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of Italian Translation**

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# **Journal of Italian Translation**

*Editor*  
*Luigi Bonaffini*

**Volume I,      Number 1,      Spring 2006**

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

In our first issue we feature the work of Giulia Di Filippi, an artist from S. Agapito, (IS) Molise.

# *Journal of Italian Translation*

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## *La Traduzione del testo poetico*

*by Franco Buffoni*

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**Franco Buffoni** lives in Rome. He is a professor of literary criticism and comparative literature at the University of Cassino. Some of his poetry books are: *Suora Carmelitana e altri racconti in versi* (Premio Montale, Guanda, 1997); *Songs of Spring* (Premio Mondello, Marcos y Marcos, 1999); *Il Profilo del Rosa* (Premio Betocchi, Mondadori, 2000); *Theios* (Interlinea, 2001); *The Shadow of Mount Rosa* (Gradiva Publications, 2002); *Del Maestro in bottega* (Empiria, 2002); *Guerra* (Mondadori, 2005). As a translator he edited for Bompiani *I Poeti Romantici Inglese* (2 Vols., 1990) and for Mondadori *La trilogia delle Ballate dell'Ottocento inglese* (Coleridge, Wilde, Kipling, 2005). As a journalist he collaborates with several newspapers and radio programs and he is the editor of *Testo a fronte* (dedicated to the theory and the practice of literary translation).

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**I**l termine “traduttologia” non è ancora uscito dal gergo specialistico in Italia, mentre sono d’uso corrente *translation studies* nel mondo di lingua inglese, *traductologie* in Francia e *Uebersetzungswissenschaft* in Germania. La reticenza ad accettare il termine è la spia in Italia di un rifiuto più grave e radicale: quello che si possa concepire l’esistenza di una scienza della traduzione. Mentre in Francia se ne parla apertamente almeno dal 1963, quando apparve *Les problèmes théoriques de la traduction* di George Mounin. Un testo che divenne ben presto una specie di manuale europeo, con i suoi innegabili pregi, ma anche con la sua concezione rigorosamente strutturalistica della letteratura. Da questo impianto derivava a Mounin la certezza - ribadita più volte nel corso dell’opera - che prima di allora nessuna teorizzazione seria fosse mai stata tentata nel campo della traduzione. Antoine Berman ne *L’épreuve de l’étranger*<sup>1</sup> invece in seguito (1984) dimostrò come - per esempio - nell’ambito del Romanticismo tedesco la questione traduttologica venga costantemente e *sistematicamente* dibattuta. E con argomentazioni ancora oggi vive e attuali. Tanto che Gianfranco Folena, il più accreditato avversario italiano di Mounin, nella premessa alla ristampa (Einaudi, 1991) di *Volgarizzare e tradurre* (1973)<sup>2</sup> parla esplicitamente di “una bella smentita” a Mounin da parte di Berman.

Ma Berman non avrebbe avuto tale impatto e tale possibilità di ascolto se nel 1975 - con *After Babel* - George Steiner non avesse formalizzato la prima grande ribellione internazionale ai dogmatismi della linguistica teorica. E dico “internazionale” perché non da meno potrebbero definirsi la portata di certi studi - e di certe ribellioni - di Gianfranco Folena, allora come oggi purtroppo circolanti solo in Italia. Incidentalmente rilevo anche

che, solo nella seconda edizione di *Dopo Babele* (Garzanti, 1994)<sup>3</sup>, Steiner inserisce Folena in bibliografia; ma lo fa indicando *Volgarizzare e tradurre* come apparso per la prima volta nel 1991, e quindi falsando completamente la cronologia delle priorità, avendo Folena trattato nello stesso modo molti dei temi di *Dopo Babele* già due anni prima (1973 vs 1975). Certamente Steiner non lo conosceva.

Nel 1975 George Steiner parlò dunque di necessità - da parte del traduttore letterario - di “rivivere l’atto creativo” che aveva informato la scrittura dell’“originale”, aggiungendo che la traduzione, prima di essere un esercizio formale, è “un’esperienza esistenziale”. Al di là delle provocazioni steineriane, potremmo chiederci come, operativamente, la traduttologia abbia tentato di contrastare il predominio linguistico-teorico nel proprio ambito di studi.

Gli sforzi si concentrarono dapprima nel tentativo di sfatare il luogo comune che tende a configurare la traduzione come un sottoprodotto letterario, invitando invece a considerarla come un *Überleben*, un *afterlife* del testo. Operazione in sé niente affatto originale, se come ricorda anche Mounin, quando nel 1948 Thomas Sébillet classificò le traduzioni fra i generi letterari non fece che “rispecchiare la tendenza in voga”. Ma ribadire quel concetto più di trent’anni fa fu una presa di posizione estremamente coraggiosa. E fu proprio un altro strutturalista, di ambito praghese, Jirí Levy, che già nel 1963, pubblicando *Umeni prekladu* (divenuta poi patrimonio dell’Europa colta nella versione tedesca del 1969, *Die literarische Übersetzung. Theorie einer Kunstgattung*: La traduzione letteraria. Teoria di un genere artistico) riconsiderò il tema prestigiosamente.

L’opera di Levy si divide in due parti fondamentali<sup>4</sup>: una prima teorica, comprendente i capitoli sulla pratica novecentesca del tradurre, sulle diverse fasi del lavoro di traduzione, sul problema estetico del tradurre, lo stile artistico e “traduttivo”, la traduzione di opere teatrali e, infine, la traduzione come problema storico-letterario. La seconda è invece imperniata sulla questione verso-prosa, sul ritmo, la rima, l’eufonia e la morfologia del verso. E si tratta di una parte che, relativamente alla questione specifica delle traduzioni di poesia, resta ancora oggi una delle poche trattazioni che affrontino esaurientemente anche questioni tecniche.

Un altro passo capitale della traduttologia contemporanea viene compiuto grazie a Friedmar Apel nel 1983, e proprio attraverso una severa critica a Jirí Levy. Nel capitolo iniziale di *Literarische Übersetzung*<sup>5</sup> Apel osserva infatti che “anche quanti considerano la traduzione come arte” (e il riferimento è ovviamente al sottotitolo dell’opera levyana) poi finiscono ugualmente con l’attenersi “a definizioni normative o ideali”. E per avvalorare la propria critica riporta queste due citazioni da Levy:

a) Lo scopo del lavoro di traduzione è quello di mantenere, cogliere e trasmettere l’opera originale (il suo



messaggio); non è mai quello di creare un'opera nuova che non abbia un antecedente. Lo scopo della traduzione è riproduttivo.

b) Quando diciamo che la traduzione è una riproduzione e che tradurre è un processo originale e creativo, noi diamo una definizione normativa e diciamo come la traduzione debba essere fatta. Alla definizione normativa corrisponderebbe la traduzione ideale. Quanto più debole è la traduzione, tanto più essa si allontana da questa definizione.

Quindi Apel aggiunge: "La problematica di una simile definizione si acuisce in Levy in quanto egli tenta di concepire la traduzione come 'genere artistico'. Il concetto di genere però ha senso solo ogni volta che esso presenta la dialettica forma-contenuto, mentre in Levy - come anche nella maggior parte delle teorie traduttologiche della linguistica - il messaggio appare fondamentalmente come una invariante. Il suo concetto di traduzione si espone così alla stessa argomentazione con la quale la critica della conoscenza, sull'esempio di forme dell'imitazione, ossia del principio di mimesis, dimostra l'impossibilità della riproduzione in senso stretto". Per concludere: "Non stupisce dunque che quegli approcci al problema di natura scientifico-letteraria, fondati su una visione storica, definiscano il concetto di traduzione in modo più aperto e soprattutto più dinamico, con lo svantaggio che i criteri di definizione sono spesso difficilmente afferrabili...". Una posizione perfettamente riassunta nella seguente "proposta di definizione" da parte di Apel del lavoro di ricerca sulla traduzione letteraria: "La traduzione è una forma che insieme comprende e dà corpo all'esperienza di opere in un'altra lingua. Oggetto di questa ricerca è l'unicità dialettica di forma e contenuto, come rapporto di volta in volta instauratosi fra la singola opera e un dato orizzonte di ricezione (stadio della lingua e poetica, tradizione letteraria, situazione storica, sociale, collettiva e individuale). Nella nuova configurazione questa costellazione diventa sperimentabile come distanza dall'originale". Con questa ipotesi di lavoro, Apel - come osserva Emilio Mattioli nella prefazione alla edizione italiana - "mette da parte tutta una serie di luoghi comuni e di questioni male impostate che hanno afflitto e affliggono il campo della traduzione, e propone la ricerca sulla traduzione in tutta la sua complessità, evitando ogni riduttivismo". Apel ci pare criticabile solo per quanto concerne la necessità di contestualizzare maggiormente l'opera levyana. Se infatti egli può permettersi di constatare i limiti che lo studio di Levy presenta, ciò va a merito anche dello stesso Levy, che nel clima culturale egemonizzato dai formalismi degli anni sessanta, seppe indicare la via da percorrere per giungere - poi - a criticarlo.

\*

"Io mi domando", si chiedeva Céline nella lettera a M. Hindus del 15

maggio 1947, “in che cosa mi paragonino a Henry Miller, che è *tradotto?*, mentre invece tutto sta nell'intimità della lingua! per non parlare della *resa emotiva* dello stile...”. E ancora: “Mi interessano solo gli scrittori che hanno uno stile. Ed è raro uno stile, è raro. Di storie, invece, sono piene le strade, pieni i commissariati”<sup>6</sup>.

E lo stile è “intraducibile”, come per Croce è “intraducibile” la poesia. Sono posizioni tardo-romantiche che, facendo leva sui presupposti a) della unicità e irriproducibilità dell'opera d'arte; b) della indissolubilità di contenuto e forma, giungono a negare la traducibilità della poesia e della prosa “alta”. Tali concezioni sono l'espressione di un idealismo oggi particolarmente inattuale, contro il quale l'estetica del Novecento (e quella italiana in prima linea, da Banfi a Anceschi a Formaggio a Mattioli) si è battuta, direi, vittoriosamente.

Il principio fondamentale che crea sintonia tra l'estetica neofenomenologica italiana e le posizioni di Friedmar Apel consiste nel rifiuto di ogni posizione normativa: non si possono dare regole per la traduzione letteraria come non si possono dare regole per l'opera d'arte. Ma, mentre il tramonto delle poetiche normative nel campo dell'attività creativa artistica è avvenuto da tempo, nel campo della traduzione persiste la tendenza a indicare delle regole. (Si consideri a riguardo l'accusa di Apel a Levy). Come osserva Mattioli: “Il genio e la soggettività assoluta sono elementi dell'estetica romantica oggi irriproponibili come tali. E un fatto rilevato da molti studiosi è che a queste categorie tardo-romantiche ricorrono anche i linguisti che formalizzano il discorso sulla traduzione, e poi - di fronte alla traduzione letteraria - non sanno far altro che riprendere queste vecchie idee”.

Come tradurre, allora, la poesia? Come “riprodurre” lo stile? Sono le domande che a questo punto un traduttore si sente porre. La risposta potrebbe prendere l'avvio dalla constatazione che le dicotomie (fedele/infedele; fedele alla lettera/fedele allo spirito; *ut orator/ut interpres*; “traductions des professeurs”/“traductions des poètes”) - da Cicerone a Mounin - inevitabilmente portano a una situazione di *impasse*, configurando, da una parte, l'intraducibilità dello “stile” e dell’“ineffabile” poetico, e dall'altra la convinzione che sia trasmissibile soltanto un contenuto. Naturalmente il fatto che sia trasmissibile *soltanto* un contenuto è una pura astrazione, ma è dove si giunge partendo sia da presupposti “crociani”, sia da presupposti “jacobsoniani”. (Notoriamente, per Jakobson, la poesia è intraducibile in quanto il tratto che più la caratterizza è la paronomasia; tuttavia la si può “comprendere” adeguatamente, e dunque interpretare in traduzione, pensando ai significati lirici dei quali è portatrice per il tramite di un'altra lingua).

Non mi pare che la situazione dicotomica di *impasse* muti analizzando la più recente querelle francese - nominalmente molto affascinante - tra Henri Meschonnic e Jean-René Ladmiral, *alias* tra *sourciers* (da “langue-source”, lingua fonte, ma con una inquietante assonanza con l'ambito

stregonesco) e *ciblistes* (da “langue-cible”, o d’arrivo, coniata sulla sigla C.B. che in inglese indica la “citizen’s band”, la frequenza radio riservata al pubblico)<sup>7</sup>. In altri termini, tra una tendenza naturalizzante - “target-oriented” - che spinge il testo verso il lettore straniero “naturalizzandoglielo” nel contesto linguistico e culturale di arrivo, fino a non fargli capire che si tratta di un testo tradotto; e una tendenza estraniante - “source-oriented” - che trascina il lettore straniero verso il testo, cercando costantemente di accendergli spie relative alla fonte, affinché non dimentichi mai che quel testo è tradotto. (Per fare un solo esempio, è tradizionalmente source-oriented il modo di presentare gli autori stranieri negli Stati Uniti; ma è certamente target-oriented il modo in cui Pound tradusse Leopardi o Cavalcanti). Secondo questa impostazione, lo scontro tra scuole traduttologiche somiglierebbe a quello in atto nel mondo del restauro: farlo vedere il più possibile, o nascondere il più possibile.

Se si prescinde dalla simpatia che certe definizioni possono più di altre suscitare, credo sia chiaro come - proseguendo con una impostazione dicotomica - si aggiungano soltanto nuove coppie - come addomesticamento/straniamento, visibilità/invisibilità, violabilità/inviolabilità a quelle da secoli esistenti: libertà/fedeltà, tradimento/aderenza, scorrevolezza/letteralità, *sensus/verbum*. Né crediamo che un suggerimento per uscire dalla millenaria *impasse* possa giungere da studiosi pur validissimi - come l’americano Lawrence Venuti, autore di *The Translator’s Invisibility*<sup>8</sup> - totalmente schierati sull’uno o sull’altro versante, malgrado la grande finezza - in certi casi - delle argomentazioni esposte. (Nel caso di Venuti, per esempio, è senz’altro di alto livello il costante riferimento a Schleiermacher e alla scuola ermeneutica novecentesca che a lui si ispira).

“Come riprodurre, allora, lo stile?” è la domanda che poco fa abbiamo lasciato in sospenso. Il nocciolo del problema, a nostro avviso, sta proprio nel verbo usato per porre la domanda: riprodurre. Perché la traduzione letteraria non può ridursi concettualmente a una operazione di riproduzione di un testo. Questo può valere al massimo per un testo di tipo tecnico, per il quale è - tutto sommato - congruo continuare a parlare di decodifica e di ricodifica. L’invito nostro è invece a considerare la traduzione letteraria come un processo, che vede muoversi nel tempo e - possibilmente - fiorire e rifiorire, non “originale” e “copia”, ma due testi forniti entrambi di dignità artistica. Uno studio fondamentale a riguardo è l’altro capitale libro di Friedmar Apel: *Sprachbewegung. Eine historisch-poetologische Untersuchung zum Problem des Übersetzens*<sup>9</sup>. Il concetto di “movimento” del linguaggio nasce proprio dalla necessità di guardare nelle profondità della lingua cosiddetta di partenza prima di accingersi a tradurre un testo letterario. L’idea è comunemente accettata per la cosiddetta lingua di arrivo. Nessuno infatti mette in dubbio la necessità di ritradurre costantemente i classici per adeguarli alle trasformazioni che la lingua continua a subire. Il testo cosiddetto di partenza, invece, viene solitamente considerato come un monumento immobile nel tempo, marmoreo,

inossidabile. Eppure anch'esso è in movimento nel tempo, perché in movimento nel tempo sono - semanticamente - le parole di cui è composto; in costante mutamento sono le strutture sintattiche e grammaticali, e così via. In sostanza si propone di considerare il testo letterario classico o moderno da tradurre non come un rigido scoglio immobile nel mare, bensì come una piattaforma galleggiante, dove chi traduce opera sul corpo vivo dell'opera, ma l'opera stessa è in costante trasformazione o, per l'appunto, in movimento. In questa ottica, la dignità estetica della traduzione appare come il frutto di un incontro tra pari destinato a far cadere le tradizionali coppie dicotomiche, in quanto mirato a togliere ogni rigidità all'atto traduttivo, fornendo al suo prodotto una intrinseca dignità autonoma di *testo*.

Maurice Blanchot nel suo studio del 1971 intitolato *Traduire*, riflettendo su *Die Aufgabe des Uebersetzers* di Benjamin, già riprende questo principio collegandosi alla tradizione humboldtiana che configura un alto grado di dinamismo in ciascuna lingua. Egli mette in dubbio pertanto il luogo comune della superiorità dell'originale rispetto alla traduzione, proprio facendo leva sul principio del movimento del linguaggio nel tempo che - coinvolgendo anche il testo "classico" nella lingua di partenza - contribuisce a quella che Blanchot definisce "la solenne deriva delle opere letterarie". Una posizione da cui consegue la definizione blanchottiana di traduttore: "Il maestro segreto della differenza delle lingue, non per abolirla, ma per utilizzarla al fine di risvegliare nella propria, con i cambiamenti violenti o lievi che le apporta, una presenza di ciò che, in origine, è differente". Può così già dirsi superata da Blanchot la metafisica posizione benjaminiana secondo la quale il traduttore libera la verità del testo facendo emergere la lingua pura che sottende tutte le lingue.

Si potrebbe persino affermare che il concetto di movimento del linguaggio nel tempo - che induce a considerare come "storici" (sull'esempio dei romantici tedeschi) sia il testo di partenza sia il testo di arrivo - nel processo della traduzione letteraria possa avere inizio prima ancora della redazione della stesura cosiddetta "definitiva" del cosiddetto "originale", allorché al traduttore è possibile accedere anche all'avantesto (cioè a tutti quei documenti da cui il testo "definitivo" prende forma), impadronendosi così del percorso di crescita, di germinazione del testo nelle sue varie fasi. A riguardo un linguista come Pareyson parla di "formatività" del testo; un poeta come Gianni D'Elia di "adesione simpatetica, non tanto al testo finito e compiuto, quanto alla miriade di cellule emotive che lo hanno reso possibile. Come tentare di ripercorrerne la trama germinativa, con una fiducia che nessun linguista ammetterebbe, perché essa non precede soltanto il soggetto ma il linguaggio: l'esperienza di un sentire che è appunto fiducia in un dono di 'contagio' controllato, inoculato giorno per giorno, fino a interagire con le ragioni più profonde del proprio fare"<sup>10</sup>.

Il testo, dunque, si muove verso il futuro all'interno delle incrostazioni

della lingua, ma anche verso il passato se si tiene conto degli avantesti. Lo dimostra molto bene Lorenzo De Carli nel saggio *Proust. Dall'avantesto alla traduzione*<sup>11</sup>, mettendo a confronto le varie traduzioni italiane della *Recherche* (Raboni, Ginzburg, Mucci, Schacherl, Nessi Somaini, Pinto). Ebbene, dall'analisi testuale appare evidente come i traduttori che hanno potuto (e voluto) accedere anche all'avantesto (nel caso di Proust, ovviamente, i *Cahiers*), avendo colto il percorso di crescita, di germinazione, subito da quel particolare passaggio proustiano, siano poi stati in grado di renderlo con maggiore consapevolezza critica ed estetica. Ma si pensi agli ottantamila foglietti da cui provengono le quattrocento pagine del *Voyage au bout de la nuit* di Céline, alle *Epifanie* da cui discende il *Portrait* di Joyce, ecc. Il tutto, concettualmente, nella piena consapevolezza della stratificazione delle lingue storiche.

Malgrado la loro solidità e malgrado circolino da vent'anni nell'Europa delle intelligenze sarebbe un errore ritenere che le posizioni teoriche anziesposte siano ormai acquisite, visto che Umberto Eco, nel suo recentissimo *Dire quasi la stessa cosa. Esperienze di traduzione* (ed. Bompiani), contrappone con sicurezza "il fatto, acclarato, che le traduzioni invecchiano" all'inglese di Shakespeare, che "rimane sempre lo stesso"<sup>12</sup>.

Perché riteniamo inadeguati gli strumenti della linguistica teorica se applicati alla traduzione letteraria? Perché essi possono funzionare traducendo da un esperanto ad un altro esperanto; appunto, da una lingua di partenza a una lingua di arrivo, attraverso un processo di decodificazione e quindi di ricodificazione. Mentre per tradurre dalla ex lingua di Chaucer e di Shakespeare nella ex lingua di Petrarca e di Tasso occorrono altri strumenti ben più sofisticati ed empirici. Un concetto - quest'ultimo - che Luciano Bianciardi esemplifica con "archittonico" didatticismo all'inizio della Vita agra, allorché descrive il palazzo della biblioteca di Grosseto. Che in precedenza era stata casa insegnante dei compagni di Gesù, e prima ancora prepositura degli Umiliati, e alle origini Braida del Guercio...<sup>13</sup>

Trasferendo al linguaggio questa descrizione si ottiene l'effetto-diodo, come osservando dall'alto una pila accatastata ma trasparente di strati fonetici e semantici.

\*

Operativamente, al fine di sfuggire all'*impasse* delle dicotomie, è forse possibile suggerire una riflessione capace di coniugare cinque concetti, aggiungendo a quelli già considerati di *avantesto* e di *movimento del linguaggio nel tempo* i concetti di *poetica*, di *ritmo* e di *intertestualità*. (Anche se la proposta teorica intertestuale, per alcuni aspetti, potrebbe farsi risalire al concetto classico di imitatio o di mimesis, che a sua volta oscillava tra conformatio e commutatio; e quindi saremmo ancora in ambito dicotomico).

Il termine intertestualità appare per la prima volta nel 1966 in un saggio di Julia Kristeva, poi ripubblicato nel 1969 su "Tel Quel". Secondo la definizione della Kristeva: "Ogni testo si costruisce come un mosaico di

citazioni; ogni testo non è che assorbimento e trasformazione di un altro testo". Una definizione che ha le sue radici nell'idea di "dialogicità" di Bachtin<sup>14</sup> e su cui, in seguito, anche Segre si è espresso con molta chiarezza, particolarmente nel saggio "Intertestualità e interdiscorsività nel romanzo e nella poesia" (in Teatro e romanzo. Due tipi di comunicazione letteraria, Einaudi 1984).

Nell'ottica intertestuale la traduzione di poesia o di prosa "alta" o poetica (e nel quinto punto, dedicato al "ritmo", torneremo su questa presunta differenza) non è che assorbimento e trasformazione di un altro testo. Forzando il concetto non è che una lunga citazione di un testo intero in una lingua straniera. Da questa angolatura ci si sottrae alla impostazione tradizionale che assegna alla traduzione il compito impossibile di una riproduzione totale, e si pone in modo nuovo sia il compito del traduttore sia quello della critica della traduzione.

La traduzione di poesia è contemporaneamente produzione e riproduzione, analisi critica e sintesi poetica, rivolta tanto verso il sistema linguistico straniero, quanto verso il proprio. Traduzione poetica, dunque, non come palinsesto nel senso genettiano di scrittura sovrapposta (nella quale è possibile sceverare il testo sottostante, l'ipotesto), ma come risultato di una interazione verbale con un modello straniero recepito criticamente e attivamente modificato.

Riassumendo quanto esposto da Emilio Mattioli negli editoriali dei primi numeri del semestrale di teoria e pratica della traduzione letteraria "Testo a fronte" (dove per la prima volta sono apparsi molti dei saggi contenuti in questo volume), lettura e analisi intertestuale mirano a cogliere in ogni traduzione la dinamica del suo costituirsi dall'originale, e il suo conflitto con esso. La differenza temporale, spaziale, culturale, linguistica viene a delinearci come distanza poetica che pone necessariamente in prospettiva ciò che è estraneo. Nella concezione intertestuale, il rapporto originale-copia (che implica una gerarchia di precedenza, di maggiore importanza dell'originale rispetto alla copia) acquista un'altra dimensione: diviene dialogico, e non è più di rango, ma di tempo. In quanto la traduzione poetica viene a configurarsi come genere letterario a sé, dotato di una propria autonoma dignità. Come scrive A. Berman in *L'épreuve de l'étranger*, "la traduzione non è né una sotto-letteratura (come l'ha considerata il XVI secolo) né una sotto-critica (come l'ha ritenuta il XIX secolo). Ma non è nemmeno una linguistica applicata o una poetica applicata (come si è creduto nel XX secolo). La traduzione è soggetto e oggetto di un sapere proprio. La traduttologia studia questo sapere".

È evidente che l'intera operazione intellettuale che andiamo proponendo non può non giovare della grande tradizione classica e umanistica della retorica<sup>15</sup>, nella convinzione che - trasponendo i problemi teorici relativi alla traduzione nell'orbita di altri fenomeni letterari - se ne faciliti il distacco, o almeno se ne incrinano la esclusiva dipendenza dai grandi

formalismi novecenteschi, in particolare dall'ambito strutturalistico e linguistico-teorico.

L'idea che nella comunicazione ci siano due momenti, uno retorico e uno ermeneutico, comporta che ogni comunicazione sia traduzione. Con questa impostazione siamo all'interno di una concezione "aperta" dell'opera letteraria, convinti che nessun testo possa essere invenzione assolutamente originale. (L'assoluto monologismo sarebbe equivalente alla incomunicabilità)<sup>16</sup>. Se dunque in ogni opera letteraria c'è il riflesso di altre opere - *sub specie* di calchi, prestiti, rifacimenti, citazioni - e quindi è in corso un dialogo con parole già dette, non si vede perché questo dialogo non possa trovare ulteriore svolgimento nella traduzione. Non si traduce infatti da una lingua ad un'altra, ma da un testo a un altro. E la disparità, il dislivello inevitabile tra autore e traduttore - che è una forma particolare del dislivello sempre esistente tra chi parla o scrive e chi ascolta o legge, anche all'interno della stessa lingua - sono la condizione medesima della libertà e della conoscenza<sup>17</sup>. È dunque motivo per noi di particolare tristezza rilevare come oggi in Italia il primo avversario di questa impostazione teorica sia proprio il teorizzatore - quarant'anni fa - dell'"opera aperta". Ma l'autore del *Trattato di semiotica*, lo si sa, ama i paradossi: vent'anni dopo avere indotto al fallimento letterario i suoi compagni di gioventù, autori di improbabili "opere aperte", giunse al successo internazionale con l'opera che "più chiusa non si può": opera che - per altro - chi scrive considera il più grande romanzo illuministico del secondo Novecento.

Con le idee sulla traduzione sostenute da Eco non si esce dalle dicotomie e dai dogmatismi si continua ad oscillare tra Croce e Jakobson nella convinzione che la poesia sia intraducibile. Cerchiamo un'altra volta ancora di impostare in modo diverso la questione volgendo al concetto di "poetica". Secondo Luciano Anceschi, "la riflessione che gli artisti e i poeti esercitano sul loro fare, indicandone i sistemi tecnici, le norme operative, le moralità, gli ideali" è la poetica. Nell'ottica della intertestualità, la traduzione letteraria è dunque il rapporto tra due poetiche, quella dell'autore tradotto e quella del traduttore. Come rileva Mattioli, Peter Szondi nel suo studio sul sonetto 105 di Shakespeare tradotto da Paul Celan<sup>18</sup> identifica la poetica della traduzione di Celan nel verso "In der Beständigkeit, da bleibt mein Vers geborgen", che rende il verso shakespeariano "Therefore my verse to constancy confined". La costanza, che è il tema del sonetto di Shakespeare, diventa nella traduzione di Celan il fattore costitutivo del verso. Szondi compie quindi un acutissimo rilievo di poetica che porta ad una comprensione tutta interna della traduzione. E ciò accade con Giorgio Orelli traduttore di Goethe e con Giaime Pintor traduttore di Rilke, con Massimo Mila traduttore delle *Affinità elettive* o con Paola Capriolo traduttrice de *La Morte a Venezia*<sup>19</sup>. In buona sostanza con quelle che Henri Meschonnic definisce le "traduzioni-testo" (a esempio egli cita S. Gerolamo, Lutero, Pasternak, Ezra Pound, Robert Graves, Paul Celan, Baudelaire come traduttori) distinguendole dalle traduzioni-non-

testo destinate a deperire rapidamente.

Mattioli invita inoltre a rileggere il commento di Valéry alla sua traduzione delle *Bucoliche*<sup>20</sup> per scoprire come il modo in cui il poeta del *Cimetière marin* prospetta il rapporto tra originale e traduzione tolga ogni rigidità all'atto traduttivo accantonando ogni idea di copia, di rispecchiamento, e quindi lo qualifichi in tutta la sua dignità. E questo proprio perché propone un rapporto poetico, un rapporto tra due poetiche, fra due momenti costruttivi, fra due processi, non fra due risultati definitivi e fermi. Una posizione, questa, ampiamente condivisa anche da Henri Meschonnic nel suo *Poétique du traduire* (1999). Sostiene Mattioli in *Studi di poetica e retorica*<sup>21</sup>: "E' proprio sull'abbandono di ogni posizione normativa che si gioca la possibilità di dare una impostazione nuova ai problemi della traduzione e al loro studio. Non ha nessun interesse continuare a discutere se si possa o non si possa tradurre, partendo dall'idea di traduzione come copia perfetta che per principio non si dà". Questa svolta<sup>22</sup> è analoga a quella avvenuta in campo estetico quando cambiò la domanda essenzialistica "che cosa è l'arte?" in quella fenomenologica "come è l'arte?". E così come la domanda fenomenologica relativa all'arte consentì il recupero pieno delle poetiche, dei generi letterari, della tecnica artistica, del discorso sugli stili ecc., disincagliando la critica dalla alternativa rigida fra poesia e non poesia, allo stesso modo la proposta di considerare la traduzione letteraria in tutta la sua non riducibile complessità, sottrae il discorso sulla traduzione all'*impasse* delle alternative secche, dicotomiche e/o giocherellone<sup>23</sup>.

Se si possa o non si possa tradurre poesia; se si possa o non si possa, o peggio, se sia lecito o meno tentare di "riprodurre" in traduzione lo stile di un autore: sono queste le domande che consideriamo assolutamente superate. Come considera Mattioli nel saggio introduttivo all'edizione italiana dell'opera di Apel: "E' evidente che la lezione da ricavare non è certo quella della negazione dell'apporto della linguistica al problema del tradurre, bensì della pretesa di alcuni linguisti di ridurre il problema ad una sola dimensione, ad una disciplina soltanto. La nostra è dunque una idea aperta della traduzione letteraria, una ripresa in chiave attuale della grande riflessione della Frühromantik sulla traduzione come compito senza fine, nella forte consapevolezza della presenza di una molteplicità di variabili nel processo traduttivo e della ineliminabilità del tempo che, solo, dà alla ricerca sul tradurre complessità, fascino e significato".

Quanto al concetto di ritmo, per noi particolarmente attuale - si veda il volume *Ritmologia. Il ritmo del linguaggio. Poesia e traduzione*, apparso nel 2002 per i tipi di Marcos y Marcos - mi limito in questa sede a ricordare i tre fondamentali indirizzi della ricerca: un indirizzo filosofico, un indirizzo filologico-linguistico, un indirizzo poetico.

Nel primo ambito configuriamo i filosofi, che tendenzialmente dovrebbero applicarsi alla categoria della ritmicità in senso ampio, cercando la funzione che il ritmo ha nel mondo. Nel secondo ambito configuriamo i



filologi, che guardano al ritmo cercando anzitutto di definire che cosa esso sia (e qui la *auctoritas* è quella di Beda il Venerabile: “Il ritmo può sussistere di per sé, senza metro; mentre il metro non può sussistere senza ritmo. Il metro è un canto costretto da una certa ragione; il ritmo un canto senza misure razionali”; una definizione che ritroviamo modernamente espressa nel recente *Traité du rythme* di Meschonnic e Dessons: “Il ritmo non è formalista, nel senso che non è una forma vuota, un insieme schematico che si tratterebbe di mostrare o no, secondo l’umore. Il ritmo di un testo ne è l’elemento fondamentale, perché ritmo è operare la sintesi della sintassi, della prosodia e dei diversi movimenti enunciativi del testo”)<sup>24</sup>. Compito dei filologi è dunque di accordarsi sul significato, di studiare la parola, e infine di condurre l’analisi secondo modalità che contemplan la lingua e la storia della lingua.

Con i poeti, infine, ciò che conta del ritmo è il momento in cui esso si fa parola, cioè diventa linguaggio e dunque si realizza attraverso una particolare intonazione, non nel senso di scansione metrica misurata, bensì nel senso eracliteo di un corpo che si fa lingua e discorso (Meschonnic). Poiché il ritmo è soggetto, se un poeta trova il ritmo, trova il soggetto; se non lo trova, i versi che sta scrivendo non sono arte. E questo vale tanto per la scrittura letteraria “originale” quanto per quella in traduzione.

Note:

1 Il cui capitolo essenziale, “L’auberge du lointain”, apparve sul n. 2 di “Testo a fronte” e viene ripresentato in questo volume. La traduzione completa è apparsa nel 1998 presso le edizioni Quodlibet di Macerata.

2 Apparso in prima edizione in volume miscelaneo per le Edizioni Lint di Trieste nel 1973.

3 Nella traduzione rivista da Claude Béguin. (Mentre la prima edizione era stata pubblicata da Sansoni nel 1984, nella traduzione di Ruggero Bianchi).

4 Di entrambe “Testo a fronte” ha pubblicato i passi essenziali (che in questo volume ripresentiamo), rispettivamente nel n. 7 (ottobre 1992) per la I parte, e nel n. 8 (marzo 1993) per la II parte.

5 Tradotto in italiano da Gabriella Rovagnati col titolo e apparso presso Guerini e Associati nel 1990 col titolo *Il manuale del traduttore letterario* nella collana I Testi di “Testo a fronte”.

6 Risposta data da Céline a Louis Pauwels e André Brissaud che nel 1959 lo intervistarono per la televisione francese.

7 L’argomento appare in vari numeri di “Testo a fronte”, e in particolare nel n. 13 (ottobre 1995). L’opera principale di Jean-René Ladmiraal è *Traduire: théorèmes pour la traduction*, Paris, Payot 1979.

8 Avente come sottotitolo *A History of Translation*, il volume apparve nel 1995 a Londra da Routledge ed è stato tradotto in italiano da Marina Guglielmi: *L’invisibilità del traduttore*, Roma, Armando 1999.

9 La traduzione italiana, curata da Riccarda Novello con prefazione di

Emilio Mattioli e una nuova premessa dello stesso Apel è apparsa nel 1997 nella collana “I saggi di Testo a fronte” per i tipi di Marcos y Marcos col titolo *Il movimento del linguaggio*.

10 Gianni D’Elia nella prefazione alla sua traduzione delle *Nourritures terrestres* di André Gide apparsa da Einaudi nel 1994 nella collana Scrittori tradotti da scrittori.

11 Edito nella collana “I saggi di Testo a fronte, ed. Guerini e Associati, 1992.

12 Come osserva Edoardo Zuccato nel saggio intitolato “Testo a fronte” in corso di pubblicazione negli Atti del Convegno tenutosi a Urbino nell’ottobre 2003 sul tema Editoria e Traduzione, “Eco non poteva scegliere un esempio più infelice, vista la disastrosa situazione testuale dell’opera shakespeariana, di cui non solo non esistono autografi, ma neppure una edizione originale di riferimento, al punto che ci sono opere di cui oggi vengono proposte due versioni diverse, entrambe come originali. Un’occhiata anche sommaria alla storia delle edizioni del canone shakespeariano mostrerebbe a chiunque che l’inglese di Shakespeare non è *mai* rimasto lo stesso”.

13 Tradurre, comunemente, si dice oggi. Ma nel Trecento dicevasi volgarizzare, perché la voce tradurre sapeva troppo di latino, e allora scansavansi i latinismi, come poi li cercarono nel Quattrocento, e taluni li cercano ancor oggi; si perché que’ buoni traduttori facevano le cose per farle, e trasportando da lingue ignote il pensiero in lingua nota, intendevano renderle intelligibili a’ più”. E’ questo il famoso attacco del capitolo VIII della *Vita agra* di Luciano Bianciardi, che così sornionamente si conclude: “Ma adesso le più delle traduzioni non si potrebbero, se non per ironia, nominare volgarizzamenti, dacché recano da lingua foresta, che per sé è chiarissima e popolare, in linguaggio mezzo morto, che non è di popolo alcuno; e la loro traduzione avrebbe bisogno d’un nuovo volgarizzamento”. Inutile sottolineare che la “lingua foresta” chiarissima e popolare da cui si traduce è l’inglese — o meglio ancora l’americano di Henry Miller e Saul Bellow; mentre il linguaggio mezzo morto in cui si traduce è l’italiano, non appartenente — così come è venuto letterariamente configurandosi - a popolo alcuno.

14 Precursore del concetto di intertestualità (senza mai aver menzionato il termine) Bachtin — come è noto — focalizza il concetto di parodia come fenomeno dialogico. Osserva F. Stella in “Testimonianze” nn. 384-5, aprile-maggio 1996, facendo riferimento al celebre saggio di Todorov su Bachtin (originale francese 1981, — qualsiasi punto se ne consideri - può leggersi tanto verso l’avanti’ (dai pre-testi al testo), quanto nel senso opposto (dal testo ai pre-testi). Nel processo intertestuale si ha a che fare con una dinamica effettiva, in cui assumono pari importanza sia le modificazioni imposte al testo dalle sue matrici pre-testuali, sia quelle indotte nei pre-testi dall’inserimento del nuovo arrivato nella rete intertestuale. La creazione di ogni nuovo testo modifica l’assetto relazionale dell’intero sistema di testi (e discorsi) a cui esso fa riferimento: da questo momento in

avanti, anche i testi preesistenti ne risultano modificati (dunque influenzati), se è vero che la loro realtà si esprime nella dimensione dialogica indicata da Bachtin. Ogni nuovo testo, con la propria costituzione, determina i propri determinanti, legge e modifica i testi passati, pronto ad essere a sua volta letto e modificato dai testi a venire. Il testo *produce* i suoi antecedenti". Di particolare interesse in questo consesso di filologi germanici può essere quest'ultima considerazione di Pasero: "Il paradosso per cui il testo posteriore modifica il precedente (ovvero: il derivato legge la fonte) non è sempre dato in questa sua drastica forma: esso si impone con particolare vigore solo quando — all'incirca a partire dalla fine del Medioevo, per quanto riguarda la tradizione culturale dell'Occidente — si delinea una ideologia del distacco dalla lettura dei testi come *auctoritates* da citare e glossare, e nel contempo si teorizza e si pratica un loro impiego più 'creativo'. Tale spostamento d'accenti trova un corrispettivo nel riconoscere a tutti i testi (anche ai 'nuovi', dunque) il diritto di comportarsi come individualità autonome, che entrano con pari chances nell'agone letterario". Dal nostro punto di vista, ovviamente, quando ci si riferisce a "tutti" i testi, compresi i "nuovi", il pensiero corre *in primis* alle traduzioni-testo (relativamente alle quali rimandiamo alla nota 25).

