèso me f'argì lontan da lue.

Nostalgia - Quando si fa scuro / ogni cosa intorno sembra vestita / di
 nero e di ombra fitta. / I lumi di questa strada / si guardano di lontano / e fra
 due lumi passano le ombre scure; / ma anche il mio cuore / ci passa e si ferma
 / quando penso al mio paese, / se la sorte mi fa partire da lui. (Traduzione di
 Achille Serrao)

La lotta de fòco

Brieve ha la vita
 la lotta che dal ciocco te se stacca:
 arluce comme 'n sole,
 t'abrucia comme 'n foco.
 Dal ceppo du che nasce
 fugge lontano, fugge 'nfim che mòre
 leggiere e zitta, zitta.

La lingua di fuoco - Ha vita breve / la lingua che si stacca dal ciocco: /
 riluce come un sole, / brucia come un fuoco. / Dal ceppo da cui nasce / fugge
 lontano fino a morire / leggera e in silenzio, in silenzio. (Traduzione di Achille
 Serrao)

'Na stilla d'acqua

Nte 'na stilla d'acqua c'è tutto 'l monno.
 E' scura e chiara; 'l cèl ci arvedi e 'l sole;
 te par che drento, lì, ce stia 'nso qué
 ch'è tutto e gnente nte 'n momento solo
 seconda chi l'aguarda e dua e quanno.
 Nte 'na stilla d'acqua è 'l piagne de Natura:
 ta 'na lagrima d'òmo s'arsomija.

Nostalgia

When it grows dark
all around looks decked
in black, thick shadow.
The lights of this street
are glimpsed from afar
and mid two lights dark shadows pass;
but my heart passes
and stops as well
when I think of my town -
does fate drive me thence?

Tongue of Fire

The tongue breaking from the log
has a short life:
it glimmers like a sun,
burns like a fire.
From the log of its birth
it flees, strays
till it dies lightly
in silence, silence.

A Drop of Water

A drop of water is the World.
So dark and clear you see sky and sun
as if within there's a who-knows,
all or nothing in the instant
whoever looks where and when.
A drop is nature's plaint -
like a human tear.

Una stilla d'acqua - In una stilla d'acqua c'è il mondo intero. / E' scura e chiara; ci si vede il cielo e il sole; / sembra che lì dentro ci sia un chi sa / che è tutto e niente in un momento / a seconda di chi la guarda e dove e quando. / In una stilla è il pianto di natura: / somiglia ad una lagrima d'uomo. (Traduzione di Achille Serrao)

Il vento

Va ... 'l vento sturza nco le fòie secche,
e sturza a rincorrelle e a gi d'an su:
se chiappano, se lassano e s'afermano.

L'arpiia, tutt'a'n botto, 'l vento a fugge:
se bira; pu' s'arbira, ecco ... s'artorna;
s'era scordéto de 'na foia secca
e fanno tutti ascième 'n mulinello.

Poi fugge su pe l'albero, nfr'i rami:
li sbatte, li strapazza e ntanto fistia:
se stronca 'n ramoscello ch'è più fino.

S'abassa 'l vento a terra, là nsul prèto,
n'aguarda manch'i petali d'i fiori,
ch'anchinan le corolle adobedienti
e ntanto 'l vento passa sempre mprescia;
cento e cento giochi t'aricomincia,
ma tutto lassa giù, ch'ha prescia 'l vento.

Il vento - Va ... il vento gioca con le foglie secche / e gioca a rincorrerle e a spingerle in alto: / si prendono, si lasciano e si fermano. // Le germisce, all'improvviso, il vento al volo: / vira: poi si rigira, ecco ::: ritorna: / aveva dimenticato una foglia secca / e insieme fanno mulinello. // Poi fugge sull'albero, fra i rami: / li scuote, li svisisce e intanto fischia; / si spezza un ramoscello, il più esile. // S'abbassa il vento a terra, sul prato, / non guarda neanche i petali dei fiori / che piegano le corolle obbedienti / e intanto il vento passa sempre velocemente: / inizia cento e cento giochi, / ma lascia andare tutto, perché ha fretta il vento. (Traduzione di Achille Serrao)

I testi sono tratti da *La lotta de fòco*.

The Wind

It goes, the wind plays with dry leaves,
plays pursuing and lofting them high.
They stick together, part, hesitate.

Suddenly the wind swoops down,
tacking, it swerves and drops again
(it had forgotten one dry leaf
but now, as one, they whirlwind).

Then it's in flight once more mid branches
that it shakes and humbles, whistling all the while.
The most slender branch snaps.

The wind sinks to earth, across the meadow,
never looking back at petals of the flowers
that, compliant, bow their corollas.

The wind, all this time, passes so quick,
launching hundreds and hundreds of games,
but lets all slide for it's in a rush.



Astratto.

Confronti Poetici
Poetic Comparisons

Edited and Translated by

Luigi Fontanella

Confronti Poetici / Poetic Comparisons

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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 John Ciardi and a poem by Giovanna Sicari.

Luigi Fontanella lives on Long Island and Florence, Italy. He is the president of IPA (Italian Poetry in America), and the editor of *Gradiwa*. Poet, novelist, translator and literary critic, his most recent books are *Pasolini rilegge Pasolini* (Archinto, RCS Libri, 2005; translated into several languages); *Land of Time* (Chelsea Editions, 2006, edited by Irene Marchegiani); *L'azzurra memoria. Poesie 1970-2005* (Moretti & Vitali, 2007); *Oblivion* (Archinto, RCS Libri, 2008); *Controfigura* (a novel, Marsilio, 2009); *L'angelo della neve* (Mondadori, Almanacco dello Specchio, 2009); *Migrating Words. Italian Writers in the United States* (Bordighera, 2012); *Bertgang* (Moretti & Vitali, 2012).



Curiosa e al contempo significativa la vicenda biografica-letteraria di John Ciardi (nato nella Little Italy di Boston nel 1916, morto d'infarto la Domenica di Pasqua del 1986 nella sua casa di Metuchen, New Jersey). La leggenda - ma fino a un certo punto "leggenda" - vuole che la sua morte sia avvenuta non molto tempo dopo che egli aveva composto il proprio epitaffio in versi: " Here, time concurring (and it does); / Lies Ciardi. If no kingdom come, / A Kingdom was. Such as it was / This one beside it is a slum".

Ho definito all'inizio "curiosa e significativa" la sua vicenda di poeta, perché in effetti fu molto apprezzato in vita, ma la sua opera sembra essere stata presto dimenticata o negletta dopo la sua morte. Geniale quanto controverso traduttore della *Divina Commedia*, Ciardi, in effetti, è stato un poeta e intellettuale di primo piano fra gli anni Quaranta e Settanta, fin dal suo folgorante esordio con *Homeward to America* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1940), raccolta nella quale la prima poesia è costituita da una celebre "lettera" alla madre, Concetta De Benedictis, di origine avellinese, emigrata in America agli inizi del Novecento.

Tanti (forse fin troppi) i suoi libri di poesia e sulla poesia (circa cinquanta!), molti dei quali pubblicati dalla Rutgers University Press, ateneo presso cui Ciardi fu docente di letteratura inglese dal 1953 al 1961, dopo aver precedentemente insegnato ad Harvard. Quasi tutto il suo *opus* (*The Collected Poems*) è stato curato da Edward M. Cifelli, che è stato anche il suo maggiore biografo (*John Ciardi. A Biography*). Ambedue i volumi, ponderosi quanto ineludibili per studiare il variegato mondo d'interessi di Ciardi, furono pubblicati nel 1997 dalla University of Arkansas Press. Mondo davvero "variegato", il suo, visto che, oltre alla poesia, John si occupò di traduttologia, critica letteraria, didattica, studi etimologici, giornalismo, nonché della letteratura d'infanzia, pubblicando lui stesso numerosi *children books* in poesia e in prosa. Fu, inoltre, per molti anni direttore della Bread Loaf Writers' Conference a Middlebury

(Vermont), la più antica Istituzione Poetica, che ogni estate da quasi un secolo (fu fondata nel 1920) organizza seminari, letture, workshops e quant'altro legato alla poesia americana e internazionale.

La sua "reputazione" come poeta fu, in vita, molto alta, pur soffrendo ogni tanto di una sorta di pregiudizio o discriminazione etnica. In seguito, la sua presenza nel mondo della poesia angloamericano è andata gradualmente diminuendo (significativa la sua crescente assenza in molte antologie moderne e contemporanee uscite in quest'ultimo trentennio), laddove è rimasta inalterata, se non perfino accresciuta, quella di altri poeti suoi contemporanei (Lowell, Bishop, Berryman, ecc.). Sarebbe auspicabile un ritorno d'interesse (anche nei corsi universitari destinati alla storia della poesia americana) verso questo poeta, che tanto si è appassionatamente prodigato, in vari modi, verso di essa.



Tragica e amara la vicenda di Giovanna Sicari (1954-2003), tarantina di origine ma romana di adozione, a mio avviso tra i poeti (mi piacerebbe scrivere "tra le poete") più dotate della sua generazione, e che meriterebbe decisamente maggiore attenzione critica. Tutto il suo lavoro edito è racchiuso nel volume *Poesie* (Roma: Empiria, 2006), che comprende le nove raccolte di versi pubblicate in vita. Indispensabile, poi, per chiunque voglia entrare nel suo mondo poetico, è un denso fascicolo monografico di *Gradiva* (n. 26, Fall 2004), da me curato otto anni fa insieme con Milo De Angelis, che, di Giovanna, è stato il marito e compagno di/in poesia, a sua volta poeta e intellettuale tra i più significativi oggi operanti in Italia. Ed è inoltre l'editrice della stessa rivista (*Gradiva Publications*), che nello stesso anno ha pubblicato *Naked Humanity*, per la traduzione di Emanuel di Pasquale: una scelta di testi che vanno dal 1981 al 2003, Introduzione di Paolo Valesio, Nota di Milo De Angelis.