17 L'idea che nella comunicazione ci siano due momenti, uno retorico e uno ermeneutico, comporta che ogni comunicazione sia traduzione.

18 Da noi pubblicato su "Testo a fronte" n. 2.

19 A riguardo Henri Meschonnic distingue tra traduzioni-non-testo, destinate a deperire rapidamente, e traduzioni-testo - come quelle di S. Gerolamo, Lutero, Pasternak, Ezra Pound, Robert Graves, Paul Celan, Baudelaire - destinate a restare, per l'appunto, come testi.

20 Da noi pubblicato su "Testo a fronte" n. 3, ottobre 1991, per le cure di Giovanni Lombardo.

21 Modena, Mucchi, 1983.

22 Se si possa o non si possa tradurre poesia; se si possa o non si possa, o peggio, se sia lecito o meno tentare di "riprodurre" in traduzione lo stile di un autore: sono queste le domande che - come comitato direttivo di "Testo a fronte" - consideriamo assolutamente superate.

23 Considera Mattioli nel saggio introduttivo all'edizione italiana di *Literarische Übersetzung* di Apel: "È evidente che la lezione da ricavare non è certo quella della negazione dell'apporto della linguistica al problema del tradurre, bensì della pretesa di alcuni linguisti di ridurre il problema ad una sola dimensione, ad una disciplina soltanto. La nostra è dunque una idea aperta della traduzione letteraria, una ripresa in chiave attuale della grande riflessione della Fruhromantik sulla traduzione come compito senza fine, nella forte consapevolezza della presenza di una molteplicità di variabili nel processo traduttivo e della ineliminabilità del tempo che, solo, dà alla ricerca sul tradurre complessità, fascino e significato"

24 A riguardo si vedano anche, nel già citato volume *Ritmologia*, gli interventi di Emilio Mattioli e di chi scrive. Una impostazione teorica che trova una sicura fonte in E. Benveniste, *Problemi di linguistica generale*, trad. di M. Vittoria Giuliani, Il Saggiatore, Milano, 1994, p.396.

***The Translation of Poetry as an Autonomous  
Literary Genre***

by Franco Buffoni

“I wonder” asked L. F. Céline in the letter to M. Hindus of May 15<sup>th</sup>, 1947, “ how can they compare me to Henry Miller, who is translated?, while everything is a question of the intimacy of the language not to mention the emotional output of style...”

Style, for Céline, was therefore “untranslatable,” just as poetry was “untranslatable” for Benedetto Croce.

These theoretical positions, which play on the assumption of the uniqueness and irreproducibility of the work of art, end up denying the translatability of poetry and “high” prose. Such conceptions are the expression of an idealism that is particularly outdated nowadays, against which Italian aesthetics of a neo-phenomenological bent (from Banfi to Anceschi to Formaggio to Mattioli) have fought for three decades at least (victoriously, I would say).

It all started with the observation that the dichotomies (faithful/unfaithful; faithful to the letter/faithful to the spirit; *ut orator/ut interpres; verbum/sensus*; “traductions des poètes/traductions des professeurs”) – from Cicero to Mounin – inevitably lead to a *cul de sac*, which puts, on the one hand, the untranslatability of “style” and of the poetic “ineffable,” and on the other hand, the conviction that it is possible to transmit just the content. Naturally the fact that it is possible to transmit *just* the content is a pure abstraction, but it is where you get starting from both “idealistic” and “formalistic” assumptions.

I don’t think that the dichotomous situation of *impasse* changes by analysing the academic argument between Meschonnic and Ladmiral, *alias* between *sourciers* and *ciblistes*, or between a naturalizing “target-oriented” tendency, which would push the text toward the foreign reader “naturalizing” it, and an alienating “source-oriented” tendency that would drag the foreign reader toward the text.

According to this kind of thought, the clash between schools of translation would resemble the one that exists in the world of art restoration: to show it as much as possible, or hide it as much as possible.

If we set aside the fondness that certain definitions may elicit as opposed to others, I believe it is clear that — if we continue with a dichotomous layout — we only add new pairs — like domestication/estrangement, visibility/invisibility, violability/inviolability to those of previous centuries: liberty/faithfulness, betrayal/assent, fluency/literalness. This is what happens with *The Translator’s Invisibility* of Lawrence Venuti despite the fact that his constant reference to Schleiermacher and the hermeneutic school inspired by him is certainly of a very high level.

“How then, can we reproduce the style?” The heart of the matter, in my opinion, is in the verb used to ask the question: reproduce. Because literary translation cannot be reduced conceptually to a mere reproduction of a text; it should rather be considered as a process, which sees not an “original” and a “copy” move through time and possibly bloom and flourish again, but two texts equally endowed with artistic dignity.

*The Movement of Language* by Friedmar Apel is a fundamental study in this regard. The concept of “movement” in language comes from the necessity of deeply analysing the so-called language of departure before embarking on the translation of a literary text.

The idea is commonly accepted for the so-called language of arrival. No one, in fact, casts any doubts on the need to constantly retranslate the classics in order to adapt them to the transformations that language continuously undergoes. The so-called departure text, on the other hand, is usually viewed as a monument — immobile in time — marmoreal and rustproof. And yet, it too is moving in time, because the words which compose it are also moving semantically in time, as well as the syntactic and grammatical structures and so on.

Essentially, what is being proposed is to consider the classical or modern literary text to be translated not as an immobile rock in the sea, but as a floating platform, where the translator works on the live body of the text, but the text itself is in constant transformation, or precisely, moving in time. In this view, the aesthetic dignity of the translation appears as the fruit of a meeting between equals (the author and the translator) fated to cause the traditional dichotomous pairs to fall away, since it is aimed at removing all stiffness from the act of translation, by giving its product an intrinsic autonomous dignity as *text*. This principle was already anticipated by Blanchot through the image of the “solemn drift of literary works.”

You can go so far as to affirm that the movement of the language in time, during this process of literary translation, begins even before the drafting of the “definitive” version of the “original,” when it is possible for the translator to access the “pre-text” (that is, all those documents from which the “definitive” text takes shape).

In this way, the translator takes possession of the path of growth and germination of the text in its various phases. In this regard, a linguist may speak of the formativity of the text; while a poet may speak of sympathetic adherence, on the part of the translator, not so much to the finished text, but to the myriad of emotional cells that made it possible.

The text, therefore, moves toward the future but also toward the past if we take into account the “pre-texts.” Think of the eight thousand sheets which gave rise to the four hundred pages of Céline’s *Voyage au bout de la nuit*, or of the *Epiphanies* from which Joyce’s *Portrait* descends, or the *Cahiers* upon which *La Recherche du temps perdu* is formed ... All this in the awareness of the stratification of historical languages. It is a concept that Luciano Bianciardi exemplifies with “architectonic” clarity at the beginning of his

*La Vita Agra (Sour Life)*, when he describes the building that houses the library of Grosseto. Previously it had been the teaching house of the Companions of Jesus, and before the Convent of the Humbled, and even before the Braidense Library...

By transferring this description to language, you obtain the diode effect, which is like seeing from high a heap of piled up but transparent phonetic and semantic layers. This is why I consider the translation of poetry as an autonomous literary genre, according to a tradition that sees in its development Thomas Sébillet in the 16<sup>th</sup> century (Mounin reminds us that, according to Sébillet, translation at that time was considered “*parmi les genres littéraires en vogue*”), and Jiri Levy, who in the early Sixties of the 20<sup>th</sup> century published in Prague *Umeni Prekladu*, a fundamental essay the subtitle of which is quite meaningful: “*Theorie einer Kunstgattung*”, that is to say “theory of a literary genre” .

*Traumatic Translation: Levi's "Ancient Mariner" from  
English to Italian—and Back Again*

by Lina Insana

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Introduction

**H**olocaust survivors, returning home after liberation and the long homeward odysseys that followed, soon found themselves prey to a new conflict: between the "burning need" to tell of their brutalizing experience and a profound confusion over how to go about representing its singular and unspeakable events. This crisis of representation stemmed, in part, from specific aspects of the Final Solution, which deployed tactics of cruel dehumanization, the debasement of significative language, and the eradication of all subject hood and agency, not to speak of unheard-of physical hardships, slavery, and torture. The result is an unbearable proximity between the *Lager's* new reality and the limits of our imaginative capacities. As Terrence Des Pres has theorized, "what we experience, symbolically, in spirit only, survivors must go through, in spirit *and* in body. In extremity, states of mind become objective, metaphors tend to actualize, the word becomes flesh" (174).

When traditional literary figures are no longer appropriate as an expressive strategy, what recourse does the survivor-writer have? Levi's response to the incommensurate communicative environments of Auschwitz and the world of survival grew out of his belief that effective communication was fundamental to the human condition.<sup>1</sup> As such, at the heart of his testimonial project was an attempt to convey the reality of the camps by recoding its various sign systems for "gli altri," who had not been there to experience it for themselves; in other words, to translate it. The translational metaphor for Holocaust testimony is particularly apt in Levi's case because of his consistent attention to language issues in his writing, his focus on the *Lagerjargon*<sup>2</sup> as a constituent element of the *univers concentrationnaire*, and his own considerable translation work.<sup>3</sup>

Across Levi's testimonial *oeuvre*, translation acts<sup>4</sup> become textual sites of survivor hood, where processes of testimony and aspects of the survivor's

condition are explored in complex and traumatically repetitive ways, mirroring the trauma of the experience, itself. Another notable aspect of Levi's translations is that they are often intentionally unfaithful, representing an unsettling or even a reversal of the source text. This undermining foregrounding of the texts that Levi chooses to appropriate and translate within the space of his ostensibly "original" testimonial production should not be inscribed within a Bloomian "anxiety of influence" directed toward the figures of Dante Alighieri and Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Rather, this author's portrayal of translation *en abyme* figures his attempt to reverse the Auschwitz source text and overcome its arrogant and omnipotent "authors." Levi's practice of manhandling his source texts in the service of a larger personal and literary program reveals nothing less than a reassertion of the subject hood so diminished in the *univers concentrationnaire*. If, as Shoshana Feldman writes, "History is the 'original,' the writings—its translations" (40), Levi's practice is indicative of a preoccupation with not only translating, but reversing the source text of the Holocaust event.

Levi's use of four verses of Samuel Taylor Coleridge's *Rime of the Ancient Mariner* (1817) is exemplary of this general tendency in his *oeuvre*. As we shall see, Levi's traumatic return to the text and its protagonist places the source text's preoccupation with the transmission of trauma *en abyme*, foregrounding Levi's and Coleridge's common themes of transmission, translation, and survivor guilt. Within this context, however, Levi makes changes to the text that simultaneously reassert his authorial agency (and thus his subject hood) and recast Coleridge's text as a testimonial utterance unique to Levi's experience.

My comments in this essay will focus in particular on Levi's 1984 poem "Il superstite" ("The Survivor"), a text whose analysis allows us to comment not only on the role of translation in Levi's authorial strategies, but also on particular problems that this poem—with its embedded (mis) translation of Coleridge—posed for its American translator, Ruth Feldman. Faced with an exercise of circular translation of the kind described by Umberto Eco in *Experiences in Translation* (40),<sup>5</sup> Feldman's decision to return to Coleridge's original verses effaced the fact, and thus the implications, of Levi's own mediation of Coleridge.

### ***The Ancient Mariner as Holocaust Survivor***

According to Marco Belpoliti (21), Primo Levi was most likely introduced to Coleridge's "Rime of the Ancient Mariner" in 1964, when Beppe Fenoglio's translation of it was published by Einaudi; we can trace Levi's public references to the poem more or less to this same period. Both in the preface to the 1966 theatrical production of *Se questo è un uomo* (cited in Anissimov 471)<sup>6</sup> and in the "Cromo" chapter of *Il sistema periodico* (1974) Levi compares himself affirmatively to the Ancient Mariner. In the first case, the terms of comparison revolve around the duties of the interlocutor (or the



theatrical audience) to come to a conclusion based on the survivor's "tale," while in "Cromo" Levi's focus is his urgent need to purify himself, to rid himself of the albatross hanging around his own neck through storytelling.

Though these paraphrastic references to the Ancient Mariner character date to 1966, his explicit citation and translation of one specific four-verse stanza brought this affinity to its culmination in the last few years of his life, inspiring not only the 1984 poem "Il superstite," but the title of its entire collection, *Ad ora incerta* (1984), and the *incipit* of his last book, *I sommersi e i salvati* (1986): "Since then, at an uncertain hour,/ That agony returns:/ And till my ghastly tale is told,/ This heart within me burns" (vv. 582-85). The consistency with which Levi returns to the Coleridge text and its protagonist challenges us to reckon with their importance as figures for Levi's testimonial project. Moreover, Levi's active mediation of his source text demands that this reckoning occur on the terrain of translation, both on the level of theme (the citing, recoding and traumatic retelling that are central to Coleridge's text), and on the formal level (the specific acts of citation and [mis] translation that occur within the textual space of Levi's poem).

### "Il superstite"

The first line of the oft-cited Coleridge passage (v. 582) is reproduced *tale quale*, as the first verse of Levi's poem: "*Since then, at an uncertain hour*". The second line is Levi's translation of the first, faithfully done, and represented in regular type: "Dopo di allora, ad ora incerta." This is followed in the third verse by a close translation of Coleridge's next line (v. 583), "That agony returns" ("Quella pena ritorna"), and then a significantly altered rendering of the next two verses, to which we will soon return.

Remarkably, despite critical unanimity regarding the role of the Fenoglio translation in familiarizing Levi with the poem, Levi's translation of the verses from the "Rime" is clearly original. Fenoglio's translation of vv. 582-85 reads: "Da quel momento, a un'ora imprecisa,/ Quell'agonia mi torna;/ E fino a che non ho detta la mia storia/ Di morti, dentro mi brucia il cuore." Levi's version, instead, reads: "Dopo di allora, ad ora incerta,/ Quella pena ritorna,/ E se non trova chi lo ascolti/ Gli brucia in petto il cuore." Of particular note in a casual comparison between the source text and Fenoglio's and Levi's translation of it is the fact that the former's addition of "Di morti" in verse 585—made, one assumes, to approximate Coleridge's original tetrameter—does not materialize in Levi's translation, leading us to believe that Levi was translating from Coleridge directly and not from Fenoglio's 1964 translation. As we shall soon see, Levi's omission of Fenoglio's unfaithful reference to death provides not only textual proof of his direct relationship to the Coleridge source text, but also helps to interrogate ostensibly clear distinctions between life and death, "sommersi" and "salvati."

Starting with v. 6, Levi's "Il superstite" then makes a transition from the Coleridge source text and his interpretation of it to a more properly "origi-

nal” segment (vv. 6-13) describing the “sommersi” that the poem’s survivor “persona” will soon address. By then admonishing the “gente sommersa” in verses 14-20, this persona ostensibly places himself in the diametrically opposed category of the “salvati,” who must defensively account for their survival to both the “sommersi”—the audience to which the quoted segment is addressed—and to the poem’s broader audience of outsiders who, privy to both sides of the dialogue, are placed in the position of judge. As such, the author sets up a seemingly neat distinction between survivors and their dead companions, complete with an implied dialogue within the survivor persona’s monologue that presents both points of view: “ ‘Indietro, via di qui, gente sommersa,/ Andate. Non ho soppiantato nessuno,/ Non ho usurpato il pane di nessuno,/ Nessuno è morto in vece mia. Nessuno./ Ritornate alla vostra nebbia./ Non è mia colpa se vivo e respiro/ E mangio e bevo e dormo e vesto panni’ ” (vvs. 14-20).

This segment, enclosed entirely in quotation marks, is characterized by a repetition of negative clauses containing “Non” and “Nessuno.” Not only is this negational structure an example of Freud’s affirming negations,<sup>7</sup> but its repetitive cadence constitutes, in microcosmic form, the sort of traumatic repetition that Levi’s use of Coleridge’s “Rime” and his testimonial work represent on more global levels.<sup>8</sup> It is precisely this combination of repetition and negation that aids Levi in portraying the dialogue within a monologue between the two parts of a divided survivor self. The affirming negations, in this context, have the striking effect of validating the accusations of the “sommersi,” even while presenting the “salvati”’s opposing—and seemingly dominant—point of view. Furthermore, the rhetorical strategy of redundancy suggests that this implicit “dialogue” is a repeating one that the surviving subject must enact over and over again. In the recent opinion of Giorgio Agamben, Levi’s poem is indicative of his refusal to accept “fino in fondo le conseguenze” of individual survivor guilt, and its poetic persona representative of one who “lotta tenacemente contro di esso” (83).

But Levi makes two significant changes to Coleridge’s original in his own loose translation (vv. 4-5) that displace him with regard to this neatly divided dichotomy of the “drowned” and the “saved.” This transitional segment that bridges the two introductory verses of faithful translation and the original verses beginning at v. 6 in effect creates a space of many ambiguities: between faithful and unfaithful translation, between the giving and the receiving of testimony, between survival and death. First, the focus on the Mariner’s first-person tale in Coleridge’s v. 584 (“And till *my* ghastly *tale* is told”) has been shifted in Levi’s rewriting to the search for an active listener: “E se non *trova* chi lo *ascolti*”. By emphasizing the necessity of finding an interlocutor (through the addition of the active verb *ascoltare*), a witness to the survivor’s testimony, Levi establishes an interactive model of narrative responsibility. In this model, the living must speak for those who did not survive. As Levi will later explain in the “La vergogna” chapter of *I sommersi e i salvati*, “[n]oi toccati dalla sorte abbiamo cercato, con maggiore o minore

sapienza, di raccontare non solo il nostro destino, ma anche quello degli altri, dei sommersi, appunto...Parliamo noi in loro vece, per delega" (65). Implicit in this model is the fact that the weight of responsibility must be distributed among speakers and listeners alike at many different levels, as the "salvati" must become witnesses to the atrocities committed against the "sommersi" and the survivor's listener-reader must, in turn, bear witness to that which is recounted to him by the survivor. It is not enough merely to tell, but the reader-listener after the fact must also be a willing interlocutor and witness, mirroring and repeating the narrative testimonial act of the survivor to create an infinite chain of witnessing and telling, listening and witnessing. Similarly, for Coleridge there is a tendency to "dissolv[e] the distinction between the roles of speaker and audience: both here are equally in thrall to the tale" (Eilenberg 287-88). For both the Holocaust survivor and the protagonist of the "Rime," each link in the transmission of the tale is simultaneously narrator and narratee, yet another example of the manner in which the representation *en abyme* of the transmissive act shines a particularly bright meta-narrative light on the process of witnessing. Referring to the Coleridge poem, Eilenberg identifies this phenomenon as a thematic "doubling" of the protagonist in that "each person who hears the story becomes, like the Mariner, the teller of that story" (277). For Eilenberg, these textual doubles include the sixteenth-century "mistral who narrates the poem that the antiquarian would gloss" (291), as well as the Hermit and Wedding Guest who are the Mariner's most immediate interlocutors. Upon close inspection, it becomes clear that Levi's own poem shares Coleridge's predilection for textual doubles, though not as explicit as those present in the "Rime." Ultimately, the poet and his survivor persona are at once elements and propagators of the poem's doubling mechanism: a poet who quotes Coleridge's original English text, who knows but sets aside a good-faith Italian translation of Coleridge (Beppe Fenoglio's), who puts forth his own translation of Coleridge; and a survivor, who, in his vehement denial of any wrongdoing against the "gente sommersa," implicitly cites the charges of his accusers. Even the final line of the poem constitutes another layer of this game of doubling through citation, as the survivor translates Dante ("e mangia e bee e dorme e veste panni" [*Inferno* 33.141]), once again making revealing changes of person and perspective ("E mangio e bevo e dormo e vesto panni" [v. 20]), to invoke the double of the traitor Branca D'Oria.<sup>9</sup>

But in keeping with poetry's role as the space in which this author works through his more conflicted responses to survivor hood, Levi's unfaithful translation of the fourth verse also serves to undermine this very narrative model whereby interlocutors, and therefore witnesses, are created within the textual space of testimony. While Coleridge's main verb is decidedly indicative ("And till my ghastly tale *is told*"), Levi's version is constructed on the first part of a hypothetical phrase, presenting the possibility of an audience in the subjunctive mode—possible, but not certain: "E se non trova chi lo *ascolti*." Levi's translation of Coleridge, then, prompts us to ques-

tion his faith in the very narrative-testimonial model that he has constructed.

The second change in Levi's reworking of the original poem involves a shift from the first person ("And till *my* ghastly tale is told/ This heart within *me* burns.") to the third: "E se non *trova* chi lo ascolti/ *Gli brucia* in petto il cuore." (vv. 4-6). By displacing the subject position away from the lyric, authoritative first person, Levi problematizes his own status as survivor, and thus, in effect, his own position in this interactive model of witnessing. In addition to the splitting and doubling effects of this move that we have already outlined, Levi's decision to speak of the survivor in third-person terms would seem to place him at least one remove from the survivor's ostensibly authoritative position, which Levi begins to question in his later years.<sup>10</sup> According to his later thought, survivors like Levi must take on the role of witness even though that role's validity is diminished by their very survival: "[Quello dei sopravvissuti] è stato un discorso 'per conto di terzi,' il racconto di cose viste da vicino, non sperimentate in proprio. La demolizione condotta a termine, l'opera compiuta, non l'ha raccontata nessuno, come nessuno è mai tornato a raccontare la sua morte" (*I sommersi e i salvati* 65).

This weakened view of the authority of survivor hood is only confirmed later on in the poem when Levi overtly quotes the survivor's defensive rebuke of the submerged. By taking the survivor's words out of the poet's mouth and citing them as the words of an unnamed survivor persona, Levi further develops the narrative duality that is set up by his translation of Coleridge's first-person stance to a third-person narrative position. But this technique is suggestive of far more than a dantesque poet-pilgrim relationship between Levi's writer and survivor identities. Rather, Levi's explicit quotation of the survivor's defensive words *as if he did not own them* amounts to a decision to position himself definitively outside of the neat drowned vs. saved dichotomy that he himself has created. This rhetorical technique suggests a survivor who is neither "sommerso" nor "salvato"; not prey to the true depths of the Nazi atrocities, and yet not wishing, in this moment of the poem, to accept the survivor's words, his responsibility, or his guilt. In effect, Levi establishes himself as a border figure who stands astride these two opposing zones of the moral system of Auschwitz—drowned and saved—but recognizes that it is his very identification with *both* survivor hood and death that warrants his occupancy of an entirely different intermediary zone.

### **"The Survivor"**

"Il superstite," with all of its layers of textual and narrative transmission, was itself translated into English by Levi's longtime acquaintance and translator Ruth Feldman.<sup>11</sup> First published in 1986 and reprinted in 1988,<sup>12</sup> the English-language translation of "Il superstite" strikingly reveals the tension inherent in the translator's attempt to faithfully render a number of different and often competing source texts: Coleridge's "Rime," Levi's "Il superstite," and, ultimately, the Holocaust, itself.

The Feldman translation of this poem, entitled "The Survivor," repre-

sents Levi's translation of v. 582 ("Dopo di allora, ad ora incerta") as the first verse of the new poem. This is followed by a direct citation of vv. 581-85 of the English-language Coleridge poem, *tali quali*, as verses 2-5, eliding Levi's changes to the Coleridge source text. In both published versions, these verses are set apart graphically from the rest of the poem, both in terms of the size of their font and by a space between verses 5 ("This heart within me burns") and 6 ("Once more he sees his companions' faces"); in the 1986 epigraphic version this separation is rendered still more striking by the fact that the first 5 verses are all in italics, implying that as a whole they represent a direct and faithful translation (or citation) of some original text, either Coleridge's or Levi's.

In both of Feldman's versions of the poem, the Coleridge citation stands in epigraph to the rest of the poetic text, but is not incorporated into it, nor is the voice of the Ancient Mariner-*cum*-survivor ever conflated with the survivor-persona's voice. As a result, the imagined dialogue that moves the second part of the poem becomes a very different kind of conversation, one where the ownership of the survivor position is not formally problematized within the poem's formal structure. The poet here can simply be said to have adopted a "voice" of anxiety vis à vis the survivor's condition, but without linking that persona textually or graphically to the Ancient Mariner character who in Levi's version takes on far more than mere emblematic value for the survivor persona in question. With the effacement of Levi's violence to the Coleridge text comes a negation of the complexity of Levi's relationship to the Ancient Mariner character inherent in his explicit and forceful rhetorical distancing from that character in the Italian poem.

Feldman's return to Coleridge's original text suggests a refusal to participate in an exercise of circular translation, a reticence to acknowledge either the translator's presence in the process of transmission, or the uniqueness of the translational act. Her decision to privilege Coleridge's source text also suggests an underlying anxiety about accuracy in the representation, transmission, and translation of Holocaust texts, and the Holocaust source text in general; Feldman's profound desire to accurately represent the Holocaust signified ultimately manifests itself in the "return" to a pristine, uncorrupted source text. Paradoxically, however, readers of Feldman's English-language translation of Levi's "Il superstite" are given less than the full picture of survivor testimony when they are denied access to Levi's poetic refraction of Coleridge's text, and his use of it to figure the complexities of transmission, translation, and the testimonial process.

Primo Levi's translation of this fragment of Coleridge's "Rime of the Ancient Mariner" and its incorporation into his 1984 poem "Il superstite" reveal the importance of translation as a textual site of meditation on the testimonial process and on the condition of survivor hood. His handling of the Coleridge fragment establishes Levi's agency as a testimonial and poetic subject, and at the same time allows him to perform a complex commentary on his own position of survivor hood between life and death,

testimony and silence. This contrasts sharply with the English-language translation of the poem, where the translator's anxieties about faithfully translating the competing source texts at issue—literary and historical alike—undermine this very complexity.

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## Notes

1. Cf. Levi's essay "Dello scrivere oscuro" in *L'altrui mestiere*.
2. The *lingua franca* of the *univers concentrationnaire*, the *Lagerjargon* was a mixture of all of the national and cultural languages represented in the camp. It contained elements of the sign systems of both victim and oppressor: on one hand, the German, Polish, and Yiddish of the Nazis and their "gray zoner" functionaries, and on the other, "bits and pieces of the languages of the victims" (Gilman 140). Levi's interest in the language of the *Lager* and of the Final Solution spans from *Se questo è un uomo* to the "Comunicare" chapter of *I sommersi e i salvati*.
3. In addition to various projects commissioned by Edizioni Scientifiche Einaudi (notably the four-volume co-translation of *Chimica Superiore Organica*), Levi's published translation work includes *La notte dei Girondini* (Milano: Adelphi, 1976; trans. of Jacob Presser's *De nacht der Girondijnen*), *I simboli naturali* (Torino: Einaudi, 1979; trans. of Mary Douglas' *Natural Symbols*), *Il processo* (Torino: Einaudi, 1983; trans. of Franz Kafka's *Der Prozeß*), *Lo sguardo da lontano* (Torino: Einaudi, 1984; trans. of Claude Lévi-Strauss' *Le regard éloigné*), *La via delle maschere* (Torino: Einaudi, 1985; trans. of Claude Lévi-Strauss' *La vie des masques*), and translations of Heinrich Heine's poetry published in the "Traduzioni" section at the end of *Ad ora incerta*, a collection of Levi's original poetic work (Torino: Garzanti, 1984). Levi was also the author of a number of essays on the topic of translation, in particular three separate pieces written in conjunction with his translation of Franz Kafka's *Der Prozeß* (his introduction to the translation, itself; "Tradurre Kafka;" and

“Una misteriosa sensibilità”) and the essay “Tradurre e essere tradotti.”

4. I define translation act quite broadly, here, as both self-standing translation projects, such as Levi’s translations of Kafka and Presser; and embedded gestures of translations, as is the case in the present study and in Levi’s translation of the 26<sup>th</sup> Canto of Dante’s *Inferno* in the “Canto di Ulisse” chapter of *Se questo è un uomo*.

5. “During a seminar on translation, a colleague of mine gave the students the English version of *The Name of the Rose* (namely, the description of the church portal) and asked them to translate it into Italian (obviously threatening to compare their result with the original). Asked for some advice, I told the students that they were not to be disturbed by the idea that there was an original (in the same sense in which a translator should not be disturbed by the suspicion that there is a Perfect Language, a *reine Sprache*, somewhere in the skies). They had to consider the translation *as if it were the original*, and they had to decide what the purpose of that text was” (emphasis mine).

6. The preface cited by Anissimov on pp. 471-72 as the source of her citation differs significantly from the original Italian. It is unclear from her note whether it is taken directly from the preface or has been adapted together with another source.

7. “Può essere a questo punto scontato citare Freud e le sue negazioni che affermano:

‘Lei domanda chi possa essere questa persona del sogno. Non è mia madre’” (Rosato, “Poesia” 425).

8. Italo Rosato (“Ad ora incerta” 96), Marco Belpoliti (*Primo Levi* 125), and Cesare Segre (xxiv) have all noted Levi’s poetics of repetition, the former two in terms of “ripetizione e accumulazione” and the latter in terms of “anafore.” None, however, have attempted to place Levi’s tendency to repeat phrases and words in the context of traumatic repetition, as I hope to do here.

9. Branca Doria (or d’Oria) (1233-1325) was a Genovese Ghibelline nobleman whom Dante places in the division of Cocytus, the realm of the treacherous, specifically reserved for murderers of guests and friends; his sin is the murder of his father-in-law (Singleton 624).

10. In the essay “La vergogna” (*I sommersi e i salvati*), Levi discusses at length the feelings of guilt that he and his fellow survivors experienced after their liberation from the camps. One of the essay’s main themes is Levi’s assertion that the “salvati” who survived to tell about the horror of the Holocaust are the minority, and that it is the majority, those who “hanno toccato il fondo,” who constitute the norm of the Final Solution’s reality. As such, the survivors are not the true witnesses to the horrors of the extermination; rather, the “sommersi” are the only ones who would have been able to truly testify to the extreme capacity for evil of mankind: “sono loro, i ‘mussulmani,’ i sommersi, i testimoni integrali, coloro la cui deposizione avrebbe avuto significato generale” (64).

11. I am grateful to Mrs. Feldman for her generous willingness to discuss her translation of this poem with me in our phone conversation of 26 Feb.



2000; unfortunately, however, she was unable to explain her decisions with regard to this particular passage.

12. Brian Swann collaborated with Feldman on the first translation of Levi's collected poetry, *Shema* (London: Menard Press, 1976, for which the pair won the 1977 John Florio Prize) and as such is listed as a co-translator on the revised and expanded 1988 publication, *Collected poems* (London, Boston: Faber and Faber, 1988). However, according to Myriam Anissimov's 1995 Levi biography, Feldman translated all of the additional poems—including the 1984 "Il superstite" —by herself. This assertion is borne out by the fact that in *Moments of Reprieve*, Feldman's 1986 solo translation of many of Levi's short stories, including those originally printed under Levi's *La stampa* rubric and in 1981's *Lilit*, the same translation of "Il superstite" stands in epigraph to the text.



*Oil on canvas, detail.*

*Lost and Found in Translation:  
A Personal Perspective*

by Rina Ferrarelli

Italians divide their country into three parts, northern, central and southern. Some of the northern and southern so-called dialects are as different from standard Italian as Portuguese or Spanish, and are, like them, separate languages, Italian being a language the immigrants had to learn in school. Those of us from the North and the South--I'm excluding central Italy because all those regions are close to Tuscany which was the source of the language from which Italian evolved and their languages may in fact be true dialects--those of us from the North and the South had to abandon our mother tongue and learn another language, the Italian language, at a very young age.

At the age of five or six, before we left our countries of birth for a foreign country, we were translating from the *mother* tongue into Italian, what I call our *father* tongue. And with it we translated ourselves from the motherland, the folk culture which was either matriarchal or a state between the two, into the fatherland, *la patria*, a national concept and a national project. Today, because of the history we have lived through, we do not like the connotations of the word *fatherland*, but that is what *patria* translates into, the root being from *pater* in Latin. *Pater* became *patre* in my vernacular, *padre* in Italian, *father* in English. Also, the nation *is* patriarchal in its ways. Ethno-linguists might tell us that the countries that use *fatherland*, different as they are among themselves, are probably even more culturally different, or were at one time, from countries whose language has them say *motherland* or *homeland*.

The Italian language and the culture that was imparted with it were used to unify the peninsula and the islands in the twentieth century, and to give all the various tribes a common tongue and a common identification.

It was in fact a kind of naturalization, for in the translation, we lost some aspects of our identities and acquired others. The mother tongue had an intonation, diction and syntax that set us apart from other Italians, even people from the same general area. It not only pinpointed us to a region, but to a particular town. We recognized each other through our speech as through a habit or dress, a costume.

I grew up in San Giovanni in Fiore (Province of Cosenza in the region of Calabria), and I remember coming home from school every day with news of the new tongue I was learning. Guess how we say *marmitta* (pot) in Italian? I would ask my mother, and then quickly answer myself: *Péntola! Frissura* (frying pan) was *padella*, *forgiaru* (blacksmith) *fabbro ferraio!* *Tappini* (slippers) were called *pantófole*, and table cloth which we called *misale* was

called *tovaglia da tavola*. And these differences in vocabulary were not exceptions but the rule. I also brought home words of other lives, for which we had no equivalents and no experience, such as *ananàs* (pineapple), *banana*, *dátteri* (dates). When I went to middle school, where I was taught by teachers who had studied Latin and Greek for many years, I discovered that some of the words in my vernacular were from Greek--*catoia*, *collura*--and that some had retained the ancient pronunciation for the *oi* diphthong *vasilicoi* for *básilico*. Later, when I read *La Divina Commedia*, I learned that some of the meanings still current in my so-called dialect but no longer so in modern Italian were used in Dante's time: *stipare*, for instance, for putting things away in a *stipo* (cupboard).. The language has a vocabulary that's different from Italian, a smattering of French and Germanic words, as well Italian words whose endings are closer to Latin; in addition, we pronounce the first syllable of the word *mamma* as a nasal schwa, and have a nasal tight rendering of other phonemes.

We don't trill or roll our *rs*. We say them against our teeth. Our metaphors are different: while in Italian stir-fried vegetables are *affogati* (drowned) in my mother tongue they're *startled*; our syntax is the same with few exceptions: we use the possessive as a suffix, instead of a separate word before the noun, not *mio padre* (my father), but *pátrema*. Again, when I say my dialect, my vernacular, I mean the spoken, not written tongue, of my home town. Not my province, my region, but my hometown.

Mastering Italian, the living language we had to use at school and with strangers, was the biggest challenge of my life between the ages of five and fifteen, and the beginning of what would turn out to be a long translation, a life-long picaresque journey. As long as I lived in my hometown, I was always translating. One language at school, one at home and in the neighborhood. We were expected to speak Italian with the people from out of town, translating sometimes for them if they did not understand the shopkeepers. It was only when I went away to school at the age of ten to attend a college prep school—my town did not have one at that time—that I switched to Italian for good.

Still, I enjoyed listening to the poetry recited in the mother tongue. I'm thinking of the satirical poems written for *carnevale*, the verses of exaggerated praise improvised for certain new year's celebrations, as well as the serious dialect poetry which was sometimes published in the paper. It's a thrill even today to hear anything literary in that language. An unusual occurrence. It's hard to find poets let alone books. People were discouraged and even punished for speaking the mother tongue, or rewarded, as I was, for using the Italian language correctly, and they were never asked to write in it. The vernacular is by definition unwritten. Even so, some poets chose to write in it. Unfortunately, they seldom found an audience outside of their towns. What Luigi Bonaffini has done in this country in his anthologies of dialect poetry, collections which offer the original mother tongues, as well as the Italian versions and the English, is indeed a rare

treat. These books are collectibles. Dialect poetry, until recently, was marginalized in the Italian culture. For the reasons I mentioned. Italy was perceived to be too fragmented and there was a movement toward union. But also for other more practical reasons. When a poet writes in the Italian language, his work can be read and understood by every Italian. When his work is in his own dialect, not in ours, the rest of us will need notes or a translation into Italian. But it's hard to ignore the thrill, when a work is in your own spoken tongue, the pleasure of the familiar, of the ordinary in an extraordinary setting.

The other huge leap in my picaresque journey was switching from Italian to English after I emigrated. Total immersion was easier in this setting. I lived in a culture and in a household that spoke English—the uncle and aunt with whom I lived for the first two years spoke Italian and did to me at the beginning, but ran the household and communicated with each other and their children in English. And I was fifteen and in school, at St. Justin's High School because my relatives didn't think much of the public high school. And school fills the whole day in this country. After a few days or a week of orientation with a girl named Roberta who knew Italian, I was on my own. In a fog, a dark wood. Fortunately, Sister Marcella, the French teacher, convinced the principal that I'd do better if she tutored me, and took me under her wing teaching me English through French. My school girl French! But I did not know English and she did not Italian. French was the only language we had in common.

Neither French nor Italian, however, helped me with the pronunciation of English vowels, the *a* in *cat*, the *o* in *got* and *i* in *pit* being very difficult. In some other cases I couldn't even hear the difference and, in others, words that were supposed to have the same vowel sound—like a grade school child I was learning groups of related words-- did not when spoken outside the classroom. Not to my ear. At that point, no one mentioned dialectal variations. It was hard to lift words and phrases out of the common run of the spoken language. Anything with *been* and *being*, to give one example, became slurred, and for a long time, I didn't know which word had been used.

For the next two or three years, while I was learning English in school and first hand in the larger American community, I was also learning the unofficial language that some of the older Italians spoke among themselves, including my Aunt Mary, my mother's sister, who was not old, but had emigrated from Italy in her twenties and had not gone to school to learn English. To understand my Aunt and the older Italians, especially my landlady when I was in college, who did not speak English and did not speak Italian, the father tongue, I had to learn the Italian-American dialect which Ferdinando Alfonsi (Almanacco, 1992) has called *Italese*, and which is made up of English words with Italian suffixes. And with English meanings even when the made-up word corresponds to an actual word in the Italian language. I learned that *parkare* means to park; *storo* store, *giobba* job, *renta*

rent, *shoppa* shop, *garbaciù* garbage, *groceria* grocery store--the list could be very long—and that *carro* does not mean *cart*, as in Italian, but automobile, and *fornitura* does not mean supplies or fittings, but furniture. I never spoke this dialect myself, but I needed to know it. My landlady spoke a mixture of an Italian vernacular mixed with this Italian American dialect.

In all of these exchanges, losses and gains. I went to see American movies, and they were no longer dubbed. Although this might seem a gain, I perceived it as a loss. I could no longer lose myself in a movie. I couldn't understand what people were saying or follow the plot. And I was also expected to read American and English books in the original, a long time-consuming process. What an innocent I had been abroad in my own country.

I had read English works in translation as if Alcott, Swift and Shakespeare had written in Italian. I had watched American movies dubbed in Italian and had asked no questions, seen no discrepancies. I never noticed how the lips moved. Or whether the gestures did not go with the words. What if cowboys spoke in long musical sentences instead of monosyllables? I had never heard a cowboy speak English, neither in real life nor in a movie. Didn't know if he spoke a dialect, nor if there were dialects. How was I supposed to know that certain taciturn, reticent types went with certain landscapes? When I came to the States and told my new friends about this wonderful western I had seen, which starred Alan Ladd against the background of gorgeous mountain peaks, and they said, *Shane*, I did not recognize the title. I wasn't sure at first that I was getting through, but even before I mentioned the Italian title--it had been translated into *Il Cavaliere della Valle Solitaria* (The Horseman/ Knight of the Solitary Valley), a title they found amusing because of its length-- I could see from the way their eyes sparkled, the way they talked, that the film had been as moving and attractive in English as it had been in Italian. In this case too, I had not been much aware of the translation, neither of the movie nor of the title. Still, the amazing thing is that the story, and in the case of *Shane*, the nobility of the character and the strong theme came across despite the differences.

I had the same experience discussing the movie *Julius Caesar*, which I had seen in Italian. The famous speeches and the key scenes had all come across. The mediums in this famously well-acted and produced movie had been the drama, the pictures, the force of the personalities brought to the screen by the actors, with the language, even in Italian, acquiring authority from them, aside from what the translator had been able to do, which I was not in a position to judge. I was then the person for which translation is meant. Perhaps this is a commonplace which we sometimes forget. We translate for those who don't know the language.

I am not now that ideal reader/viewer of Shakespeare in Italian. Some excellent translations of Shakespeare in the romance languages don't sound anything like Shakespeare to me. But, then, how could they? Still, they bor-

der on the absurd. And I'm saying this after translating hundreds of Italian poems into English and feeling that I was doing a fairly good job. English has great synthetic power, and Shakespeare is master of syntactic concision, a great inventor of verbs; while the forte of Italian is the strong phrase, the musical phrase.

When I was growing up I never considered translation as one version of the original. I had no idea what the differences between the two might be, the different approaches and complementary results, or that different versions might be needed for different purposes. Despite a spoken vernacular that deviated in major ways from Italian, which was in fact another language; despite the study of Latin and French, I took translations into Italian for granted just as the natives of any place take their language and mores for granted --as the only way something is said and done. No matter what the language, one's way of seeing the world through words becomes the way it is. Translation, in this frame of reference, is seen as the same piece of writing with the very same words but in a different language. I did not entertain the idea that translators have to interpret what they read, and may interpret the same passage differently, or that if a word is ambiguous in one language, the same word might not be in another language. *Carta* can be both paper and map in Italian, but has to be one or the other in English; *sueño* is both sleep and dream in Spanish, but has to be one or the other in English. It's impossible to ignore the context, but even that does not solve all the conundrums. It takes a conscious effort to realize that every piece of literature is another way of seeing, another way of doing, of being, not only of a people, but of a particular person living at a particular time and place-- every experience being filtered through the individual consciousness and sensibility of the author-- and that authors have affected in major ways, if they're Dante, Cervantes, Shakespeare, the language they have chosen or inherited.

Dante chose to write his epic-length poem in the spoken tongue rather than in Latin, the literary language. And he consciously forged a national language out of his own Tuscan dialect. A language all writers had to subsequently learn, regardless of their mother tongue. Alessandro Manzoni, who is given credit for developing the historical novel in the nineteenth century, and for enriching the language of prose, was a northern Italian who started with the language he had learned in school and then, he said, went to Tuscany to rinse it in the waters of the Arno.

Translators not only have ways of reading (first level of interpretation); they have ways of re-creating through their choices (second level of interpretation) character and literary persona, diction and syntax, rhythm and sound, tone. Sometimes they have to invent what their own language does not have to come out with an equivalent. The translation is always the product of a symbiotic relationship, for the translator's interpretation of the original and her sense of her own language, of the language of literature always play a part.

Still, most of us even today ask no questions, or, with a little knowledge, swing to the opposite position and assume the worst, and are quick to cry, *Traduttore traditore* (translator traitor), unaware that in every translation there are losses and gains, and that, broadly speaking, translation is all there is. The original and the translation are both translations, and as such, approximations. Authors translate what they see and feel, the experience of life into the experience of words, structures made of words, choosing out of huge vocabularies, and they may be more or less successful, more or less satisfied. What the authors think they have accomplished, how much they've brought across, can often be different from what readers think. Regardless of how it was, how many versions this version went through, it is now fixed and the words are all a reader has. The reader who is also a translator lets the words take him beyond the words, as close to the experience that inhabits the words and that the words conjure as he's capable of going. He has to try to imagine what the author saw or felt, and it is only when he has a view, that he can re-create the physical and emotional landscapes. A translator has access to the original. For most of us, the approximation that we call translation is all there is. Without it, we wouldn't have the *Bible*, *The Iliad* and *Odyssey*, *The Aeneid*, *The Metamorphoses*, *The Divine Comedy*, Shakespeare's plays, *The Gilgamesh*, *The Tao*, *The Bhagavad Gita*, the great Russian novels, etc. In fact, even with a second and a third language, we would know very little of the world's great literature.

Many of the books I read as a child were in translation. And in many cases, the name of the translator wasn't even in the book-- the exception being Cesare Vico Lodovici, who translated Shakespeare's plays--as if one translator would make the same choices as any other, given an excellent knowledge of both languages! Not only hadn't the readers given much thought to translation, even the people who should've known better had not given much thought to the art. And in Italy, a great many prose writers and poets have also been gifted translators. Sometimes, they too took for granted what they did, and so did their editors and publishers. And if they didn't, they didn't leave us their thoughts about it. In modern times, the list of Italian poet/translators includes two Nobel prize winners, Quasimodo and Montale; as well as Pavese and Sereni, to mention only four.

When I started reading English Literature in college with barely a year of English—through some translation error, I started college at 16-- all of it was equally difficult for me. I had no bias in favor of modern or contemporary works as the American students did, and I made no distinction between the English and American dialect. Likewise, as a child I read *Little Women* and *Gulliver's Travels* in translation and, unlike my children, had no trouble with the language. They had to contend with archaic versions of English, while I read contemporary Italian translations. The strangeness I had encountered had to do with content, with elliptical political and social references rather than with terms and phrases that had become obsolete. Translation into the language of my time had smoothed the way, and had



given me an experience similar to that of the original readers at the time of Swift and Alcott.

The picaresque journey that is translation has continued throughout my life. Not only because learning involves translation; I have been professionally involved with translation for many years, in my work, and as a poet. When I was still in college, I was asked by the poet Sam Hazo, who was one of my English professors at Duquesne University, to translate a few poems of Quasimodo. I did, and that started me on my way, publishing them in *Choice*, a poetry journal edited by John Logan. But that was the beginning and the end for many years. Life intervened. I had no time write or translate when my kids were little. But when I started working, still part-time and at a research job in anthropology with a flexible schedule, my languages came into play again. I read and translated from ethnographies, some of whom were in French, Italian and Spanish. It wasn't until I was through with this project that I started literary translation again. I have since rendered into English hundreds of individual poems, and I have collected some of my translations of modern Italian poets in three books: the *poesie-racconti* of Giorgio Chiesura, who spent two years in various German internment camps during WWII; the lyrics of Leonardo Sinisgalli; and most recently the work of Bartolo Cattafi, a Sicilian poet, forthcoming from Chelsea Editions.

I always translated from Italian into English. For the past year, though, I've undertaken the arduous task of translating my own poetry into Italian. And for reason that I'm trying to fathom, it's proving to be much more difficult, much harder and time consuming than translating into English. After doing so much translating of poetry, some of it nationally recognized, I'm beginning to feel how impossible the task is, how preposterous at times. Utterly necessary—I have to remind myself over and over that I'm doing it for people who don't know English, some of them close friends—and utterly baffling.

I don't know for sure why I feel so differently about translating into Italian. It's true that I have not been back in Italy for several years, and that the language that was fresh in my ear has now become faint. Not that the language of poetry has much to do with the spoken tongue. Still, the point is valid. Also true that I always write in English, think in English, and have done so for decades, and that I seldom have much chance to speak Italian. The most significant reason, perhaps, might have to do with the fact that I'm translating my own poems, work that I feel is finished, that I have abandoned and left behind. Thus, the challenge of reading, digging, understanding, of discovering another persona, of hearing another voice is missing, and this, which should make things easier, make them go faster, slows everything down instead. I'm not terribly interested in going over old poems, in reworking them in another language, even Italian. No, I'm not, not especially. But I *am* doing it. And through it, I'm coming full circle. I'm reversing the process. Writing in English about my childhood in southern Italy, I

had to find ways to say things which did not exist in this culture, I had to interpret my experiences and present them so they could be understood. I'm now exploring the Italian language with a maturity which I did not have in my teens, availing myself, when applicable, of my knowledge of the mother tongue, and also interpreting—for language even without setting is a bearer of culture—the immigrant's American experience for the other side.

## *Translating by the Numbers*

by John DuVal

I was raised in the faith and discipline of the New Criticism, scrutinizing, dissecting, and reassembling that exquisite monument, the poem itself. A frequent implication of the New Criticism was, “There’s only one way to say something and that’s how the great poet said it.” Thus if Keats wrote, “When I have fears that I may cease to be,” he wrote *to be* because *to be* was the perfect expression, far better than *to exist* or *to live*, and *may cease to be* was better than *may die*. It was our job as students to explain why *to be* was best, and woe to the smart aleck who claimed it was best because it rhymed with *charact’ry*.

This approach was useful because it taught us to learn from the masters, how they packed the maximum meaning into every word despite the requirements of meter or rhyme. It was also useful in that we learned to cherish the words of the great craftspeople of our language. Where it failed, I believe, is in not paying due respect to the language itself and the infinite choices it offers of saying almost the same thing, with infinite slight and delightful variations and always a hint that a phrase could be better phrased.

For us translators the New Critical approach is still useful in that it encourages us to study each word and each phrase of an original to learn what the original writer has done to make it so wonderfully what it is. The problem is that it directs us straight to the Slough of Despond, where we stay, sunk and moping unless Faith in the language we are translating into pulls us out. We will not find in English *the* phrase that G.G. Belli, for instance, wrote in Romanesco, the dialect of the people of Rome, but given how slowly our minds work and how vast our language is, we can always discover another phrase like it, and then another, and if we keep looking, we may find a better one than the ones we found before.

I had thought the following translation of a poem by Trilussa, another Romanesco poet, was finally and after much struggle finished when I had this down on paper:

To Mimi

Do you remember our first rendezvous  
behind the Convent House, alone  
together in the cloister? We carved  
each other’s name into the ancient stone  
I wrote, *Fourteen May*,

*Nineteen hundred. Here Carlo kissed Mimi.*  
Twenty years. And yesterday  
as I reread the names and the date,

I found myself regretting  
 the blessed, painful time that slipped away.  
 I saw you once more, just as you had been,  
 wearing a pretty lilac dress. You'd pinned  
 roses in your hair.  
 "Everything fades," I said. "Nothing can stay.  
 The words I chipped from marble with a knife  
 still glitter in the noonday sun,  
 but not enough to summon back to life  
 a thing that's gone."  
 I stood in sorrow there beside the wall,  
 when suddenly I saw another date  
 and other names: "*Rosa and Paul,*  
*August twenty-eight*  
*seventeen hundred twenty-three.*  
 Then I murmured to myself, "Poor Paul,  
 he's worse off than me."

Six months earlier than that version, I had thought the translation was finished, and I had been wrong then. I had translated the Carlo and Mimi of Trilussa's Romanesco into Charley and Mary:

Fui io che scrissi: "Qui  
 Carlo baciò Mimi.  
 Quindici maggio millenovecento."  
 Più de vent'anni! Pensa! Eppure, jeri....

I wrote, *Twelve February,*  
*nineteen hundred.*  
*Here Charley kissed Mary.*

I think it might have been the chance of rhyming *Mary* whimsically with a Romanesco word in the original, *jeri* (*yesterday*), which first inclined me toward the English names. Also I was fascinated by how, in this poem about the passage of time, the poet had handled words that marked off time: months and years, dates. There was a whole hendecasyllabic line for one date, *Quindici maggio millenovecento* (15 May 1900) rhyming interestingly with *convento*, and *ventotto agosto* (28 August) rhyming with *posto* and *millesettecentoventitré* (1723) rhyming with *me*. In English it would have been easy to rhyme *May* (*maggio*) with *yesterday*, but I wanted a cleverer time rhyme, one that reflected Trilussa's flair for words: *February/Mary*. What difference did the month make when everybody knows that given the right weather in Rome, the noonday sun can glitter as brightly in February as in May?

But with the name *Charley* I was missing something. Trilussa had been *Trilussa* since he was eighteen. He even signed his name *Tri*. But he was born Carlo Alberto Salustri. Carlo. For a poet who described his poetry and his personality as a series of masks, this mention of his almost-forgotten (well, forgotten by me anyway!) first name was a moment of delicious intimacy in a volume of translations where it would not appear elsewhere.

Also, as the months went by, it dawned on me that February is not May, no more than age is youth or disillusion hope. January wasn't May either. Carlo, Mimi, and the month of May too were all written back into the poem. While I was at it, I changed Rosa, who had been *Rose* in the English, back to her original name, but Paul, whose name in Romanesco was Pasquale, stayed *Paul* to rhyme with the *wall* on which he had carved his name. Now, I thought the translation was finished, and I submitted it, just as it appears at the beginning of this article, in a volume of translations from Trilussa for the University of Arkansas Press.

One of the outside readers for the University of Arkansas Press, however, going over the manuscript before its publication, did not think the translation of the last line was finished: "'He's worse off than me' is a grammatical error; *than* is a conjunction not a preposition; *me* should be *I*, as in "'He's worse off than *I am*.'"

I knew that. This is one of those few instances in English where what everybody says is an error and what is correct is pedantic.

"You're right, John" replied Miller Williams, the editor of the Press and the poet and translator who had introduced Trilussa to me. "But," he added gently, "your error comes at the end of the poem, where it's so obvious.... Look, you don't have to rhyme the end of the poem with *three*. Paul could have been in love with Rosa in 1724 or 1725 or even in 1726. What difference does it make?"

Of course. I could translate by the numbers. Vistas of alternate endings opened before me. To be systematic, I began with 1721.

seventeen hundred twenty-one.  
Then I murmured to myself, "Poor Paul,  
he's done worse than I've done."

There. I had scored with my first shot. The grammar was correct without being pompous, the rhyme was perfect, and the line meant pretty much the same as the original:

"...li ventotto agosto  
der millesettecentoventitré."  
Allora ho detto:--Povero Pasquale,  
sta un po' peggio de me.

I read the English to myself aloud. Maybe I hadn't scored. Something

was wrong. The present perfect tense seemed to imply that if only Paul pulled himself together, and *did* something, he might still come out all right. Paul was a dead person; I was making him sound like a failure in the business world.

I changed the tense.

..."Poor Paul,  
he's doing worse than I've done."

No. The present progressive tense inspires us to ask, "Just what is poor Paul doing down there?" Decomposing? The problem was more than the tense; it was also the too active rhyming verb, *done*.

And *do* would not do when I got to 1722. Nor would *too*, being a homonym rather than a rhyme ("I'm bad off; well, he is too!") as well as for other reasons. *You* might do. Carlo could address his fellow lover across the centuries instead of merely meditating on his fate.

seventeen hundred twenty-two.  
Then I whispered to the stone, "Poor Paul,  
at least I'm better off than you."

Almost, but no. This was more comic than the Romanesco, but not as kind. In the original, the emotion goes outward; self pity blossoms into sympathy. By ending in *you* rather than *me*, Carlo seems to be taking not only consolation, but satisfaction in knowing that someone is worse off than he is. The *you* sounds almost taunting, whereas "He's worse off than I am," shakes the speaker out of his self pity. Translating a little closer to the original might help:

..."Poor Paul,  
I'm still a little better off than you."

A little for *un po'* had not worked well rhythmically with *worse off*, but it did work with *better off*, and it tempers the sense of sneering, if it were only a little more sympathetic....

But there were more numbers. I might try three again, varying the last line:

seventeen hundred twenty-three.  
Then I muttered to myself, "Poor Paul,  
it's worse on him than me."

Here the problem is that *it* in the last line has no clear antecedent. We understand that Paul's loss is worse on him than my loss is on me, but then *it* has to stand for two different antecedents: Paul's loss and my loss, an ambiguity which fuzzes up the poem at the crucial ending.

Four:  
seventeen hundred twenty-four.

Then I murmured to myself, "Poor Paul!  
What am I feeling sorry for myself for?"

There are a number of technical problems with the *four* solution: a) the last line is unmetrical and too long; b) the poem now ends with a homonym again rather than a rhyme; c) the two *for*'s in the last line clunk unharmoniously together; d) the sentence ends with a preposition, which, not ordinarily a problem, gets excessive emphasis at the end of the poem. For some reason I was fond of this solution anyway. Maybe the technical flaws gave it a kind of humor in accord with the sardonic Romanesco, but nobody that I showed it to liked it.

Five:

seventeen hundred twenty-five.  
Then I muttered to myself, "Poor Paul,  
he's got it worse than I've."

The less said about that the better.

Six:

seventeen hundred twenty-six.  
Then I muttered to myself, "Poor Paul,  
he's in an even worse fix.

I don't think that makes Paul sound like a cat, but it's still unpleasantly comical to picture Paul's condition as one which, if he were only clever enough, he might be able to get out of.

Seven:

seventeen hundred twenty-seven.  
Then I muttered to myself, "Poor Paul,  
he's worse off than I am, even."

This is not bad. The *even* makes perfect sense: I'm bad off, but he's even worse. But at the end of the sentence, when the sentence could have ended perfectly well without it, *even* sounds as if the translator stuck it there simply for the rhyme, which he did.

Eight:

seventeen hundred twenty-eight.  
Then I muttered to myself, "Poor Paul,  
his is an even worse fate."

Here there is an infidelity to reality not in the original: Paul's fate is not worse than Carlo's, because they have the same fate, death. Paul's just happens to be sooner. Perhaps

He's even in a worse state."

There is no infidelity to reality in this alternative, but the line is too funereal, as in “laid out in state.”

Nine:

seventeen hundred twenty-nine.  
Then I muttered to myself, “Poor Paul,  
his case is worse than mine.”

*Case* is too clinical. Other abstract words, such as *predicament* or *situation* or (of course) *state* either bring on other associations in conflict with the original or are too vague.

Ten:

seventeen hundred ten.  
Then I muttered to myself, “Poor Paul,  
he’s worse off than I’ve been.”

No. It is late in the poem to be introducing an Arkansas accent, rhyming *been* with *ten*. Also, Carlo’s concern is with how he feels *now*, standing by the wall, not with how he *has* felt in the past.

seventeen hundred eleven . . .

Same as *seven*.

Twelve:

seventeen hundred twelve.  
And then I whispered to the stone, “Poor Paul,  
and I was feeling sorry for myself!”

This is a little too far from the literal for my comfort. Other than that, I don’t know why I don’t like it, but I don’t.

Thirteen:

seventeen hundred thirteen.  
Then I muttered to myself, “Poor Paul,  
and I thought I was hurting!”

Here the language becomes a little too with-it, too contemporary. Also, it evokes the metaphysical question of whether Paul, having died, is now experiencing Purgatory or worse, a question that has no place in this poem.

I wrote more, with rhymes for *fourteen*, *fifteen*, *sixteen*.... There must be better endings, but mine get worse. You don’t want to hear them. After considering every alternate I could devise and laying them all out on little scraps of paper on my bed and after all I have said and all I have claimed about my precious English language, despite my fondness for the *seventeen hundred twenty-four* solution and despite the grammatical problem which precipi-



tated this discussion, I liked my first choice best. I decided that it might be the context, rather than the line, that needed changing, because Trilussa's Romanesco, though by no stretch of the imagination ignorant sounding, is conversational, and I felt that he would, if he had been writing in English, have written the kind of grammatical error that people condemn only in writing, never in conversation. But did *my* language sound conversational enough throughout the poem? I went back through the translation and changed the barely eloquent line seventeen, "but not enough to summon back to life," to "but not enough: they don't bring back to life...." And I changed the self-consciously elegiac, "I stood in sorrow there beside the wall," to, "I stood there, feeling bad beside the wall," a perfectly correct sentence in English, but colloquial enough even to make some readers suppose that the incorrect "feeling badly" would be more dignified.

Finally, before the anthology *Tales of Trilussa* went to press, I went back through all the poems, making tiny adjustments toward a more conversational English in the hopes that readers would not fault the English version of "A Mimi" for a technicality, and on page 54 I printed,

seventeen hundred twenty-three.  
Then I muttered to myself, "Poor Paul,  
he's worse off than me."



*"Paso ardiente", oil on canvas.*

## *Traduzione da altre lingue nel dialetto molisano*

di Giose Rimanelli

**U**no dei maggiori traduttori nonché critico contemporaneo dei vari dialetti italiani in lingua Inglese, Luigi Bonaffini, in occasione dell'uscita del primo numero di una nuova rivista di traduzioni da lui diretta, *Journal of Italian Translation* gentilmente m'invita a collaborare con un qualcosa in linea con l'etica linguistica del *Journal*, ricordandomi quanto segue:

“Dato che in *Gioco d'amore Amore del gioco*<sup>1</sup> hai tradotto poesie dal provenzale ed altre lingue nel tuo dialetto, ho pensato che potresti parlare di questo tuo libro e della problematica di tradurre in dialetto testi che appartengono sia alla tradizione romanza sia alla letteratura contemporanea. Potresti anche citare l'altro molisano che si è cimentato in tal senso, cioè Beppe Jovine che ha tradotto Montale. Lui dice che in dialetto si può esprimere tutto, ma è chiaro che il problema principale è quello di rendere un testo scritto in lingue sofisticate come il provenzale e l'inglese, che appartengono a tradizioni letterarie molto ricche, in un linguaggio molto più povero e con scarsi riferimenti culturali.”

Bonaffini è un principe nell'arte della traduzione e sua lessicografia,<sup>2</sup> mentr'io mi considero in quell'arte un dilettante, e le ragioni o cause sono due: Bonaffini conosce la profonda semantica dialettica-orale dei dialetti italiani (e culturalmente degli antichi, devo credere), mentr'io - da narratore in più lingue e poeta - mi considero solo un curioso delle lingue in genere, essendo il mio metodo non esattamente quello del “traduttore” ma del novello studente il quale - come appunto accade in *Gioco d'amore Amore del gioco* - traduce col vocabolario in mano dopo aver controllato le grammatiche delle lingue in corrispondenza con quelle che lui già conosce. Si tratta di un “gioco” infatti, come appunto il titolo del mio libro dichiara, che sempre comporta tuttavia un gran rischio: sballare concetto e ritmo della determinata lirica del tale autore, inventandone una propria con una certa *vis comica* o, alla Cicerone, obbedendo alla Virtù come guida, a braccetto con la Fortuna.

A parte il Provenzale, che fu mia curiosa necessità adolescenziale di studio al di là della noia, cercai anche di annusare latino e greco in un Istituto di Frati Minori Francescani nei miei anni puberi; e ripeto che cercai di studiarli soprattutto come diversivo alla mia quasi “naturale” noia d'ogni cosa; vivevo infatti come in una bottiglia d'acqua con solo la testa fuori, respirando aria, quindi parole, idee di gente lontana in tempi lontani che, poi mi accorsi, mi stavano accanto più vivi dei miei collegiali compagnucci. Mi accorsi infatti che, mentre sfuggivo un certo ordine di

educazione monastica trovavo libertà, cioè sollievo e rifugio su grammatiche e vocabolari, attratto anche (sebbene non “specificamente”) da grammatiche di tedesco e inglese, mentre quelle di francese e spagnolo erano le ufficiali, sanzionate dal curriculum, quindi da praticare come studio obbligato.

Ma io ero innamorato del Provenzale. Da ragazzo, in quel collegio di Frati Minori, inconsciamente appresi (per istinto all’inizio) che vi sono due tipi di amore: quello umano e quello divino. Il punto interrogativo era comunque questo: è possibile unirli eliminando il dualismo? Rabbrividii un tantino quando, crescendo, riflettei che “dualismo” indica sia “contrasto” che “copula.” E’ possibile che stiano bene insieme? Me ne convinsi più tardi, verso gli anni quaranta, un libro di Mario Casella sul trovatore da me più amato, Jaufrè Rudel, che appunto incorporò nella sua lirica i “termini” dell’umano e del divino. E anche a quel tempo riflettei, sebbene azzardosamente, che il concetto di amore, umano e divino, poteva anche ridursi - nella mente più che nella coscienza - a un gioco: e questo, più tardi negli anni, non poté infine non incorporare anche il filosofico concetto di Eros e Thanatos, da me già percepito (sebbene non inteso) nella mia prima e quasi infantile lettura di Jaufrè.

Da quell’Istituto francescano me ne andai al quinto anno - io ne contavo 15 - decidendo contro il noviziato e il sacerdozio. Scelsi male, comunque: uscendo nel mondo di fuori mi trovai improvvisamente di fronte alla guerra, la follia del destino, la salvezza miracolosa a diciannove anni e l’immediata scrittura da parte mia del confessionale libro di guerra *Tiro al piccione*, pubblicato solo anni più tardi.

Vi è sempre un 2 nella vita, un binario per il treno infatti, che conduce o condurrebbe da qualche parte, mentre con il numero 3 potremmo finalmente giungere alla salvezza: il sacrificio della meditazione, la liberazione da noi stessi e persino l’accettazione della morte di noi stessi. Io sono passato attraverso questi cicli, e ne scrissi. E però il numero 2 per me resta come catalista verso la vera vita: creatività. Il libro *Gioco d’amore Amore del gioco* vuole esplorare la sottile malizia cerebrale della poesia su latitudine internazionale per quanto riguarda il soggetto fragile-labile chiamato amore, sul quale tuttavia vive, sopravvive e genera la copula umana Lui e Lei...

Le lingue di queste poesie sono state esplorate, controllate e comparate prima di essere state tradotte... nel mio dialetto molisano, e dal dialetto quindi ritradotte nella lingua ufficiale italiana. Si è trattato di un esperimento quasi impossibile: il ricco delle varie lingue ridotto al povero del mio dialetto, per infine accorgermi che tanto povero non lo è poi. Ho riaperto a caso *Gioco d’amore Amore del gioco* mentre scrivevo queste righe, e fuori son venute pagine 96-97, latino/dialetto, per subito realizzare che il mio dialetto, pur linguisticamente ristretto, a volte ha la possibilità di coesistere quasi letteralmente con altre lingue, come - ad esempio - in questo difficile tedesco di Paul Celan, *Irisch*:

Gib mir das Wegrecht  
 über die Kornstiege zu deinem Schlaf,  
 das Wegrecht  
 über den Schlafphad,  
 das Recht, dab ich Torf stechen kann  
 am Herzhang,  
 morgen.

Dämme vije libbere  
 ngòpp'i scale de rèndineje dénd'u  
 suónne tije,  
 vije libbere  
 p'a vijèrèlle d'u suónne,  
 a libbertà de tèglià u càrevóne  
 nu mmiézze d'a'mmèrze  
 demàne<sup>3</sup>

Ricordo che qualcuno, giustamente lodando Luigi Bonaffini, lo paragonò a “quel monaco del monastero medievale impegnato a salvare i dialetti della nostra lingua.”<sup>28</sup> Ed io ricordo Bonaffini che in un suo intervento sulla poesia e l'arte del tradurre venne fuori con una frase memorabile, come a volte sono le autobiografie, questa: “Quando gli oggetti sono spariti, ci rimangono le parole, e queste devono essere sufficienti per esprimere lo spirito di ciò che si è perso.” E le parole sono il dialetto dei nostri primi passi nella vita. Così anche commenta un nostro magnifico dialettologo, Franco Brevini, certamente alludendo ai poeti espatriati dalla lingua ufficiale e, come in un esilio, tornati alla mammella materna, il dialetto.

Sia quel che sia, Bonaffini e Rimanelli sono degli espatriati nell'America dei padri emigrati, per i quali il legame più forte con la loro infanzia, e la terra da cui provengono - il Molise - è appunto il “parlato” del loro primo balbettare, oggi sostanza e sostegno del loro discorso, il dialetto appunto!

#### Note

1. Giose Rimanelli. *Gioco d'amore amore del gioco. Poesia provenzale in dialetto molisano e lingua*. (Cosmo Iannone Editore, Isernia 2002).
2. La similitudine allegorica mi riporta al traduttore-esegeta.
3. Irlandese. Dammi via libera / sulle scale di granone dentro il tuo sonno, / via libera / per il viottolo del sonno. / La libertà di tagliare il carbone / sul cuore del pendio, / domani.
4. Vedi anche Annalisa Buonocore. *Dialettali e Neo dialettali in Inglese*. Prefazione di Cosma Siani. (Edizioni Cofine, Roma, 2003).



*Quadrato magico.*

*Traduzioni/Translations*





***In Answer to a Translator's Last Six Questions***  
**(Raffaello Baldini 1924-2005)**

by **Adria Bernardi**

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**Adria Bernardi's** novel, *Openwork*, will be published in fall 2006 by Southern Methodist University Press. She is the author of *In the Gathering Woods*, a collection of stories, which was awarded the Drue Heinz Prize, and a novel, *The Day Laid on the Altar*, which was awarded the Bakeless Fiction Prize. She has translated Gianni Celati's *Adventures in Africa*, the poetry of Tonino Guerra, *Abandoned Places*, and a theatrical monologue by Raffaello Baldini, *Page Proof*. She teaches at the Warren Wilson MFA Program for Writers.

Born in 1924 in Santarcangelo di Romagna, **Raffaello Baldini** published six poetry collections, all written in the romagnolo dialect of Italian: *E' solitèri* (Galeati, 1976), *La nàiva* (Einaudi, 1982), *Furistír* (Einaudi, 1988), *Ad nòta* (Mondadori, 1995), as well as *La nàiva*, *Furistír*, *Ciacri* (Einaudi, 2000). *Intercity*, was published by Einaudi in 2003. His collection *Furistír* was awarded the Viareggio Prize. Baldini wrote three theatrical monologues: *Carta canta*, *Zitti tutti!* and *In fondo a destra*. He died in Milan in March of 2005

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In the poem "Water," what does *concredendo* mean?

It means only "*credendo*." Believing. There are no further allegorical, liturgical or philosophical significances to this *con-credendo*, with prefix? It's not an old word, dialect word, with multiple meanings, meanings on multiple levels? No.

In the poem, "Water," do the friends, with whom the narrator attends the spectacle in the theater, remain in their seats? Correct. They do not accompany him up onto the stage to confront the huckster-performer wearing the shabby jacket? Correct.

After fleeing the lower levels of the theater that has flooded with water, the narrator climbs flight-of-stairs after flight-of-stairs, opens door after door, and meets a card-reader with cards all laid out on a table; is this card-reader a man or a woman? I think it's probably a man.

What does the dialect term *o roviè* mean? in your poem, "Candles." It just means *ho cominciato* — I started. That's it? That's it.

*Un bel piatto?* The translator wants to get this exactly right. He exhales. How can I explain it? He was in great pain. Each word cost him. Not a small plate. Not a huge plate. A plate substantial enough to hold a candle when you're coming upstairs from some dark place.

About the phrase, *È qualcosa di vivo*—something living, something

that's alive, a living thing? Is this an evocation of a particular line of poetry? No.

The verb tenses must be changed:

"He lives in Milan, where he has resided since 1955."

"He has been supportive and encouraging of this translation."

"He has been generous of his time."

"All of his six poetry collections and his three theatrical monologues are written in the dialect of the town of his birth, Santarcangelo di Romagna."

"His work has been awarded the Viareggio Prize, the first time this prestigious prize was awarded to a work written in a dialect. His most recent collection was awarded the Campana Prize."

"His poems are intense internal monologues in which generally only one of the interlocutors gets to speak."

"His themes are reflected in some of these titles: *Solitude*, *Outsider*, *Small Talk*. Each poem moves towards and resists Death."

Few of his poems are free from parenthetical asides, digression, non sequitur. His narrators also wander into anacoluthon, that is to say ending a sentence with a different structure from that with which it began. His poems employ the rhetorical techniques that form the backbone of argument:

indignatio

memopsis

oiktros,

erotesis

orcos

threnos

ara

decsis

diasymus

aposiopesis

apostrophe

In the end his spine

caused great pain,

a tall, thin man.

The rhetorical techniques of argument are defined in this way:

indignatio, impassioned speech or loud, angry speaking

memopsis, complaining against injuries and pleading for help

oiktros, evoking pity or forgiveness

erotesis, rhetorical question implying strong affirmation or denial

orcos, oath

threnos, lamentation

ara, curse or imprecation

decsis, vehement supplication of gods or men

diasymus, disparagement of opponent's arguments

aposiopesis, stopping suddenly in midcourse, leaving a statement  
unfinished

apostrophe, breaking off discourse to address directly some present or  
absent person or thing

*Dove sei?* (Where are you?)

an oratorio in four tempos for soloist, chorus and piano.

The translator read it late one night,

intending to phone the next day to ask

if it was possible to get a copy of the music.

There was a message on the answering machine.

The translator was feeding paper

into a printer, catching yet more errors.

Mumbling and imprecations.

Cartridge out of ink. Empty paper tray.

A computer talking back: Printing Error.

White stacks on floor,

packages prepared for release

to known addressees

to reach the unknown interlocutor.

The window was open in Milan.

motorbikes sputtering,

a tram creaking and rolling past on rails,

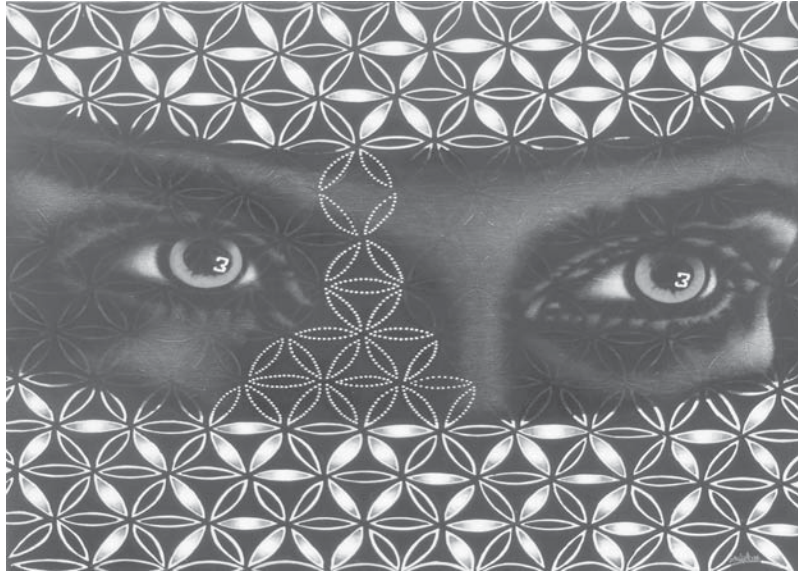
movement away from the receiver,

and footsteps echoing away,

then returning, pages rustling.

Here it is, he said.