Scomparsa precocemente, Giovanna Sicari ha comunque lasciato un corpus poetico notevole, che è andato accrescendosi d'importanza nel suo proseguimento sia per intensità lirica sia per nettezza di dettato. La sua ultima raccolta, pubblicata proprio negli ultimi di giorni di vita, s'intitola *Epoca immobile* (Jaca Book, dicembre 2003), un titolo perentorio - come altrettanto perentori sono stati tutti i titoli delle sue raccolte precedenti - , che sembra suggellare per sempre un che di fermo e immutabile, come un imprescindibile credo, che trascina con sé una nudità assoluta, francescana e disarmante, di fronte al mondo. Questo "credo" può sintetizzarsi in una fede totale e categorica della e nella Poesia. Una "fede" che non è mai confessionale e non si chiude solipsisticamente in chi la professa, ma - come già mi è avvenuto di scrivere - si rivolge a tutti coloro che siano "degni", capaci di ascoltarla e condividerla. Una fede che è sinonimo di costante attenzione al mondo degli umili, degli sfruttati, dei periferici, degli emarginati, dei "perduti".

Da qui, una poesia, questa di Giovanna, che spinge a una presa di coscienza totale e che, al contempo, stimola la visione di ciò che essa suscita nell'animo trepidante dell'autrice che se ne fa messaggera e veggente.

JOHN CIARDI, from his collection *FROM TIME TO TIME*
(New York: Twayne Publishers, 1951)

Manocalzata (Gloved Hand)

Outside my mother's town in Avellino
There stands a rock with a gloved hand chiseled on it.
And so it names a place: *Manocalzata*.

That's all I know of it. I've never been
Nearer to it than three thousand miles.
No one knows whose hand or why the glove.

How many times have I thought of it, needing a name
For what will not be named except by chance,
Or for some reason no one can remember?

As a tree mosses itself into twilight folding
The place of the tree into its presence in time -
Someone could be born there and believe it.

As a diver hangs forever in the eye
Between sea and rock, the arrest of the action glazed
Forever on the air of the place of the dive.

Or simply because it is more important
To remember being than to have been, I am
That hand in the glove and that glove on the hand

Of an unknown stone whose presence I shall someday enter
(As one arrives familiarly to twilight)
Being convinced at last of my presence there.

Manocalzata (Mano guantata)

Fuori della città dov'è nata mia madre,
Vicino Avellino, c'è una roccia con scolpita una mano
[guantata
E così dà il suo nome al luogo: *Manocalzata*.

Questo è tutto quello che so. Non ci sono mai stato
Più vicino di tremila miglia.
Nessuno sa a chi appartiene quella mano e perché quel
[guanto.

Quante volte ci ho pensato mentre cercavo un nome
Per quanto non potrà mai essere nominato se non a caso
O per qualche ragione che nessuno può più ricordare?

Come un albero si copre di muschio per farsi crepuscolo
Piegando il luogo dell'albero dentro la sua presenza nel
[tempo -
Così qualcuno potrebbe lì essere nato e crederci.

Come un tuffatore resta sospeso per sempre nell'occhio
Tra mare e scoglio, il fermo-azione invetriato
Per sempre nell'aria del luogo del tuffo.

O semplicemente perché è più importante
Ricordare di essere che essere stato, io sono
Quella mano guantata e il guanto sulla mano

Di una pietra ignota la cui presenza un giorno
Io penetrerò (come quando ci si familiarizza con la luce del
[crepuscolo)
Convincendomi infine di essere lì dentro presente.

GIOVANNA SICARI dal volume *POESIE 1984-2003* (Roma: Edizioni Empiria, 2006)

Non sono né carne né volo

Solo una scia d'amore vorrei cantare
quando non sono né donna
né carne, né volo, né acqua
quando non sono quella

e il nulla pietrifica in una condizione
d'inferno: sconforto di giorni
dove tutto e niente sono
la cosa cieca della cosa viva.
Se almeno piovesse e tu dicessi
— fai questo per me con la mano
premuta, vedi questo seno
di donna non è sessuale, è una
cosa di bambine -.

I am Neither Flesh nor Flight

Only a wake of love I'd like to sing
as I'm neither woman
nor flesh, nor flight, nor water,
as I'm not that

and nothingness petrifies into an infernal
condition: daily misery
where all and nothing are
the blind thing of the living thing.
If only it rained and you would say
— do this for me with your hand
on my chest, see this woman's
breast is not sexual, it is a
little girl's thing -.



San Nicollicchio

New Translators

Edited by

John DuVal

Selected stories by Giovanni Rodari

Translated by Emma Kantor

Emma Kantor graduated in 2012 from Vassar College, where she studied English and Italian literature and served as Co-Managing Editor of *Helicon*, the college's student literary magazine. She will be attending the Columbia Publishing Course this summer. Her translation of Rodari's *Favole al telefono* developed, with great joy and passion, out of Roberta Antognini's seminar on literary translation at Vassar.

Born in Omegna, **Gianni Rodari** (1920-1980) was a writer, journalist, and educator, best known for his contribution to twentieth-century children's literature. Rodari began his career as a teacher before joining the Communist Party and the Italian resistance movement towards the end of World War II. In 1945, Rodari founded the Communist journal, *L'ordine nuovo*. He served on several political publications before accepting work as editor at *Il Pioniere*, a children's magazine in Rome. The 1950s marked Rodari's transition to writing children's literature. His stories often address social and political realities through fantasy. Written in 1962, *Favole al telefono* presents a collection of bedtime stories that Signor Bianchi, a traveling salesman, tells his daughter over the telephone. Rodari's 1973 *Grammatica della fantasia: Introduzione all'arte di inventare storie*, elucidates his approach to using fairy tales and storytelling in early childhood education. In *Grammatica della fantasia*, the author discusses the rewards of adapting (and parodying) folklore and fairy tales in his work. Rodari was himself a translator of fairy tales, reinterpreting and rewriting them in an imaginative manner. A master of word play, his linguistic transformation perfectly suits the magical transformation in fairy tales.



Catania, Alici.

Favole al Telefono (1962)

C'era una volta...

... il ragioniere Bianchi, di Varese. Era un rappresentante di commercio e sei giorni su sette girava l'Italia intera, a Est, a Ovest, a Sud, a Nord e in mezzo, vendendo medicinali. La domenica tornava a casa sua, e il lunedì mattina ripartiva. Ma prima che partisse la sua bambina gli diceva: $\frac{3}{4}$ Mi raccomando, papà: tutte le sere una storia.

Perché quella bambina non poteva dormire senza una storia, e la mamma, quelle che sapeva, gliele aveva già raccontate tutte anche tre volte. Così ogni sera, dovunque si trovasse, alle nove in punto il ragioniere Bianchi chiamava al telefono Varese e raccontava una storia alla sua bambina. Questo libro contiene appunto le storie del ragioniere Bianchi. Vedrete che sono tutte un po' corte: per forza, il ragioniere pagava il telefono di tasca sua, non poteva mica fare telefonate troppo lunghe. Solo qualche volta, se aveva concluso buoni affari, si permetteva qualche "unità" in più. Mi hanno detto che quando il signor Bianchi chiamava Varese le signorine del centralino sospendevano tutte le telefonate per ascoltare le sue storie. Sfido: alcune sono proprio belline.

Il palazzo di gelato

Una volta, a Bologna fecero un palazzo di gelato proprio in Piazza Maggiore, e i bambini venivano da lontano a dargli una leccatina.

Il tetto era di panna montata. Il fumo dei comignoli di zucchero filato, i comignoli di frutta candita. Tutto il resto era di gelato: le porte di gelato, i muri di gelato, i mobili di gelato.

Un bambino piccolissimo si era attaccato ad un tavolo e gli leccò le zampe una per una, fin che il tavolo gli crollò addosso con tutti i piatti, e i piatti erano di gelato al cioccolato, il più buono.

Una guardia del Comune, ad un certo punto, si accorse che una finestra si scioglieva. I vetri erano di gelato alla fragola, e si squagliavano in rivoletti rosa.

Telephone Tales

Once upon a time there lived...

... Mr. Bianchi the accountant, of Varese. He was a salesman and six days a week he toured all of Italy, from East, to West, to South, to North and in between, selling medicine. On Sundays he returned to his home, and on Monday mornings he left again. But before he left, his daughter said to him: $\frac{3}{4}$ Pretty please, Daddy: a story every night.

The little girl could not sleep without a story, and besides, her mom had already told her all the ones that she knew three times. So every night, wherever he was, at nine o'clock sharp Bianchi the accountant telephoned Varese and told a story to his daughter. This book contains the very stories that Bianchi the accountant told. You will see that they are all a bit short: of course, the accountant had to pay for the phone call out of his own pocket, and he could not make calls too long. Only sometimes, if he had made a good deal, he allowed himself some extra time. I've been told that when Mr. Bianchi called Varese, the young ladies at the switchboard stopped all of the phone calls to listen to his stories. I can well believe it: some are quite lovely.

The Gelato Palace

Once, in Bologna; they made a palace out of gelato right on Piazza Maggiore, and the children came from afar to give it a little lick.

The roof was made of whipped cream, the chimney smoke of cotton candy, and the chimneys of candied fruit. All the rest was gelato: gelato doors, gelato walls, gelato furniture.

A tiny boy had attached himself to a table and was licking the legs one by one, until the table collapsed on top of him with all of the plates – and the plates were of chocolate gelato, the best kind.

A policeman, at some point, realized that a window was melting. The window panes were of strawberry gelato, and they dissolved into rose rivers.

“Quick,” shouted the policeman, “quicker!”

And everyone came to lick more quickly, not letting go a single

“Presto,” gridò la guardia, “più presto ancora!”

E giù tutti a leccare più presto, per non lasciare andare perduta una sola goccia di quel capolavoro.

“Una poltrona!” implorava una vecchietta che non riusciva a farsi largo fra la folla. “Una poltrona per una povera vecchia. Chi me la porta? Coi braccioli, se é possibile.”

Un generoso pompiere corse a prenderle una poltrona di gelato alla crema e pistacchio, e la povera vecchietta, tutta beata, cominciò a leccarla proprio dai braccioli.

Fu un gran giorno, quello, e per ordine dei dottori nessuno ebbe il mal di pancia.

Ancora adesso, quando i bambini chiedono un altro gelato, i genitori sospirano:

“Eh, già, per te ce ne vorrebbe un palazzo intero, come quello di Bologna.”

La donnina che contava gli starnuti

A Gavirate, una volta, c’era una donnina che passava le giornate a contare gli starnuti della gente, poi riferiva alle amiche i risultati dei suoi calcoli e tutte insieme ci facevano sopra grandi chiacchiere.

“Il farmacista ne ha fatti sette,” raccontava la donnina.

“Possibile!”

“Giuro, mi cascasse il naso se non dico la verità, li ha fatti cinque minuti prima di mezzogiorno.”

Chiacchieravano, chiacchieravano e in conclusione dicevano che il farmacista metteva l’acqua nell’olio di ricino.

“Il parroco ne ha fatti quattordici,” raccontava la donnina, rossa per l’emozione.

“Non ti sarai sbagliata?”

“Mi cascasse il naso se ne ha fatto uno di meno.”

“Ma dove andremo a finire!”

Chiacchieravano, chiacchieravano e in conclusione dicevano che il parroco metteva troppo olio nell’insalata.

Una volta la donnina e le sue amiche si misero tutte insieme, ed erano più di sette, sotto le finestre del signor Delio a spiare. Ma il signor Delio non starnutiva per nulla, perché non fiutava tabacco e non aveva il raffreddore.

drop of that masterpiece.

"A chair!" pleaded a little old lady, who could not push through the crowd. "A chair for a poor old woman. Who will fetch it for me? With armrests, if possible."

A generous fireman ran to get her a pistachio-cream gelato chair, and the poor old woman blissfully began to lick its armrests.

It was a great day, and by order of the doctors no one had a belly ache.

Even now, when children ask for another gelato, their parents sigh:

"Of course, for you it would take an entire palace, like the one in Bologna."

The little woman who counted sneezes

Once, in Gavirate, there was a little woman who passed her days counting the people's sneezes. Afterwards she reported the results of her calculations to her girlfriends, and together they talked a lot about them.

"The pharmacist sneezed seven times," recounted the little woman.

"Impossible!"

"I swear, may my nose fall off if I don't speak the truth; he sneezed five minutes before noon."

They chatted, and chatted and in conclusion said that the pharmacist watered down the castor oil.

"The priest sneezed fourteen times," recounted the little woman, red with excitement.

"That can't be right!"

"May my nose fall off if he sneezed one sneeze less."

"But where will it end!"

They chatted, and chatted and in conclusion said that the priest put too much oil in his salad.

Once, the little woman and her friends sat down together (and there were more than seven of them) under Mr. Delio's window, to spy. But Mr. Delio did not sneeze at all, because he did not sniff tobacco and he did not have a cold.

"Not even one sneeze," said the little woman. "There's some-

“Neanche uno starnuto,” disse la donnina. “Qui gatta ci cova.”

“Sicuro,” dissero le sue amiche.

Il signor Delio le sentì, mise una bella manciata di pepe nello spruzzatore del moschicida e senza farsi scorgere lo soffiò addosso a quelle pettegole, che se ne stavano rimpiazzate sotto il davanzale.

“Etcì!” fece la donnina.

“Etcì! Etcì!” fecero le sue amiche. E giù tutte insieme a fare uno starnuto dopo l’altro.

“Ne ho fatti di più io,” disse la donnina.

“Di più noi,” dissero le sue amiche. Si presero per i capelli, se le diedero per dritto e per traverso, si strapparono i vestiti e persero un dente ciascuna.

Dopo quella volta la donnina non parlò più con le sue amiche, comprò un libretto e una matita e andava in giro tutta sola soletta, e per ogni starnuto che sentiva faceva una crocetta.

Quando morì trovarono quel libretto pieno di croci e dicevano:

“Guardate, deve aver segnato tutte le sue buone azioni. Ma quante ne ha fatte! Se non va in Paradiso lei non ci va proprio nessuno.”

Alice Cascherina

Questa è la storia di Alice Cascherina, che cascava sempre e dappertutto.

Il nonno la cercava per portarla ai giardini:

“Alice! Dove sei, Alice?”

“Sono qui, nonno.”

“Dove, qui?”

“Nella sveglia.”

Sì, aveva aperto lo sportello della sveglia per curiosare un po’, ed era finita tra gli ingranaggi e le molle, ed ora le toccava di saltare continuamente da un punto all’altro per non essere travolta da tutti quei meccanismi che scattavano facendo tic-tac.

Un’altra volta il nonno la cercava per darle la merenda:

“Alice! Dove sei, Alice?”

“Sono qui, nonno.”

“Dove, qui?”

thing fishy going on here.”

“Certainly,” said her friends.

Mr. Delio heard them, put a nice handful of pepper in the bug spray and, without being seen, he blew it onto those gossips that were hiding themselves under his windowsill.

“Hachoo!” went the little woman.

“Hachoo! Hachoo!” went her friends. And off they went, sneezing again and again.

“I sneezed the most,” said the little woman.

“We sneezed more,” said her friends. They grabbed each other by the hair, they hit each other left and right, they tore each others’ dresses, and each lost a tooth.

After that turn of events the little woman no longer spoke with her friends. She bought a notebook and a pencil and traveled about all alone, and for every sneeze that she heard she made an X.

When she died they found the notebook full of crosses, and said:

“Look, she must have marked all of her good deeds. She has done so many! If she does not go to Heaven, then no one will.”

Falling Alice

This is the story of Falling Alice, who fell all ways and always. Her grandfather was looking for her to bring her to the park:

“Alice! Where are you, Alice?”

“I’m here, grandfather.”

“Where, here?”

“In the alarm clock.”

Yes, she had opened the alarm clock to look around a bit, and had ended up among the gears and the springs. Now she had to jump continuously from one point to another, so as not to be crushed by all of the mechanisms that set off ticking and tocking.

Another time, her grandfather was looking for her to give her a snack:

“Alice! Where are you, Alice?”

“I’m here, grandfather.”

“Where, here?”

“Right here, in the bottle. I was thirsty, and I fell in.”

“Ma proprio qui, nella bottiglia. Avevo sete, ci sono cascata dentro.”

Ed eccola là che nuotava affannosamente per tenersi a galla. Fortuna che l'estate prima, a Sperlonga, aveva imparato a fare la rana.

“Aspetta che ti ripesco.”

Il nonno calò una cordicina dentro la bottiglia, Alice vi si aggrappò e vi si arrampicò con destrezza. Era brava in ginnastica.

Un'altra volta ancora Alice era scomparsa. La cercava il nonno, la cercava la nonna, la cercava una vicina che veniva sempre a leggere il giornale del nonno per risparmiare quaranta lire.

“Guai a noi se non la troviamo prima che tornino i suoi genitori,” mormorava la nonna, spaventata.

“Alice! Alice! Dove sei, Alice?”

Stavolta non rispondeva. Non poteva rispondere. Nel curiosare in cucina era caduta nel cassetto delle tovaglie e dei tovaglioli e ci si era addormentata. Qualcuno aveva chiuso il cassetto senza badare a lei. Quando si svegliò, Alice si trovò al buio, ma non ebbe paura: una volta era caduta in un rubinetto, e là dentro sí che faceva buio.

“Dovranno pur preparare la tavola per la cena,” rifletteva Alice. “E allora apriranno il cassetto.”

Invece nessuno pensava alla cena, proprio perché non si trovava Alice. I suoi genitori erano tornati dal lavoro e sgridavano i nonni:

“Ecco come la tenete d'occhio!”

“I nostri figli non cascavano dentro i rubinetti,” protestavano i nonni, “ai nostri tempi cascavano soltanto dal letto e si facevano qualche bernoccolo in testa.”

Finalmente Alice si stancò di aspettare. Scavò tra le tovaglie, trovò il fondo del cassetto e cominciò a batterci sopra con un piede.

Tum, tum, tum.

“Zitti tutti,” disse il babbo, “sento battere da qualche parte.”

Tum, tum, tum, chiamava Alice.

Che abbracci, che baci quando la ritrovarono. E Alice ne approfittò subito per cascare nel taschino della giacca di papà e quando la tirarono fuori aveva fatto in tempo a impiasticciarsi tutta la faccia giocando con la penna a sfera.

And there she was swimming breathlessly to stay afloat. Luckily the previous summer, in Sperlonga, she had learned to doggie paddle.

"Wait for me to fish you out."

The grandfather cast a small rope inside the bottle. Alice clung to it and skillfully climbed up. She was good at gymnastics.

Another time Alice had disappeared again. Her grandfather was looking for her, her grandmother was looking for her, a neighbor who always came to read her grandfather's newspaper to save 40 cents was looking for her.

"We'll be in trouble if we don't find her before her parents return from work," murmured her grandmother, frightened.

"Alice! Alice! Where are you, Alice?"

This time she did not answer. She could not answer. While looking around the kitchen, she had fallen into the drawer with the tablecloths and napkins and had fallen asleep there. Someone had closed the drawer without paying her any attention. When she awoke, Alice found herself in the dark, but she was not afraid: once she had fallen inside a faucet, and it was pitch black inside there, indeed.

"But they must prepare the table for dinner," thought Alice. "And then they will open the drawer."

Instead no one thought about dinner, exactly because they could not find Alice. Her parents had returned from work and scolded her grandparents:

"This is how you keep an eye on her?"

"Our kids didn't fall into faucets," protested the grandparents. "Back in our day they only fell out of bed and got a few bumps on the head." Finally Alice grew tired of waiting. She dug between the tablecloths, found the bottom of the drawer and began to bang it with her foot.