*Sefirà e il f. vita*

**E' sènt**

Ció, mè a i craid, io ci credo, in un qualcosa,  
 e a n mu n vargògn, mo non pretendo mica,  
 mè, la zénta, par mè, i à da fè ognéun  
 come si sente, sgònd la su coscienza,  
 a n sémm piò témp d'na volta, mè a déggħ sno,  
 quant a sint zért dischéurs fat a l'arvérsa,  
 mo 's'ut dischéut, è un sentimento quello,  
 ta n'e' cnòss, lasa stè, pórtta rispèt,  
 ch'è anche un mistero, s' ta m'e' dmand mu mè  
 quèll ch'a sint, a n'e' so,  
 mè quant a so tla cisa, u n gn'éntra i prit,  
 csa vól déi, è la nostra religione,  
 mo a n so bigòt, mè, a i vagh,  
 te ta n mu n cridaré, si sèt dè fa,  
 un dopmezdè, a paséva, ò détt: a m férum,  
 tla Colegèta, e dréinta un frèsch, Pepino  
 l'era dri ch'e' spazéva, mè d'impí,  
 da zétt, at cla penòmbra,  
 e lí il pensiero, a l so ch'è in ogni luogo,  
 mo però in chiesa, e tè dàila si prit,  
 zért ch'i sbàia ènca lòu,  
 sono esseri umani come noi,  
 parchè, néun a n sbaiémm? che quèst l'è un mònd  
 ch'a duvrésmi ès fradéll, volerci bene  
 uno con l'altro, invíci,  
 non vedi l'ingiustizia, l'egoéisum,  
 la cativéria, ch'a n sémm mai cuntént,  
 che mè dal vólti a i péns, s' t'èss rasòun tè  
 ch'e' finéss tótt aquè, cumè, mo 'lòura  
 i à d'avài rasòun sémpra i prepotent?  
 rubé, mazè, basta sno no fès zcruv,  
 se al di sopra di noi non c'è nessuno,  
 mo tè la nòta ta n guèrd mai d'insò?  
 tótt' cal stèli, migliéun,  
 questi mondi infiniti, andémma, zò,  
 un essere supremo u i à da ès,  
 che li ha creati, a n so sno me ch'a i craid,  
 u i n'è tint, profeséur, grandi scenziati,  
 ta n sé piò tè ch' nè lòu? mo fa la próva,  
 sta s'una mena verta, sta 'lè di an,  
 sémpra verta, csa crèssal? du quaiéun,  
 gnént piò gnént e' dà gnént, ci vuole un Dio,  
 che basta un sóffi, ed è nata la vita,

**The Saint**

So. I believe, I believe in it, in a something,  
and I'm not ashamed, but I'm not at all claiming,  
I, people, as far as I'm concerned, each one has got to do  
however one experiences it, according to one's conscience,  
we're not living in the old days anymore, I'm just saying  
when I hear certain discussions, arguing otherwise,  
what's there to discuss, it's merely one opinion,  
I don't agree, then let it rest, have respect,  
that it is a mystery as well, if you ask me  
how I feel about it, I don't know,  
but when I'm in church, the priests have got nothing to do with it,  
how can I put it? it is our shared religion,  
but I'm not some pious bigot, I go there,  
you're not going to believe me but six days ago,  
one afternoon, passing by, I say: I'm going to stop,  
in the Collegiata, and inside it was so cool, Peppino  
was in there sweeping, I was standing,  
silent, in that half-light,  
and the thought came to me there, I know it is present in every place,  
but in church, and you, you really have it in for the priests,  
of course even they make mistakes,  
they are human just like us,  
why? you think we never make mistakes? this is a world  
where we should all be brothers, love one another,  
as one's self, but  
don't you see the injustice, the egotism,  
the cruelty, we are never content,  
which makes me think sometimes,  
if you're right  
that it all ends here, how can that be, so then  
the ones with power always win?  
robbing, killing, it's bad enough they never get caught,  
if up above us there is no one,  
haven't you ever looked up there?  
all those stars, millions,  
arrived, crying, it's her mother,  
you can imagine, and the two of us, in the hallway,  
waiting, how long will it be? what are they doing to her in there?  
to my wife? by this time it was morning,  
My Lord! Mother of God! in these moments  
I don't know how those who don't believe get through it,  
it is a need, to address someone,  
that you are in his hands, he can help you out,

e a sémm aquè ch' à bazilémm, che mè  
 'ta bón, va là, u i n'è óna tótt i dè,  
 u m'è vnéu la finèzza ir, i è stè 'lè  
 a scartablè dagli òuri,  
 i à fat un gran verbèl, par do fatéuri,  
 e dis ch' u i amanchéva ènca dal bòlli,  
 va a zcòrr sa lòu,  
 tanimódi qualquèl i à da truvè,  
 u s buscarà du bòch, mo t'avdiré-che,  
 e irisàira un nervòus,  
 ma chèsa, da par me, no, la Jolanda  
 a la ò manda in muntagna,  
 sla Silvana, a Madonna di Campiglio,  
 la s' à da divaghè, dop quell ch' la à pas,  
 amo cumè, quatr' òuri sòtta i férr,  
 che cla sàira, mo gnént, émmi magnè,  
 spaghétt in biènc,  
 puràzi, du tri sgómbar marinéd,  
 émm guèrs ènc' la televisiòun, pu a lèt,  
 e a una zért' òura a sint: «Carlo, a stagh mèl»,  
 «T n' é digeréi ?», «L' è dal curtlèdi, aquè»,  
 «T' é bsògn d' andè de còrp?», ciò, 's' ut ch' a gèss,  
 agli óngg la stéva Bén, può zais la luce  
 e ò capí tótt, ò ciamè Giunchi, via  
 te bsdèl, e un' òura dop la antréva zà  
 tla sèla operatòria, ch' l' è rivat'  
 la Silvana, t' un piènt, li la su mà,  
 t si mat, e alè nun déu, 't che curidéur,  
 a spitè, quant u i vó? csa i fai adlà  
 ma la mi mò: l' era bèla matéina,  
 Madòna! Signuréin! at chi mumént.  
 mè a n' e' so cmè ch' i fa quèi ch' i n' i craid,  
 è un bisogno, rivolgersi a qualcuno,  
 che sei nelle sue mani, u t pò 'iuté,  
 parchè Alesandri, brèv e sol che brèv,  
 mo al su paróli, quant l' è scap, l' à détt:  
 «Questo è stato un miracolo, che se  
 tardava tre minuti», e mè alè ò tach  
 a piànz, a réid, una nòta cmè quèlla,  
 s' a n so s-ciòp, mo ò capéi tènt' ad cal robi,  
 che questa vita, in fondo, e' basta gnént,  
 e néun ch' a s cridémm d' ès,  
 tótt' la nòsta imbiziòun, mo da fè chè?  
 siamo tacati a un filo,



because Alessandri, I can't say enough good things about him,  
but his words, when he came out, he said:  
"This is a miracle, if it had been  
three minutes later," and I started crying, right there, and laughing,  
if it hadn't burst, but I understood a lot after those things,  
that this mortal life, when it's all said and done, nothing's ever  
enough,  
and we, whatever it is we believe in,  
all our ambitions, for what?  
we are holding on by a thread.  
because in the hospital I saw Nandi, I didn't recognize him,  
he'd gone down to have X-rays taken, we talked and then  
saying goodbye he squeezed my hand,  
without looking at me: "But fifty's  
a little early," and he went away with the nurse,  
I didn't know how to answer him, and then during the night,  
those words, I thought about them,  
because he, yeah, a real wheeler-dealer, true, but everyone  
likes money, let's be honest, plus with deals,  
if you don't do it someone else will,  
he'd bought out Cecchi months ago,  
and now even Armanda, alone,  
a woman, we were talking the other day  
about Paolino Campidelli, he goes strictly by the books,  
and he ends up in that living hell, in that case instead,  
but this is not the time, with that boy,  
who he bragged about, think about that, then, try to understand,  
it's that they have too much, but it's not all their fault either,  
his mother, all he had to do was ask her,  
and his head, or was it someone he associated with,  
one year? it must be two by now,  
and he doesn't write, nothing,  
they don't hear a single thing,  
it's as if he's dead,  
and I know him well, Paolino, when I needed some help,  
he always worked hard, he never screwed  
anyone, why then is he castigated  
in this way? I don't know, but even yesterday evening,  
that girl, who I'd passed  
just five minutes before,  
they went right up on the sidewalk, killed instantly,  
what wrong could she have done?  
I know, they're questions,  
but I see certain things,  
which is a sin, I know, but if there is a God,

che te bsdèl ò vést Nandi, a n l'ò 'rcnunséu,  
 l'andéva zò a fè i raggi, émm zcòurs, e pu  
 te salutém u m' à tnú strètt' la mèna,  
 senza guardèm: «Però a zinquèntun'an  
 l'è un pó prèst», e l'è 'ndè véa sl'infermír,  
 che mè a n gn'ò savú 'rspònd, e dop la nòta,  
 cal paróli, a i ò péns,  
 parchè léu, sè, afarésta, mo i baócch  
 i i pis ma tótt, andémma, pu i aféri  
 s' ta n'i fé tè u i fa un èlt.  
 ch' l'éva còmpar da Cecchi si méis fa,  
 e adès ènca l'Armanda, da par li,  
 'na dona, ch'a zcurémmi l'altredè  
 ad Palín Campidèli, léu strètt,  
 e pu alazò a l'inféran, alè invíci,  
 mo adès u n'è e' mumént, sa che burdèl,  
 ch'u s stiméva, fighéurt, pu, va a capéi,  
 l'è ch'i à trop, u n'è gnénca còulpa sóvva,  
 la su mà, léu bastéva ch'e' dmandéss,  
 e tla su testa, o l'è stè qualch' cumpàgn,  
 un an? i è bèla déu,  
 e u n scréiv, gnént, u n s sa gnént, è come morto,  
 ch'a l cnòss Bén, mè, Palín, quant ò vù bsògn,  
 l'à sémpra lavurè, u n'a mai fregghè  
 niseun, e parchè 'lòura castighél  
 at sté modí? a n'e' so, mo ènca irisàira,  
 cla burdèla, ch'a séra pas d'alè  
 zéinch minéut préima, i la è 'ndèda a tó sò

se marciapí, dis an, morta se còulp,  
 che mèl pòla avàì fat? a l so, l'è dmandi,  
 mo mè vdai zérti robi,  
 che è peccato, lo so, mo se c'è un Dio,  
 però ènch s'u n gn'è, al mi mèssi, al cumagnòun,  
 mo no sno mè, tótt quèi ch'i va tla cisa,  
 tótt' cal candàili zàisi,  
 tótt' al cisi, quant u i n'è mai te mònd,  
 bèli, grandi, par gnént? che mè a San Pitar,  
 m'arcórd, u m'è vnú la chèrna pléina,  
 no, una fede ci vuole,  
 cs'èll ch'a sémm, di animèli? a sémm di brécch?  
 émm e' zarvèl, druvémmal,  
 ci sarà una ragione, un fundamént,  
 che adès a n gn'arivém, mo però un giorno  
 u s capirà iniquèl,

which even if there isn't, all of my masses, communions,  
but it's not just me, all those who go to church,  
all those lit candles,  
all the churches, how many of them are there in this world?  
beautiful, enormous buildings, for nothing? I, at St. Peter's,  
I remember, I got goose bumps,  
no, you need a faith,  
what are we, animals? are we donkeys?  
we each have a brain, we make use of it,  
there's got to be a reason, a basis,  
which we don't get right now,  
but one day  
everything will be understood,  
there's got to be a purpose, because if not,  
if it doesn't matter,  
if this world is just an Instant Lottery,  
where if your number comes up you don't even know  
if you've won or if you've lost  
these are discussions, these are,  
which the inside my head, afterwards, is roiling, I can't stand it,  
but I think about this every so often,  
you have to do it, today  
people just don't want to think about anything,  
just having fun,  
and they make fun of you, a girl on the train,  
last year, with her friends, I'd said: We are all smaller,  
because everyone does whatever he feels like doing, that the world  
isn't right and from here it will only get worse,  
and she said, "From where?" they all laughed, what did I say,  
"We're not going to wait our turns in line, there's too many of us,"  
and I wanted to answer her right back, but I kept quiet,  
then I got off, these kids, I don't understand,  
they think in a certain way,  
but sometimes in Rimini, on the street,  
I'm standing there for a minute, there are a lot of them, I mean lots,  
where are they all going? pfft! what are they all doing?  
and in summer, at the beach, in the Piazza Tripoli,  
talking all different languages, what are they saying?  
then the thoughts, which sometimes  
I stay there and watch them for a half-hour, another half-hour,  
and at night I dream of ants,  
the pavement, covered, even the stairs, they're black,  
some that fly, they're walking over, they crunch,  
they form little mounds around me,  
and I say: standing here, for them,

u i à da ès un vérs, parchè se no,  
 s'l'è tòtt cumpàgn,  
 se aquè sté mònd l'è sno una loteréa,  
 che s'e' vén e' tu nómar ta n sé gnénca  
 se t'é véint, se t'é pérs...  
 l'è zchéurs, mè, quést,  
 che la testa, a m'imbròi, dop, a n gn'aréss,  
 però a i faz d'ogni tènt, bsògna fèi, òz  
 la zénta invíci i n vó pensè ma gnént,  
 sno divertéis,  
 e i t tó ènca in zéir, una ragaza in treno,  
 an, si su améigh, mè a géva: a s sémm ardótt,  
 tòtt i fa quèll ch'u i pèr, e dop e' mònd  
 u n pò andè bén, e adlà e' sarà ènca pézz,  
 e li: «Di là?», i ridéva tòtt, cs'òi détt?  
 «Non ci stanno più dietro, siamo troppi»,  
 e mè alè a i vléva arspònd, pu a so stè zétt,  
 dop a so smòunt, sti zóvan, a n'e' so,  
 i ragiòuna t'un módi,  
 però dal vólti, a Rémin, par la strèda,  
 ch'a m'aférm un mumént, i è tint, dabón,  
 dò ch'i va? boh, csa fai?  
 e d'instèda, a maréina, in piazza Tripoli,  
 ch'i zcòrr at tòtt' al lèngui, csa girài?  
 pu i pensír, che dal vólti  
 a stagh alè a guardèi par dal mèz' òuri,  
 e la nòta a m'insògni tòtt' furméighi,  
 e' sulèr bróst, ènca i scaléin, i è nir,  
 u i n'è ch'al vòula, a i caméin sòura, al scrécca,  
 u m s fa i patéun, e a déggh: mè què par l'òu  
 a so e' Signòur, dò ch'a pas l'è la guèra,  
 a pòs fè tòtt, fiumèna, taremòt,  
 sémpa tl'insògni, e u m ciapa una paéura,  
 a m svégg ad bot, a vagh ma la finestra,  
 i lómm ch'u i è, la zénta, sl'autostrèda  
 i n s férma mai, e mè aquè spèsa i véidar,  
 a pi néud, sal mudàndi,  
 e a pràigh, ò tróv un sènt te calendèri,  
 ch'a n faz e' nóm, mo a n l'ò mai sintí déi,  
 quèll che 'lè, a so sichéur, a 1 cnòss sno mè,  
 la Jolanda la sbròuntla: «Mo l'è al quatar,  
 csa fèt?», e a n'i dmand gnént,  
 a n vi nisuna grèzia, tanimódi  
 quèll ch'e' pò fè léu u l fa, mo u n m'arimpórta,  
 ènca s'u n pò fè gnént, mè a so ch' l'è 'lè,

I am the Lord, wherever I am is war,  
I can do anything, make rivers overflow, earthquakes,  
still in the dream, I get afraid,  
I wake up wide awake, I walk to the window,  
lights out there, people, on that highway,  
they never stop, and I'm here facing the window,  
bare feet, in my underwear,  
and I pray, I find a saint on the calendar,  
I don't want to say his name, but he's one I've never heard talked about,  
I'm sure I'm the only one who knows that one,  
Jolanda's complaining, "It's four in the morning,  
What are you doing?" and I don't ask him for anything,  
I don't want any grace, it's enough  
that he'll do whatever he can, but it doesn't matter,  
even if he can't do anything, I know that he's there,  
that I pray and that he hears me.

### **Water**

I, it was my buddies, you go, you go,  
for laughs, and I walked up, there were six or seven of us,  
he'd set up chairs, and seeing him  
up close, he was slight, with this shabby jacket,  
and, man, was he was frenetic,  
jabbering away, in five minutes  
I was already dazed, he talked a mile a minute,  
there I was, head hanging down,  
where have I ended up? he picked Mirko first:  
"Observe all the butterflies! here is the net, now catch them!"  
and Mirko, intent, with that butterfly net, is running, he's leaping up,  
as if there were moths, then he stopped him,  
he was pointing like a bloodhound, people were saying: "Come on,  
it's right there," he, flick, swoosh, and that guy: "You have caught it,"  
he slapped him on the back: "Congratulations!"  
next he picked Dato and Carlín di Faiòun,  
he positioned them in front of him: "Brrr, it's freezing!"  
they started to shiver, they were stomping their feet,  
they blew into their hands, "And this snow  
is wicked!" they turned up their collars,

both of them standing, they opened an umbrella, Dato  
pointed it down low into the wind,  
Carlín right there behind him, hunched over, his cap jammed  
down to his ears, and I sat there,  
with my arms crossed, what is this garbage?

che mè a pràigh e che léu u m sta da sintéi.

### Aqua

Mè, l'è stè chi burdéll, va tè, va tè,  
 par réid, e a so 'ndè sò, a sérmì si sèt,  
 léu u s' à dè dal scaràni, e a vdail alè  
 da davséin, l'era znin, s'na sèrga léisa,  
 mo l'éva la tarèntla,  
 e s'una parlantéina, in zéinch minéut  
 u m'éva zà invurnéi, 'na machinèta,  
 mè a stéva a testa basa,  
 dò ch'a so capitè? l' à tach da Mirko:  
 «Quante farfalle! ecco il retino, prendile!»,  
 e Mirko, séri, s' ché ridéin, córr, sèlta,  
 cm' u i fòss dal pavaiòti, pu u s' è férum,  
 e' puntéva cmè un brach, la zénta: «Dài,  
 ch' la è 'lè», léu, tac, 'na bota, e cl' èlt: «L'hai presa»,  
 u i à batéu s'na spala, «Complimenti!»,  
 l'è 'ndè da Dato e da Carlin 'd Faiòun,  
 u s' i è pustè davènti: «Brrr! che gelo!»,  
 lòu i à tach a bublé, i batéva i pi,  
 i s sufiéva tal dàidi, «E questa neve!  
 una tormenta!», i s' è tiràt sò e' bèvar,

tutt du d'impì, i à vèrt l' umbrèla, Dato  
 u la puntéva basa còuntra e' vént,  
 Carlin di dri, gubéun, se brètt calchèd  
 fina agli urècci, e mè disdài alè,  
 brazi incrusèdi, mo cs' èll ch' l' è sta roba?  
 mè a so vnéu concredend ch' e' foss di zugh  
 d' abellità, si fazulétt, sal chèrti,  
 ch' i t taia la gravata, robì acsè,  
 da divertéis, ch' i s chèva la bumbèta  
 e e' vòula véa 'n pizòun, mo fè e' zimbèl,  
 no, no, a n' i stagh, ò un esercéizi, mè,  
 'na clientela, ò una riputaziòun,  
 e' zcòrr s' un èlt: «Ti piace  
 la Guzzi California?», a n' e' cnòss quèll,  
 «Eccola qui, è la tua, la vuoi provare?»,  
 e st' pataca e' partéss, brrrum! brrrum!  
 a caval d' na scaràna,  
 mè a n' e' so, mo i n s n' incórz ? i n sint la zénta ?  
 che Dato l' è impieghèd ma la Pruvéinza,  
 e Carlin, ènca léu, l' à mòì e fiùl,

I came here believing it was going to be games  
of skill, with handkerchiefs, cards,  
that they'd cut your tie in two, stuff like that,  
entertainment, a top hat  
and out flies a dove,  
but to make people laughing-stocks,  
no, no, this I won't stand for, I have a business, I,  
have a clientele, I have a reputation,  
he's talking to someone else: "Would you like  
to have a Guzzi? the California model?" I don't know that  
particular model, "There it is, it's yours, would you like to take it  
for a ride?"  
and this idiot takes off, vroom, vroom,  
straddling a chair, don't these people get it? do people just not listen?  
Dato, he's got a staff position for the Province,  
and Carlin, even him, he's got a wife and kids,  
how could he have pulled this off? did he trick them?  
what could he have said to them? you will not thwart me, you will  
do as I command,  
or maybe he promised them money? but he's coming this way, oh no,  
he looks at me out of the corner of his eye every so often,  
it would be quite a feat to put me to sleep,  
or what if I fake it?  
whatever he wants, for awhile, it would be hilarious,  
then, this would be the best part: "That's enough now, I'm bored,  
I'm going to get a cup of coffee, see you guys later,"  
now that would really thwart him, then afterwards  
people would run him out of town, poor guy, they'd chase him all  
the way to Cesena,  
no, no way, I'm telling you no, you're not glomming on me,  
that's that, but then what if it has consequences for him?  
I go ahead and just let him say it: "This fellow is not an appropriate  
subject,"  
then I go back to my seat and that's all she wrote,  
meanwhile my friend over there on the Guzzi is not slowing down,  
he's leaning into all the curves, he's going to end up falling,  
it's been going on for a quite some time now,  
no, that's it, he's stopped, if I could just say something to him,  
for his own good, so he could come back to his senses,  
but there's no way to do it, I wave to him, no response,  
doesn't he understand? is he afraid? come here,  
you might have gotten into an accident, he's gone over to someone  
else now:  
"You have a great gift,"  
that fat guy, the redhead, who works at the methane gas plant,

cm'al fat? u i à intraplè?  
 csa i avrâl détt? nu m'arviné, fé mód,  
 o u i à prumèss di bóch ? però aquè u n vén,  
 u m guèrda d'ogni tèt sla còuda dl'òc,  
 la sarà gnara indurmantèm mu mè,  
 o magari fè féinta,  
 tòtt quèll ch'e' vó, pr'un pó, u i sarébb da réid,  
 pu te piò bèl, «Adès basta, a m so stóff,  
 a vagh a tó un cafè, a s'avdém, burdèll»,  
 che ta l'arvéin dabón, la zénta dop  
 i i da dri, me puràz, fina Ceséina,  
 no, gnént, a i déggh ad no, sa mè la n taca,  
 e basta, ch' pu l'è robi ch'al suzéd,  
 u 1 pò déi: «Questo qui non è il sogetto»,  
 mè a tóuran te mi pòst e bonanòta,  
 e quèll dla Guzzi u n mòla,  
 e' pènd tal curvi, e va finéi ch'e' casca,  
 sno che què la vén lónga,  
 no, ècco, u 1 férma, s'a i putéss dí quèl,  
 ènca par léu, ch'u s pòsa regolè,  
 mo u n gn'è mèzi, a i faz ségn, e léu cmè gnént,  
 u n capéss? l'è paéura? vén aquè,  
 ch'u t végn a un azidént, l'è 'ndè da un èlt:  
 «Lei ha avuto un gran dono»,  
 che gròs, gag, che lavòura me metano,  
 u s'i è fisé: «Ci farà questo onore?  
 È qui con noi un artista di grido»,  
 u s'è sintí rógg: «Italo, sei grande!»,  
 e Italo l'è stè sò, l'è fat ad sè  
 sla testa, l'è vnú 'vènti,  
 l'è tach a ócc céus «Una furtiva lacrima»,  
 u n déva invéll, la zénta: «Bravo! bravo!»,  
 i n l'è las gnénch' finéi, i vléva e' bis:  
 «Che gelida manina! », « No! », da un pèlch  
 d'ilt i à dè sò: «Fin che la barca va!»,  
 «Che gelida manina! », «O sole mio!»,  
 «Fin che la barca va!», «Mamma!», un caséin,  
 u n s capéva piò gnént,  
 éun sla pila, tla sèla, cmè un curtèl,  
 da d'in èlt u i à 'rspòst un'èlta pila,  
 dal saètti te schéur,  
 e sémpra piò cagnèra,  
 alòura Gufredín l'è zais al luci,  
 mo l'è stè pézz, te luzòun i s'è méss  
 a bat i pi: «Vogliamo i soldi indietro!»,



he's zeroed in on him: "Will you grant us this honor?  
We have here among us an artist of first order"  
he shouted, "Italo, you are magnificent!"  
and Italo stood up, he nodded yes,  
he walked to the front,  
he closed his eyes, "Una furtive lacrima,"  
he didn't hit a single note, people were shouting, Bravo! Bravissimo!  
they didn't even let him finish, they wanted an encore:  
"Che gelida manina!" "No!" from another row  
others were yelling out: "Fin che la barca va!" "Mamma!" It was a  
zoo,  
you couldn't understand a word anyone was saying,  
one guy had flashlight, in the hall, slashing it around like a knife,  
someone else answered with another flashlight,  
making lightening bolts in the dark,  
there was even more of a ruckus,  
so Goffredino turned on the lights,  
but that made it worse, in the balcony they started  
stomping their feet: "We want our money back!"  
it was chaos, the light bulbs were flickering,  
some of the hotheads down there were coming to blows,  
some of the old people got up and scurried out, their heads bent over,  
coats draped over their arms,  
we were completely silent up on the stage, watching,  
he was watching too, then he strutted out:  
"All eyes on me!" with that smirk, "Everyone stop!  
Cease! This is an order!" and at that exact moment  
a crash onstage and all this spattering,  
what's going on? they'd thrown a bag of water,  
then another, and another, my pals, I said:  
Hey! what do you think you're doing throwing it here?  
oh but they thought it was just fine,  
water, bags, great fun,  
they were horsing around, they started lifting the chairs  
over their heads, for protection, the legs turned up,  
another bag, the redhead pointed a finger:  
"Giorgio! I saw you!" whistles from above:  
"Referee! Are you blind? Do you need glasses?" then everything  
pelted down,  
pieces of carob, apple cores, banana peels, orange peels, a can of Fanta,  
a barrage, which if you were to get hit, and this? you filthy pigs,  
it's not water, and where is he? oh, there he was,  
his ears all slick and shiny from his hair cream,  
sweating, with his crooked bowtie,  
"It's really coming down now, it's time to make a break for it,"

un purbiòun, e' treméva al lampadéini,  
 di scalmanèd ad sòtta i s'atachéva,  
 qualch' anzièn u s'alzéva e véa cuvéun  
 se capòt sottabraz,  
 néun tótt zétt se pelcsènic a guardè,  
 e' guardéva ènca léu, pu u s'è indrizé:  
 «A me gli occhi!», s'na zurma, «Fermi tuttil  
 fermi, vi dico!», e própia at che mumént  
 una bota se pèlch e tènt 'd chi squézz,  
 cs'èll stè? i éva tiràt un sachètt d'aqua,  
 pu un èlt, un èlt, i mi cumpàgn, mè ò détt:  
 «Ció, aquè cm'a la mitémme?», mo lòu sè,  
 aqua, sachètt, l'era un divertiment,  
 i zughéva, al scaràni, i s li era mèssi,  
 par arparès, gambi d'insò, sla testa,  
 un èlt sachètt, e' gag l'à punté un daid:  
 «Giorgio, a t'ò vést», da d'in èlt di gran fés-ci:  
 «Arbitro, occhiali! », pu l'è vnú zò e' mònd,  
 pézz 'd carobla, tursóll, bózzi 'd banana,  
 ad melarèzza, un busilòt dla Fanta,  
 pin, ch' s'i t ciapa, mo quèsta, brutti porci,  
 u n'è aqua, e duv'èll léu? l'era alè,  
 u i luséva agli urècci ad brilantina,  
 sudéd, se nòtal tórt,  
 «Aquè u s'è smòs 'na vèggia ch' l'è mèi còisla»,  
 a i ò détt, léu u m'à guèrs: «Se ce la fai»,  
 «S'a gli à faz mè? mo mè chi vut ch' m'aférma?»  
 «Non parlo della gente», «E 'lòura?», «L'acqua»,  
 «Sté pacéugh?», «Cresce», «Mo sèt òt sachètt»,  
 «È un'altra cosa», «Come un'altra cosa?»  
 e te zcòrr a m so mòs, orca, a sguazéva,  
 mo quèsta addò ch' la vén? ch'i apa las vért  
 un rubinètt, aquè, ad sta baraònda,  
 mo là spèsa u i sarà pò qualcadéun,  
 u i vó póch, «Non si ferma»,  
 «Marà farmèla invíci, fai un rógg»,  
 «È tardi», e ò sintí un giàz, éva i pi a bagn,  
 a so mòunt s'na scaràna, csa suzédal?  
 che un mumént fa, mo èl dóbbi, Gufredín  
 dò ch' l'è? u n s n'è incórt? u n vaid?  
 u i n'era bèla quatar dàida, spórca,  
 pina ad cichi, ad ziréin,  
 e mè ch'ò d'andé chèsa, cmè ch'a faz?  
 pu quèst, 's'ut rubinètt,  
 u s'è ròtt un cundótt, l'è un canòun d'aqua,

I said to him, he was looking at me: "If you can."  
"If I can? me, who's going to stop me?"  
"I'm not talking about the people," "What then?" "The water,"  
"This mess?" "It is getting bigger," "Just seven or eight bags,"  
"There's something else," "What do you mean, something else?"  
and while we were talking I got drenched, what the hell? I was soaked,  
a faucet? here, in all this mayhem?  
there's got to be someone behind this,  
it wouldn't take much, "It is not stopping," "But it's got to be stopped,  
give them a yell," "It's late," I felt ice-cold, my feet were wet,  
I jumped up on a chair, what's going on?  
because a minute ago, it could be, Goffredino?  
where is he? does he not realize? doesn't he see?  
there's already three inches, it's filthy,  
it's full of cigarette butts, matchsticks,  
and I, I need to get back home, what am I going to do?  
now this, it's not a faucet,  
the water-main has burst, it's a flood,  
someone, come on now, go notify the police,  
because if it's not cut off, and be quick, it's really gushing,  
it's already above the transoms,  
you can see the lights reflecting down into it, I can see myself,  
where are the others? my pals, and him,  
they're not here anymore, how did they get out? and the pandemonium  
out ahead, it's all collapsing, no, it's the cover  
of the prompt box which has given,  
the water has made another route,  
it's receding, listen to how it's rumbling below,  
it's gone down, there on the wall  
you can see the watermark,  
or is it? it's still too soon, it was all the way up to the knees,  
but it must be going down, see how much it's gone down already,  
but in case it hasn't, be on the lookout for a landmark, some plaster  
peeling,  
that one, that one I saw earlier in the evening,  
it looked like a leaf on a stem,  
where is it? was it there then? I don't see it anymore,  
oh no, instead of going down, wait, what's all that stuff  
coming this way? a loaf of bread?  
completely saturated? bloated, it's enough to turn your stomach,  
and here, on the seat of the chair, is a puddle,  
the other chairs are moving,  
going in every direction, knocking against each other,  
what's going on down there?  
a crash of windows breaking, a roar,

qualcadéun, zò, ch'e' vaga a visé al guèrdis,  
 s' ta n la stagn, e fè prèst, quèsta la còrr,  
 la è zà mòunta sòura mi cavéi,  
 u s'i vaid dréinta i lómm, a m vèggh par mè,  
 mo e ch'ilt duv'èi? i mi cumpàgn, e léu,  
 i n gn'è piò, dò ch'i è pas? e sté malàn  
 alè 'vènti, e' casca tòtt, no, l'à zdéu  
 e' cvérc dla béusa de sugeridòur,  
 l'aqua, u s'i è vért un pas,  
 la va zò, sint ad sòtta cmè ch' la arbòmba,  
 aquasò adès u s sgòmbra, alè te méur  
 u s'avdirà la réiga de bagnèd,  
 o no? l'è prèst ancòura, u i n'era un znòc,  
 però la chin calè, quèll ch' va mai zò,  
 se no basta tní d'òc un sègn, un scòurgh,  
 quèll alè, ch'a l'ò vést ad préima sàira,  
 u m pareva una foia se gambòz,  
 dò ch' l'è? l'era alè dè, a n'e' vèggh piò,  
 ció, mo invíci 'd calé, spétta, cs'èll ch' l'è  
 cla roba ch' vén avènti? una pagnòta,  
 tòtt' imbumbèda, gòunfia, la fa séns,  
 e sla pivira aquè u i è la piscòlla,  
 agli èlt scaràni al s móv,  
 al va d'in quà e d'in là, al sbat tra 'd l'òu,  
 e alazò in fònd cs'èll stè?  
 un scatramàz ad véidar rótt, un sciòun,  
 aquè u n s pò spitè piò, sno che dú s val?  
 basta, quèll ch' vén e' vén,  
 che tavuléin, ò slòngh 'na gamba, dàì,  
 s'a i putéss arivé, se pi ò tòcch l'òural  
 de mèrum, a so stè pr'un pó a cavàl  
 tra la scaràna e e' tavuléin, s'a sguéll  
 a m sbrènc, ò fat la blènza, a m so dè e' slènz,  
 ò dvanè un pó sal brazi, a m so indrizé,  
 aglia ò fata, 'ta bón, e un batimèní,  
 ch'a m so ènca spavantè, a n mu n l'aspitéva,  
 mo sta festa ma chéi?  
 mu mè? pu a i ò vést, tòtt,  
 la zénta mai ch'u i era, i dént a d'ór,  
 no, i réid, ta n sint? l'era una sbacarèda,  
 i s batéva sal còsci, i s déva ad gòmat,  
 i s pighéva, u s'i avdéva tremè al spali,  
 i s'asughéva al lègrimi se braz,  
 mo pu di sgréss, di céul, al dònì al stéva  
 testa d'indrí, u i ridéva ènca al culèni,

you can't wait here any longer, but where can you go?  
enough, whatever's going to happen will happen,  
that little table, I've extended my arm, come on, come on,  
if I can reach it, I'm touching the marble ledge  
with my feet, I've been here for awhile straddling  
between a table and chair, if I slip  
I'm done for, I'm balancing, then this impulse,  
I've tilted my arms a little, I've righted myself,  
I've done it, steady, and then there's clapping,  
which scared the living daylights out of me, I wasn't expecting that,  
who's the applause for anyway?  
for me? then I saw them, everyone,  
tons of people, someone with gold teeth,  
no, they're laughing, can't you hear? bursts of laughter,  
slapping their thighs, elbowing each other,  
they were doubled over, you could see their shoulders quaking,  
wiping off tears with an arm,  
but then, there were shrieks and catcalls, women  
with their heads thrown back, even the necklaces were convulsing  
with laughter,  
some were all splayed out, completely disheveled,  
they started coughing, they were choking with laughter,  
a little boy standing in the aisle  
was watching me, they are laughing at me,  
I got dizzy, too much of a din,  
it was all flickering, I raised my hand:  
be quiet, someone yelled out: "Silence in the hall!"  
someone else: "Speak up," what's going on with them?  
"Speech!" are they all insane? "We're all waiting Four Eyes!"  
I don't dare say a word, plus, what can I tell them?  
"You're the Boss, you tell us," all right, be quiet then, "Here, folks,  
whoever can,  
you should get up and go home," you could hear snickering,  
"It's nothing to laugh about, you don't believe me? look,  
no, look at me, up here, at me, don't you see me?"  
from one row they heckled: "Projector! He's all out of focus!"  
it was worse than before, now they were hoarse,  
with flushed faces, and over there?  
what's that rumbling?  
it's like it's boiling, plus it's risen, it's a gush,  
it was the hole, it had filled up below,  
it was spouting up again,  
and then something broke, this isn't happening, it was  
like when they open the sluice at the millstream,  
it went down, but a river rises, screams,

d'ilt i era a gambi vérti, tutt sbudléd,  
 u i avnéva da tòs, i s'afughéva,  
 un burdèl u m guardéva  
 d'impí te curidéur, i réid sa mè,  
 u m ziréva la testa, tropa boba,  
 avdéva imbarbaièd, o 'lzè una mèna:  
 sté zétt, éun l'à rugéu: «Silenzio in sala!»,  
 un èlt: «Hai la parola», cs'ài capéi?  
 «Discorso! », mo i è mat ? «Quattr'occhi, dàì ».  
 ch'a n m'aréisgh, pu csa i dégghi? «Capo, alòura?»,  
 va bén, sté zétt: «Aquè, burdèll, chi ch' pò »,  
 a n'éva e' spéud, «Quèst l'è un zavài ch' l'è mèi

tò sò e 'ndè chèsa», u s'è sintú sgrigné,  
 «La n'è da réid, a n mu n cridéi? guardé  
 mo guardém, aquasò, mu mè, a n m'avdéi?»,  
 da un pèlch i m'à 'rspòst: Quadro!», la è stè fata,  
 pézz ch' nè préima, i era ormai tòtt runchèd,  
 dal fazi lóstri, e alè cs'èll ch'e' sbarbòtla?  
 cmè ch' la buléss, pu la à dè sò, mo un zèt,  
 l'era la beusa, sòtta u s'era impéi,  
 u la arbutéva fura,  
 e pu la à ròtt, u n s'è capéi, l'è stè  
 cmè quante mi muléin i éirva e' butàz,  
 la andéva zò, mo una fiumèna, rógg,  
 u n s'avdéva piò gnént,  
 un nibiòun, a vampèdi, da srè i ócc,  
 la m piuvéva madòs, e ad sòtta l'era  
 la fèin de mònd, l'aquí, u sintéva sbat  
 ti méur, u m'arivéva i squézz tla faza,  
 ò vést 'na córda, a l'ò ingranfèda, sò,  
 a m so tróv spèsa al quéinti,  
 u i era un'asa, cmè un caminamént,  
 avènti pò, fina una pórtà ad fèr,  
 ò vért, un curidéur se tapàid ròss,  
 mo quést l'è i pèlch, ò vést scrétt «II Ordine»,  
 sò pr'al schèli, «III Ordine», un mumént,

che pèlch sla pórtà vértà, fam avdài,  
 a so éintar, ò guèrs ad sòtta, mama,  
 zénta, pultròuni, gnént, l'era tòtt'aqua  
 sòura u i baléva plézzi, guènt, capéll,  
 e la crèss sémpa, i préim pèlch i è zà a bagn,  
 l'è sòtta ènca i sgónd pèlch, èlt che guardè,  
 aquè bsògna 'ndè sò,

you couldn't see a thing anymore,  
a dense fog, in gusts, it forced you to close your eyes,  
I was in a downpour, and below, it was  
the end of the world, water, you could hear it slapping  
against the walls, my face was being sloshed,  
I saw a rope, I grabbed it, up we go,  
I found myself behind the wing,  
there was a board, like over a war trench,  
careful now, all the way to an iron door,  
I pulled it open, a hallway with red carpet,  
but these are the different tiers, I saw "Level II" written,  
some stairs, up, "Level III," wait a second,  
that tier with the open door, let's have a look,  
I went in, I looked down, oh mother,  
people, seats, it was all water,  
on the surface, there were furs,  
gloves, hats,  
and it's still rising, the first tiers are already submerged,  
the second tiers are under too, but why am I standing here watching,  
you need to get up higher,  
come on now, this is the upper balcony, this is the snack bar,  
I jumped up onto the counter, I got through,  
then stuff everywhere, jam-packed, a storage area, huge boxes,  
crates, sacks, empty bottles,  
if I come down wrong on my foot, ouch, my head!  
what did I hit it on? is it bleeding? on this iron pipe,  
I worked my way behind it, careful, it's the handrail  
of another staircase, water, below, listen to  
it rumbling, I ran as fast as I could,  
I took it two stairs at a time,  
a door, I grabbed the door handle,  
it gave, it opened, and all the lights were blazing,  
it's town hall, the meeting chambers,  
there wasn't a soul,  
I passed through it, into the engineering department,  
from there into the archives, another staircase, this one's stone,  
narrower, Jesus, look at these pendulums,  
it's the town clock, they're nothing but bricks attached to a piece of  
wire,  
and what is happening down below?  
it looks like a storm at sea, over there is an opening,  
three steps, a tiny gate,  
what's all this stuff flying around, pigeons?  
I was underneath the roof tiles, where's that music coming from?  
be careful walking, it's all just laths,