Thud, thud, thud.

"Quiet everyone," said her dad, "I hear banging from somewhere."

Thud, thud, thud, called Alice.

What hugs, what kisses when they found her! Right away Alice took the opportunity to fall into her father's breast pocket. By the time they pulled her out, she had managed to smear her whole face while playing with his ballpoint pen.

A inventare i numeri

“Inventiamo dei numeri?”

“Inventiamoli, comincio io. Quasi uno, quasi due, quasi tre, quasi quattro, quasi cinque, quasi sei.”

“È troppo poco. Senti questi: uno stramilione di biliardoni, un ottone di millantoni, un meravigliardo e un meraviglione.”

“Io allora inventerò una tabellina:

tre per uno Trento e Belluno
 tre per due bistecca di bue
 tre per tre latte e caffè
 tre per quattro cioccolato
 tre per cinque malelingue
 tre per sei patrizi e plebei
 tre per sette torta a fette
 tre per otto piselli e risotto
 tre per nove scarpe nuove
 tre per dieci pasta e ceci.”

“Quanto costa questa pasta?”

“Due tirate d’orecchi.”

“Quanto c’è da qui a Milano?”

“Mille chilometri nuovi, un chilometro usato e sette cioccolatini.”

“Quanto pesa una lagrima?”

“Secondo: la lagrima di un bambino capriccioso pesa meno del vento, quella di un bambino affamato pesa più di tutta la terra.”

“Quanto è lunga questa favola?”

“Troppo.”

“Allora inventiamo in fretta altri numeri per finire. Li dico io, alla maniera di Modena: unci dunci trinci, quara quarinci, miri miminci, un fan dè.”

“E io li dico alla maniera di Roma: unzi donzi tenzi, quale qualinzi, mele melinzi, riffe raffè e dieci.”

A comprare la città di Stoccolma

Al mercato di Gavirate capitano certi ometti che vendono di

Inventing Numbers

"Shall we invent numbers?"

"Let's invent them. I will start. Nearly one, nearly two, nearly three, nearly four, nearly five, nearly six."

"That's much too little. Listen to this: a jack-and-jillion, a reptillion godzillion, a daffodillion, and a brazillion."

"Then I will invent a multiplication table:

Three times one, cinnamon bun.
Three times two, old and new.
Three times three, honey and tea.
Three times four, peace and war.
Three times five, jump and jive.
Three times six, pick-up sticks.
Three times seven, angels in heaven.
Three times eight, roller-skate.
Three times nine, yours and mine.
Three times ten, pencil and pen."

"How much does this pencil cost?"

"Two earfuls."

"How far is it from here to Milan?"

"A thousand new miles, one used mile, and seven chocolate ones."

"How much does a tear weigh?"

"It depends: the tear of a naughty child weighs less than the wind, and the tear of a starving child weighs more than the entire earth."

"How long is this tale?"

"Too long."

"Then, to finish, let's quickly invent some other numbers. I will count as they do in Modena: onesie tootsie treesie, feefi fohsie, lollie lopinsie, en fan swish."

"And I will count as they do in Rome: woozy toozy tirzy, furry furroony, merry merroony, piff puff and ten."

To Buy the City of Stockholm

At the Gavirate market certain men arrive who sell everything,

tutto, e più bravi di loro a vendere non si sa dove andarli a trovare.

Un venerdì capitò un ometto che vendeva strane cose: il Monte Bianco, l'Oceano Indiano, i mari della Luna, e aveva una magnifica parlantina, e dopo un'ora gli era rimasta solo la città di Stoccolma.

La comprò un barbiere, in cambio di un taglio di capelli con frizione. Il barbiere inchiodò tra due specchi il certificato che diceva: "Proprietario della città di Stoccolma," e lo mostrava orgoglioso ai clienti, rispondendo a tutte le loro domande.

"È una città della Svezia, anzi è la capitale."

"Ha quasi un milione di abitanti, e naturalmente sono tutti miei."

"C'è anche il mare, si capisce, ma non so chi sia il proprietario."

Il barbiere, un poco alla volta, mise da parte i soldi, e l'anno scorso andò in Svezia a visitare la sua proprietà. La città di Stoccolma gli parve meravigliosa, e gli svedesi gentilissimi. Loro non capivano una parola di quello che diceva lui, e lui non capiva mezza parola di quello che gli rispondevano.

"Sono il padrone della città, lo sapete o no? Ve l'hanno fatto, il comunicato?"

Gli svedesi sorridevano e dicevano di sì, perché non capivano ma erano gentili, e il barbiere si fregava le mani tutto contento:

"Una città simile per un taglio di capelli e una frizione! L'ho proprio pagata a buon mercato."

E invece si sbagliava e l'aveva pagata troppo. Perché ogni bambino che viene in questo mondo, il mondo intero è tutto suo, e non deve pagarlo neanche un soldo. Deve soltanto rimboccarsi le maniche, allungare le mani e prenderselo.

Vecchi proverbi

"Di notte," sentenziava un Vecchio Proverbio, "tutti i gatti sono bigi."

"E io son nero," disse un gatto nero attraversando la strada.

"È impossibile: i Vecchi Proverbi hanno sempre ragione."

"Ma io sono nero lo stesso," ripeté il gatto.

Per la sorpresa e per l'amarezza il Vecchio Proverbio cadde dal tetto e si ruppe una gamba.

Un altro Vecchio Proverbio andò a vedere una partita di calcio, prese da parte un giocatore e gli sussurrò nell'orecchio:

and no one knows where to find better salesmen.

One Friday there arrived a little man who sold strange things: Mount Everest, the Indian Ocean, and the moon's seas. He had a magnificent sales pitch, and after an hour only the city of Stockholm remained.

A barber bought it, in exchange for a haircut and a massage. The barber nailed between two mirrors the certificate that said: *Owner of the city of Stockholm*, and he proudly displayed it to his customers, answering all of their questions.

"It's a city in Sweden, better yet it's the capital."

"It has almost a million inhabitants, and naturally they're all mine."

"There's also a sea, of course, but I don't know who owns it."

Little by little, the barber set aside his money, and last year he went to Sweden to visit his property. The city of Stockholm seemed marvelous to him, and the Swedes very polite. They did not understand a word of what he said to them, and he did not understand half a word of their reply.

"I am the master of the city, didn't you know that? Didn't they make the announcement?"

The Swedes smiled and said yes, because they did not understand but they were polite, and the barber rubbed his hands contentedly:

"Such a city for a haircut and a massage! I really paid a low price."

But he was wrong; he had paid too much. Because for every child that comes into this world, the whole world is all his own, and he need not pay a single penny. He needs only to roll up his sleeves, and reach out his hands and take it.

Old Proverbs

"At night," declared an Old Proverb, "all cats are gray."

"But I am black," said a black cat crossing the road.

"That's impossible: the Old Proverbs are always right."

"But I am black all the same," repeated the cat.

From surprise and resentment, the Old Proverb fell from the roof and broke his leg.

Another Old Proverb went to see a soccer game, took aside

“Chi fa da sé, fa per tre!”

Il calciatore si provò a giocare al pallone da solo, ma era una noia da morire e non poteva vincere mai, perciò fece ritorno in squadra. Il Vecchio Proverbio, per il disappunto, si ammalò e dovettero levargli le tonsille.

Una volta tre Vecchi Proverbi si incontrarono e avevano appena aperto bocca che cominciarono a litigare:

“Chi bene incomincia è a metà dell’opera,” disse il primo.

“Niente affatto,” disse il secondo, “la virtù sta nel mezzo.”

“Gravissimo errore” esclamò il terzo, “il dolce è in fondo.”

Si presero per i capelli e sono ancora là che se le danno.

Poi c’è la storia di quel Vecchio Proverbio che aveva voglia di una pera, e si mise sotto l’albero, e intanto pensava:

“Quando la pera è matura casca da sé.”

Ma la pera cascò soltanto quando fu marcia fradicia, e si spiacicò sulla zucca del Vecchio Proverbio che per il dispiacere diede le dimissioni.

Il filobus numero 75

Una mattina, il filobus numero 75, in partenza da Monteverde Vecchio per Piazza Fiume, invece di scendere verso Trastevere, prese per il Gianicolo, svoltò giù per l’Aurelia Antica e dopo pochi minuti correva tra i prati fuori Roma come una lepre in vacanza.

I viaggiatori, a quell’ora, erano quasi tutti impiegati, e leggevano il giornale, anche quelli che non lo avevano comperato, perché lo leggevano sulla spalla del vicino. Un signore, nel voltar pagina, alzò gli occhi un momento, guardò fuori e si mise a gridare:

“Fattorino, che succede? Tradimento, tradimento!”

Anche gli altri viaggiatori alzarono gli occhi dal giornale, e le proteste diventarono un coro tempestoso:

“Ma di qui si va a Civitavecchia!”

“Che fa il conducente?”

“È impazzito, legatelo!”

“Che razza di servizio!”

“Sono le nove meno dieci e alle nove in punto debbo essere in Tribunale,” gridò un avvocato, “se perdo il processo faccio causa all’azienda.”

Il fattorino e il conducente tentavano di respingere l’assalto,

one of the players and whispered in his ear:

"If you want it done right, do it yourself!"

The soccer player tried to play ball by himself, but was bored to death and could never win, so he returned to the team. The Old Proverb, out of disappointment, got sick and had to have his tonsils removed.

Once, three Old Proverbs met and had barely opened their mouths when they began to argue:

"Well begun is half done," said the first.

"Not at all," said the second. "Virtue lies in the middle."

"You are seriously mistaken," exclaimed the third. "Save the best for last."

They grabbed each other by the hair, and to this day they are still there, fighting.

Then there's the story of the Old Proverb who wanted a pear, and sat under a tree, meanwhile thinking:

"The pear will fall when the time is ripe."

But the pear fell only when it was soaking wet, and splattered on the noggin of the Old Proverb, who resigned out of discontent.

Trolley Number 75

One morning trolley number 75, departing from Monteverde Vecchio for Piazza Fiume, instead of going down Trastevere by way of Gianicolo, turned onto Aurelia Antica and, after a few minutes, ran between the fields outside Rome like a rabbit on vacation.

At this time, the passengers were almost all office workers, and were reading the newspaper, even those who hadn't bought one, because they read over their neighbor's shoulder. One man, while turning the page, raised his eyes for a moment, looked outside and began to shout:

"Ticket-boy, what's happening? Treachery! Treachery!"

The other passengers also raised their eyes from their newspapers, and the protests became a thunderous chorus:

"But from here we'll go to Civitavecchia!"

"What is the driver doing?"

"He's gone mad, tie him up!"

"What kind of service is this?"

"It's ten to nine and at nine o'clock sharp I have to be in court,"

dichiarando che non ne sapevano nulla, che il filobus non ubbidiva più ai comandi e faceva di testa sua. Difatti in quel momento il filobus uscì addirittura di strada e andò a fermarsi sulle soglie di un boschetto fresco e profumato.

“Uh, i ciclamini,” esclamò una signora, tutta giuliva.

“È proprio il momento di pensare ai ciclamini,” ribatté l’avvocato.

“Non importa,” dichiarò la signora, “arriverò tardi al ministero, avrò una lavata di capo, ma tanto è lo stesso, e giacché ci sono mi voglio cavare la voglia dei ciclamini. Saranno dieci anni che non ne colgo.”

Scese dal filobus, respirando a bocca spalancata l’aria di quello strano mattino, e si mise a fare un mazzetto di ciclamini.

Visto che il filobus non voleva saperne di ripartire, uno dopo l’altro i viaggiatori scesero a sgranchirsi le gambe o a fumare una sigaretta e intanto il loro malumore scompariva come la nebbia al sole. Uno coglieva una margherita e se la infilava all’occhiello, l’altro scopriva una fragola acerba e gridava:

“L’ho trovata io. Ora ci metto il mio biglietto, e quando è matura la vengo a cogliere, e guai se non la trovo.”

Difatti levò dal portafogli un biglietto da visita, lo infilò in uno stecchino e piantò lo stecchino accanto alla fragola. Sul biglietto c’era scritto: Dottor Giulio Bollati.

Due impiegati del ministero dell’Istruzione appallottolarono i loro giornali e cominciarono una partita di calcio. E ogni volta che davano un calcio alla palla gridavano:

“Al diavolo!”

Insomma, non parevano più gli stessi impiegati che un momento prima volevano linciare i tranvieri. Questi, poi, si erano divisi una pagnottella col ripieno di frittata e facevano un picnic sull’erba.

“Attenzione!” gridò ad un tratto l’avvocato.

Il filobus, con uno scossone, stava ripartendo tutto solo, al piccolo trotto. Fecero appena in tempo a saltar su, e l’ultima fu la signora dei ciclamini che protestava:

“Eh, ma allora non vale. Avevo appena cominciato a divertirmi.”

“Che ora abbiamo fatto?” domandò qualcuno.

“Uh, chissà che tardi.”

E tutti si guardarono il polso. Sorpresa: gli orologi segnavano

cried a lawyer. "If I lose this case I'll sue."

The ticket-boy and the driver tried to drive back the mob, declaring that they knew nothing, that the trolley no longer obeyed their commands and had a mind of its own. In fact, at that moment, the trolley went completely off the road and came to a stop at the edge of a fresh and fragrant grove.

"Oh, wildflowers," exclaimed a woman joyfully.

"A fine time to think of wildflowers," replied the lawyer.

"Never mind," declared the woman, "I'll be late for work and get a scolding, but all the same, since I am here I may as well satisfy my whim. It must be ten years since I last picked wildflowers."

She got off the trolley, and with her mouth open wide, breathing the air of that strange morning, she began to make a bouquet of wildflowers.

Seeing that the trolley did not want to start up again, one after the other the passengers got off to stretch their legs or smoke a cigarette, and meanwhile, their ill tempers were vanishing like fog in the sun. One picked a daisy and placed it in his buttonhole. Another discovered an unripe strawberry and shouted:

"I found it. Now I will place my business card here. When it is ripe I will come back to pick it, and woe if I don't find it."

He then took a business card from his briefcase, stuck a toothpick in it and planted the toothpick next to the strawberry. On the card was written: Doctor Giulio Bollati.

Two office workers from the Department of Education crumpled up their newspapers and began a soccer game. And every time they kicked the ball they shouted:

"The heck with you!"

In short, they no longer appeared to be the same office workers who a moment before wanted to tie up the ticket-boy and the driver. Those two, for their part, had split a little loaf of bread and an omelet, and were having a picnic on the grass.

"Look out!" the lawyer shouted suddenly.

With a jolt, the trolley was starting again all on its own, at a slow trot. They hopped on just in time, and the last one on board was the woman with the wildflowers, who protested:

"Oh, but it's not fair. I was just starting to enjoy myself."

"What time is it?" someone asked.

"Oh, who knows how late it is."

ancora le nove meno dieci. Si vede che per tutto il tempo della piccola scampagnata le lancette non avevano camminato. Era stato tempo regalato, un piccolo extra, come quando si compra una scatola di sapone in polvere e dentro c'è un giocattolo.

"Ma non può essere!" si meravigliava la signora dei ciclamini, mentre il filobus rientrava nel suo percorso e si gettava giù per via Dandolo.

Si meravigliavano tutti. E sì che avevano il giornale sotto gli occhi, e in cima al giornale la data era scritta ben chiara: 21 marzo. Il primo giorno di primavera tutto è possibile.

A sbagliare le storie

"C'era una volta una bambina che si chiamava Cappuccetto Giallo."

"No, Rosso!"

"Ah, sì, Cappuccetto Rosso. La sua mamma la chiamò e le disse: Senti, Cappuccetto Verde..."

"Ma no, Rosso!"

"Ah, sì, Rosso. Vai dalla zia Diomira a portarle questa buccia di patata."

"No: vai dalla nonna a portarle questa focaccia."

"Va bene. La bambina andò nel bosco e incontrò una giraffa."

"Che confusione! Incontrò un lupo, non una giraffa."

"E il lupo le domandò: Quanto fa sei per otto?"

"Nente affatto. Il lupo le chiese: Dove vai?"

"Hai ragione. E Cappuccetto Nero rispose..."

"Era Cappuccetto Rosso, rosso, rosso!"

"Sì, e rispose: Vado al mercato a comperare la salsa di pomodoro."

"Neanche per sogno: Vado dalla nonna che è malata, ma non so più la strada."

"Giusto. E il cavallo disse..."

"Quale cavallo? Era un lupo."

"Sicuro. E disse così: Prendi il tram numero settantacinque, scendi in Piazza del Duomo, gira a destra, troverai tre scalini e un soldo per terra, lascia stare i tre scalini, raccatta il soldo e comprati una gomma da masticare."

"Nonno, tu non sai proprio raccontare le storie, le sbagli tutte."

And everyone looked at their wrist. Surprise: the watches still showed ten to nine. Clearly, for the duration of their little outing the hands on their watches hadn't budged. It had been a gift of time, a little extra, as when one buys a box of cereal and inside there is a toy.

"But that can't be!" marveled the woman with the wildflowers, while the trolley returned to its route and raced down Dandolo Road.

Everyone marveled. Indeed, some had the newspaper under their eyes, and at the top of the paper the date was clearly written: March 21. Anything is possible on the first day of spring.

Getting the Stories Wrong

"Once upon a time there was a girl named Little Yellow Riding Hood."

"No, Red!"

"Ah, yes, Little Red Riding Hood. Her mom called her and said: Listen, Little Green Riding Hood..."

"But no, Red!"

"Ah, yes, Red. Go to your Aunt Diomira's and take her this baked potato."

"No: go to your grandmother's and bring her this focaccia."

"All right: The little girl went into the woods and came across a giraffe."

"What a mess! She came across a wolf, not a giraffe."

"And the wolf asked her: Why was six afraid of seven?"

"That's not it at all. The wolf asked her: Where are you going?"

"You are right. And Little Black Riding Hood replied..."

"She was Little Red Riding Hood, red, red!"

"Yes, and she replied: I'm going to the market to buy tomato sauce."

"Not in your dreams: I'm going to my grandmother who is sick, but I've lost the way."

"Right. And the horse said..."

"What horse? It was a wolf."

"Of course. And he said: Take trolley number seventy-five, get off at Main Street, turn right, and you will find three steps and a nickel on the ground. Leave the steps be, pick up the nickel and buy some chewing gum."

Però la gomma da masticare me la comperi lo stesso.”

“Va bene: eccoti il soldo.”

E il nonno tornò a leggere il suo giornale.

“Grandpa, you don’t know how to tell stories at all; you get them all wrong. But you can buy me the chewing gum all the same.”

“Okay: here’s a nickel.”

And the grandfather went back to reading his newspaper.



Sant'Elia.

**Traduttori a duello /
Dueling Translators**

Edited by

Gaetano Cipolla

A text of poetry or prose, translated by ten equally skilled translators, will result in ten different texts. In theory, the different versions should convey the kernel meaning, that is, the basic message contained in the original text. This section of *Journal of Italian Translation* will test this theory by asking our readers to translate a text chosen by the editor, using whatever style or approach they consider best. The submissions will then be printed with the original text. We will publish as many entries as possible.

In the last issue of JIT we asked translators to try their hand at translating an excerpt from the incipit of a novel *Gilberte*, by Ignazio Apolloni, published in Italy by Novecento, Palermo in 1994. Apolloni is a prolific and multifaceted writer who was one of the founders of the Sicilian Antigruppo. He lives in Palermo. *Gilberte* is a woman whom the photographer/writer is about to leave after a long relationship.