forza, quèst l'è e' luzòun, quèst l'è e' bufè,  
 a so sèlt se bancòun, a so pas 'dlà,  
 l'era pin 'd roba, un magazéin, scatléun,  
 casi, sach, bòci svéiti,  
 s'a vagh zò mèl s'un pi, ahi, la mi testa!  
 dò ch'ò batéu? u m vén e' sangh? sté fèr,  
 a i so 'ndè dri, 'ta bón, l'è e' tinimèn  
 d'un'èlta schèla, l'aqua, sòtta, sint  
 cmè ch' la gargòia, andéva ad scaranèda,  
 du scaléin a la vólta,  
 una porta, a m so ciap ma la manéglija,  
 la à zdéu, l'è vért, e tótt' al luci zàisi,  
 mo l'è e' Cuméun, la sèla de cunséi,  
 u n gn'era un'anma,  
 ò trarsè, a so 'ndè tl'uféizi technich,  
 da 'lè tl'archéivi, un'èlta schèla, ad sas,  
 piò strètta, orca, vè i péndal, l'è l'arlózz,  
 ch' pu l'era di madéun lighéd s'na spranga,  
 e sòtta csa suzédal? e' pareva  
 cumè un mèr in burasca, alè che béus,  
 tri scaléin, un rastèl,  
 e' svulaza dla roba, l'è pizéun?  
 a sera sòtta i cópp, mo dò ch'i sòuna?  
 aténti a caminé, l'è tótt sturúl,  
 se t sgar t vé ad sòtta, e u s sint sémpra sunè,  
 sté budèl, u s'i va cuvéun, e què?  
 dò ch'a so scap? mo quèst  
 l'è e' pèlch dl'òrgan 'd San Ròch, ècco chi ch' sòuna,  
 l'è du burdèll, i zuga, éun e' pacéuga  
 si tast, purséa, cl'èlt me mèng u m'à vést,  
 u s'è férum, i tast i à batú ciòch,  
 ad sòtta ò sintí frézz, 'na pozza ad zira,  
 la éva zà cvért i altèr, qualche candàila  
 la era ancòura zàisa,  
 sla fiamba ch' la baléva,  
 pu u s'è smórt tótt, però alè u m pèr, cla pórtia,  
 u s va se campanéil, a m'i so bótt,  
 sno che i scaléin, lègn vèc, un scricadézz,  
 alt, féрма, quèst e' zéd, e' zóccla ènch' quèst,  
 gnént, l'è tótt fraid, ta n vaid alasò ch' sbrèrch?  
 e cagli asi spandléun, óna la déndla,  
 la casca, plòff, adès a turnè indrí,  
 pianin, acsè, 'd curtèl, tachèd me méur,  
 e quèst? che préima a n l'éva mégga vést  
 sté purtunzéin, l'è vért, 'n'andit, 'na cambra,



if I stumble, I fall down below, and you can still hear the music playing,  
this narrow chute, if you crawl on all fours, and here?  
where has it belched me out?  
this is the organ loft at San Rocco, that's what's playing,  
two kids, they're playing around, one of them is  
banging on the keyboard, helter-skelter, the other, at the bellows,  
has seen me,  
it stopped, they keys were playing by themselves,  
from below I heard a hissing, a stink of wax,  
it had already covered the altars, a few candles  
were still lit,  
with flames that were flickering,  
then it all went out,  
but over there, it looks like, maybe, that door,  
leads up into the bell tower, I ran to it,  
it's just that these stairs, the wood's old, they're creaking,  
stop, wait, this one's giving, this other one's vibrating too,  
it's nothing, no good, it's rotten, don't you see that fissure up there?  
and those hanging boards that are swaying,  
it's falling, boom, so now go back the way you came,  
slowly, that's right, it's angled, the wall's slanted,  
what's this? I hadn't seen it at first,  
this hatch, it's open, a passageway, a room,  
I held my breath, that's Father Gaetano,  
at the back of the room, in an armchair, his mouth open,  
without his dentures, he was snoring, forward I go,  
on tiptoes, a step,  
the laundry room, hanging sheets,  
pillowcases, towels, shirts, tablecloths,  
you could get lost here, isn't that a staircase over there,  
a spiral staircase, come on now, carefully,  
so you don't slip, what is this smell? it's like  
carbolic acid, a tincture of some sort, and all these beds,  
in a row, white, where have I ended up? the hospital?  
and this sawdust on the floor, to keep it dry?  
right, keep it dry, can't you see  
there's already more than an inch? "Sshh! be quiet!"  
"But sawdust isn't going to do any good, " "Quiet,  
because he's dozed off, just go wherever you need to go,"  
"Give it to me straight now, is this a place where I'd be better off  
not being?"  
"And he's got a strangulated hernia," "I've warned you,  
do what you want," and there, what's that,  
what's beyond that glass door? I felt around,  
another staircase, a beam, two beams, a door,

a tnéva e' fiè, mo quèll l'è don Gaitèn,  
 d'indri s'un scaranòun, a bòcca vértà,  
 senza dantira, e' surnicéva, avènti  
 in pèunta 'd pi, 'na schèla,  
 e' cambaròun da stènd i pan, lanzúl,  
 fudrètti, sugamèn, caméisi, tvai,  
 aquè 'un u s pérd, mo alazò u n'è una schèla?  
 a luméga, sò, pièn,  
 da no sguilé, cs'èll ch' l'è st'udòur? cm'e' fòss  
 acid fènich, tintéura, e tótt chi létt,  
 in féila, bièrch, dò ch'a so vnéu? te bsdèl?  
 e sté sgadézz ma tèra, pr'asughé?  
 sè, t'é vòia, a n'avdéi  
 ch'u i n'è zà piò 'd do dàida? «Ssst! sté zétt! »,  
 «Mo se sgadézz u n s'i fa gnént», «Sté zétt,  
 ch'u s'è supéi, andé dò ch'i d'andè»,  
 «Dém rèta, quèst l'è un pòst ch' l'è mèi no stèi»,  
 «Mo s'un'ergna struzèda», «Mè a v l'ò détt,  
 fé vuílt», e alè, ch'a vègga,  
 csa i èll dlà 'd cla vedrèda? a m'e' sintéva,  
 un'èlta schèla, un rèm, du rèm, 'na pórtà,  
 la è sno custèda, u n gn'è niseun? ò vést  
 e' lómm sòtta una bóssla, ò busé, «Avènti,  
 vní 'vènti, a v faz 'na stàisa?»,  
 la déva dréinta m'un maz 'd chèrti, «A n pòs»,  
 «Zincmella frèrch», «U n'è pr'i bóch, ò préssia»,  
 «Duv'iv d'andè?», «D'in èlt, dò ch' l'è una schèla?»,  
 «Drétt me vòst nès, arví cla pórtà», «Adio,  
 mo vò, ènca vò, nu sté spitè, scapé,  
 u i è zà un pacéugh aquè», «Eh, a l so purtròp,  
 l'è una chèsa, mè, quèsta, quant e' pióv  
 a chin mètt dimpartótt dal caldarètti»,  
 e la zénta i capéss sémpira a l'arvérsa,  
 's'ut caldarètti, mo ta n la sint sòtta,  
 aquè sòtta, ta n sint cmè un animèli  
 ch'e' lènsa? gnént, va là, 's'ut zcòrr, piotòst  
 adès aquè, quèst l'è l'éultum pianètt,  
 e sté purtòun l'è srèd, però adlà i zcòrr,  
 l'è scap un camarir, a m so infilé,  
 i éva fini 'd magnè, mo una tavlèda,  
 i bacaiéva, un fóm, i n m'à gnénch vést,  
 ò imbócch un curidéur,  
 sta pórtà u i è la cèva dréinta, vdémma,  
 a i ò inzècch èrch' stavolta, un souraschèla,  
 e alasò u i è un batóss, a m'i so ciap,

it's ajar, isn't there anyone here? I saw  
 the light under a doorbell, I rang," Come in,  
 come in, should I lay them out for you?  
 she was shuffling a deck of cards, "I can't,"  
 "Just five thousand lire," "It's not the money, I'm in a hurry,"  
 "Where do you have to go?" "Up higher, where's a staircase?"  
 "Follow your nose, open that door," "Goodbye,  
 and you, you too, don't stay here waiting, come away,  
 it's already a morass," "Ah. You don't have to tell me,  
 this is a house, and I, this is, and when it rains,  
 I have to put bowls all over the place,"  
 and people are always getting things half-assed backwards,  
 what good are basins and bowls? can't you hear it down below,  
 right down here, don't you hear how it sounds like an animal  
 gasping? no response, fine then, what's the point of talking, in any  
     case,  
 this is the final landing,  
 and this huge door is shut, but there's talking behind it,  
 a waiter came out, he slipped past me,  
 they'd finished eating, it was quite a group,  
 they were squabbling, a cloud of smoke, they didn't even see me,  
 I made my way to a hallway,  
 and this door? there's a key inside, let's see,  
 I could have guessed it, stairs,  
 and up there, a trapdoor, I grabbed it,  
 I braced myself against the wall, I hefted myself up,  
 and this? it's like walking inside a cloud,  
 it's filled with tufts of wool, it's Pia's house,  
 Pia the mattress-maker, and that curl over there  
 is a railing, at least my vision's still sharp, above  
 it's all horsehair, quiet now, who's moaning?  
 "Are you hurt?" there's two of them, "What do you want?" "Is it  
     Nando?"  
 "No, please excuse me, I was just passing through,"  
 "Get the hell out of here," she had covered her face  
 with her hands, and now where?  
 stay calm, beyond that net is a door,  
 with a bolt that's all rusted, this is a bitch,  
 come on, up and down, up and down, that's right, to get it to budge,  
 all it needs, come on, up and down, and pull,  
 that's it, it gave, hurry, come on, unbelievable!  
 I tripped, I came close to falling, it's pitch dark,  
 and I'm not finding the switch, here it is, right here,  
 but this stone feels like tufa, and hanging from it, up high there,  
 is a rabbit stuffed with straw,

pi còuntra e' méur, a m so tiràt sò 'd pais,  
 e aquè? l'era cmè caminé t'na nòvla,  
 tóttà lèna scàrmiéda; l'è la chèsa  
 dla Pia di mataràz, e alè che rézz  
 l'è una ringhira, ò un òc ormai, ad sòura  
 l'è tóttà créina, zétt, chi ch' s'alaménta?  
 «A stè mèl ?», mo i è in déu, «Csa vut ?», «L'è Nando ?»,  
 «No, 'i da scusé, a paséva da què»,  
 «Tót de caz!», li la s'era cvért' la faza  
 sal mèni, e adès dù s val?  
 'ta bón, adlà 'd cla ràida, l'è una pórtà,  
 s'un carnàz tótt ruznéid, quèst l'è una bés-cia,  
 dàì pò, sò e zò, sò e zò, acsè, da smóval,  
 u i vó, mo e' vén, sémpira sò e zò e tirè,  
 ècco, l'è vnéu, andémma, dàì, 'zidénti!  
 ò inzampighé, che un èlt pó a casch, l'è un schéur,  
 e a n tróv e' scròch dla luce, ècco, l'è què,  
 mo quèst 'l'è tóff, e tachèda sò 'lè  
 una pèla ad cunéi sla paia dréinta,  
 una canèla ad gòmma m'un ciód, bòci,  
 fiasch, lègna, telaràgn, l'è una cantéina,  
 o ch'a zavèri? no, l'è bòtti, quèlli,  
 ch'a m so s-cènt bèla al gambi,  
 schèli e schèli, ò s-ciupè par avní réss,  
 che s' la s'inféila aquè  
 l'è la mórta de sòrgh, mo cmè ch'ò fat?  
 csèll ch'u m suzéd?  
 porca boia, u n m'avrà mégga indurmént  
 ènca mu mè? no, mo va là, che préima  
 ò batú 'na zuchéda, sint che gnòch,  
 èlt che indurmént, spétta, no, ècco, a i so,  
 gnént, a vénggh da la basa,  
 ènca al chèsi, i palàz, l'è di scaléin,  
 ch'u i aréiva un burdèl,  
 mo quant u s'à e' nervòus,  
 ch'u n s ragiòuna, 'ta bon,  
 a so pas un spaghètt, e sò mal schèli  
 dop a ridéva da par mè, mè déggh  
 ch'a sarò pò un pataca, mo adès basta,  
 basta, la è pasa, a so quasò d'in èlt,  
 quant u s pò guardè ad sòtta, lasa pò,  
 ènca s'u i è póch d'avdài, mo u s téira e' fiè,  
 sno che la n déura, sint, l'aria la è griva,  
 i calzéun i s'ataca,  
 e' casca d'ogni tènt un calzinàz,

a rubber hose on a nail, bottles, wine flasks, wood, spider webs,  
it's a wine cellar,  
or am I delirious? no, there are wine barrels,  
my legs are killing me,  
stairs and more stairs, I'm going to collapse trying to get to the end,  
because if the water gets down here,  
I'll drown like a rat, how did I get here?  
what is happening to me?  
Damn, could he have hypnotized me too?  
no, forget it, first  
I banged my head, can you feel that lump?  
you can just forget about sleep, wait, no, here, there's  
nothing, I'm coming up from the plains,  
even the houses, the villas, they're steps,  
a little boy is coming this way,  
when you're a nervous wreck,  
and not thinking straight, stay calm now,  
I just had a good scare, and coming up the stairs later  
I was all alone laughing, I mean,  
what an imbecile, but enough of that now,  
enough, it's passed, I'm way up here,  
when you can see down below, or even if not,  
even if there's not much to see, at least you can take a deep breath,  
but it doesn't last, feel it, it's humid,  
my pants are sticking, every so often a piece of plaster falls,  
there it is, look at that mark on the pavement,  
down below there, it's getting bigger, it's here already,  
you can't get away from it, you can't escape,  
but you can get used to it, plus there's not any choice,  
on your haunches and climbing,  
even when there's nowhere else to go, when there's nothing left to  
say,  
it seems like you're trapped, then, if you look closely,  
in the back, there's a staircase,  
how many times has this happened to me, and you run up them  
in a frenzy,  
after awhile you're there all over again, here is the wall,  
here too, it's all wall, but this time,  
you stay there, looking down, but no, it's never going to end,  
there could even be a hidden door,  
like right now, you've got to pay attention to every little nook and  
cranny,  
the slightest creaking, matches would really be a help now,  
but they're not lighting, the tips are all soggy, wait a second,  
let me see, this skinny hanging cord,

l'è li, vèrda cla macia se sulèr,  
 alè ad sòtta, ch' la s slèrga, la è zà què,  
 ta n'i scap, ta n t sgavàgn,  
 mo u s'i fa l'òs, pu u i è póch da capè,  
 pi te chéul e andè sò,  
 ènch' quant u n s va piò invéll, ch'u n s pò mai déi,  
 u t pèr d'ès intraplèd, pu a guardè bén,  
 in fònd u i è una schèla,  
 quant vólti u m'è suzèst, e t vé sò 'd féuga,  
 dop un pó ta i si dl'èlt, aquè l'è méur,  
 ènca què, l'e tótt méur, stavólta mò,  
 t sté 'lé, a ócc bas, invíci no, mai zéd,  
 u i putrébb ès 'na pórtà mascarèda,  
 cmè 'dès, bsògna stè 'ténti ènch' m'un ciaplètt,  
 m'un scròch i furminènt, ch'i m farébb bén,  
 mo i n zènd, al cróccli al s'è spaplèdi, spétta,  
 fam avdài, sta curdléina  
 u n sarà una marlètta? ció, la s'éirva  
 dabón, l'è tótt scaléin, a vagh ch'a vòul,  
 a rógg, a chènt, ch'a so stunèd, pazinzia,  
 u n sint niseun, e alà u i è un'èlta schèla,  
 ch'a i so zà pas da què, o no? i póst ormai,  
 tanimódi l'è chèsi,  
 i è tótt cumpàgn, l'è cumè fè e' zéir dl'óca,  
 mo me, basta tní bota,  
 fintènt che li la è sòtta, orca, ò vést bén?  
 bèla, puzèda alè, cmè una putèna,  
 u n m'era 'ncòura capitè, i la à lasa  
 di muradéur, la fa rinséida, quèsta,  
 la dòndla, e quasò in zéima ciapès bén,  
 a scavèlch la finèstra,  
 'na sèla, avènti, un'èlta schèla, ad mèrum,  
 se tinimèn d'utòun, u s va da sgnéur,  
 pu un'èlta, a n finéss mai, e tè csa vut?  
 nu scróllti aquè, mòl fràid, u m'a dluvié,  
 u i amanchéva un chèn, córr, dàì, va véa,  
 va te caséin, che invíci mè a m'arpòuns,  
 bsògna fè tapa, d'ogni tènt, cumè,  
 a n'ò méggh' piò vint'an, ècco, a so pòst,  
 mè u m basta zéinch minéut,  
 mo quant'èll ch'a vagh sò? adès a tach,  
 sémpa acsè, s'a m'aférum, dop pr'un pó,  
 la testa, un mulinèl, u i sarà pò  
 da qualche pèrta e' sótt,  
 ch'a n gn'apa d'arivé? mo sótt dabón,

wouldn't this be a latch, hey, it opens,  
it sure does, it's a tiny staircase, I'm taking off,  
I'm yelling, singing, me, even though I'm tone deaf, patience,  
no one's making any noise, and there's another staircase over there,  
didn't I already pass through here already? or not? places, at any  
rate,  
so many of them are the same, they're all alike, it's a wild goose-  
chase,  
but I'm, banging my head was bad enough,  
as long as it's down below, Jesus, did I see right?  
beautiful, all spread out like a whore,  
I hadn't understood yet, the stone masons  
had left it there, it means I can do it,  
it's swaying, and up here at the top, hold tight now,  
I climb through the window,  
a meeting room, keep going, another staircase, it's marble,  
with brass railings, it's easy street,  
then another, they just keep going on and on, and you, what do  
you want?  
don't you shake all over me, it's complete drenched, you got me wet,  
the only thing missing was the dog, go, go on, scat,  
you can go to hell, but I'm going to rest,  
you've got to catch your breath every once in awhile,  
I'm not twenty anymore, all right then, much better,  
all I need is five minutes,  
just how steep is this? I'm starting now,  
it's always like this, if I stop, after awhile,  
my head starts spinning like a top, there's got to be  
some place, somewhere, that's dry,  
you think you're ever going to get there?  
but it's dry, I'm telling you,  
dry as a walnut,  
with dust like that fluff under the bed,  
on those curled-up notecards  
on the dresser mirror, and then even there,  
are you so sure that the water's not going to come?  
I don't know, they're all good questions, who can reply?  
but there is one in particular, and that question, if we meet,  
not him, he doesn't control a thing, with all his chitchat,  
he's a pawn, no, it's the ones who are above him,  
the ones who really run things, the ones you could have the talk with,  
two words for you: why me?  
because when you think about it,  
this is a big deal, it's way too big,  
I'm here, it seems to me, I was selected at random,

sótt cmè una néusa,  
 sla pòrbia ch' la fa i rózzal sòtta e' lèt,  
 sal cartuléini a rézz  
 mi véidar dla cardenza, e pu ènca 'lè  
 sichéur che l'aqua la n'arivarà?  
 a n'e' so, l'è tòtt' dmandi, chi ch' pò 'rspònd?  
 mo u i n'è óna, mè quella, s'a incuntréss,  
 no léu, ch'u n cmanda gnént, tòtt' la su ciacra,  
 l'è una pedéina, no, quéi ch'i i è sòura,  
 quéi ch'i cmanda dabón, putèi fè un zcòurs,  
 do paróli: parchè própia mu mè?  
 che quant a i péns,  
 quèst' l'è una roba gròsa, tropa gròsa,  
 mè què, sgònd mè, a so vnù ciapèd par chès,  
 l'è un quiproquò,  
 che s'a i déggh e' mi nóm, a so sichéur,  
 i starà alè a guardèm: e tu chi sei?  
 l'è quell ch'a v vléva déi, chi ch'a so mè?  
 a n so gnént, mè, zò, a còunt cmè e' do 'd bastòun,  
 ch'a patéss ènch' d'otite, pu a i vèggh póch,  
 e sa sti ucèl, ch'i mè casch, ò una lénta  
 tóttà cripèda, quell ch'a gí vuílt  
 l'è un èlt, chi sa, magari u m s'asarméa,  
 mo a n so mè, e adès farmé,  
 ch'ò una vòia 'd butém stuglèd ma tèra,  
 e stè 'lè quant u m pèr, a n dmand 'na masa,  
 e dop, s'u s pò, qualche scaléin d'inzò,  
 vérs chèsa, che ènca 'lè mè u m basta póch,  
 la partéida ma la televisiòun,  
 'na gita d'ogni tènt, a vrébb avdài  
 al Dolomiti, ch'a n'i so mai stè,  
 dal nòti andè a luméggh, s' l'à piuvéu,  
 ch'a m pis, e quèst e quell, e avènti a zcòrr,  
 da par mè, e u n suzéd gnént,  
 ch'i n'apa da capéi, i m'avdirà pò,  
 o ch'i n guèrda, dò ch'i è? ma chéi ch'a l déggh  
 che mè què, quèst l'è un sbai, a n gn'éintar gnént!

### **Ciacri**

O insugné mèl stanòta, dal gran béssi,  
 mo cmè tòtt fé e' cafè? vè ach pìsarèla,  
 l'è tòtt' al vólti acsè, ma tè u t vó óna  
 ch' la t vénga dri dò t pas, mo èl dóbbi, zò,  
 ta n'apa da imparè, ch' t si bèla vèc,



it's a quid pro quo,  
 which if I were to tell them my name, I'm sure,  
 they'd be up there looking down at me:  
 and you, who are you?  
 that's what I wanted to say to you, who am I?  
 I'm nothing, I'm, let's be honest, I'm worth less than the two of clubs,  
 the otitis makes my ears buzz, I can't see well,  
 even with these glasses, they fell off, one of the lenses  
 is cracked, the one you're talking about  
 is not me, who knows, maybe it looks like me,  
 but it's not me, and now you've stopped,  
 now when all I want to do is throw myself on the ground,  
 and stay here as long as I want, I'm not asking much,  
 and later, if possible, a few stairs down,  
 toward direction of home, even there, I wouldn't need much,  
 a game on t.v.  
 a little trip every once in awhile, I'd like to see  
 the Dolomites, I've never been there,  
 to go out a few nights collecting snails, if it had rained,  
 because I like the taste of them, a little bit of this and that, and to  
     keep talking,  
 by myself, with nothing happening,  
 but there's no way they understand, they see me all right,  
 or aren't they looking, where are they? who am I going to tell  
 that I'm here, that this is all a mistake  
 which has nothing to do with me.

### Small Talk

I had bad dreams all night, all these snakes,  
 how did you make this coffee? look at this, spills,  
 every time it's like this, with you  
 you've got to have someone  
 there with you every second, is it possible  
 you're never going to learn, you're already old,  
 and don't walk on it, we need a rag here,  
 leave it alone, I'll do it, with my bones aching,  
 listen, do you hear it, it's eight already, I'm going out to do some  
     shopping.

my gosh, the sirocco, I feel it too,  
 my bones are aching,  
 Clara, is it true  
 that your brother has bought,  
 that he wants to go live at Poggio? has he gone crazy?

e nu caméini sòura, aquè u i vó e' straz,  
 lasa 'lè, ch'a faz mè, ch'ò un mèl tagli òsi,  
 sint, l'è zà agli òt, a vagh a fè un pó 'd spàisa,

orca che curinaza, a l so ènca mè  
 ch'u m dól agli òsi,

Clara, ciò, dabón  
 che e' tu fradèl l'à còmpar,  
 ch'e' vó 'ndè stè me Pózz? mo l'è dvént mat?  
 csa val a fè me Pózz?  
 che mè a n'i starébb gnénca sa che grèpp,  
 e la su mòì, la tu cugnèda, cs'èll?  
 la è vlú 'ndè li? alòura l'è un èlt zcòurs,  
 ciò, s'u i pis alasò, l'è par la nòna?  
 la mama ad léu, a l so, la sta 'lasò,  
 ò capí tòtt, sa tri burdèll, la nòna  
 l'è un bèl apòz, cumè,  
 zért ch'ènca lòu però l'è un cambiament,  
 mo i è zóvan, pu, sè, zò, ch'u s sta bèn  
 ènca mé Pózz, d'in èlt, aria piò féina,  
 a m férum da Nazario,  
 mo ènca tè fat avdài, a s'incuntrémm  
 sémpra par chès,

Caterina, dú vét?  
 t'é una préssia, te bsdèl? chéi t'é te bsdèl?  
 Giani? ch'a si parént, un pó a la lónca,  
 a si fiúl ad cuséin, o no? cum stal?  
 che mè, sgònd mè, quèll' l'è una malatea,  
 léu, l'è du an, da quant ch' mórt' la Jole,  
 l'à fat un cambiament, u n'è piò léu,  
 tla butàiga u n gn'è mai,  
 l'è sémpra te cafè, pasti, luvéri,  
 biciaréin, che acsè, zà ch' l'è 'nca un òm griv,  
 acsè e' vó dèi mazès,  
 amo tè t déi quèll ch'a déggh mè, l'è li,  
 l'è la su mòì, la Franca, ch' la à sbaiè,  
 li ma Giani la n l'à mai capéi, léu  
 l'è un pó sgustòus, sè, u n'i va mai bèn gnént,  
 mo u n'è catéiv, bsògna savàil ciapè,  
 t n'i pò dè sémpra còuntra,  
 ta n pò sémpra ragnè, dop, dàì e dàì,  
 e' vén fura una Jole,  
 ch'ènca 'lè, zò, la Franca la à sbaiè,  
 tòtt chi spatéran,  
 ò capéi, sè, sfughès, mo zérti robi

what's he going to do up at Poggio?  
I wouldn't go up there either, up on that cliff,  
and his wife, she's your cousin, or what?  
she wanted to go up there?  
well then that's a different story,  
if she likes it up there, it's because of the grandmother?  
his mother, I know, she lives up there,  
I understand completely, with three kids, a grandmother,  
now that's something you can count on, why wouldn't it be?  
but, certainly, even for them, it's still a big change,  
but they're young, then, yes, it's true, you do feel good up there,  
even at Poggio,  
up there, the air's better,  
I'm going to Nazario's,  
you too, drop by and see me,  
they only time we see each other is by accident,  
Caterina, where are you going?  
you're in such a hurry, to the hospital, who do you have in the  
hospital?  
Gianni? you're related, a little distant,  
you're children of cousins, or no? how is he?  
which I think, in my opinion *that* is a sickness,  
he, it's been two years, since Yole died,  
there was a big change, he's not himself anymore,  
he's never in the shop,  
he's always at the cafe, sweets, it's gluttony,  
shots, which with that, he's a heavy man to start with,  
he's going to kill himself like that,  
but you're saying what I'm saying, it's her,  
it's his wife, Franca, who was at fault,  
she, with Gianni, she never understood him he's  
a little prickly, yes, nothing's ever right  
but he's not mean, you have to know how to take him,  
you can't always be contradicting him,  
you can't always argue,  
then afterwards, little by little,  
a Yole shows up,  
which even there, then, Franca was wrong,  
all the scenes,  
I understand, yes, letting off steam, but certain things,  
you can't go around town saying,  
he hadn't even moved out, yes,  
he did that for the boy, yes, but however in any case  
they're together, you, now, stay another second,  
how can I say it, to stop trying,

ta n li pò 'ndè dí in piazza,  
 ch'u n'era gnénca scap da chèsa, sè,  
 u l'à fat pr'e' burdèl, mo però intent  
 a sté insén, e tè 'loura sta un pó bóna,  
 cm'òi da déi? nu l ziménta,  
 se t rógg l'è pézz, dop u la ciapa ad péunta,  
 mo la Franca zért robi la n gn'aréiva,  
 no, t'é rasòun, l'è zchéurs, quést, l'è fadeiga,  
 bsògna pruvè, da 'd fura a sémm brèv tótt,  
 mo quant t si 'lè, che t vaid e' tu maréid,  
 mè a so rivàta, a s'avdém, Caterina,  
 ta la é frèsc, Nazario, la sunzèzza?  
 tri budéll, no, fa quatar,  
 e un pó 'd grasúl, che ma Pèval i i pis,  
 ir ta m'é dè una chèrna ch' la n s magnéva,  
 ò capéi da fè e' bród, mo l'era stòppa,  
 ch' ta l sé 'nca tè, zò, nu fa la cumédia,  
 csa i éintra e' castrè?  
 e' castrè l'era bón, a t'ò détt gnént?  
 mo la chèrna, Pèval u s'è incaplè,  
 u la vó tèndra léu, cm'a t l'òi da déi?  
 cumè, viziéd, ta m tó 'nca in zéir?  
 e tè?

Bina, mo dò t si stè ch' l'è un témp ch'a n t vèggh,  
 ah, t'é viazè? duvò? pu bén, che mè,  
 quèll che là u n s mób e gnénca,  
 che invíci u m pisarèbb, mè, d'ogni tènt,  
 andè in zéir, vdai dal robi, mo léu sè,  
 e adès du vét? mè invíci ò da pasè  
 da l'Elda a tó i spinàz,  
 u i è 'nca al rósli?

mèz chéll, ch'agli è 'nca tropi, ècco, acsè, basta,  
 dò ch' ta l'é mès ma Nino? l'è te lèt?  
 sla févra? un'influenza? amo la è fura,  
 la è te lèt ènch' la Flavia, la à un mamòun,  
 li pu la fómma ènca, ch' a i e' déggh sémp, mè, u t fa mèl fumé,

l'è un vlén, sè, mo va a zcòrr sa li, che or'èll?  
 l'è al dis, dabón? ch'a n n'ò mélla da fè,  
 Elda, a s'vdém,

oh, la Dolores, spétta,  
 Dolores, ò una roba da dmandèt,  
 t'é prèssia? l'è un minéut,  
 tè ta l'é cnunsú bén Misirúl, no?  
 che irisàira émm ragnè, se mi maréid,

if you scream and yell it's worse, then they're pointing fingers at you,  
but Franca, certain things, she just never figured out,  
no, you're right, it's all just talk, all this, it wears you out,  
you do the best you can, from the outside, we all look good  
but when it's you, seeing your husband,  
here I am now, I'll be seeing you, Caterina,  
do you have any that's fresh, Nazario? sausage?  
three good long pieces, no, make it four,  
and a little of the crackling, which Paolo likes,  
yesterday you gave me a piece of meat that was inedible,  
I used it to make broth, I'm telling you it was tough,  
you know it too, come one, don't put me on,  
what's steer meat got to do with it?  
the steer meat was good, I didn't tell you?  
but the meat, Paolo got mad,  
he likes it tender, he, how can I explain it to you?  
what do you mean he's spoiled? are you pulling my leg?  
and what about you?  
Bina, and where have you been, I haven't seen you in ages?  
oh, a trip? where? how nice, and me,  
mine won't budge,  
but now I'd like to, I'd like, every once in awhile  
to take a trip, see some things but him, sure,  
and where are you going now? I've got to go to Elda's  
to get some spinach,  
do you have some greens too?  
a half kilo, which is even too much, there, that's good,  
where did you leave Nino? he's in bed?  
with a fever? the flu? oh well, it's going around,  
Flavia's sick in bed too, she's got a bad cold,  
on top of it, she smokes,  
which I'm always telling her, I do, smoking's not good for you,  
it's poison, sure, try talking to her, what time is it?  
it's ten? really? I'll see you  
oh there's Dolores, wait,  
Dolores, I've got one thing to ask you,  
are you in a hurry, it'll take just a second,  
you knew Missiroli well, right?  
because last night we were arguing, with my husband,  
he says, he is so stubborn,  
he says that he came from Verucchio, which I don't know where  
he gets these things, he was from Bellaria, wasn't he?  
see, see there, that I'm right, I was sure of it,  
I remember, your mother, worked twenty years in his shop,  
but Paolo when he digs his heels in, I know, it's late,

léu dis, mo l'é un tistòun,  
 dis ch' l'avnéva da Vrócc, che mè a n'e' so  
 'ddò òch'u li téira fura zéрти robi,  
 l'era 'd Belaria, o no?  
 vitt, ch'ò rasòun? mo mè a séra sichéura,  
 a m'arcórd, la tu mà  
 la à lavurè vint'an tla su butàiga,  
 mo Pèval quant e' péunta, a l so, l'è tèrd,  
 émm préssia tótt, saléutmi la tu mà,  
 che mè a déggh sémpa ch'a vi vni a truvèla,  
 pu a la armand, a la armand, e' pasa i dè,  
 mo préima o dop a vénggh,

e quèst l'è Giorgio,  
 t saré cuntént? ò vést la tu Milena  
 in divéisa, ció, la fa una fighéura,  
 la va 'nca se mutòur? la guéida li?  
 t'é capéi, mè a n guéid gnénca la carióla,  
 però, la n'era mèstra la tu fióla?  
 ah, u n'i pieséva da fè scóla, e alòura,  
 ch' la farà ènca carira, òz u n gn'è piò  
 nisun impediment, òz una dòna,  
 ta n li vaid? al fa tótt, ènca e' suldè,  
 la va par lòu, Giorgio, u n gn'è gnént da fè,  
 saléutmi la Graziella,

e adès aquè  
 ch'a n mu n zcórda, e' sèl gròs, e' zóccar, l'óli,  
 'na savunètta, ch'u i n'è ormai 'na scaia,  
 'na bósta ad boratalco,  
 ècco, l'Idrolitina, ch'a m zcurdéva,  
 e a ví tó 'nca de mél, ò un pó 'd rampàzna,  
 che se lat chèld e' s-ciòi,  
 e pu avrébb da pasè da la Lucia,  
 ch' la sta alazò a l'inféran, spétta, mo  
 u n'è li, la Lucia, quèlla che là?

ch'a stéva pr'avni zò da tè, e alòura  
 cla sutèna t la é fata? no? a l savéva,  
 tè t prumètt, tè t prumètt, u n gn'è sà stofa?  
 dabón? ch' l'è una piò bèla fantaséa,  
 e alòura u n'i vén gnént?  
 orca, zà, t'é rasòun, 'na bèlza, bló  
 o un maròun schéur, andémm insén da Miro,  
 ènca adès, ta n pò 'dès?  
 admatéina, Lucia, a s'avdémm 'dmatéina,

we're all in a hurry, say hello to your mother for me,  
which I'm always saying I'm going to stop by and visit,  
then I put it off, put it off, days go by,  
but sooner or later I'm coming,  
and here's Giorgio,  
you'll be happy to know that I saw your Milena  
in her uniform, oh my gosh, she cuts quite a figure,  
does she even ride the motorbike? she drives?  
you understand I wouldn't even know how to steer a wheelbarrow,  
but wasn't she a teacher, your daughter?  
ah, she didn't like school, oh well,  
which would be a nice career, today there aren't any  
obstacles, today a woman,  
don't you see them? they do everything, even the military,  
they do what they want, Giorgio, what can you do about it?  
say hello to Graziella for me,  
and now, here,  
so I don't forget, some coarse salt, sugar, oil,  
a bar of soap, the other one's just a sliver at this point,  
a packet of talcum powder,  
here, fizz tablets, which I'd forgotten all about,  
and I want to get some honey, too, I'm a little hoarse,  
which if you put it in some hot milk,  
and then I should go and see Lucia  
who lives so far down there it's the end of the earth, wait now,  
isn't that Lucia, the one over there?