“Dovevamo partire da Parigi alle 7. Diluviava. All’eroporto ero andato in pullman, uno di quelli che fanno la spola tra il terminal e il pigolio di tutta la gente che cerca sempre di trovare un posto in aereo quasi fosse la pancia della mamma-gallina. La gallina era là ma non potevamo vederla a causa dei condotti obbligati che bisognava varcare prima di arrivare alla scaletta di imbarco. Sotto l’acquazzone le lampade dei lampioni alti quanto Mose sembravano ovaie per quel loro stare aggrappate le une alle altre attorno a un grissino. L’umido che saliva dall’asfalto appannava la vista facendo gocciolare le palpebre e la punta del naso. Dappertutto l’odore di nafta spalmava i suoi ottani sulla cute di quel pezzo di suolo adibito al trasporto di sogni dalla vecchia Europa ai confini del West.

Ad Orly ero arrivato alle 5. *Gilberte* era venuta a trovarmi ed avevamo pranzato insieme facendo fuori una bottiglia di vino lasciata a invecchiare perché col suo flute ci dicesse che stava succedendo qualcosa: quel qualcosa che era nell’aria e che faceva paura ad entrambi, sia pure per motivi diversi.

Avevamo trascorso momenti bellissimi insieme. Su quel treno che ci portava ad Ivry, per esempio. Fu d’estate, ero solo, non sapevo che fare. Andai alla stazione di Sevres. Passava un treno e lo presi. Non avevo nemmeno il biglietto. Fra un pensiero e l’altro mi accorsi di quella ragazza. Mi guardava probabilmente da un pezzo, o forse semplicemente osservava quell’essere muto. Incrociammo gli sguardi a metà. Dopo appena un istante mi scoprii a scrutare il suo volto. La luce dei suoi occhi, per pudore, non inquadrava più me. Fu un viaggio esaltante. Lei uscì in corridoio per scattare fotogrammi a ripetizione su tutto quel giallo punteggiato di case e di mucche. Anch’io mi affacciai ma per lanciare i miei flash su lei. Dopo

un poco il suo primo sorriso fu come un dolce sormontato di panna.

In attesa di sentire chiamare il mio volo mi intrattenni a guardare quelle magiche scatole in cui si annunciano arrivi e partenze di alcune esistenze, che per un tempo più breve o più lungo restano sospese nel cielo. Fra poco sarebbe accaduto anche a me. Avevo chiesto a Gilberte di lasciare che andassi da solo, ed era stata una pena. Era venuta la mattina presto dopo essere passata dal nostro fornaio per comprare quattro brioches e succo di mele. Facemmo il caffè ascoltando le notizie del mattino. Si prevedeva aria calda e pioggia a bizzeffe ma non era questa che volevamo sapere. Per lei era urgente sapere perché me n'andavo. Per me l'urgenza nasceva dal bisogno di capire il perché dell'insoddisfazione, malgrado i successi raccolti come fotoreporter. Mi disse che avrebbe tenuto per sé, se l'avessi voluto, tutti i servizi firmati da me. Era un modo come impegnarmi a tornare.

Le diedi le chiavi di casa e le dissi che poteva restare fino alla fine del mese. Le tendine erano state abbassate. Immaginavo sarebbe successo. Pianse in silenzio mentre adesso la pioggia cadeva.

Si annunciava l'arrivo di un aereo da Bangkok, capitale di traffici strani. Tra la folla cercai qualche volto che vagamente potesse somigliare a un orientale per vedere di scoprirne i segreti, almeno stavolta. Volendo cambiare mestiere avevo lasciato a Gilberte la fedele Hasselblad con la quale avevo fatto prodigi, ma quelli erano solo profili, labili tracce di un effimero durato l'espace d'un matin.

Neanche le immagini sulle favelas cui L'Express aveva dato un grande risalto, riuscivano ormai a caricarmi di orgoglio. Gilberte aveva voluto festeggiare, a base di champagne, al Vigneron di Porte Saint Cloud. Alla fine della serata in cui cominciammo con i frutti di mare al citron rimase dentro di noi la solita ebbrezza per un paio di ore, mentre il resto del mondo non si accorse nemmeno di quella. Le bollicine del vino raggiunsero l'aria certamente più felici di noi che restavamo schiacciati dalla nostra impotenza. Non bastava infatti caricare di significati la vita degli altri, riprodotta su carta, se poi l'indomani mattina tutto veniva sconvolto e si doveva ricominciare da capo.

Ero stanco di vedere apparire le mie foto più belle e di scoprire poco dopo che soltanto qualcuno le aveva osservate. Peggio ancora quando nessuno ricordava di averle mai viste. Tuttavia non era solo l'ansia del nuovo che mi spingeva a lasciare Parigi."

From *Gilberte* by Ignazio Apolloni**Translated by Giuseppe Bruno-Chomin**

“We were supposed to leave Paris at 7. It was pouring. I had taken a bus to the airport, one of the ones that run between the terminal and the twittering of all the people in constant search of a place on a plane, as if it were the belly of a mother hen. The hen was there, but we couldn’t see it due to the course one is obligated to take prior to arriving at the boarding ladder. The lights of the streetlamps, tall as anything, resembled ovaries, beneath the downpour of rain, on account of their clinging together around a breadstick-like pole. The dampness, rising up from the asphalt, obscured the view, causing both the eyelids and the tip of the nose to drip. All around, the smell of fuel spread its octane upon the surface of that strip of ground, used to transport dreams from old Europe to the frontiers of the West.

I arrived at Orly at 5. *Gilberte* had come to see me. We had lunch together, downing a bottle of deliberately set aside to age so its flute could tell us that something important was happening: that something in the air that instilled fear in both of us, albeit for different reasons.

We had shared beautiful moments together, like on that train ride to Ivry, for example. It was summer, I was alone, and didn’t know what to do. I went to the station at Sevres, a train pulled in and I boarded it; I didn’t even have a ticket. While caught up in my thoughts, I noticed that girl. She was probably looking at me for some time, or perhaps merely observing the mute being that I was. Our glances met halfway. Shortly afterwards I discovered myself staring at her face; out of modesty, the light of her eyes was no longer fixed on me. It was an exhilarating trip. She went into the corridor to take multi-frame shots of the yellow landscape dotted with houses and cows. I too went out, but only to focus on her. After a while, she smiled for the first time, and it was like a cake topped with whipped cream.

While waiting to hear my flight called, I entertained myself by watching those magical boxes wherein they announce the arrivals and departures. The arrival of a few beings who for either an extended or lesser period of time remained suspended in the air. Soon

enough it would happen to me as well. I had asked Gilberte to let me go alone, and it had been difficult. She had come to me in the early morning, after stopping by our baker to buy four croissants and some apple juice. We made coffee while listening to the morning news; they predicted warm air and rain galore, but, this was not what we wanted to know. For her, it was imperative to know why I was leaving. And for me, the imperativeness stemmed from a desire to understand the reason for my dissatisfaction, regardless of the success I had had as a photo reporter. She told me that, if I liked, she would hold on to all of my signed services. It was a ploy to ensure my return.

I gave her the keys to the house and told her that she could remain there until the end of the month. The curtains had been lowered, I expected that this would happen. And, while the rain now fell, she cried in silence.

They announced the arrival of a plane from Bangkok, the capital of peculiar trafficking. I attempted to spot, amongst the crowd, a face that might vaguely resemble an Asian one, in an attempt to uncover the secrets therein, at least this time. Wanting to change professions, I left my faithful Hasselblad with Gilberte. The very camera with which I had worked wonders, but those were only profiles, weak traces of an ephemeral success lasting only a day.

Not even my images of the shanty towns that had been given such ample coverage by *L'Express* magazine, were now capable of filling me with pride. Gilberte had wanted to celebrate, with champagne, at the Vigneron of Porte Saint Cloud. At the end of the evening, which we began with seafood sprinkled with citron, the usual high stayed with us for a couple of hours; meanwhile, the rest of the world did not even notice it. The wine bubbles certainly met the air much more happily than we, who remained weighed down by our helplessness. It wasn't worth it to fill the lives of others with meaning, reproduced on paper, if only the following morning it all would be destroyed and we had to begin anew.

I was tired of seeing my most beautiful photos published only to discover, shortly thereafter, that only one person had seen them; or even worse that no one recalled having seen them at all. Yet, it wasn't only the drive for new things that drove me to leave Paris."

From *Gilberte* by Ignazio Apolloni**Translated by Miguel Alejandro Valerio**

We were supposed to leave from Paris at 7. It was pouring. I took a shuttle to the airport, one of those that commutes between the terminal and the cackling of people looking for a seat on the plane as if it were the belly of a mother hen. The hen was there but we couldn't see it due to the numerous corridors we had to navigate before we could get to the boarding stairs. Under the deluge, the lights of the lamps, high as Moses, looked like ovaries on account of their clinging to each other around a breadstick. The humidity from the asphalt fogged our sight making our eyelids and noses drip. The smell of diesel fuel everywhere smeared its octane on the skin of that piece of pavement utilized for the transport of dreams from old Europe to the remotest corners of the West.

I got to Orly at 5. *Gilberte* came to meet me and we had lunch together downing a bottle of wine set aside to age so that its flute could tell us something important was happening: something which was in the air that frightened both of us, albeit for different reasons.

We had shared great moments together. On that train to Ivry, for example. It was during the summer. I was alone. I didn't know what to do. I went to the station at Sevres. A train was passing and I took it. I didn't even have a ticket. Between one thought and another I noticed that girl. She probably had been watching me for some time through the corner of her eyes, or maybe she was just observing my silence. A minute later I discovered myself scrutinizing her face. The light of her eyes no longer focused on me, out of modesty. She stepped out to the corridor to take repeated pictures of the yellow dots of houses and cows. I too went to the window but to cast my flash on her. A little later her first smile was like a cream covered dessert.

As I waited for my flight to be called, I passed the time looking at those magic boxes where arrivals and departures of some lives, which for a long or short time are suspended in the sky, are announced. In a short while it would happen to me as well. I asked *Gilberte* to let me go alone, and now I was sorry. She came early in the morning after going to our baker to buy four muffins and

apple juice. The weather forecast predicted hot air and abundant rain but this wasn't what we wanted to know. For her, it was urgent to know why I was leaving. For me, the urgency came from the need to understand why the dissatisfaction, despite my success as a photo reporter. She told me that if I wanted she could stay in the house and upkeep the utilities. It was her way of having me commit to return.

I gave her the keys to the house and told her she could stay until the end of the month. The curtains were drawn. I foresaw what happened then. She cried in silence as the rain began to fall.

The arrival of a plane from Bangkok, capital of strange traffic, was announced. In the crowd, I looked for a face that bore a vague resemblance to an oriental to see if I fathom his secrets, at least this time. Wanting to change profession I left my faithful Hasselblad with which I had achieved miracles, but those were profiles, fleeting traces of an ephemeral moment that only lasted *l'espace d'un matin*.

Not even the photographs on favelas which *L'Express* had greatly emphasized now manage to fill me with pride. Gilberte wanted to celebrate with champagne at the Vignerons in Porte Saint Cloud. At the end of the evening which we started with seafood al citron there remained within us the usual high for a couple of hours, while the rest of the world didn't even noticed it. The little wine bubbles rose in the air much more happily than we, who were overwhelmed by our helplessness. It was not enough in fact to fill others' lives with meaning, reproduced on paper, if then the next morning everything came unraveled and one had to start all over again.

I was tired of seeing my most beautiful photographs appear and discovering that only one person had paid attention to them. It was even worst now that no one remembered ever seeing them. Nevertheless it was not only the yearning for something new that drove me to leave Paris.

The challenge for the next issue is an excerpt of a inventive long poem in praise of wine, “Ditirammu: Sarudda,” written by Giovanni Meli. The Sicilian *puiticchiu*, as he was known, follows a long list of poets who have written about wine and its influence on people’s lives. But Meli’s poems poses a challenge to the translator not only with its lively characterizations of Sarudda, a master in the art of imbibing and of his inebriated companions, but also for its linguistic pyrotechnics, cacophony, and irregular rhymes. Try your hand at this excerpt.

Sarudda, Andria lu sdatu e Masi l’orvu
 Ninazzu lu sciancatu,
 Peppi lu foddi e Brasi galiotu
 ficiru ranciu tutti a taci maci
 ntra la reggia taverna di Bravascu,
 purtannu tirrimotu ad ogni ciascu.
 E doppu aviri sculatu li vutti,
 allegri tutti misiru a sotari
 ed abballari pri li strati strati,
 rumpennu ‘nvitriati
 ntra l’acqua e la rimarra,
 sbrizziannu tutti ddi genti
 chi jianu ‘ncuntrannu
 E intantu appressu d’iddi
 picciotti e picciriddi,
 vastasi e siggitteri,
 cucchieri cu stafferi,
 decani cu lacchè
 ci jianu appressu, facennuci olè.
 Allurtimata poi determinaru
 di jiri ad un fistinu
 d’un so vicinu, chi s’avia a ‘nguaggiari,
 e avia a pigghiari a Betta la caiorda,
 figghia bastarda di fra Decu e Narda;
 l’occhi micciusì, la faccianza lorda,
 a vucca a funcia, la frunti a cucchiara,
 guercia, lu varvarottu a cazzalora,
 lu nasu a brogna, la facci di pala,
 porca, lagnusa, tinta, macadura,
 sdiserrama, ‘mprisusa, micidara.
 Lu zitu era lu celebri ziu Roccu,
 ch’era divotu assai di lu diu Baccu:

nudu, mortu di fami, tintu e liccu;
 e notti e jornu facia lu sbirlaccu.
 Eranu chisti a tavula assittati
 cu li so amici li chiù cunfidati;
 ntra l'autri cunvitati
 c'era assittata a punta di buffetta
 Catarina la Niura,
 Narda Caccia-diavuli,
 Ancila Attizza-liti,
 E Rosa Sfincia 'Ntossica-mariti.
 Eranu junti a la secunna posa,
 cioè, si stava allura stimpagnannu
 lu secunnu varrili,
 ch'era chiddu di dudici 'ncannila,
 ben sirratu,
 invicchiatu,
 accutturatu,
 e pri dittu di chiddi ch'annu pratica,
 era appuntu secunnu la prammatica.
 Quann'eccu a l'improvisu chi ci scoppanu,
 e, comu corda fradicia, si jettanu
 sti capi vivituri, li chiù 'nfanfari,
 chisti sei lapaderi appizzafferri,
 chi sgherri sgherri dintra si cci 'nfilanu;
 vennu ad ura ed appuntu, anzi l'incappanu
 cu lu varrili apertu, e si cci allippanu.
 Primu di tutti Sarudda attrivitu
 stenni la manu supra lu timpagnu,
 e cu un imperiu d'Alessandru Magnu,
 a lu so stili, senza ciu ne bau,
 a la spinoccia allura s'appizzau.
 Poi vidennu dda 'ncostu na cannata,
 di vinu 'mpapanata,
 cu un ciauru chi pareva na musia,
 la scuma chi vugghieva e rivugghia,
 l'agguanta, e mentri l'avi ntra li pugna,
 grida: "Curnuti, tintu cui c'incugna!"

Recensioni / Book Reviews

Salvatore Di Marco, *L'aranciu amaru e àutri puisii/The Bitter Orange and Other Poems*, with an Introduction by Florence Russo, edited and translated by Gaetano Cipolla, Mineola, New York: Legas, 2012, 212 pages.

Salvatore Di Marco, one of Sicily's major living poets, has been on the forefront of dialect poetry for a long time. As the founder of the journal, *Rivista italiana di letteratura dialettale* and of the *Giornale di poesia siciliana*, Di Marco has been a prolific contributor to the debate on the use of the dialect in poetry both as a critic and as a poet. In the last 20 years he has written numerous monographs on some of the major Sicilian poets and writers such as Antonio Veneziano, Francesco Lanza, and Alessio Di Giovanni, to name only three. But he has also continued to write poetry in Sicilian. His latest book of poetry, *Cu rimita menti*, was published in 2010. A number of studies have been published on his work such as Tommaso Romano's *L'inquieta misura. Bibliografia di Salvatore Di Marco*, which provides ample support to the claim that Di Marco is a major literary figure in Sicily.

It was, therefore, high time that his work crossed the boundaries of Sicily and landed on this side of the Atlantic. Thanks to the work of Gaetano Cipolla who edited and translated the book and to Florence Russo who wrote a well informed and insightful introduction, English speakers can now become acquainted with Di Marco's poetry.

The Bitter Orange and Other Poems is a welcome addition to the "Pueti d'Arba Sicula/Poets of Arba Sicula" series that has already published ten other volumes, featuring the poetry of Giovanni Meli, Antonio Veneziano, Nino Martoglio, Vincenzo Ancona, Nino Provenzano and Senzio Mazza. *L'aranciu amaru e àutri puisii* is an anthology containing five works which the poet had published as separate books: *L'acchianata di l'aciddara*, *Quaranta*, *La ballata di la morti*, *Epigrafie siciliane* and *Cu rimita menti*. The title of the anthology is derived from one of his poems written as a reaction to Giovanni Falcone's murder perpetrated by the mafia. The five collections represent aspects of Di Marco's eclectic approach to poetry. Each of the collections is written in a style that is different from the others, as if the poet were attempting something new with each new book. The poetry ranges from the nostalgic reminiscences of

L'acchianata di l'aciddara to the lyrical, ethereal poetry of *Quaranta*, to the rhythmical mantra-like lines of *La ballata di la morti*, to the succinct and highly concentrated lines of the *Sicilian Epigraphs* and finally to the soul-searching soliloquy that characterizes much of the last collection *Cu rimita menti*. Such variety of styles places a heavy burden on the translator who must match the poet's stylistic choices at every turn. This is something that someone as experienced and skilled as Gaetano Cipolla does well. A few examples shall suffice:

'Na vuci di gattu

'Na vuci di gattu
mi sta cusennu stanotti
un filu griciu
d'allamicu:
e mi consu cu li me' manu
n'artaru di malincunia.

A Cat's Voice

A cat's voice
is sewing for me
a gray thread
of misery tonight,
and I set up with my two hands
an altar of melancholy.

But it is with the galloping lines of *La Ballata di la morti*, which often combine nursery rhymes or nonsensical chains of words that the poet may have heard as a child with current events in rhythmic quatrains that the translator's skill is tested in earnest. And here again Cipolla matches the rhythm of the original with accents on the first third and fifth syllable, adding rhymes where possible. Again one example shall give an idea of the process:

Zampugnedda crisci crisci
ca ti dugnu pani e pisci,
pani e pisci nun ci nn'è
vi manciati zoccu c'è.

Little reed pipe grow and grow
for I'll give you bread and fish,
we have neither fish nor bread
you will eat what's in the dish.

San Micheli acchiana 'ncelu
pi sunari tri campani,
li campani su' sunati
su' li rosi spampinati.

Our Saint Michael climbs to heaven
for he wants to ring three bells
now the bells have all been rung
and the roses are in bloom.

Supra 'u munti c'è lu lupu
c'è lu pisci 'nfunn'o mari,
la cirasa ni la rama
lu nutricu ni la naca.

In the mountain there are wolves
there are fishes in the sea,
and the cherry is on the branch
and the infant in its crib.

The *Sicilian Epigraphs*, as Florence Russo noted in her introduction, “are difficult to classify. Epigraphs are engraved inscriptions or lines placed at the beginning of a book to suggest its theme. Di Marco himself was aware of the fact that he was attempting something new to the Sicilian tradition. He called them “epigraphic versifications” and they represent quite a departure from the two collections we have discussed already. Writing epigraphically means to endow words and images with greater intensity in order to make them more memorable. Their brevity, in effect, adds to their memorability. While in many of them the poet addresses a fact or a situation that seems devoid of his personal involvement, in others he manages to reveal moments of intense participation as for instance in the following:”

Ni la vna 'mpazzuta di lu cori
mi ci sdivacasti lu focu
cu ' na sula taliata.