I was just about to go down to see you, and so  
have you finished the skirt? no? I knew it,  
you promised, you promised, wasn't there enough material?  
really? it's such a pretty pattern,  
and now nothing can be done with it,  
goodness, you're right, a flounce, either blue  
or a dark brown, let's go together to Miro's,  
how about now? you can't go now?  
tomorrow then, Lucia, I'll see you tomorrow,

bread, no, there's yesterday's  
which we throw away and people are dying of hunger,  
it's a crime, I'm ashamed, I am, but him, sure,  
if he doesn't have fresh bread, all right, fine,  
a roll, for that pain-in-the-neck, bread's good,  
even the next day bread's good, why wouldn't it be,  
the flavor comes out more,

e e' pèn, gnént, u i è quèll d'ir,  
 ch'a n butémm véa, e u i è chi ch' mór ad fèma,  
 l'è un delétt, a m vargògn, mè, mo léu, sè,  
 s'u n'à e' pèn frèsch, va bén, zò, una rusètta  
 ma che nuiòus, ch' l'è bón ènca e' dè dop  
 e' pèn, cumè, pu e' fa 'nca piò rinséida,

t'é parcè tè? admèn e' fa la nàiva,  
 alòura addò ch' l'avnéva Misirúl?  
 che irisàira ta m'é magnè la faza,  
 da Belaria, la m l'à détt la Dolores,  
 mo pu i l sa tótt, sno tè ta n'e' savévi,  
 e t vlévi avài rasòun, quant ta t'i mètt,  
 t si piò intipatic,

ò incòuntar Giorgio in piazza,  
 no, Giorgio ad Magalòt, che sa cla fióla,  
 e' pareva che, brèva, la piò brèva  
 tla scóla, chi sa dò ch' la arivarà,  
 e adès la fa la guèrdia, bèla roba,  
 la à studié, la à studié  
 par fè al contravenziòun, ch' la sta piò mèl  
 sa cla divéisa, una ragaza, zò,  
 mo va là, a fè la guèrdia,  
 pu che brètt sla visira, tótt calchèd,  
 ch' la à sno i cavéll ad bèl,

(cs'èll ch'a magnémm?)

u i è n'córa un gòzzal 'd bród, sa sté pèn déur  
 a faz una stuvèda,  
 e du budéll 'd sunzézza,  
 ch' la è sémpra bóna la stuvèda, sint,  
 ò ragnè sa Nazario, mo sté bród  
 l'è specièl, vé che stèli,  
 un budèl, lè ènca trop, mè, e quést che què  
 l'è du grasúl, però nu magni tótt,  
 i t fa mèl, tótt, lasni un pó par stasàira,  
 basta, zò, che dop ta n'i digeréss,  
 a n t'i tóghh piò, a zéur, a n t'i tóghh piò,  
 che quant t sté mèl u n s chèmpa,  
 t la vó una pàira? no? ch' la t lèva dréinta,  
 a t la sbózz mè, una fètta,  
 sint che roba, un butír,

u t'è scap l'òura?

va là che ta n pérđ gnént, tè ta n t vaid mégga,  
 sa cla televisìòun t si cmè un arlózz,  
 che ta m fé vni un nervòus, cambia, ta n t stóff?



you set the table? pigs do have wings,  
so where did Missiroli come from,  
last night you just about bit my head off,  
from Bellaria, Dolores told me,  
but then everybody knows it, it's only *you* that didn't know,  
and you just had to be right, when you dig in,  
you are truly unpleasant,  
I ran into Giorgio uptown,  
no, Giorgio Magalotti, who with that daughter,  
it seemed like, she did so very well, she was the best  
in school, who knows how far she'll go?  
and now she's a meter maid, nice, huh?  
she studied, she studied,  
to hand out parking tickets, and she looks awful  
in that uniform, a girl, come on now,  
get off it, a traffic officer,  
then that cap with the visor, it's all shoved up inside there,  
the only nice feature she has is her hair,  
what should we eat?  
there's still a few drops of broth, which with the stale bread,  
I'll make some *zuppa di pane*,  
and two pieces of sausage,  
who says *zuppa di pane* isn't good? listen,  
I complained to Nazario, oh this broth,  
turned out especially good,  
just look at those beautiful little tear drops floating inside,  
one piece of sausage is even too much for me,  
and here I'll give you a couple of pieces of crackling, but don't eat  
it all,  
it doesn't sit well, all of it, leave a little for tonight,  
that's enough, come on, then afterwards you won't digest it,  
I'm not going to get it for you anymore, I swear it, I'm not going to  
buy it again,  
because when you feel bad it's unbearable,  
do you want a pear? no, it'll clean you out,  
I'll peel it for you, a slice,  
just taste this, it's butter,  
why don't you go out now?  
you won't miss out on anything, you don't even seem yourself  
anymore,  
with that television set you're like a clock,  
it makes me jumpy, with all that switching, aren't you tired of it?  
when it's that time, he turns it on,  
there could be an earthquake, but he'd still turn it on,  
I myself would throw it out the window,

léu quant l'è cl'òura e' zénd,  
 e' pò vní e' taremòt, mo léu e' zénd,  
 ch'a te butarébb vèa da la finestra,  
 mè, che telecomando,  
 par stè sintéi, ch' l'è tótti ciacri, zò,  
 i n chèva un ragn da un béus, sémpra al stèss' robi,  
 e u n a pò dí gnént, bsògna stè zétt, cumè,  
 l'à da zcòrr chi pataca, lasa andè,  
 va là, t fé un schiv sa cla televisiòun,  
 sémpra tachèd alè, mo va un pó in piazza,  
 va te cafè, va a fè una pasegèda,  
 a n stagh mai zétta?  
 l'è lòu ch' i n sta mai zétt, basta, va là,  
 guèrda quèll t vu, mè a vagh adlà a stiré,

sè, cs'èll ch'a stéir, aquè, vèrda che roba,  
 ch' i era nóv, sti calzétt, mo cmè ch' us fa?  
 di béus ch' u i pasa un braz, aquè t' é vòia,  
 quést i è da buté véa, sémpra acsè, léu,  
 se una roba la i pis u n la smètt piò,  
 ènca sta sèrga, vè, 's'ut rinacè,  
 quèsta la è 'ndèda, i gómat, èlt che sléis,  
 u s vaid la fódra, u s' inamoura, léu,  
 t'na sèrga, sémpra quèlla, sémpra quèlla,  
 l'ardéus un straz, e dop, t si mat, la zénta,  
 vè cmè ch' la l manda, u m fa fè dal fighéuri,  
 ch' ènca la zénta, s' i badéss par lòu,  
 no, quèsta, via, a glia bótt tla mundèzza,  
 u s mitrà quèlla 'd vléut, ch' e' sta ènca mèi,  
 mo u n n' à tènti, l' à piò vistí ch' nè mè,  
 e avènti pò, vè che muntagna ad roba,  
 che stiré a n'ò mai vú 'na gran pasiòun,  
 u m pis piò i férr, mè, lavurè si férr,  
 a i ò fat un maiòun, an, ch' u s stiméva,  
 un péunt ad vàird,

                  e adès fura a daquè,  
 che s' a n' i stagh dri mè mal robi, léu,  
 Emma, t guèrd e' mi órt? u t pis? vén dréinta,  
 fa e' zéir, a t vénggh arvéi, ta t pórt a chèsa  
 tri quatar pumidór, che in insalèda,  
 s' ta i fé stasàira, ta m giré,

                  a i mitém  
 at sté sachètt, no, ch' i n' è trópp, ta n vaid  
 quant u i n' è? chi è ch' i i magna?  
 e a n gn'ò mégga dè gnént, mè u i è dal vólta,

I would, that remote control,  
just sitting there listening to it, it's all chatter, come on now,  
it's just a big waste of time, always the same stuff,  
and you can't say a word, *they* should be the ones shutting up,  
                                shouldn't they?

those jerks, they've just got to talk, well let them,  
come on, you're, with that television,  
always glued to it, go on and go uptown,  
go to the cafe, go take a walk,  
I never shut up?  
it's them that never shut up, enough, come on now,  
watch all you want, I'm going in the other room to iron,

sure, and just what am I ironing? here, look at all this stuff,  
which these were brand new, these pants, what am I supposed to do?  
holes you could put a hand through, you've got to be kidding, here  
these should be thrown away, it's always like this, he,  
if he has a certain thing, you can't tear it away from him,  
this suit coat too, look, what's the use of mending it,  
this one's shot, the elbows, never mind worn out,  
you can see the lining, he falls in love, he does,  
with a jacket, always that one, always that one,  
he's worn it down to a rag, which then people,  
look at how she sends him out, he's making me look bad,  
which people too, if they would just mind their own business,  
no, this one's gone, I'm throwing it away,  
you could put on some of that velour, which would even work  
                                better,

but he's got so many, he's got more clothes than I do,  
well just keep at it, look at this mountain of stuff,  
I've never had a big love for ironing,  
I like knitting better, for me, knitting,  
I made him a pullover, last year, which he was proud of,  
he showed it off,  
and now the watering outside,  
which if I don't keep on top of things, he,  
Emma, come look at my garden? do you like it? come on in,  
come take a look, I'll come and open it, you can take home  
three or four tomatoes, which in a salad,  
if you use them tonight, will you tell me,

                                                I'll put them  
in this bag, no, it's not too much, can't you see  
how many there are? who's going to eat them all?  
and it's not that I haven't fed him any, I, sometimes,  
in the afternoon, a tomato with bread,

e' dopmezde, un pumidór se pèn,  
 pr'imbrènda, a n'e' lèv gnénca, s'un pó 'd sèl,  
 e alòura déim, che tè ta i sté tachèda  
 ma la Giordana, mè ò sintéi dal ciacri,  
 ènca tè? ch'a so 'rvènza,  
 fóss stè la Dora, fóss stè la Marina,  
 che lòu dabón, l'è mèi stè zétt, va là,  
 un dè a la ò vésta piànz ma la Giordana:  
 "Ò do surèli che", la s vargugnéva,  
 e adès e' scapa fura,  
 che mè a n'aréiv a cràidi, gnénca tè?  
 amo, cumè, la è sémpra stè a e' su pòst,  
 u n s'è putéu dí gnént, mai, la su mà  
 la s stiméva, t si mat, la su Giordana,  
 e tótt t'un bot, mo l'è quèll ch'a déggh mè,  
 u i è tènt ad chi pastrócc òz, cmè ch'u s fa  
 'rvanzè in cinta? e sa chéi? li la n dí gnént,  
 dis ch' la n dí gnént, mo u i è chi ch' déi, e' pèr,  
 ta l'é sintí 'nca tè? sa Walter Lucchi,  
 ch'a n'e' so, mè, ènca li, s'un òm spusèd,  
 ch' la è inteligenta, inteligenta ad chè?  
 t'é e' zarvèl, ta n'e' dróv? e dis che l'Elsa  
 la sa zà tótt, Walter l'è du tri dè  
 ch'u n s vaid, l'è fura, ènca 'lè dè s cundèla,  
 do famèi arvinédi,

mo tè stasàira ta t fé un'insalèda,  
 t'é tólt e' squaquaròun? l'è la su mórta,  
 mo pu ta i pò magnè sa quèll ch'u t pèr,  
 i à un parfómm, sint che roba,  
 mè invíci a faz agli óvi sfritulèdi  
 si spinàz, l'è al si, a i vagh a mètt sò 'dès,  
 mo grezia ad chè, par du tri pumidór?  
 u i n'è ch'a n'i stémm dri,  
 a s'avdémm, e saléutmi la Mariula,  
 una surèla acsè la m vrèbb mu mè,  
 la à al mèno d'ór, e st'èlta vólta, arcórdti,  
 quant t pas da què, u i è féigh, vè quant u n n'à,  
 fra dis quéngg dè i è fat,

cumè, l'è prèst, l'è al sèt e mèz sunèdi,  
 quant t vu magnè? zò, sbréigti, ch'al s'agiàza,  
 agli è s-ciavéidi? e mètti e' s'el, ma tè  
 u t pis salèd, ch'u n va mégga tènt bèn,  
 a n so sno mè ch'a l déggh, u l dí i dutéur,

for a snack, I don't even wash it, with a little salt,  
and so tell me, which you're near  
Giordana, I heard some talk, you too, I was talking to,  
it could have been Dora, it could have been Marina,  
which they really, it's better to say nothing,  
but come on, one day, I saw her crying to Giordana,  
"I have two sisters who. . ." she was ashamed,  
and now it comes out, which I just couldn't believe, you either,  
and well, she always did what was expected,  
you couldn't have said a bad word, never, her mother  
used to brag, are you crazy, her Giordana,  
then out of the blue, *that's* what I'm saying,  
there's so many of these kinds of messes these days, how did she  
end up  
pregnant? and with who? she's not saying a word,  
they say she's not talking, buy there are some who are saying,  
that's what it seems like,  
you heard it too? with Walter Lucchi,  
which I don't know, I, even her, with a married man,  
who's intelligent, so intelligent that,  
you've got a brain? why don't you use it? and they say that Elsa  
already knows everything, it's been two or three days  
that no one's seen Walter, he's away, even there, suiting himself,  
two families ruined,

so, you're going to make a salad tonight, does it give you the runs?  
it kills him, but you can eat whatever you want to,  
they have such a perfume, smell it,  
no, I'm going to make scrambled eggs,  
with spinach, it's six, I'm going in now to get things started, thank  
you for what? for two or three tomatoes?  
it's been awhile since we've talked,  
I'll see you and say hello to Mariola for me,  
I'd love to have a sister like her too,  
she can do anything with her hands, and the next time, remember,  
when you come by here, there's figs, look how loaded it is,  
in a week-and-a-half or two they'll be ripe,

what do you mean it's early, it's ringing seven-thirty,  
when do you want to eat? come on now, hurry up, it's getting cold,  
is it too bland? put in some salt, you  
like it salty, which isn't good for you,  
it's not me saying it, it's the doctors saying it,  
too much salt is bad for you,

troppo sale fa male,  
 bsògna magnè s-ciavéid,  
 ch' l'è pu s-ciavéid par tè, par mè e' va bén,  
 t'é sémpra da sbruntlè-tè,  
 mo magna cal do óvi, e sta un pó zétt,

che invici mè stasàira a la ví vdai  
 un pó 'd televisiòun, u i è Millesogni,  
 dis ch'u s véinz dis migliéun  
 s'i t cèma me telefan, sè, ò capéi,  
 mo tè 'nca s'i ciaméss, tè ta n'arspònd,  
 ta n'arspònd mai, u m tòcca córr mu mè,  
 ècco, a i sémm, i ravéa, quèsta che què  
 la i i è ad tòtt i brudétt, la zcòrr t'un módi,  
 u n s capéss gnént, la pzézza, e st'èlt ancòura,  
 ch' l'è piò ghignòus, e ma la zénta, u i pis,  
 i n capéss mégga gnént, la zénta, e adès,  
 mo cs'èll ch'i fa? mè a déggh-che,  
 cs'èll ch'i va a strulghè mai, mo fé dal robi,  
 ch'i ciapa tènt 'd chi bòcch, e tè, salàm,  
 tòtti i an, tè ta n sté bén s' ta n vé a paghè  
 l'abonament, ch'i s dà, vè quèll ch'i s dà,  
 vè che roba, e i va 'vènti, no, no, basta,  
 a m so zà stóffa, mo va là, che or'èll?  
 l'è al nóv e mèz? dabón, zà al nóv e mèz?  
 ció, ta l sé cs'èll ch'a t déggh? a vagh a lét.

you've always got to complain about something, you,  
now eat those eggs, and be quiet a second

tonight I'd like to see some television  
for a change, *A Thousand Dreams* is on,  
they say someone is going to win ten million  
if they call you on the phone, yes, I understand,  
but even if they called, you wouldn't pick it up,  
you never answer, you make me run and get it,  
here, here we are, they're starting, this one here,  
there's all possible ways, the way she talks,  
you can't understand anything, she mumbles,  
and this one, he's even worse,  
he's always sneering, and people like him,  
people don't understand anything, and now,  
what are they doing? I say that,  
what are they racking their brains about? you do stuff,  
they win all this money, and you, you numskull,  
every year you're not happy until you march down  
and pay, everything-on-the-up-and-up,  
the television fee, which then they give us, look what they give us,  
look at all that stuff, and they just keeping going on and on, no, no,  
that's enough,  
I'm already sick and tired of it, come on now, what time is it?  
nine-thirty? really? nine-thirty already?  
well, you know what I have to say to you? I'm going to bed.

*A New Annotated Translation of Carlo Emilio Gadda's  
Quer pasticciaccio brutto de via Merulana*

by Roberto De Lucca

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**C**arlo Emilio Gadda (1893-1973) is considered today to be the giant among Italy's modern prose writers: in the words the critic Andrea Cortellessa he has assumed the status of "the prototype of the writer: challenge to emulation, reservoir of quotation, monument of worth." Critical consensus during the last decade of the century regarding the many-sided qualities of this extraordinary writer-figure seems to have secured him a firm place as the major Italian prose writer of our time, as well as one of the major twentieth-century European writers, next to other names (Joyce, Kafka, Proust, etc.) which have reached entrenched canonical status.

This widespread judgment is not so much due to the novelty of Gadda's themes, nor to his experimentation with the conventions of prose narration, nor, in the last analysis, despite the great importance of this facet of his work, to his linguistic originality. Gadda's importance largely consists in the power of a prose which achieves, as Emilio Manzotti has written, "a rare density of expression, a "white-hot" quality that inscribes itself on our memory with aphoristic conciseness."

In spite of this, the reception of Gadda's work in English-speaking countries has not been a success, and he remains relatively unknown here even within the academy. The main reason is translation. Aside from a few short pieces buried in the back issues of reviews, only two of Gadda's works have appeared in English: *That Awful Mess on Via Merulana*, William Weaver's 1965 version of *Quer pasticciaccio brutto de via Merulana* (which appeared in Italy in 1957), and, in 1968, *Acquainted with Grief* (Weaver's title for the 1963 *La cognizione del dolore*).

The English in the 1965 translation of the novel regularly tends towards the very linguistic *medietas* Gadda takes every possible step to avoid. The version offered here remedies the extremely heavy losses of formal features which make reading the Weaver translation an experience so distant from that of reading Gadda's original Italian. It also offers extensive commentary in the form of linear notes.

The importance of the linguistic elaboration, indisputable in Gadda, are of primary concern to the translator. Much effort is being made in the present version to preserve the diatypes (lexical variety) of the original, where possible.



Given the impossibility of translating into another language the *aura parlativa* peculiar to an environment, the translator must, however, try to conserve, in some way, the heterogeneity of registers that the introduction of colloquialisms and dialects represents. The dialects in the novel are never adopted for mere naturalistic verisimilitude, but blended into a more general “macaronism” which affects the narration at the minimal and maximal levels of syntax, morphology and vocabulary.

Current scholarship has resulted in a nearly complete re-interpretation and re-evaluation of Gadda’s masterpiece. The publication, from 1988-93, of Gadda’s complete works in a reliable edition makes it possible, for the first time, to verify intertextual references throughout. This new translation is a small part of the renewed understanding of this great literary work.

### Synopsis

In Fascist Rome (the novel takes place in 1927), the young police inspector Francesco Ingravallo (called don Ciccio for short), a detective-philosopher from the southern Italian region of Molise, is called on to investigate a jewel theft that has taken place in an apartment building at 219, Via Merulana. In the building lives a couple, Remo and Liliana Balducci, friends of Ingravallo: the wife, whom Ingravallo admires for her sweetness, and with whom he is perhaps secretly in love, is of a family whose wealth has been built in large measure on speculation during the First World War. During a lunch with the couple, don Ciccio guesses that Liliana’s obvious melancholy has been caused by her sterility, a calamity she attempts to soothe by temporarily “adopting” several girls from the Roman provinces, mostly servants that she showers with gifts and other blandishments. Three days after the robbery, whose investigation is so far inconclusive, Ingravallo is shocked by the news that Signora Balducci has been found murdered in her home. He rushes to the scene and takes part in the preliminary inquiry, wondering whether there is any link between the two crimes. Liliana’s cousin, the young and handsome Giuliano Valdarena, is present at the murder scene having discovered her corpse. Suspicion falls on him as the murderer with money as motive; Liliana’s husband Remo is away on a business trip and cannot be apprised of the murder. As chapter four opens, he returns and learns of his wife’s death. Liliana’s cousin, Giuliano Valdarena, is under arrest at a Roman prison, but no one seems convinced of his guilt. Liliana’s family awaits some news of the family jewels, left in her keeping; and the Fascist authorities are pressing the police for an arrest - even for an official scapegoat. The interrogation of Balducci is interrupted by Liliana’s priest, Don Lorenzo Corpi, with the news that Liliana Balducci had entrusted her last will and testament to him. Dottor Fumi (Ingravallo’s Neapolitan superior) reads the will, and Ingravallo indulges in some of the speculation for which he is famous among his colleagues.

Gadda’s heavy use of dialects, technical language, parody, and literary archaisms make for a dense linguistic mix.

*Chapter Five*

Chapter five of the *Pasticciaccio* precedes a division in the novel: beginning with chapter six, in fact, the action veers away from Rome, only to return there, briefly, just before the famous close in chapter ten. It also abounds (indirectly, via remembered citations from others) in speech from the murdered Lilians Balducci – an anomaly in a novel where the Signora is central, though largely silent.

The chapter also contains vestiges of the famous “interrogatorio del Balducci” which comprised chapter four of the version that appeared in “Letteratura” in 1946, and nearly completely suppressed by Gadda.

The excerpt here ends just as the narrator reports briefly on Lilians’s funeral.

**Quer pasticciaccio brutto de via Merulana***Capitolo 5*

Ma le deposizioni del Ceccherelli, del suo «giovine di negozio», certo Gallone, un ber vecchietto asciutto asciutto co l’occhiali a stanga, e di un lavorante, certo Amaldi, o Amaldini, furono pienamente favorevoli a Giuliano. Il Ceccherelli, appoggiato dai due, confermò in ogni particolare l’incarico ricevuto più de due mesi prima dalla povera signora, le varie fasi dell’approntamento del ciondolo: «è p’un mio parente che sposa, me raccomandano a lei». La signora gli aveva fatto vede un anello d’oro a la cavaliera, massiccio, oro giallo, con un diaspro sanguigno, bellissimo, recante le cifre GV a glittico, e in carattere gotico per modo de di: «il diaspro pe la catena, lo vorrei che s’accompagnasse con questo.» Gli aveva lasciato l’anello. Lui aveva preso l’impronta in cera: prima della cifra, poi de tutta la pietra, che sporgeva dal castone. Lilians Balducci era poi tornata in bottega altre due volte, aveva scelto la pietra fra cinque che le erano state mostrate dopo che le avevano provvedute apposta dalla Digerini e Coccini, la ditta fornitrice, ch’era tanti anni che lo serviva: permodoché non aveva sollevato obiezioni ad un prestito. Del pari pienamente confermato risultò che l’opale, bellissimo, benché co quel tanto de jella addosso che cianno tutti l’opali, lo doveva rilevare il Ceccherelli, e lo aveva rilevato di fatto dietro conguaglio, nonostante quell’RV, ch’era inciso leggero, «che però io, poi, sa, con rispetto parlanno, si che me ne buggero de tutte ste superstizione de la gente: che pare d’esse in der medioevo, quasi quasi! io, in coscienza, tiro a fa l’affari mia: più puliti che posso. In quarant’anni che ciò er negozio, me creda, dottó, nun ho avuto a di p’una spilla! E poi, a bon conto, l’ho subito schiaffato in der cassetino ch’ ‘o tengo apposta pe questo, subito subito appena l’ho cavato fora dar castone suo, a forza de pinze, senza manco toccallo co le dita, se po di: le pinze, ho fatto un sarto dar barbiere de faccia pe disinfettalle coll’alcole: e

## Quer pasticciaccio brutto de via Merulana

### Chapter 5

*The excerpt here ends just as the narrator reports briefly on Liliana's funeral.*

But Ceccherelli and his “shop boy”, a certain Gallone, skinny old gent with specs, and an assistant, one Amaldi or Amaldini, deposed wholly on Giuliano's side. Ceccherelli, backed by the other two, corroborated down to the last detail both the order received by the poor Signora, more than two months before, and the sundry phases of the readying of the fob: “It's for family getting married, so I'm counting on you.” She'd shown him a gold signet ring, solid yellow gold, with a bloodstone jasper, very fine, engraved with the initials G.V., in gothic letters, sort of: “I'd like the jasper on the chain to match this one here.” She'd left him the ring. He'd made a wax impression: first of the monogram, then of the whole stone, which protruded from its setting. Liliana Balducci had then come back to the store twice, picking the gem from five that had been shown her, stock furnished specially by Digerini and Coccini, the suppliers he'd dealt with for ages, so they'd provided them on loan without batting an eyelash. It was likewise fully confirmed that Ceccherelli had been asked to remove the opal, gorgeous, despite that jinx it hauled around with it like all opals have, and that he'd accepted it in fact as part payment despite that R.V., not deeply engraved: “But let me tell you something, I don't give a crap about folks' superstitions, excuse my French here... You'd almost think we're back in the dark ages, almost! In all honesty, I just focus on doing my job, as above board as possible. In forty years I've had this shop, take it from me, officer, I haven't logged one complaint! Not a pin! Anyway just to be on the safe side, I chucked it right in this special drawer here I got for that stuff, just right as soon as I got it pried out of the setting with the pliers, without even laying a pinky on it, like. The pliers I ran over to the barber to have disinfected with alcohol: the doohickey I just chucked it in that drawer there, last one on the way to the can... Alfredo, you know the one I mean, Peppi, you too... a bunch of those coral good luck charms heaped in there, so if that old opal got it in his head to lay some curse on the shop... What, put a curse on it? Yeah, right: like to see him try, with all

lui, er sor coso, l'ho schiaffato in der cassetto quello là in fonno isolato p'annà ar cesso, tu Arfredo ce 'o sai, e tu pure Peppi: che ce stanno insieme tanti de quei corni de corallo che si gnente gnente je pijasse la fantasia de volemme jettà la bottega... a me, jettamme? sì, stai fino: vorebbe vede, povero fio! E come un cappone in mezzo a tanti galli!... ma co la punta bona, je lo dico io.»

L'anello je l'aveva ridato a la signora dopo un par de giorni, «Sli m'aricordo bene, quando ripassò a bottega pe vede li diaspri». Il ciøndolo doveva consegnarlo a Giuliano in persona. Sarebbe passato lui a ritrillo, portando con sé la catena: «quella, sì»: la riconosceva perfettamente. «Quella catena, aveva detto Liliana, «sa? lei sor Ceccherelli la conosce bene, s'aricorda? Quella che me l'ha stimata dumila lire?... Quella j'ho da regalà. E l'anello del nonno, cor brillante, s' 'o ricorda? che me l'ha stimato novemila e cinque?» Ingravallo gli mostrò pure l'anello. «E questo, nun c'è dubbio: un brillante de dodici grani dodici emmezzo a di poco. Un'acqua magnifica.» Lo prese, lo rigirò, lo guardò: lo sollevò contro luce: «Tante volte me l'aveva detto, il nonno: aricordate, Liliana, che deve restà in famija! Sai a chi vojo di! » La frase der nonno suo, una formula sacra a momenti, pe lei; se vedeva: be', l'aveva ripetuta du volte, in bottega: «nun è vero?»: presente il Gallone, presente il Giuseppe Amaldi; che confermarono col capo. All'Amaldi Liliana stessa aveva voluto spiegaje lei ogni cosa: e com'ereno le du lettere intrecciate che doveva incidere, com'era che voleva incapsulato il diaspro: un po' sporgente dalla legatura ovale: il Ceccherelli secondò con l'unghia del mignolo il fermo contorno della pietra verde, montata a sigillo, vale a dire in lieve oggetto sul castone: e con una laminetta d'oro sul rovescio, a celare la faccia grezza, a richiudere.

Oltre agli orefici, che furono ascoltati de mattina, bisogna di che la famiglia Valdarena e addentellati, e cioè la nonna de Giuliano, il Balducci medesimo, le du zie de li Banchi Vecchi e zi' Carlo, e zi' Elvira, e li parenti un po' tutti, staveno ad annaspa da tre giorni chi de qua chi de là pe trovà er filo de la salvazione e tirallo fora, lui Giuliano, da li pasticci in cui s'aritrovava, povero fijo, senz'avé né colpa né peccato. Una parola. Ma dopo le tre deposizioni a discarico de li tre orefici, ch'ereno già bone, je venne subito dietro quella più bona ancora del cassiere—capo de la banca: der Banco de Santo Spirito. Dar cartellino del conto (ai libretti de risparmio) risultò che il prelievo de diecimila, Liliana l'aveva fatto là, propio il 23 gennaio: due giorni prima del regalo: che quello glie l'aveva fatto il 25, a casa, quann'era andato a trovalli, e aveva trovato solo lei. Il cassiere—capo ragionier Del Bo conosceva Liliana: l'aveva contentata lui, quella volta: era lui a lo sportello, numero otto, pieno di paterni sorrisi. A momenti mezzogiorno. Sì, sì: ricordava perfettamente: all'atto dello snocciolarle sul vetro i dieci fogli — dieci bricoloni zozzi, lenticchiosi, de quelli co la lebbra, che so' stati ner portafojo a fisarmonica d'un pecoraro de Passo Fortuna o sur banco fracico de vino dell'oste de li Castelli — lei invece j'aveva detto, co quella voce così morbida, e quel'occhioni fonni fonni: «Mbè la prego, sor Cavalli, veda un po' si me li po dà belli novi si ce l'ha: lei ce lo sa che me piaceno un po' puliti... », perché

those lucky pieces in there, poor sap! Like a capon in the middle of a bunch of roosters!... but still with some sharp beak on him, I'll tell you!"

The ring he'd given back to the Signora after a couple days, "If I remember rightly, it was when she came by the store to look at the jasperstones." He was supposed to hand the fob over to Giuliano in person, coming by himself to get it, bring the chain: "Yep, that one": he recognized it perfectly. "That chain, you know the one?" Liliana had said, "You know that chain, Mister Ceccherelli, you remember? The one you estimated at two thousand lire? I want to give that one away as a present. And grandfather's ring, with the gem, remember? The one you figured was worth nine and a half thousand?" Ingravallo showed him the ring as well. "It's this one, all right: three carats and a little left over. A magnificent water." He took it, turned it, studied it: held it up against the light: "All the time he said to me, grandpa said: remember, Liliana, that has to stay in the family! You know to whom I mean!" Her grandfather's word, a holy formula almost for her: that was plain: anyway, she'd repeated it twice, in the shop: "Ain't I right?", he asked in the presence of Gallone and Giuseppe Amaldi, who acknowledged with their heads. Liliana herself had insisted on explaining everything to Amaldi: how the two letters that he was supposed to engrave were linked together, how she wanted the jasperstone to be set: bulging a little from the oval setting: Ceccherelli traced with the nail of his little finger the clean contour of the stone, green, seal mounted, that is to say slightly overhanging the setting, and backed with a thin gold plate, in order to hide and encase the uncut face.

Apart from the jewelers, who were heard in the morning, the Valdarena family and consorts, that is Giuliano's grandmother, Balducci himself, the pair of aunts from Banchi Vecchi, unca Carlo, auntie Elvira and just about the whole of the relatives, had been thrashing about for the last three days every which way to get a hold on the lifeline and pull him out, Giuliano, from the fix he'd got himself into, poor guy, though he was as innocent as a baby. Easier said than done. But after those three depositions in his defense by the three jewelers, that were middling enough, there was the one, better still, by the head teller of the bank: the Banco di Santo Spirito. According to the bank balance (on the savings account passbooks), it turned out that Liliana had withdrawn the ten thousand lire there, just on January 23: two days before the gift: the one she'd given on the twenty-fifth, at home, when he'd dropped by to visit them, and had found just her. Del Bo, the head teller, knew Liliana: he'd served her that day: at window eight, beaming paternally. Round about noon. Oh yes, he remembered it like yesterday: as he was shelling out the ten bills onto the counter – ten big crumby leaves, the leprous kind that've been lying in the pants wallet of a goatherd from Passo Fortuna or on a wine-splotched bar of some tavern keeper in the Castelli – she'd said, with that velvety voice of hers, and those big, deep eyes: "Please, Sor Cavalli, see if you can't give me some nice new ones, if you have any: you know I like them sort of clean...": because she called him Cavalli instead of Del Bo. "Like this?" he'd asked, one hand already stashing away the rags, the other hand pinch-

lo chiamava Cavalli, in luogo di Del Bo. «Cosi?» le aveva detto lui riponendo i sudici che aveva già in mano: e glie ne mostrava una mazzetta fresca, per aria, come contro luce, presi p'un angolo, che je pencolava dai due diti: «Lustri lustri, guardi!... so' arrivati propio jeri da la Banca d'Italia: appena sputati fora dar torchio. In odorino bono, senta un po'. L'antro jeri mattina ereno ancora a Piazza Verdi. Che? ha paura de li bacilli? Ha raggione!... Una bella signora come lei.»

«No, sor Cavalli, è che devo fa un regalo» aveva detto Liliana. «Sposi?» «Sì, sposi» «Dieci fogli da mille è sempre un bel regalo: pure pe li sposi.» «*Un cugino: che è come un fratello. Sapesse! je feci quasi da madre, quann'era pupo.*» Proprio così aveva detto: lo ricordava perfettamente: lo poteva giurare sul vangelo. «Auguri agli sposi: e a lei pure, signora.» Si ereno stretti la mano.

Domenica 20, nella mattinata, ulteriori indicazioni del Balducci ai due funzionari: poi al dottor Fumi, solo, allorché don Ciccio, verso la mezza, fu tirato a «occuparsi d'altro», preferì «uscire un momento.» In verità, «d'altre pratiche» non ne mancava, sul tavolo. Ché, anzi, il tavolo ne rigurgitava agli scaffali, e questi agli archivi: e gente che saliva e che scegneva, e che aspettava de fora: e chi fumava, chi buttava la sigheretta, chi scatarrava su li muri. Tutto greve e fumoso, il gentile clima del Cacco, in un odorino sincretico un po' come de caserma o de loggione der teatro Jovinelli: tra d'ascelle e de piedi, e d'altri effluvi ed olezzi più o meno marzolini, ch'era una delizia annasalli. Di «pratiche» ce n'era da gavazzarci, da nuotarci dentro: e gente in anticamera! Madonna! più che ai piedi de la gran torre de Babele. Furono accenni (e meglio che accenni) «di carattere intimo» quelli espediti dal Balducci: parte spontaneamente, si direbbe a scivolo, abbandonatosi il cacciatore—viaggiatore a quella tale specie di logorrea cui si danno vinte certe anime in pena, o un po' ripentite magari de' trascorsi loro, non appena sopravvenga la fase di addolcimento, come il livido suole sopravvenire alla botta: di cicatrizzazione post—traumatica: allorché sentono che li raggiunge intanto il perdono, e di Cristo e degli uomini: parte, invece, tiratigli col più soave spago di bocca da una civile dialessi, da un appassionato perorare, da un vivido volger d'occhi, da una traente maieutica e dalla caritatevole papaverina—eroina e della parlata e del gesto, del Golfo e del Vòmero: con azione blanda a un tempo e suasiva, tatràc! da cavadenti di tipo amabile. Ed ecco il dente. Liliana, ormai, s'era fitta in capo che dar marito... non le verrebbero pupi: lo giudicava un buon marito, certo, sotto tutti gli aspetti: ma d'un bebè in viaggio, che! neanche il presagio. In dieci anni de matrimonio, a momenti, che, che! manco l'inspirazione: e aveva sposato a ventuno. I medici aveveno parlato chiaro: o lei, o lui. O tutt'e due. Lei? p'esclude che la colpa fosse sua avrebbe dovuto provà con un artro. Glie lo aveva detto anche il professor D'Andrea. Per modo che da quelle delusioni continuate, da quei dieci anni, o quasi, dove aveveno messo così tormentate radici il dolore, l'umiliazione, la disperazione, il pianto, da quegli anni inutili della sua bellezza datavano pure quei sospiri, quei mah! quelle lunghe guardate a

ing a fresh wad with two fingers, holding it up against the light, like: “Shiny new, look!... Just yesterday they got here from the Banca d’Italia: just off the press. Nice little smell, just take a whiff. Fresh from the Mint. What, you’re nervous about germs? You’re right!... Pretty lady like you.”

“No, Sor Cavalli, it’s just that I’m giving a present”, Liliana had answered. “Newlyweds?” “Yes, newlyweds.” “Ten grand’s always nice to get: especially for a pair of newlyweds.” “A cousin: who’s like a brother. Just think! I practically played the part of mother when he was a baby.” She’d said it just like that: he remembered perfectly: he could swear on the Bible. “My best wishes to the happy couple: and to you too, Signora.” They’d shaken hands.

Sunday the 20th, in the morning, more background given by Balducci to the two officers, then to dottor Fumi alone, when don Ciccio, toward half past noon, was prompted to “handle another file”. He preferred to “step out for a moment”. There was indeed no shortage of “other files” on his table. The table, in fact, overflowed onto the shelves, and from there to the cabinets: with people climbing up and stomping down as well as loitering outside: this one smoking, that one flicking away a butt, another hawking phlegm on the walls. All smoky and stifling, the charming Cacco atmosphere, in a syncretic little fragrance sort of like a barracks or the upper gallery of the Teatro Jovinelli: ‘tween armpits and feet, and still other perfumes more or less like March cheese, that to get a whiff of was sure bliss. “Files” there were enough to wallow in, to scull around inside: and folks, then, in the hall! Christ! Beat the tower of Babel on a shopping day. Balducci got some hints (and better than hints) of an “intimate nature” off his chest: partly impromptu, spilling out as the sales-and-huntsman surrendered to that sort of logorrhea certain pained or perhaps repentant souls succumb to, as soon as the healing phase sets in, as a bruise succeeds a blow: the phase of post-trauma scar formation when they feel both heaven and mankind have extended pardon; partly, instead, drawn from him with the mildest mouth-twine by affable dialektike, ardent discourse, mobile fervor of eyes, maieutic ingenuity and the charitable anaesthesia of Parthenopean speech and gesture: with the action at once gentle and persuasive, gotcha! of a kindly toothpuller. And here’s the molar. Liliana, by now, had got it into her head that from her husband... that she wasn’t getting any kids out of him. She considered him a good husband, of course, “any way you look at it”, but there wasn’t, you know, the slightest hint of a little bundle on the way. In ten years of marriage, almost, not even a token: and she’d wed at twenty-one. The doctors had laid it on the line: either her or him. Or both. Her? To prove it wasn’t her fault, she would have had to try with another guy. Even Doctor D’Andrea had told her that. So that out of those ongoing disappointments, those ten years, or nearly, where the pain, the humiliation, desperation and tears had put down roots; from those useless years of her beauty those sighs dated, those ahs, those long glances at every woman, not to mention the ones with a baby in the oven!... What the

ogni donna, a quelle piene, poi!... chi dice ma, cuore contento non ha... ai bambini, a le belle serve tutte fronzute de sélleri e de spinaci, in della sporta, quando venivano da piazza Vittorio, la mattina: o cor mappamondo in aria, inchinate a soffià er naso a un pupetto, o a toccallo, si s'è bagnato fuori ora: ch'è propio allora che je se vede er mejo, a la serva, tutta la salute, tutte le cosce, de dietro: dar momento ch'è de moda che cianno la mutanne corte corte, si pure ce l'hanno. Guardava le ragazze, ricambiava d'un lampo, come una profonda malinconica nota, le guardate ardite dei giovani: una carezza, o una benevola franchia, mentalmente largite ai futuri largitori della vita: a qualunque le paresse portare in sé la certezza, la verità germile, gheriglio del segreto divenire. Era il limpido assenso di un'anima fraterna: a chi delineava il disegno della vita. Ma precipitavano gli anni, l'uno dopo l'altro, dalla loro buia stalla, nel nulla. Da quegli anni, operando la coercizione del costume, il primo palesarsi indi il graduale esasperarsi d'un delirio di solitudine: «raro int' 'a femmena», interloquì pianamente il dottor Fumi: «int' 'a femmena romana, poi...»: «semo de compagnia, noi romani, » consentì Balducci: e quel bisogno, tutt'al contrario, di appoggiarsi con l'animo all'altrui fisica immagine, e alla vivida genesia delle genti e dei poveri: quella mania... di regalar lenzuoli doppi alle serve, de faje la dote pe forza, d'incoraggià ar matrmonio chi nun aspettava de mejo: quela fantasia de volé piagne, poi, e de soffiasse er naso, che je pijava pe giornate sane, povera Lillana, si davvero se sposaveno: come je fosse venuta l'invidia, a cose fatte. Un'invidia che je rosicava er fegato: come si l'avessino fatto pe fa dispetto a lei, de sposà, pe poi dije: «Vedi un po': de quattro mesi c'è già er pupo! Er maschietto nostro de quattro chili: un chilo ar mese. » Bastava, certe matine, che un'amica je facesse: «Vedessi che baulle cià Clementina! », pe fasse veni l'occhi rossi. «Una vorta me fece una mezza scena a me, suo marito, p'una ragazza de Soriano ar Cimino: una contadina ch'era venuta a Roma co la viterbese, a portamme li confetti. "Quela zozzona manco la vojo vede!" strillava. La sposa, povera pupa, arrivò co lo sposo, preceduti da na panza come na mongolfiera a San Giovanni, a li fochi. Diceveno: avemo portato li confetti. Se sa, ereno un po' imbarazzati. Je feci, ridenno: se vede che tira aria bona sur Cimino: lei arrossì, abbassò gli occhi sul ventre, come l'Annunziata quando che l'angelo se mette a spiegaje tutta la faccenda: poi però prese coraggio a risponne: embè, che ce volete fa, sor Balducci? Semo giovini. Avemo preso li passi avanti... Quando la cratura sarà venuta ar monno, chi se n'aricorda più? si c'era er prete o si nun c'era er prete, á benedicce? Mo stia tranquillo, che semo benedetti tutt'e tre. » Gli anni! come una rosa che sfiori: i petali, uno dopo l'altro... nel nulla.

Fu a questo punto, co na faccia color cenere, che Ingravallo domandò licenza: pe motivi di servizio. Ragguagli e rapporti di subalterni, parole e carta scritta: disposizioni da dare: telefono. Il dottor Fumi lo seguì con l'occhio, mentre quello si diresse verso l'uscio a capo chino, curve le



heart thinks, the tongue speaks... at the babies, at the pretty maids all verdant with chard and spinach, in baskets, coming from Piazza Vittorio in the morning: or with their fannies in the air, bent over to mop some kid's nose, or poke around, see if he's wet himself, off schedule: since it's right then you get a load of her goldmine, that is the maid's, the whole works, all the thigh from behind: now that it's the style to wear such skimpy underpants, if they're even wearing. She looked at the girls; returned, in a flash as by deep-felt, despondent signal, the bold glances of young men: a caress or benevolent franchise mentally bequeathed future bequeathers of life: to whoever might bear within him the certainty, the seminal truth, the kernel of secret becoming. The pure assent of a fraternal soul: to those who traced the pattern of life. But out of the dark manger the years stampeded, one after the other, into nothingness. From those years, the constraints of morality, at work, the initial manifestations and hence the gradual deterioration into a delirium of solitude ("rare, in a woman", dottor Fumi put in gently: "In a Roman woman, then...": "We're chummy, we Romans", Balducci acquiesced): and that entirely contrasting need to depend spiritually on the other's physical image; upon the vigorous breeding of peoples, of the poor. That mania... for forking out double bed-sheets to the maids, insisting on putting up dowries, pushing folks who asked for nothing better to tie the knot: and then the whim, that took hold of her for days on end, to want to bawl and blow her nose, poor Liliana, if they actually went ahead and did it: as if pricked by jealousy after the fact. Ate her heart out: like they'd up and married to spite her, just to be able to say: lookee here, four months only and already a kid's on the way! Our eight pound kiddo, two pounds a month. "Some mornings all it took was some girlfriend saying: You should see the spare tire Clementine's got on her!", to give her the sniffles. "Once she almost threw a fit with me, her husband, over some girl from Soriano nel Cimino: country girl'd come down to Rome by train to bring me a piece of the wedding cake. "I don't even wanna lay eyes on that dirty bitch!" she was screaming. The bride, poor kid, comes in with her guy, preceded by a belly like a hot air balloon at the fireworks at San Giovanni. They said: we brought you the wedding cake. Naturally they were a little embarrassed. I say to them, laughing: I see you're enjoying the fresh air up there, at Cimino: she blushes, glances down at her belly, like the Virgin Mary when that angel lays it on the line at the Annunciation: but then she gains her spunk back and says: well, what do you want, Mr. Balducci? We're young. So we jumped the gun a little... When the kid comes into the world who's gonna still remember? if the priest was around or wasn't around, to give his blessing? Not to worry, 'cause now we're all three blessed." The years! like a wasting rose, its petals falling one by one into nothingness.

It was at this point, his face ashen, that Ingravallo begged leave to shove off: duty calling. Reports and memoranda from subordinates, voiced or in writing: orders to impart: telephone. Dottor Fumi followed him from out of the corner of his eye as he moved toward the exit, his head bowed and

spalle, in un'attitudine che sembrò stanca ed assorta: lo vide levar di tasca un pacchetto macedonia, e una sigheretta dal pacchetto, l'ultima, sommerso da chissà quali affanni: l'uscio si richiuse.

Don Ciccio, tutta quella storia, gli pareva d'avella saputa già da un pezzo. Le impressioni e i ricordi che il cugino e il marito di Liliana andavano estraendo, in una specie di tormentoso recupero, dal di lei tempo così atrocemente dissolto, gli confermavano Ciò che egli aveva già intuito per proprio conto, sebbene in modo vago, incerto.

Pure quell'idea di voler morire, se non le arrivava il bambino: un po' se l'era «immaginata», don Ciccio, o credeva? pe la conoscenza de la signora Liliana: un po' era venuta a galla dalle ammissioni del cugino e, ora, dal parlare del marito: fatto loquace dalla disgrazia, e dal sentirsi al centro dell'attenzione e della compassione generale (cacciatore, era! je pareva de tornà co la lepre, fucile a spalla, stivaloni infangati e cani stracchi) e bisognoso de sfogasse, dopo la botta: e discettante a piede libero su la delicatezza dell'animo femminile e, in genere, su quella gran sensitività della donna: che in loro, povere creature! è una cosa diffusa. Il «diffusa» l'aveva letto a Milano, sur *Secolo*, in un articolo di Maroccus... er dottore der *Secolo*: finissimo!

La postuma cartella clinica de Liliana venne poi integrata dalla pietà delle amiche e delle beneficate: orfanelle che piagneveno, moniche der Sacro Core che nun piagneveno, perch'ereno sicure ch'era già in Paradiso, a quell'ora, lo poteveno giurà: e zi' Marletta e zi' Elvira in gramaglie, e un paro d'altre zie, de li Banchi Vecchi, pure piuttosto nere pure loro: e conoscenze diverse, ivi computando la contessa Teresa (la Menecacci) e donna Manuela Pettacchioni, oltre a quarche altra gentile casigliana der ducentodicinnove: le due terne antagoniste: l'Elodia, la Enea Cucco, la Giulietta Frisoni (scala B), da una parte, e da quell'atra la Cammarota, la Bottafavi e l'Alda Perneti (scala A), che ciaveva pure er fratello, che contava per altre sei. Femmine tutte, a *sensibilità diffusa*, dunque: benché de quela sorta che Liliana... se le teneva a la larga. Una diffusa e delicata ovaricità, proprio così, je permeava a tutte lo stelo dell'anima: come antiche essenze, nella terra e nei prativi della Marsica, lo stelo d'un fiore: premute lungamente a poi esplodere in der soave profumo d' 'a corolla; che la su' corolla de loro, viceversa, era er naso, che se lo poteveno soffià quanto je pareva. Femmine tutte, e nel ricordo e nella speranza, e nel pallore duro o ostinato della reticenza e nella porpora del non—confiteor: che il dottor Fumi elicò in quei giorni a una memore analisi, col tatto e col garbo che lo distinsero lungo tutta una operosa carriera (e l'hanno fatto oggi, meritato premio! sottoprefetto de Lucunaro adniente Gaspero: cioè no, mejo ancora! de Firlocca, un sitarello delizioso, dove ha tutto l'agio di far valere tutte le sue qualità) e co chella calda voce... quella che lo dava subito presente, prima ancora der campanello (stanza numero quattro), agli orecchi d'ogni brigadiere e d'ogni ladro, non appena mettesse piede in ufficio.

shoulders sagging, with a bearing that seemed tired, absorbed. He saw him pull a pack of cigarettes from his pocket, engrossed in unknown cares. The door closed behind him.

Don Ciccio sensed he'd already known it for a while, that whole story. What he'd already vaguely grasped on his own was confirmed for him by the impressions and recollections that Liliana's cousin and husband, in a sort of recuperative agony, were in the process of dragging out of her so atrociously voided days. Even that notion of wanting to die if no kid came: a bit of it had been his "imagination," (or perhaps belief, through his acquaintance with Signora Liliana); a bit had surfaced from the cousin's disclosures. And now from the talk of the husband, made garrulous by hardship, by his sense of being at the center of attention and collective commiseration (A hunter, he was! Saw himself tramping in with a bagged hare, shouldering his gun, muddied boots, panting hounds), needing to get it off his chest after the blow: and holding forth, untrammelled, on the delicacy of the female spirit and that extreme sensitiveness of women in general: which in them, poor things, is widespread. That widespread he'd picked up in *Il Secolo*, an article in the Milan paper by Maroccus... the medical correspondent for *Il Secolo*: a brain!

Liliana's posthumous case history was then rounded out by the compassion of her female friends and beneficiaries: crying orphans, Sacred Heart nuns, dry-eyed because they'd cross their hearts she was already in heaven, and auntie Elvira in weeds, plus a couple of other aunts from *Banchi Vecchi*, pretty black also: and miscellaneous acquaintances, figuring in the countess Teresa (Bigazzi) and milady Manuela Pettachioni, plus some other gentle women tenants at two hundred nineteen: the two rival triads made up of the Elodia woman, Enea Cucco and Giulietta Frisoni (B stairs), on one side, and from that other the Cammarota woman, Mrs. Buttafavi and Alda Perneti (stairway A), whose brother counted for an extra six. Females all, demonstrating that widespread sensitiveness, in consequence: though of that sort which Liliana... kept at arm's length. A widespread and delicate ovarianism, that's the word, impregnated, in all of them, the soul's stem, like ancient essences in the earth and fallow fields of the Marsica might the stem of a flower: pressed at length until they burst in the perfume of the corolla; but their corolla consisting of the nose, that they could blow to their hearts' content. Females all, both in memory and hope, and in the hard, stubborn pallor of their reticence and the purple of the non-confiteor which dottor Fumi, those days, was soliciting them to recall in detail, with the courtesy and tact which set him apart during the whole of a long and busy career (the just reward of which, today, is his nomination to the position of sub-prefect of Lucunaro, adniente Gasparo: no, sorry, better still, of Firlocca, delightful little spot where his manifold qualities find more than ample range) and with that warm voice... which announced him, right off the bat, even before the buzzer (room number four), to the ears of every corporal or criminal, as soon as he'd set foot in the office.



*“Dentro il silenzio c'è troppo rumore”, oil on canvas.*

## *English Translations of Poems by Giorgio Roberti*

by John DuVal and Louise Rozier

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The Academy of American Poets granted **John DuVal** the 1992 Harold Morton Landon Translation Award for his translation of Cesare Pascarella's *The Discovery of America*. He received a 1999-2000 NEA for his translation of a play by Adam le Bossu. His latest book of translations is *From Adam to Adam: Seven Old French Plays*, with Raymond Eichmann and published by Pegasus Press, which will republish an expanded edition of their *Fabliaux Fair and Foul* at the end of this year. He directs the Program in Literary Translation at the University of Arkansas.

**Louise Rozier** directs the Italian Program at the University of Arkansas. Her translation of Fortunato Pasqualino's *Il giorno che fui Gesù* (*The Little Jesus of Sicily*), published by the University of Arkansas Press in 1999, was awarded the 1996 PEN Renato Poggioli Translation Award. She is the author of the monograph *Il mito e l'allegoria nella narrativa di Paola Masino*, published by the Edwin Mellen Press in 2004.

**Giorgio Roberti** Poet, essayist, translator, editor, founder and president for thirty years of the Centro Romanesco Trilussa, Giorgio Roberti energetically promoted Romanesco language, culture and poetry. Among many awards, his *'na zeppa a l'occhio* (*A Stick in the Eye*) won the Premio Nazionale di Poesia "Roma" and the Premio Internazionale per la Satira, and his *Antiche farmacie romane* won the Premio Internazionale di saggistica. His 1974 translation into Romanesco of *Er Vangelo seconno S. Marco* has been much praised and often reprinted. After his death in November, 2002, a special issue of the magazine *Romanità* was dedicated to him.

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### **Note on translation**

G.G. Belli, writing sonnets in Romanesco in the early nineteenth century, gave an example for Italian poets with his sonnets that showed how dialect could convey the energy of conversation more effectively than standard language. We translators of dialect into English in the United States do not have dialects to convey that energy precisely, so we try to make our verse sound like people talking. This would seem impossible for *A Stick in the Eye*, a story over twenty-seven centuries old, but Roberti helps with his deft details and his sudden shifts of style, and makes translating his poem a pleasure, though difficult.

**GIORGIO ROBERTI**

**Sonnets from 'na zeppa al'occhio**

**XXXVI**

**L'offerta der vino**

Ulisse allora ritentò un approccio  
co un quartarolo in mano, ormai deciso  
a nisconne le fregne in un sorriso.  
Dice:--Mó ch'ai magnato ce vò un goccio...

Senti che marvasia de paradiso  
che t'avevo portata dentro ar còccio...  
E quello, ingarbujato, poro boccio,  
pe' tre vorte arzò er gommito sur viso.

Poi disse: "Er vino mio sarà gajardo  
perché ogni vaga d'uva è un palloncino  
tale e quale a 'na palla de bijardo,

ma ringrazianno Bacco e a falla breve,  
si da le parti vostre c'è 'sto vino  
quella è 'na Grecia Magna... perchè beve!

**XXXVII**

**La sborgna der cicròpe**

E siccome la coppa era un vascone  
come quello der Moro in Agonale,  
ce se prese una sborgna, uno sborgnone  
che nisuna osteria n'ha visto uguale.

Poi guardò Ulisse e fece: --E naturale  
che devo ripagà la bònna azzione.  
Come te chiami? Nottola senz'ale?  
Gnappetta? Tappo? Caccola? Cojone?

--Io so' Nessuno... e pò giurallo ognuno!  
---Okei, pe' ricambià quer che m'hai dato  
me te pappo urtimo, Nessuno!--

**GIORGIO ROBERTI**  
**Sonnets from *A Stick in the Eye* ('na zeppa a l'occhio)**

Situation: the Cyclops has Ulysses and his men trapped in his cave  
and has already gobbled down six of them.

**XXXVI**  
**The Gift of Wine**

Ulysses approached him when the snack was done,  
grinning hard to hide a twitch of fear,  
cradling a jug above his hip bone: "Here!  
Here's a drop to wash your breakfast down.

Here, taste. It's from the paradisal stock  
we brought here for you. That's why the jug's so big."  
A little confused, the poor brute took a swig...  
another swig..., and swallowed the whole crock,

then said, "My wines were pretty strong I thought,  
because each grape is bigger than a billiard ball,  
but let's praise Bacchus for the stuff you brought,

sailing over the wine dark sea. You call  
your country Greater Greece, because you dine  
on greater grease I guess--and stronger wine!"

**XXXVII**  
**The Cyclops Blind Drunk**

And since the crock was really more a tub,  
an "Agonale Basin with the Moore,"  
he got so stinking drunk, a tavern, pub,  
or barroom never saw the like before,

then, looking at Ulysses, said, "Hey you,  
one good deed deserves another. Tell  
me what your name is. Pigmy? Corky Screw?  
Mouse Pill? Mosquito? Tommy Tinkerbell?"

--"I'm No One. Anyone will swear I am."  
--"Okay, then for your gift of wine, you've won  
first prize: you'll be the last I eat, No One."

--Grazzie, gigante da le spalle tozze,  
 ma dimme: sei zitello o sei sposato?  
 --Io pe' la scapolanza vado a nozze!--

### XXXVIII

#### **Er cicròpe s'abbiocca**

E detto questo prese la rincorza  
 verso un branco de pecore lì appresso,  
 ma fece un giravorta su sé stesso  
 uguale a un picchio quanno perde forza.

E mentre sbarellava come un fesso  
 sentiva ne lo stommaco una morza  
 de cacio, vino, stracci e ciccìa borza,  
 assieme co 'na voja d'annà ar cesso.

Poi, tutt'un bòtto, pòro babbalèò,  
 cascò de peso tale e quale a un toro  
 che scapicolli giù dar Colosseo.

Eppoi senza ritegno nè decoro  
 mentre finiva in braccio de Morfeo  
 se vommitava... li mortacci loro!

### XXXIX

#### **Er sorteggio der quartetto de... punta**

Sùbbito Ulisse riattizzò sur fòco  
 la punta de quer palo..., e, appena pronta,  
 disse: -- Regazzi, fate un po' de conta  
 pe' decide tra voi chi fa 'sto gioco!--

Ma quelli incominciorno, a poco a poco,  
 a chièdeje l'esonero e, pe' gionta,  
 chi prometteva svànziche all'impronta,  
 chi vantava amicizzie in arto loco...

Tanto che quanno fu a la concrusione,  
 com'è come nun è vennero fòra  
 li quattro stronzi senza protezione.



--"Thanks, Mr. Shoulders-like-a-battering-ram.  
But are you single? Do you have a wife?"  
--"Who, me? I'm hitched. Hitched to the single life."

**XXXVIII**  
**The Cyclops Lies Down**

Having said that, the Cyclops turned around  
and headed unsteadily over toward a huddle  
of ewes and lambs nearby, then spun a little  
the way a top wobbles when it slows down,

and halfway through another off-balance lurch  
across the cave, his stomach felt the press  
of sheep cheese, rich wine, fat meat, and a mess  
of chewed up clothing, with a sudden urge

to run to the bathroom. Then the poor fool fell,  
fell like a stone, like a bull with his throat cut  
in the Colosseum at a festival.

Down now, without good timing or decor,  
drifting off in Morpheus's boat,  
he vomited their dead friends on the floor.

**XXXIX**  
**The Chosen Four**

Ulysses grabbed the pole and in the flame  
twirled the sharp point. "Okay, boys,  
he said, "we're going to have to make a choice:  
which of you is staying in this game?"

But one by one his soldiers got loquacious.  
They wanted out. Some promised they were able  
to slip him a little gift beneath the table;  
and others talked about friends in high places.

Like it or like it not, when all talk ended,  
all that the lottery threw up were four  
pathetic bastards no one ever protected.

E Ulisse, ner vedesseli in ginocchio,  
strillò: -- Forza, perdio, nun vedo l'ora  
de cecallo, così ce perde... d'occhio!--

### XL

#### **L'accecamento der gigante**

Schizzofatto li quattro der drappello  
mirato all'occhio diedero l'affono,  
mentre Ulisse, incazzato e furibbonno,  
girava er palo come un carosello.

Sùbbito quer vurcano moribbonno  
sputò brandelli d'occhio dar cervello  
e fece un urlo che sembrò un appello  
da fà aggriccià la pelle a tutto er monno.

E mentre Lui strillava la natura  
diventava rugosa e penziosa:  
s'increspava de monti la pianura.

Tanto che a quer mutà de giografia  
più d'una stella fissa, luminosa,  
se trasformò in cometa e scappò via.

### XLI

#### **Ariveno li cuggini der gigante**

L'artri cicròpi, già piazzati a séde,  
pe' fasse 'na scopetta e 'no spuntino,  
se chiesero: "Che avrà nostro cuggino?"  
E detto fatto je l'annorno a chiède.

"A Polifé, che fai? Che te succede?  
Chi te fa piagne come un regazzino?  
Com'è che tenghi chiuso er portoncino  
e fai der tutto pe'nun fatte vède?"

E Lui: "E' Nessuno che me fa der male...  
Nessuno che me leva, sarvognuno,  
tutto er punto de vista personale..."

"Ma nun ciavrà li vermi o l'orecchioni?"  
"V'ho detto ch'è... Nessuno!" "Si è nessuno  
sta zitto e nun ce rompe li cojoni!"

There they knelt. "Now I can't wait to bust his eye out, men," he yelled, "so make sure this will be the last he sees of us!"

**XL**  
**The Giant Blinded**

The four flag bearers aimed, charged, planted, ground the long shaft deep into the cyclops' socket. Furious, frantic, fast, Ulysses struck it deeper and turned it like a merry-go-round.

At once that moribund volcano hurled forth great eye fragments and little wads of jell out of his monster brain. He yelled a yell enough to raise goose pimples on the world.

As he was screaming, Mother Nature frowned, wrinkling her great face, and started to stir and raised up mountains from the level ground.

Beholding earth beneath them relandscaped, many a luminous, uneasy star turned into a comet and escaped.

**XLI**  
**The Giant's Cousins Arrive**

The other cyclopes had come to town to snack and have a card game. One said, "Wasn't that Poliphemo?"--"Yeah! What's with our cousin?"-- And they ran to find out what was going on.

--"Hey, Poliphemo! Hey! Are you all right? Who's got you crying like a little kid? Why have you pulled your cave door shut and hid yourself away from us and out of sight?"

And him: "No One has caused me all this pain. No One, god damn it! Goddamn No One's taken all of my personal point of view away."

--"What is it, cousin, worms? Ear ache? Migraine?" "I already told you: No One!" --"No one? Then, hey, shut the fuck up and quit your belly aching."

**XLII****Li cicròpi soccoritori se ne vanno scocciati**

E mentre quelli, ormai pe' le campagne,  
se n'annavano via de gran cariera,  
Ulisse fece ar mostro: -- Aspetta e spera...,  
nun ciài nemmanco l'oculo pe' piagne!

--E' vero, l'occhio è 'na caverna nera  
e ancora sento er palo che lo sfragne,  
le lacrime però nun sò taccagne  
e ne tengo, perdio, 'n'acquasantiera!

Ma tu che ciài l'occhietti sopra ar viso  
e guardi er celo, sai chi sò le stelle?  
Sò Cicròpi che stanno in Paradiso!

E le stelle me dichenò: "Pastore,  
coraggio! Pe' guidà le pecorelle  
nun te serveno l'occhi, abbasta er còre!"--

**XLII**  
**The Helpful Cyclopes Clump Off**

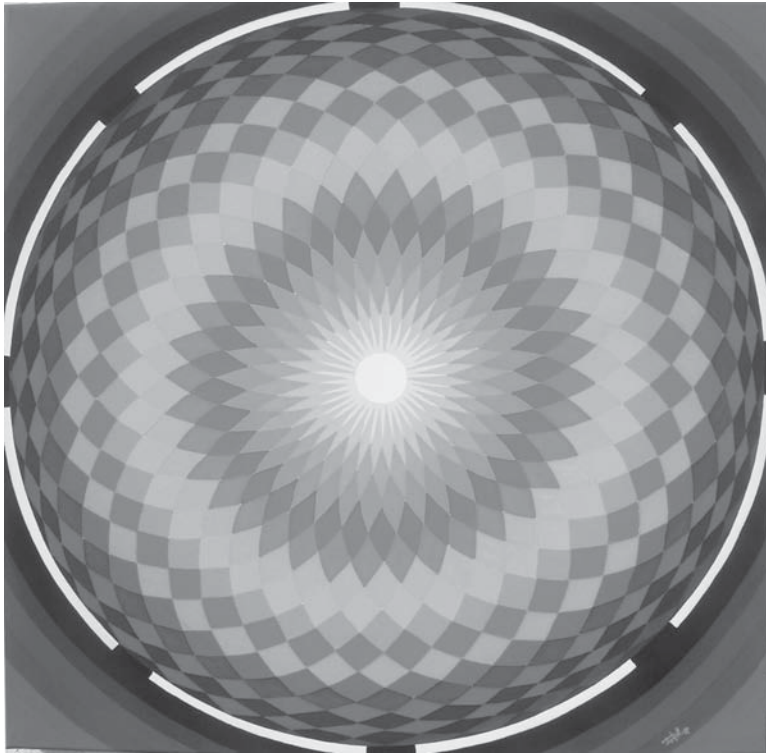
Now that the giant's neighbors and relations  
were hurrying back to the farm yards where they lived,  
Ulysses said to the monster, "Hope and have patience!  
You don't even have an eye for crying with."

--"It's true. The eye I had is a black cave,  
and I still feel the stick that burst it open,  
but I can't stop tears, and tears, by God, I have--  
enough to fill a holy water fountain.

But you, who have a face that's got two eyes,  
and see the sky, do you know what stars are?  
They're cyclopes who've gone to Paradise.

Those stars are saying to me, 'Shepherd, keep  
your courage up, because for herding sheep  
eyes don't matter: all you need is heart.'

Roberti's note to Sonnet XXXVII: "The Agonale Basin with the Moor is the basin of the Fountain of the Moor in Piazza Navona, completed by Bernini, who designed the statue of the Ethiopian in the center of the fountain."



*Toroide, oil on canvas.*

*English Translations of Poems by Cesare Fagiani*  
by Gil Fagiani

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**Gil Fagiani** co-hosts the monthly open reading of the Italian American Writers' Association at the Cornelia Street Café. He has published two poetry chapbooks: "Crossing 116th Street: A Blanquito in El Barrio," by Skidrow Penthouse, and "Rooks," by Rain Mountain Press. In 2005, he won an "Honorable Mention" for both the Allen Ginsberg Poetry Awards, and the Bordighera Prize. Gil's translations include the poetry of three North African immigrants living in Italy due to be published in a Bilingual Anthology of Italian Migrant Poetry edited by Luigi Bonaffini and Mia Lecomte.

Born in Lanciano, **Cesare Fagiani** (1901-1965) was considered one of Abruzzo's leading poets from the 1930s to the 1960s. His poetry has been included in numerous anthologies and published in local, regional and national magazines and newspapers. In 1951, he won first prize along with Alfredo Luciani, at the first Modesto Della Porta Convention of Abruzzese Poetry. His principal works include: Luna nove (New Moon), 1949, Stamme e senti (Stay With Me and Listen), 1954, Fenestre aperte (Open Windows), 1966, and Teatro abruzzese di Cesare Fagiani, (Cesare Fagiani's Abruzzese Theater), 1961.

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**Note on translation**

The dialect I have translated is referred to by local people as Lancianese, that is the language of Lanciano, a city of 30,000 inhabitants in Abruzzo. Although people familiar with Abruzzese dialects in general have proved helpful, at times I needed to consult with people who grew up in Lanciano in order to obtain the full flavor of a particular word or expression. A second challenge stemmed from the fact that many of the poems I've worked on were written more than 70 years ago. Lancianese, like all languages, has evolved over time. Some words and expressions are now extinct. Therefore, for the sake of accuracy, I've had to seek out and consult with people fluent in Lancianese who are in their 70s and 80s. In this regard, I've had the good fortune to be given a rare Abruzzese dictionary, Vocabulario abruzzese, by Nicola De Archangelo, published in 1930, by one of the daughters of the poet I translated.

**La gente**

-- A monte nen ci i': ci sta lu foche!  
 A destre nen yutà': ci sta lu vente!  
 A manche truve l'acque che t'affoche!  
 Soltante arrete va o puramente

statte 'nchiuvate proprie addò ti truve! --  
 Cuscì la gente dice se ti smuve.

Ma tu ne le senti' che la campane:  
 sinte lu core, ride e va luntane!

**Amore e cante**

Amore, ti facesse 'na canzone,  
 une di quille a foche martellate,  
 turnite gna si deve e rimpastate  
 di note arillucinte di passione.

P' avè' chiù tempe a fa' 'na cosa bbone  
 ci jasse, 'n cuscienze, carciarate,  
 nen ci durmesse pe' 'na 'nter' annate  
 pecchè la notte chiù sa dà' lu tone!

E queste nom pecchè i' stenghe in vene  
 di farme, come tante, lu bbelline  
 ma sole pe' cantarte a vocia piene

nu mutivette nove, proprie fine,  
 pe' dire ca pecchè ti vojje bbene  
 'stu core è diventate cantarine.

**Discurse d'amore**

Quande credeme ca niente chiù  
 ci sta da dire pe' che la jurnate  
 allore... parle i' ca parle tu...  
 n' atru discorse è pronte 'ntavulate.

E che diceme? Cose ariccuntate,  
 ditte e riditte sole tra di nù  
 duvente, pecchè sème 'nammurate,  
 cose che vale chiù di lu Perù.



### People

-- Keep away from the mountain: there's fire!  
Don't turn to the right: there's wind over there!  
Over towards the left there's water, you'll drown!  
Only go backwards or even better

stay nailed to the spot where you find yourself! --  
So say the people if you try to move.

But it's best not to listen to those bells:  
listen to your heart, laugh and travel far!

### Love and song

My love, I would compose for you a song  
one of those hammered and forged in fire,  
polished the way it should be and blended  
with notes that are shiny and passionate.

To find time to make something beautiful  
maybe I would even go to prison,  
and wouldn't sleep for an entire year  
because night time brings on such a somber tone!

And I'd do this not out of vanity  
like so many others do, my darling  
but just to sing to you in a full voice

a sweet little melody, spanking new,  
to say that because of my love for you  
this heart of mine has become a songsmith.

### Love Talk

Whenever we believe there's nothing more  
that could possibly be said for the day  
then first ... I speak and afterwards you speak ...  
and we're ready to shoot the breeze some more.

And what do we say? Things already told  
said and resaid just between me and you  
becomes for us, because we are in love,  
things that have greater value than *Perù*.

Chiù l'accuntème e chiù ve' lu vulie  
di dirle pecchè sempre cagne tone  
e si fa bbelle ogne fessarìe,

pecchè, quande ci sta la passione,  
pure 'na chiacchiarelle che si sie  
è pe' lu core come 'na canzone!

### La vita mé

La vita mé: *nu ciele* annuvelate,  
*nu vente* 'ngustiose, nu garbine,  
'*na ruvenella* d'acque cuncrïate  
pi tirà 'nnenze sempre tra le spine!

*Nu ciele* che te' spesse nu cavute  
che certe vote fa da fenestrelle:  
di jorne, a nu serene di vellute;  
di notte, a 'na sguardate di 'na stelle.

*Nu vente* che, a vote, se s'appose  
mi lande tra le pide la pampujje;  
di bbone che ci truve?... Di 'na rose  
'na fronna solamente ci - ariccuje!

'*Na ruvanelle* che, pur' esse a vote,  
lande la macchie de la pecuntrie  
e va, senza 'mbrattarse 'nche la lote,  
cantenne sole esse pé la vie.

### Lu cante

A chi nen cante chiù si fa sciapite  
lu sense de la vite.  
A chi chiù cante pijje chiù sapore  
la voce de lu core.

### Cuncette

#### I

Cuncè, troppe fucante è ssa suttane  
che fa sciò - llà - sciò - n qua quande camine!

The more we tell them the more we desire  
to tell them because every foolishness  
improves the sound and becomes beautiful

because a little chat already known  
is like a familiar song to the heart!

### My Life

My life: cloudy *sky*,  
an annoying *wind*, a Southern wind,  
*a brooklet* of water gathering  
to go ahead always among the thorns!

A *sky* that often has a hole  
that at certain times makes like a small window:  
at daytime, a velvet serenity;  
at nighttime, a glance of a star.

A *wind* that, sometimes, if it stops  
leaves the dry leaves by my feet;  
What do you find that is good? Of a rose  
the only thing that you can pick up is a leaf!

A *brooklet*, even that at times,  
leaves the stains of melancholy  
and goes, without getting dirty with mud,  
singing all by itself along the way.

### The Song

To those who no longer sing, the spirit of life  
is tasteless  
To those who sing more, the voice of the heart  
gets more flavor

### Concetta

#### I

Concetta, your petticoat is too hot  
swinging every which way as you walk!

N' avaste le papambre di 'stu grane  
a mette' foche all'arie 'sta mmatine?

Cuncette, nche ssu passe vacce piane:  
mi te' ffà' troppe vènte ssa pedane!

Cuncette, scì bbendette, pecchè schèppe?  
Quanta dispitte ti pò fa nu streppe

e quante foche vive chiù s' accampe  
dentr' a 'stu core che già te' la lampe!

## II

E vie!... Fa chiù piane gna camine  
se no le pieghe 'n te ricasche bbone!  
Le trijje si scampane, Cuncettine,  
nen tirà' 'nnenze gne 'na sciambricone!

Mi sfronne le papambre bbone bbone  
ssu passe che nen vo' capì' raggione!

Pe' ssu passe le morre fanne a truzze,  
si scòtele e ti jèttene la ruzze.

La ruzze di... 'stu core e di... ssu grane  
po' fa perdi' lu pregge a ssa suttane!

## Lanciane

Bande e campane!  
Ecche Lanciane:  
sopra tre còlle  
tra sole e stelle  
nche la Maielle  
quase vicine  
e nu strapizze  
all' atru pizze  
fatte di mare.  
Ecche 'sta care

Lanciana mé  
proprie addò sta.

Aren't the poppies in this field enough  
to set the air on fire this morning?

Concetta, step more softly as you go:  
your hem is stirring up the air too much!

Concetta, my God, why are you running?  
A thorn bush could cause you so much trouble

and how much more intense the fire grows  
inside my heart that's already in flames!

## II

Go ahead! ... Take it easy as you walk  
or the folds of your dress will not fall right!  
The needlework will vanish, Concetta,  
don't carry on as if you are tipsy!

You're trampling on all these lovely poppies  
and you don't want to listen to reason!

You're making the ears of wheat strike each other,  
they're being shaken up and resent it.

The resentment ... of my heart and ... these ears  
makes your petticoat lose all its worth!

## Lanciano

Bands and bells!  
This is Lanciano:  
on top of three hills  
in between the sun and stars  
with the Maiella  
almost near  
and a drop  
to the other side  
made of sea.  
Here is

my dear Lanciano  
exactly the way it is.

**Bomme e campane!**

Ecche Lanciane:  
 orte e ciardine,  
 chiese e funtane,  
 genta frentane,  
 cante e camine,  
 core a la mane,  
 cipolle e pane  
 ma... coccia 'n terre!...  
 Pure la guerre!...  
 Ne j' tuccà'  
 la libbertà

**Neve**

Tutt'arruffate e nche chell'ucchietille  
 annacquante, chelu passerette  
 sott'a chela nenguente, puvirette,  
 guardè' lu ciele e ci jettè' nu strille.

Cerchè pietà a li Sente e a l'Angelille  
 pe' nen fa' nengue almene a chelu tette?  
 Pure nu San Franscesche, scià bbendette,  
 da che sta 'n ciele chiù nen pense a cille!

**Zampogne**

Cale la neve e sente nu scapiste;  
 è proprie esse: è lu scupinare  
 che, quand' ere quatrale, appena viste  
 pe' me ere 'na feste senza pare!

Ma coma va? Se un - è la scupine  
 e un - è la canzone che si cante

pecchè, pecchè se l'anne chiù camine  
 chiù che la feste luce entr' a lu piante?

Fireworks and bells!  
This is Lanciano:  
gardens and parks,  
churches and fountains,  
Frentane people,  
songs and walks  
heart in their hand,  
onions and bread  
but...head to the ground!...  
Even the war!  
Don't touch  
their liberty!

### **Snow**

All ruffled and with those tiny eyes  
soaked through and through, that wee bitty sparrow  
under that snowfall, wretched little thing,  
looked up at the sky and gave out a cry.

He looked for pity from saints and angels  
at least to keep the snow off of the roof?  
Even a Saint Francis, blessed be,  
since he's in heaven thinks no more of birds.

### **Bagpipes**

Snow falls and I hear the sound of footsteps;  
it is really him, it is the piper  
that, when I was a kid, just seeing him  
for me was a good time beyond compare!  
But how goes it, if one -- is the bagpipe  
and the other one -- is the song one sings

why, why, do the oncoming years go by  
more than the festival shines through my tears?

***English Translations of Poems by Davide Rondoni***  
by Gregory Pell

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**Gregory Pell** teaches Italian language, literature and cinema at Hofstra University (NY). He has published articles on Luzi, Montale, Tobino, and film. His translation focuses on Paolo Ruffilli and Davide Rondoni. Recently, he has published a book on cinematic and holographic images in Eugenio Montale's poetry.

Poet, essayist, playwright, translator and editor, **Davide Rondoni** is one of contemporary Italy's most active and diversified writers. His contribution to literature includes his recent founding of the Centro di Poesia Contemporanea (Università di Bologna) and his continuous participation in the journal *clanDestino*, of which he is founder and director. In these capacities, Rondoni has his finger on the pulse of Italian poetry. Spanning 20 years, Rondoni's own poetic activity, which reflects such influences as Rimbaud, Luzi, Testori, Bigongiari and Caproni, has most recently culminated in the works *Avrebbe amato chiunque* (2003) and *Il veleno, l'arte* (2004). Rondoni's awards are numerous and his poetry is recognized in translation in such countries as France, Spain, the United States and Russia.

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**T**he difficulty in translating Rondoni's poetry is not the result of an elaborate or opulent use of language; nor is it necessarily a result of a reliance on impenetrable slang or idiom. Rather the difficulty can be attributed to his capturing the immediacy of the contexts around him in a language that is exceedingly organic and expressed through a rhythm that causes the poetry to seem meditated or uttered under the poet's breath. Three problems present themselves. First, as a translator, I feel humbled and unnecessary: his poetic language seems so simple that I am almost tempted to overjustify my role by implying things in my rendition that were not implied in the original. Second, in this lyric unpretentiousness, cultural-linguistic differences arise. Rondoni employs the banality of a key term like "autogrill" (in one of his most well-known poems, "Bartolomeo") which cannot be rendered in English in one word: 'rest area', 'service area', and 'highway reststop' are too clumsy to be poetic. One could say the same thing for the use of "benzinai" in the same poem: "filling station attendants," "gas station attendants", or "gas attendants" take away from the terseness and the musicality. I chose the latter, for it was the shortest version I could find to emulate the syllabation, without overlooking the suggestiveness of gasoline found in "benzinai." Third, there remains the task of capturing the vagaries and contingencies of intonation: Rondoni's is a poetry that must – perhaps more so than others – be spoken aloud, as it follows broken rhythm and unfixed, uneven lineation reminiscent of Luzi's poetry, which is, likewise,



full of deliberate horizontal tabulations. Rondoni's poetry, then, is deceptively plain, so my role is to take the ordinary Italian and marry it to a corresponding syntax, replete with Rondoni's deliberate lack of punctuation, in an English version. Rondoni's primary insistence on the tabulation of verses and the positioning of certain types of words at the end of each verse demands it. Yet, how does one translate a poetry that sounds like the manifestation of a man's contemplations, or his remarks about life as it happens around him? How does one reproduce the cadences that follow a rhythm found somewhere between thought and dialogue? How does one translate a word that simultaneously exists as the beginning of a new thought as much as it exists as a continuation of a previous thought? At best, one can listen to Rondoni intone his own verses; but even if solutions presented themselves in such a reading, I would have to betray the written verse and that could violate the very primacy of Rondoni's original, albeit unusual, choices for his verse delineations.

**New York (*Avrebbe amato chiunque*)****I.**

Central Park, fine autunno, alberi  
di seta elettrica e color sangue  
nel freddo azzurro del cielo che salgono  
si aprono

poi piano che si spengono,  
ombra  
che sta venendo, aria  
che si oscura.

E inizia a splendere la corona  
ghiacciata dei grattacieli  
sulla folla più cupa nelle strade.

Io chiedo a Oonagh: perché tieni i capelli così,  
grigi a trent'anni.  
Ma lei ballando muove la cenere della testa  
e gli occhi celesti impensabili  
fa un cerchio magico  
a Manhattan, fa di sé un incendio  
e apre braccia, remi, ali

nell'oceano delle voci della sera.

Senti che grida di barche invisibili.  
Nella baia nera.

**II.**

Cosa succede in questa poesia?  
succede

che ti vedo aprire  
il frigorifero e in quel bagliore  
sul viso ecco i ventagli luminosi, il tempo

e ti vedo un po' bevuta  
e disperata in modo fantastico  
lanciare dalle gallerie della casa  
dove dormono le tue bambine  
il richiamo che dirama nella nebbia:

New York

I.

Central Park, autumn's end, trees  
of electric silk and blood hues  
in the sky's cold blue that rise up  
proffer themselves

then slowly they relent,  
shadow  
in its becoming, air  
as it dims.

And it starts, the frosty crown  
of the skyscrapers,  
to glisten on the more somber throng in the streets.