In the deranged vein of my heart
you dumped fire
with just one glance.

The essence here is to provide a translation that reflects the author's distillation of his vocabulary to the essential:

Vistutu d'umbri
di la cima a lu zuccu:
l'arbulu.

Clothed in shadows
from top to bottom:
this tree.

Professor Cipolla's translation relies on a close reading of the original, augmented by intuition and interpretation, and his final version produces in the English-speaking reader effects that are uncannily similar to those produced by the original on Sicilian-speaking readers. The translator takes some liberties, as for example in the title of the following poem, but the essence, the kernel of meaning comes across unmistakably:

Si c'è di chiànciri

Si c'è di chiànciri
chiànciu li palori d'amuri
ca si pèrsinu strata facennu
una oggi una dumani
'nzina ca siccaru l
i rami ntall'àrburu;

If there's regretting to be done

If there's regretting to be done
then I regret the words of love
we lost along the way
one today, another tomorrow
until the branches on the tree
withered away;

li palori ca non ti potti diri mai
 e chiddi parrati cull'occhi
 ca mai ti li sappi cuntari
 e chiddi chi m'arristaru in pizzu,
 paparini di focu
 na li labbra pusati
 sutta l'ali di lu silenziu.

The words I never could tell you
 and those spoken with the eyes
 that I never knew how to express
 and those that remained on the tip
 like burning poppies
 upon the lips
 lying beneath wings of silence.

Chianciu li vasati
 ca nun mi dasti
 e chiddi ca mi ristarù
 'mpinti na li labbra,
 chiànciu li silenzi residuti casa casa
 e nuatri zitta tu zittu iu
 cu lu cori chinu e la vucca vacanti.

I regret the kisses you did not give me
 and those that remained
 ungiven on my lips
 I regret the hanging silences
 inside the house
 while you and I were still
 with brimming hearts and empty
 mouths.

Chiànciu lu me tempu pirdutu
 na li chiffari
 cu la testa straviata di lu cori,
 e li to capiddi discunzati
 ca ci bastava na carizza
 pi daricci lu so postu nni la frunti:

I regret the time I lost
 in my own cares
 with my head unmindful of my heart
 and your mussed-up hair
 which needed but a soft caress
 to set it straight upon your forehead:

pi chistu, amuri miu,
 siddu c'è di chiànciri
 iu chiànciu.

these things, my love,
 if there's regretting to be done,
 I do regret.

Antonio Pagano

Alfonso Gatto, *The Wall Did Not Answer. Selected Poems 1932-1976*. Translation and Introduction by Philip Parisi. New York: Chelsea Editions Books, 2011.

In his timely translation of Alfonso Gatto's poetry, Philip Parisi does great service to the diffusion of this important writer's work, a writer considered one of the major exponents of hermetic poetry in Italy. Thanks to this comprehensive volume, readers in the English-speaking world can now, for the first time, garner a true sense of Gatto's opus. Parisi's keen selection of poems from ten of Gatto's books, is complemented by an emphasis on the poet's civic compositions, such as those from *Il capo sulla neve* (1947) and *Storia delle vittime* (for which Gatto was awarded the Viareggio Prize in 1966). Italo Calvino was known to have described Gatto's

work as representing “the largest poetic testimony of the man of the Resistance,” and Parisi’s poignant choice of title showcases this very aspect of Gatto’s writings (the title, indeed, comes from the closing line of a poem within *Storia delle vittime* entitled “Una sera di marzo” which reads: “non rispose il muro”). The wall, as Parisi points out in his introduction, is the killing block, witness to brutality and injustice, and subsequently emblem of the victims killed in front of it. Hence, it serves as the place of anticipated celestial restitution, but in true hermetic style, the hoped-for justice is met with an indifferent sky (“the blue that I saw / turn dark foreboding did not answer, / the wall did not answer.”). By retracing this metaphor of the wall throughout his selection of texts, Parisi takes the reader on a visual voyage through Gatto’s poetic reality, in which the memory of victims, as Parisi alludes, holds the key to developing in us “conscience and empathy, the basis of hope for the future” (26).

Parisi’s expansive and yet engaging choice of poems affords the reader an intimate glimpse into the complex historical period in which Gatto was writing: from his early days under the Regime, to his documentation of the Resistance, through his adhesion to and then dissidence from the Communist Party, up until his untimely death in a car accident in 1976. In his discerning introduction, Parisi prepares the reader for the poems which lie ahead, by elegantly summing up Gatto’s artistic dilemma as such: “the imagination in solitude is turned loose in the act of creation, but by that very act the artist cuts himself off from the human intercourse necessary for creativity” (14). But this inner, solitary conflict, as Parisi posits it, ultimately served to re-engage the poet with his external reality, not to dissociate him from it. Hermeticism was not a form of escape, but rather an act of engagement. The hermeticism of Gatto’s (and others’) poetry, in the poet’s own words, was precisely what made it anti-Fascist since poetry, as Gatto reflects, was a way to ‘encounter oneself’, a way of resisting an outside power aimed at defining us. This uneasy contrast between inner creative struggle and interrelation with the external social world is rendered through a crystal-like and yet uncanny aura in many of Gatto’s verses. An example of this, and of Parisi’s ability to render as such in English, is perhaps best seen in “In Piazzale Loreto” from *Giornale di due inverni* (1943-1944, 1964-1965). The poem documents the Massacre

in Piazzale Loreto which occurred in Milan on August 10, 1944, during which fifteen Partisans were executed in cold-blood by Nazi-Fascist troops. In an effort to intimidate future Partisan activity, the Regime ordered that the fifteen corpses were to be left out in the scorching sun for an entire day, guarded by Fascist troops, who had orders to keep everyone away, including family members. By focusing on the presumed aggressor in the event, the poet reveals the striking complexity of the situation, wherein the perpetrator is just a lonely and awkward pawn:

Quel giorno di Loreto uno squadrista zoppo
di guardia ai morti urlava: «indietro buona gente»,
ed era sfatto, stanco di chiedere col troppo
insistere un favore che «non costava niente».

Con la parola «buona» cercava scampo al male
anonimo di tutti, o a sceglierla per caso
era il suo stesso fiuto di povero animale
della campagna avvezzo a spingere col naso? (130)

Parisi translates as:

That day at Loreto a lame squadrista
guard of the dead, yelled, "Get back good people,"
and he was beside himself, tired of asking with
overinsistence a favor that "costs nothing."

He sought to escape from everyone's general ill will
with his word "good," or did he unleash it
with only his smell of a poor field-animal
used to pushing about with its nose? (131)

The choice of 'unleash' for 'sceglierla per caso' is a felicitous rendering which imbues the English with a strong primal sense. Gatto memorialized the massacre in other poems, including in "Per i martiri di Piazzale Loreto" (Il capo sulla neve), a translation of which Parisi includes in the volume on pp. 70-72.

Gatto's interest in rhyme as a generator of significance is, per force, an aspect destined to be lost in translation, but Parisi prevails at creating a very interesting auditory patterning in English, built

on sounds of consonance and assonance, which attunes the reader's ears to the musical flow of the original. For example, the following verses of the first stanza of "Campagna al mattino sul mare" read:

Mattoni di contento nel fervore
della luce continua che fa giorno,
costrutto di creato ove il tepore
arioso del sole è ancora stórno

And Parisi translates with a distinct rhythmic pattern in which he is even able to preserve one of the rhymes in English:

Bricks of happiness in the glow
of steady light that build day
world of nature where the airy
warmth of the sun is still dapple-grey
(214-215)

Throughout the translations, the poetic sensibility of the translator comes through with elegance and contemplation. We should not forget that Parisi himself is a poet and that such a capacity permits him to render Gatto's work into flowing and comfortable English. Missing from the collection is a selection from "Morto ai paesi," which Parisi discusses in his introductory essay, but omits from the translations. An inclusion from that collection would have made this volume truly complete.

The book is published by Chelsea Editions Books, a not-for-profit publishing company with the honorable mission of disseminating modern and contemporary Italian (and French) poets in the English-speaking world. The timing of the publication could not have been better, given the recent rekindling of interest in Gatto in Italy, as evidenced by the inception of the Fondazione Alfonso Gatto (Salerno, Italy). In recognition of its first year of existence, the Foundation republished this year the aforementioned 1947 collection of Gatto's poems entitled *Il capo sulla neve. Liriche della Resistenza*, including a Preface by Andrea Camilleri, an essay by Massimo Bontempelli and a brief piece by Italo Calvino. Additionally, in 2005, a complete edition of Gatto's poems was published (Alfonso Gatto, *Tutte le poesie*, a cura di Silvio Ramat, Milano, Ed. Mondadori, 2005). In 2006, thirty years from his death, a confer-

ence was organized in Florence, resulting in the publication of the following proceedings: *Alfonso Gatto, "Nel segno di ogni cosa". Atti del seminario*. Firenze, 18-19 dicembre 2006, ed. by Anna Dolfi, Roma: Bulzoni, 2007. Also noteworthy are critical analyses by Marica Romolini ("La «memoria velata» di Alfonso Gatto. Temi e strutture in *Morto ai paesi*." Florence: Società Editrice Fiorentina, 2009) and Barbara Carle ("Poiein and Pictura in Alfonso Gatto's *Rime di viaggio per la terra dipinta*" in *Italica*, Vol. 83, No. 3/4 (Fall - Winter, 2006), pp. 489-504). These new developments make Parisi's translation all the more opportune. My hope is that his work will invite critical discourse in English on a poet heretofore hidden from the Anglo-Saxon world.

Amelia Moser

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