I ask Oonagh: why do you keep your hair like that,  
grey at thirty.  
But dancing she moves her head's cinders  
and those inconceivable azure eyes  
she forms a magic circle  
in Manhattan, she sets herself ablaze  
and opens arms, oars, wings

into the ocean that is the evening's voices.

You hear the shouts from invisible boats.  
In the dark bay.

II.

What is it that happens in this poem?  
it happens  
that I see you open  
the refrigerator and in that flash  
on your face suddenly luminous fans, time

and I see you a bit tipsy  
and wonderfully desperate  
cast from the balconies of the house  
where your little girls sleep  
your cry that emanates in the fog:

«sono solo una donna che passa le voci  
di bocca in bocca, solo  
una traduttrice con le sue figlie,  
lasciate l'ira che rade  
le parole dal viso, lasciate o ci farete tutti  
morire»

e mentre tace il buio di alti cristalli di banche  
e l'ombra in grandi moschee, in uffici deserti

viene la risposta da un punto invisibile del porto  
o da che battello, da che vagone  
che trema nella sera su una pianura d'Europa  
o da un uomo solo al volante,  
sirene lunghe che si cercano,  
le voci di chi non si vede

in questo viaggio di sete, di appunti  
strappati su biglietti,  
di riconoscenza...

#### **Bartolomeo (*Il bar del tempo*)**

Quando anche tu ti fermerai in questo grande  
autogrill e il viso stancovedrai rapido  
sui vetri, sull'alluminio del banco,

sarà una sera come questa  
che nel vento rompe la luce  
e le nubi del giorno, sarà  
un grande momento:  
lo sapremo io e te soli.

Ripartirai  
con un lieve turbamento, quasi  
un ricordo e i silenzi delle scansie di oggetti,  
dei benzinai, dei loro berretti,  
sentirai alle tue spalle leggero  
divenire un canto.

La felicità del tempo è dirti sì,  
ci sei, una forza segreta  
uno sgomento ti fa, non la mia  
giovinezza che cede, non l'età

“I’m just a woman who passes voices  
from one mouth to another, just  
a translator with her daughters,  
let go of the ire that cancels  
words from your face, let go or you’ll cause us  
to die”

and while the darkness of tall-paned banks hushes  
and the shadow in imposing mosques, in empty offices

the reply comes from an invisible point in the harbor  
or from some barge, from some rail car  
shaking through the night over a European plain  
or from a man alone at the wheel,  
drawn out sirens

[seeking each other,  
the voices of the unseen

on this journey of thirst, of notes  
scattered over tickets,  
of gratitude...

**Bartolomeo (*Il bar del tempo*)**

And when you too will pause in this vast  
highway rest-area and see your face  
flash onto the glass of the metal counter,

it will be an evening like this one  
where the wind breaks up the day’s light  
and passing clouds, it will be  
a wondrous moment:  
only you and I will get it.

You’ll take your leave again  
with slight agitation, almost  
a memory and the silence of display shelves,  
of gas attendants, their caps,  
all will be turned lightly to song  
behind you.

The joy of time’s passing is telling you: yes,  
you’re really there, a secret force,  
a consternation creates you,

matura, non il mio invecchiamento -  
 la nostra vera somiglianza  
 è là dove non si vede.

Mio figlio, mio viaggiatore,  
 sarà il tuo inferno, la tua virtù  
 questo udito da cane o da angelo  
 che sente all'unisono il giro dei pianeti  
 e la pastiglia cadere nel bicchiere  
 due piani sotto, dove due vecchi  
 si accudiscono.  
 Sarà questo amore strepitoso  
 tuo padre, quello vero.

Fermati ancora in questo autogrill,  
 dal buio mi piacerà rivederti...

A Giuseppe Ungaretti, **visto di notte alla televisione leggere «I fiumi» (II  
*bar del tempo*)**

Non ho fiumi io,  
 non ho mai vissuto sporgendo  
 il volto sull'acqua  
 che quieta o vorticosa  
 taglia la città, nobilita o nel gorgo  
 ruba via tutti i pensieri.  
 Non ho avuto  
 gradoni di pietra su cui disteso perdere sotto il sole  
 il lume della mente, addormentando.

Ho avuto viali,  
 strade larghe, rumorose, il getto alto  
 di tangenziali,  
 braccia aperte di povera madre  
 vene da cui entra in città  
 ogni genere di roba.  
 Ho avuto viali d'alberi  
 o rapide vertigini tra l'acciaio di pareti  
 e vetro oscuro.

Il caos  
 li rende identici, sotto la pioggia

not my waning youth, not the mature  
years, not my growing old –  
our resemblance lies  
in the unseen.

My son, my traveler,  
your hell, your virtue  
might be your dog-like or  
angel-like hearing  
that detects the turning of the planets  
and a pill falling into a cup  
two floors below,  
where two seniors citizens  
attend to each other.  
This roaring love will be  
your father, your real one.

Stop off for a spell in this highway rest-area,  
from the darkness it will be a pleasure to see you again...

**To G. Ungaretti seen at night on the TV reading “I fiumi” (*Il bar del tempo*)**

Myself, I have no rivers,  
I’ve never lived leaning  
my face over the still  
or turbulent water that carves  
the city, ennobling us or stealing  
our thoughts in an eddy.

I’ve never had  
terraced rocks, outstretched over which  
to dampen my mind’s wick,  
dozing under the sun.

I had avenues,  
wide, noisy streets, tall trajectories  
of by-passes,  
the open arms of a poor mother  
veins through which all sorts of things  
come into the city.  
I had tree-lined avenues  
or swift bouts of vertigo between steel walls  
and tinted glass.

Chaos  
renders them indistinguishable, under the rain

sono l'inferno,  
 sono frenetici.  
 Ma la notte, quando cade  
 la notte  
 si ridisegnano,  
 viali nuovi  
 d'ombra e di solitudine,  
 quando li illumina il lento  
 collo dei lampioni e lo spegnersi  
 delle ultime réclame.  
 Si muovono allora leggermente,  
 ramificano, forse rotea un poco  
 tutta la città;  
 qualcuno finisce  
 in faccia a un castello, a una  
 cattedrale, altri smuovono  
 sotto i fari arancio di un nodo autostradale -  
 i viali la notte respirano  
 con le foglie dei platani, larghe, nere,  
 le grate dei metrò e l'aria nenia  
 che dorme sui bambini.  
 Tirano il fiato quando va  
 il passeggero dell'ultimo tram -  
 I viali mi danno  
 una vita speciale,  
 che non è pianto e allegria  
 non è, ma una ventosità,  
 un andare  
 ancora andare  
 che viene da chissà che mari,  
 da quali valli, da grandi fiumi.

***Cosa c'era là fuori (Avrebbe amato chiunque)***

Cosa c'era là fuori,  
 che vuoto  
 o che cielo in quel vuoto,  
 che notte  
 il fuoco  
 tirava giù tutto  
 e rompeva





togliendovi il fiato.

Cosa c'era dove hai lanciato

il tuo bambino  
                   il vuoto  
 del quarto piano, o che vento, che fiato  
 che oro, che affido di vita nel buio  
 per salvar lui  
                   via  
 via, in un respiro.

E mentre lui cadeva  
 tu bruciavi maternamente.

Ma le tue braccia alla finestra  
 prima di tornare al carbone e alla memoria  
 furono comete,  
 ponti di Brooklyn d'amore  
 nella notte in periferia di Milano.

E io te le ho prese,

signora, lascia le braccia  
 a questo ballo lontano,  
 alla musica che io e te  
 da due sponde nell'ombra per sempre sentiamo.

**Pietà di Michelangelo, vagone (*Avrebbe amato chiunque*)**

Quando si torna da Roma gallerie  
 si devono passare,  
                   molti bui, lampi, strane  
 fratture della luce.  
 E i silenzi del corpo in questi treni veloci

È difficile riconoscere il proprio volto  
 nel lampo che lo fotografa sul vetro,  
 gli occhi al magnesio degli anni.

Il tizio che per tutto il viaggio  
 fissa la borsa chiusa di fronte a sé,  
 la ragazza coi capelli colorati  
 e il labbro forato  
 che vuole raccontare la sua vita ad un estraneo.

[hurled  
your baby  
    the nothingness  
of the fourth floor, oh what wind, what breath  
what gold, trust in life itself in the dark  
but to save him  
    away  
away from there, in a gasp.

And as he fell  
you burned maternally.

But your arms on the windowsill  
before turning back to carbon and in a recollection  
were comets,  
Brooklyn bridges of love  
in the night outside of Milan.

And I have taken them  
[from you,  
lady, leave those arms  
to this faraway dance,  
to the music that I and you  
from two shores in the shadows eternally share.

**Michelangelo's *Pietà*, train car (*Avrebbe amato chiunque*)**

Upon returning from Rome, tunnels  
must be traveled,  
    many dark, flashes, odd  
fractures of light.  
And the body's silences in these fast trains

It's hard to recognize one's own face  
in the flash that photographs it onto the glass,  
magnesium eyes from over the years.

The guy who for the whole trip  
stares at the sealed bag in front of him,  
the girl with the dyed hair  
and a pierced lip  
who wants to tell her life story to a stranger.

E l'altro, brutto, gonfio  
di medicinali, il cappello  
tirato sulla calvizie, piange  
o forse ha pianto.

Leggo nella rivista delle Ferrovie:  
1498, cinquecento  
anni della Pietà di Michelangelo –  
e vedo quell'abbandono senza posa  
le lunghe braccia

bianche, la madre così  
ragazza, il corpo di Dio che dorme  
in quell'assortito bianco.

Materia  
che non crede a se stessa –

come questi viaggiatori,  
nel sonno che ingigantisce  
i vagoni nella sera.

And the other, ugly one, swollen  
with medications, hat  
pulled over his bald spot, crying  
or maybe he's just cried.

I read in the Railway magazine:  
1498, five hundred  
years of Michelangelo's Pietà –  
and see that incessant abandon  
the long, white  
arms, a mother herself  
still a girl, God's boy sleeping  
in that rapt whiteness.

Matter  
that does not believe in its own being –

like these travelers,  
in a slumber that amplifies  
the train cars in the evening.

*English Translations of Poems by  
Raffaele Carrieri and Italian Translation of Poems by the  
Translator*

di Rina Ferrarelli

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**Rina Ferrarelli** taught English and translation theory at the University of Pittsburgh for many years. She has published a chapbook and a book of original poetry, *Dreamsearch* (malafemmina, 1992) and *Home is a Foreign Country* (Eadmer, 1996) respectively, and two collections of translation, *Light Without Motion* (Owl Creek Press, 1989), *poesie-racconti* of Giorgio Chiesura, which received the Italo Calvino Prize from the Columbia University Translation Center; and *I Saw the Muses* (Guernica, 1997), lyrics from the Italian of Leonardo Sinisgalli, which was mentioned as one of five “outstanding” finalists in the Landon Translation Prize. She was also awarded an NEA in translation. *Winter Fragments: Selected Poems of Bartolo Cattafi* is being published in the spring by Chelsea Editions.

**Raffaele Carrieri** (1905-1984) was born in Taranto, and lived a vagabond life in his teens and early twenties. He quit school at 14 and sailed to Albania, from where he went first to Montenegro and then to Fiume to fight with D'Annunzio. He was only 15 when he was wounded, a serious injury to his left hand. He went back to Taranto, but after a brief stay, he sailed again around the Mediterranean visiting various ports including those along the coast of Africa. He worked at many jobs to support himself, and on his return to Italy, worked as tax collector for two years. It was during these two years that he started writing poetry, the poems that were collected in *Lamento del gabelliere* (1945). In 1923 he went to Paris where he lived for several years among the poets and painters of the time, and where he started writing articles about his travels. He settled for good in Milan 1930, and worked as art critic. In addition to several books of poetry, some of which won awards, including the Premio Viareggio, he wrote many books of art criticism, and biographies and studies of poets, sculptors and painters. Some of his other collections are *La civetta* (1949), *Il trovatore* (1953), *Canzoniere amoroso* (1958), *La giornata è finita* (1963), *Io sono cicala* (1967) and *Le ombre dispettose* (1974) among others.

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*Translating Carrieri*

In the poems that I translated Carrieri uses many of his briefly inhabited identities as masks, creating a multiplicity of selves: not only a

*doppio*, sometimes like an ancestral other he's inherited, but a soldier, street vendor, ditch digger, ragpicker, rope maker, tax collector, emigrant. At times, he even identifies with the inanimate. The adolescent search for identity is given body, substance, voice. And all the personae have something in common but are also different.

In translating his work, the challenge was in creating a voice that sounded like the Carrieri in my head: restless, homeless, lonely, in danger. A man who often looks over his shoulder, and narrowly escapes; who comes face to face with death and is seriously wounded, his wounded, damaged hand giving him yet another identity. But also a weary man of no age, or even old, who expects nothing, wants nothing. The challenge was to create this voice, but also to preserve the variation in tone from poem to poem, the simplicity or complexity of narrative, the muted music. It was important to keep the poems' slim, hungry look. Their short takes and sharp images. Their impatient, hurried runs. I decided against "cerulean," the cognate of "céruli" because its four syllables are too long for the line, and it's not a word *sdrúcciola* as the original. Also, the shade and connotations are slightly different in English. I kept the focus on the one poignant image— "The bowl of milk/Filling with darkness"; "... the shoes/That watched like dogs," or scattered it through the verses, preserving the unpredictable quality of his collages. In poems such as these, there is no room to move. Like the poet, I put my trust in the image.

**Raffaele Carrieri****Si era in due**

Si era in due a morire  
Alla fine di una sera  
Io e l'alpino del Friuli.  
Ognuno di noi lo sapeva  
Ch'era l'ultima sera.  
Vedevo sul comodino  
La ciotola di latte  
Riempirsi di tenebra  
E questo ancora vedere  
E distinguere il bianco  
Dal nero mi dava piacere.  
L'occhio e la ciotola  
Erano gli anelli  
Di una stessa catena.  
Il giorno che seguì  
Sopravvissi all'alpino.  
Altro non ricordo  
Di quella sera.

**Piccola morte**

So questo, era un soldato  
Con un paio di scarpe nuove  
Che accanto gli stavano  
A vegliarlo giorno e notte.  
Aveva una fucilata nel petto  
E ogni volta che tossiva guardava  
Con ceruli occhi le scarpe  
Che vegliavano come cani  
La branda dell'infermeria.  
Morì alle cinque del mattino  
Dicendo queste sole parole:  
"Mettetemi amici le scarpe  
È venuta l'ora d'andarmene."  
Morì alle cinque del mattino  
Con gli occhi rivolti alle scarpe.



***Raffaele Carrieri***

**Two of Us**

Two of us were dying  
At the end of one evening  
The alpine soldier and I.  
Each of us knew  
It was the last evening.  
I saw on the night table  
The bowl of milk  
Filling with darkness  
And I was pleased  
I could still see  
And distinguish  
White from black.  
My eye and the bowl  
Were links  
In the same chain.  
The day after  
I survived the other.  
That's all I remember  
From that evening.

**Small Death**

I know this: he was a soldier  
With a new pair of shoes  
Which kept vigil near him  
Day and night.  
He was shot in the chest  
And every time he coughed  
He turned his sky-blue eyes  
To look at the shoes  
That watched like dogs  
The infirmary cot.  
He died at five in the morning  
Saying only these words:  
"Friends, put my shoes on  
It's time for me to go."  
He died at five in the morning  
Eyes turned toward his shoes.

**Morte**

In ogni  
Luogo  
T'ho  
Sentito  
Passare  
E tornare  
Come  
Passa  
E torna  
Il vento.

**Non ho niente**

Non ho niente  
Proprio niente  
Che sia mio.  
Dalla camicia  
Al berretto  
Non ho più  
Niente di mio.  
Degli occhi  
Ho fatto tranello  
All'inverno.  
Ho asservito  
All'astuzia  
L'orecchio.  
Dall'udito  
Al mantello  
Non ho più  
Niente di mio.  
Anche le mani  
Hanno cessato  
Di essere mie.  
Le mie mani  
Sono di questo  
Sparuto fucile  
Che all'oscuro  
Mi somiglia.

**Fine di giornata**

A ogni fine di giornata  
Quando il cielo muore

**Death**

Death  
In every Place  
I have  
Felt you  
Passing  
And returning  
Like  
The wind  
Passes  
And returns.

**I Have Nothing**

I have nothing  
Truly nothing  
That's mine.  
From shirt  
To hat  
I no longer  
Have anything  
That's mine.  
Out of my eyes  
I've made a snare  
For winter.  
I've put my ears  
At the service  
Of cunning.  
From my hearing  
to my cloak  
I no longer  
Have anything  
That's mine.  
Even my hands  
Have ceased to be mine.  
They belong  
to this bony gun  
which in the dark  
resembles me.

**Day's End**

At every day's end  
When the sky dies

Con la gola tagliata  
Come la gallina nera  
Resto solo sul prato  
Con gli odori della sera  
E il sacco di cenciolo  
Dove raccolgo la cenere  
Delle mie ore terrene.

**Attesa di Niente**

La luce non mi è stata compagna  
Sulla terra né l'acqua sorella.  
L'affabile acqua piovana  
Che materna addormenta  
Il vecchio gabelliere  
E la giovane rana.  
Avrei voluto chiudere il cielo  
Come una semplice porta  
Per restare una giornata  
Acquattato nell'erba  
In attesa di niente

Its throat severed  
Like the black hen's  
I linger in the meadow  
Alone with the evening smells  
And the rag picker's sack  
where I gather the ashes  
Of my earthly hours.

**Waiting for Nothing**

Light has not been my friend  
On the earth nor water my sister.  
The amiable rain water  
That like a mother puts to sleep  
The old tax collector  
And the young frog.  
I would have liked to close the sky  
Like a simple door  
To remain all day  
Hidden in the grass  
Waiting for nothing.

*Journal of Italian Translation*

**Poems in English by Rina Ferrarelli translated into Italian**

**Dreamsearch**

I was back in that other  
country again last night  
those narrow streets  
familiar and strange.  
I walked on the worn stone  
in the shadow of houses  
looking for a door  
looking for a face  
and again  
I woke up too soon.

And it's been thirty years now  
I've mothered three children  
made a warm home for them  
and that little orphan girl.

**Back to the Source**

Granite and river stone  
                    worn by walking,  
wide sloping steps with short rises  
  
the steep descent  
                    but not  
the straight path of a torrent  
sharp turns  
                    and small wide bends  
                                    where walls jut out  
alleys come in  
  
I always go up in my dreams  
  
upstream back to the source.

**Inside the Frame**

Someone's often missing  
from family pictures,

### **Cercando nel sogno**

Mi ritrovai in quell'altro  
mondo durante la notte  
quei vicoli stretti  
intimi e strani.  
Camminavo sulle pietre consunte  
nell'ombra delle case  
cercando una porta  
cercando un volto  
e di nuovo  
mi svegliai troppo presto.

E sono già passati trent'anni,  
ho dato alla luce tre figli,  
ho fatto un nido morbido e caldo  
per loro e quella piccola orfanella.

### **Ritorno alla fonte**

Pietre del fiume pezzi di granito  
logorati dai piedi  
ampi ripiani spioventi piccoli gradini  
l'erta discesa  
ma non  
la diritta via d'un torrente  
curve improvvise  
e anse piccole ed ampie  
dove i muri sporgono  
i viottoli rientrano  
nei sogni vado sempre in su  
contro corrente ritorno alla fonte.

### **Dentro il Quadro**

Manca sempre qualcuno  
in quelle foto di famiglia

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someone you can find,  
sometimes, if you look  
at the clothes she made  
or bought, the colors that go  
with your eyes, your hair  
slicked with a wet comb  
or braided with ribbons.  
At your features, your expression.  
She wanted you to smile  
off the frame, inside the frame  
and sometimes you did.

**Divestiture**

She unpinned the folds  
of white linen  
eloquent of place,  
loosened the loops  
and braided knots,  
and combed her hair  
into a bun.  
She untied her apron,  
took off one by one  
the pleated skirts,  
the black jacket  
with wide velvet cuffs,  
the padded camisole,  
the long shirt  
articulate with lace.  
Then stepped into a dress  
skimpier than a slip,  
and naked,  
exposed like that,  
my grandmother  
came to America.

**Linens**

Plain weaves, twills and herringbones,  
woven at home linen on linen, linen  
on cotton. Some are still uncut—a band  
of warp threads separating one napkin,  
one towel from the other—but most are decorated  
with needlepoint lace. My mother's older sister  
had the broad back and strong constitution



qualcuno che a volte si trova  
 nei vestiti che ha fatto  
 o comprato, nei colori  
 che vanno cogli occhi  
 i capelli, lisciati  
 col pettine bagnato,  
 o intrecciati coi nastri.  
 Nei tuoi lineamenti,  
 la tua espressione.  
 Voleva vederti sorridere  
 fuori, dentro il quadro  
 e a volte l'hai fatto.

### Divestiture

Tolse lo spillo *d'u rituortu*,  
 candido lino  
 eloquente del luogo,  
 sfece lacci e nodi intrecciati  
 e raccolse i capelli sulla nuca.  
 Snodò il grembiule,  
 si tolse una dopo l'altra  
 le gonne fitte di pieghe,  
 la giacca nera  
 coi larghi risvolti di velluto,  
 il corpetto imbottito,  
 e la lunga camicia  
 articolata di merletto.  
 Poi si mise un vestito  
 succinto come *'na suttana*,  
 e spogliata, esposta così,  
 mia nonna  
 partì per l'America

### I Panni di Lino

Intrecci semplici, incrociati, a spine di pesce,  
 tessuti a casa lino su lino, lino su cotone.  
 Alcuni non sono stati tagliati, e una striscia  
 d'ordito separa tovaglie e tovaglioli.  
 Gli altri sono tutti ricamati ad intaglio.  
 La sorella maggiore di mia madre, di fibra  
 forte e spalle larghe, stava intere giornate  
 piegata sul telaio, e mandava i pedali su e giù,  
 facendo scorrere a braccia tese, da una sponda

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to bend for hours, working the pedals, arms  
stretching to send the shuttle scuttling through.  
My mother, the more delicate one, the one  
who wanted to get away, sat where the light  
fell on her hands, and pulling out the weft threads  
her sister had worked into a tight fabric,  
restructured the space with floss, white on white  
openwork borders, arabesqued windows.  
Rough- or fine-textured, the linens I was saving  
were meant to survive soaking in hot water  
and ashes, milling on the rocks. I machine  
wash them and when the weather is good,  
hang them outside, the way women still do over there,  
stretching them into shape while damp. Most  
are holding up well; a few show signs of wear,  
but not from use. It was keeping them safe in a trunk  
for so many years that weakened the fabric.

**The Bridge**

Progress has finally come  
to the forgotten South.  
A new superstrada  
wide and straight as none before  
bypasses the shelf of road  
the sharp-angled bridge.

The cross by the roadside  
reminds the few of us who remember  
fewer all the time  
of the men who died there  
hitting the rocks of the stream  
when their truck went off the road.

Seven men who knew how to do without  
how to turn in a small place  
taking nothing for granted.

The bridge is crumbling  
purple flowers grow out of the wall.

The river keeps on going  
as it did then

the rocks are mute—

all'altra la navetta. Mia madre, ch'era la più  
delicata, quella che sognava d'altri posti, altre  
vite, se ne stava dove la luce le cascava sulle mani,  
e tirando i fili, tessuti stretti stretti dalla sorella,  
strutturava lo spazio colla seta, bianco su bianco,  
orli traforati, piccole finestre rabescate.  
Ruvidi o fini, i panni che conservavo erano fatti  
per superare le prove del ranno e delle pietre.  
Io il bucato lo faccio nella lavatrice, e quando  
il tempo è bello, metto tutto fuori ad asciugare,  
come fanno le donne al mio paese, tirando  
e stirando con le mani, modellando la tela  
mentre è umida. Per lo più si son mantenute belle  
queste cose. Le poche logore, non lo sono  
per l'uso. È stato il chiuso della cassa—  
per tenerle intatte—che ha indebolito il tessuto.

### **Il Ponte**

È finalmente arrivato il progresso  
al sud dimenticato.  
Una nuova superstrada  
ampia e diritta  
come non ce n'erano mai  
ha tagliato la mensola di via  
le curve strette del ponte.

La croce al lato della strada  
ricorda ai pochi  
che ancora si rammentano,  
ogni giorno più pochi,  
gli uomini che morirono  
sbattendo contro le pietre del fiume  
quando il camion sbandò dal ponte.

Sette uomini che sapevano far senza,  
che si muovevano  
nello stesso piccolo spazio  
senza prendere niente per scontato.

Il ponte si sta sgretolando,  
fiori viola spuntano dal muro.

Il fiume continua il suo cammino  
come ha fatto quella volta

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deep within their heart  
the crack of bone  
the shocked cry of pain.

**Broomflowers**

Chrome yellow against green stems  
in bunches on the reddish dirt  
even-spaced rows  
like a pattern on a quilt.

Is this new or have I forgotten  
as I forgot the nightingale  
singing in the trees below the wall—  
what did I know then about nightingales—  
the row of stones holding the tiles down  
at the edge of the roof?

I've missed the Corpus Christi procession  
the creweled bedspreads hanging  
on the balcony rails, gaudy  
against the old walls, the petals  
twirling in the air like confetti  
a carpet on the street  
more dazzling than the gold monstrance  
the white and gold canopy.

On the breeze a whiff of their scent,  
delicate pleasing.

The sun is down now, the sky  
turning indigo, but their yellow endures  
on the slope below the parapet.

Inside

rough bouquets in earthenware jars.  
And the little girl who picked them for me  
is saying to her mother, sotto voce,  
«She comes from America,  
and she likes broomflowers?»

e le pietre sono mute—  
in fondo al loro cuore  
lo schianto delle ossa  
il grido sorpreso di dolore.

Le ginestre

Luccicano gialle contro i fusti verdi  
a mazzi sulla terra rossiccia  
file diritte e uguali  
come i disegni delle coperte nostrane.

È stato sempre così o mi sono dimenticata  
come ho dimenticato l'usignolo  
che cantava negli alberi sotto il muro—  
che cosa ne sapevo allora d'usignoli—  
la fila di pietre sulle tegole rosse  
all'orlo del tetto?

Non c'ero per la festa di Corpus Christi,  
non ho visto le coperte ricamate  
che pendevano da finestre e ringhiere  
i colori sgargianti  
contro i vecchi muri, i petali  
che giravano nell'aria come coriandoli,  
un tappeto sulla via  
più vistoso dell'ostenstorio dorato  
del baldacchino in bianco e giallo.

Il vento me ne porta l'odore,  
delicato e piacevole.

Il sole è dietro i monti, il cielo  
è diventato viola, ma il giallo brilla ancora  
al di là del parapetto.

Dentro casa  
mazzi alla buona in vasi di terracotta.  
E la ragazzina che li ha raccolti  
dice alla mamma, sottovoce,  
«viene dall'America,  
e le piacciono le ginestre?»



*"Folgori di tempesta", mixed techniques on canvas.*

*Italian Translation of Poems by W. S. Merwin*

by Adeodato Piazza Nicolai

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**Adeodato Piazza Nicolai**, nato a Vigo di Cadore (BL) nel 1944 ed emigrato negli Stati Uniti nel 1959, è poeta, saggista e traduttore. Laureatosi nel 1969 dal Wabash College, ha ottenuto il Master of Arts dall'Università di Chicago nel 1986. Ha lavorato per 30 anni presso la Inland Steel Company di Chicago. Autore di quattro volumi di poesia, il prossimo sarà *L'apocalisse e altre stagioni*. Sta traducendo vari poeti dall'italiano all'inglese e viceversa. Di prossima pubblicazione l'antologia *Nove poetesse afroamericane*. Ha insegnato letteratura italiana e "Creative Writing" all'Università di Purdue Calumet, Indiana. Tuttora vive in Italia, dove si occupa di poesia, traduzioni e di "workshops" sul ladino del Centro Cadore.

**W. S. Merwin** è nato a New York City nel 1927 e cresciuto a Union City, New Jersey, come pure a Scranton, Pennsylvania. Dal 1949 al 1951 ha lavorato come tutore in Francia, Portogallo e Majorca. Da allora ha vissuto in vari luoghi del mondo, il più recente a Maui nelle Hawaii, dove fa il coltivatore di rare piante di palma. Ha pubblicato più di 46 opere di poesia, prosa e traduzioni. Ha ricevuto una Fellowship dall'Accademia dei Poeti Americani (di cui ora è cancelliere), il Premio Pulitzer per la poesia come pure il Premio Bollingen. Recentemente è stato onorato dalle Hawaii con il Governor's Award per la Letteratura, il Premio Tanning come maestro di poesia, il Premio Lila Wallace--Reader's Digest e il Premio Ruth Lilly per la poesia.

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**Da: *Flower & Hand* – 1977-1983**

**(The Compass Flower, 1977)**

**The Heart**

In the first chamber of the heart  
all the gloves are hanging by two  
the hands are bare as they come through the door  
the bell rope is moving without them  
they move forward cupped as though  
holding water  
there is a bird a thing in their palms  
in this chamber there is no color

In the second chamber of the heart  
all the blindfolds are hanging but one  
the eyes are open as they come in  
they see the bell rope moving  
without hands  
they see the bathing bird  
being carried forward  
bathing  
through the colored chamber

In the third chamber of the heart  
all the sounds are hanging but one  
the ears hear nothing as they come through the door  
the bell rope is moving like a breath  
without hands  
a bird is being carried forward  
bathing  
in total silence

In the last chamber of the heart  
all the words are hanging  
but one  
the blood is naked as it steps through the door  
with its eyes open  
and a bathing bird in its hands  
and with its bare feet on the sill  
moving as through water  
to the one stroke of the bell



Da *Fiore e mano* – 1977-1983

(*Il fiore bussola*, 1977)

### Il cuore

Nella prima camera del cuore  
tutti i guanti sono appesi in coppia  
le mani sono nude mentre entrano dalla porta  
la corda del campanello si muove senza di loro  
mentre avanzano unite come una coppa  
che porta l'acqua  
c'è un uccello una cosa nelle palme  
in questa camera non c'è colore

Nella seconda camera del cuore  
tutte le bende rimangono appese eccetto una  
gli occhi sono aperti mentre entrano  
vedono la corda del campanello che si muove  
senza le mani  
vedono un uccello al bagno  
portato in avanti  
attraverso la camera colorata

Nella terza camera del cuore  
tutti i suoni sono appesi eccetto uno  
le orecchie non sentono mentre entrano dalla porta  
la corda del campanello si sposta come un respiro  
senza mani  
un uccello viene portato in avanti  
mentre fa il bagno  
nel silenzio totale

Nell'ultima camera del cuore  
tutte le parole sono appese  
eccetto una  
il sangue è nudo mentre entra dalla porta  
con gli occhi aperti  
e un uccello al bagno nelle sue mani  
e con i suoi piedi nudi sul davanzale  
muovendosi nell'acqua  
a battito unico del campanello  
qualcuno suona senza le mani.

someone is ringing without hands

### **The Snow**

You with no fear of dying  
how you dreaded winter  
the cataract forming on the green wheated hill  
ice on sundial and steps and calendar  
it is snowing  
after you were unborn it was my turn  
to carry you in a world before me  
trying to imagine you  
I am your parent at the beginning of winter  
you are my child  
we are one body  
one blood  
one red line melting the snow  
unbroken line in falling snow

### **Apples**

Waking besides a pile of unsorted keys  
in an empty room  
the sun is high

what a long jagged string of broken bird song  
they must have made as they gathered there  
by the ears deaf with sleep  
and the hands empty as waves  
I remember the birds now  
but where are the locks

when I touch the pile  
my hand sounds like a wave on a single beach  
I hear someone stirring  
in the ruins of a glass mountain  
after decades

those keys are so cold that they melt at my touch  
all but one  
to the door of a cold morning  
the colors of apples

### La neve

Tu senza paura di morire  
come temevi l'inverno  
la cataratta che si formava sulla verde collina di frumento  
ghiaccio sulla clessidra e gradini e calendario  
sta nevicando  
dopo che non eri nato venne il mio turno  
di portarti in un mondo che mi precedeva  
cercando d'immaginarci  
sono il tuo genitore all'inizio dell'inverno  
tu sei il mio bambino  
siamo un solo corpo  
un solo sangue  
una riga rossa che scioglie la neve  
riga indivisa sulla neve che cade.

### Mele

Vegliando presso un mucchio di chiavi diverse  
in una stanza vuota  
il sole è al massimo

che lunga coda puntuta di note interrotte di uccello  
avranno fatto mentre si ammucchiavano là  
vicino alle orecchie sorde dal sonno  
e le mani vuote come onde  
ora ricordo gli uccelli  
ma dove sono le serrature

quando tocco quel mucchio  
la mano sembra un'onda sull'unica spiaggia  
sento qualcuno che si sveglia  
fra i ruderi di una montagna di vetro  
dopo decine di anni

quelle chiavi sono così fredde che si disfanno al tatto  
tutte eccetto una  
appartenente alla porta di un freddo mattino  
i colori delle mele.

**The Horse**

In a dead tree  
there is the ghost of a horse  
no horse  
was ever seen near the tree  
but the tree was born  
of a mare  
it rolled with long legs  
in rustling meadows  
it pricked its ears  
it reared and tossed its head  
and suddenly stood still  
beginning to remember  
as its leaves fell

**Alcuni critici hanno scritto:**

“La voce di Merwin, sinuosa e infinitamente flessibile, ha creato un nuovo tipo di verso narrativo: la tragica storia delle Hawaii, sofferta da una famiglia, raccontata come da un nativo, con una semplicità immediata e uno sciolto realismo di saga.”

-- Ted Hughes

“Un elettrizzante racconto storico -- compatto e raffinato e pieno di valori dimenticati. Merwin crea una forte narrativa poetica con grande intimità e umanità.

-- Michael Ondaatje

“Merwin è sempre stato un poeta contemplativo, attirato dalla lezione del mondo naturale e il rigore di una visione incontaminata. È anche un poeta romantico, eroico nella sua ricerca del profondo e intenso, dalla forza e potenzialità della coscienza. Ma soprattutto rimane un poeta che ci sorprende, che continuamente sorpassa le frontiere di una facile ammirazione.”

-- J. D. McClatchy, *The New Yorker*

**Il cavallo**

In un albero morto  
c'è lo spirito di un cavallo  
nessun cavallo  
fu mai visto vicino a quell'albero  
ma l'albero era nato  
da una cavalla  
scorazzava sulle lunghe gambe  
attraverso pianure ondegianti  
rizzava le orecchie  
s'impennava e scrollava la testa  
e d'improvviso restò immobile  
incominciando a ricordare  
mentre le sue foglie cadevano.

Traduzioni da *AUTOBIOGRAFIE NON VISSUTE*

di Mia Lecomte

**Mia Lecomte** è nata a Milano nel 1966 e vive a Roma. Ha pubblicato: il saggio *Animali parlanti. Le parole degli animali nella letteratura del Cinquecento e del Seicento* (Firenze 1995); i libri per bambini *La fiaba infinita* e *La fiaba impossibile* (Torino 1987), *Tiritiritère* (Bergamo 2001); il volume fotografico *Luoghi poetici* (Firenze 1996), realizzato con il fotografo Sebastian Cortés, di cui è autrice e curatrice di testi ed apparato critico; e le raccolte poetiche *Poesie* (Napoli 1991), *Geometrie reversibili* (Salerno 1996, Premio Città di Ostia 1997, segnalato Premio Internazionale E. Montale 1997), *Litania del perduto* (Prato 2002, testo a fronte in inglese. Con incisioni dell'artista canadese Erica Shuttleworth), *Autobiografie non vissute* (Lecce 2004). Per l'ed. "Zone" di Roma dirige la collana *Cittadini della poesia*, dedicata alla poesia della migrazione in italiano. E' redattrice del semestrale di poesia comparata *ASemicerchio@*, del quadrimestrale di poesia internazionale "Pagine", delle riviste di letteratura on-line "Kùmà", "El Ghibli" e "Sagarana", presso la cui scuola di scrittura, a Lucca, svolge un laboratorio di poesia all'interno del Master annuale.

Vita è quello che rimane  
quando si è perduto tutto.  
È il cane a tre zampe  
tutte e tre dritte e forti  
e una quarta strappata dall'inguine,  
è la quarta zampa del cane  
che nessun altro cane ha voluto  
e non smette di piangere l'inguine  
e tutte e tre quelle altre, dritte e forti.  
Vita, quando si è perduto tutto  
e ovvia è la taglia sull'incolpevole  
della pietra scagliata, il cieco  
che senza quell'unica gamba  
la gamba strappata dall'inguine  
malgrado le altre, tutte e tre dritte e forti  
non può più far tornare il suo cane.

ooo ooo

L'anima della tua anima  
è un inutile involucro vuoto  
la matrioska intermedia già sterile  
una cellula di scaglie coriacee

Life is what is left  
when all has been lost.  
It is the dog with three legs  
all three straight and strong  
and the fourth one ripped from its belly,  
it's the dog's fourth leg  
that no other dog wanted  
and the belly doesn't stop groaning,  
and the other three straight and strong.  
Life, when all has been lost  
and the blame falls on the one who  
did not throw the rock, the blind man  
who without that singular limb  
the leg ripped from the belly  
in spite of the others, all three straight and strong  
cannot make his own dog return.

oo

The soul of your soul  
is an empty useless envelope  
the inner matrioska already dried up  
a cell with horny scales

che non può penetrare la voce –  
non c'è polpa senza spina  
in terra o sulla croce,  
ancora gattoni caparbio  
alla periferia di te stesso,  
il dente è più guasto  
nella bocca rifatta di fresco –  
parole che qualcuno ha voluto  
il suono della loro sconfitta  
attraversano l'anima vacua  
di quell'anima che dicono tua  
e non lasciano traccia di sé.

ooo

**Congedo**

Spartiamoci ora l'eternità comune.  
Eco a caduta dal passato  
balena in incaglio sul futuro,  
viatico forse a una qualunque vita  
l'andare in pace, intanto  
alla fine del rito.



the voice is unable to penetrate –  
there's no pulp without thorn  
on earth or on the cross,  
you still stalk stubbornly  
around your outer self,  
the tooth is more rotten  
in the restructured mouth –  
words that someone wanted  
to be the sound of their rout  
traversing the hollow spaces  
of that soul they say is your own  
without leaving any trace.

ooo

**Leave-taking**

Let's share now one common eternity.  
Echo falling from the past  
whale beached upon the future,  
maybe remedy to an everyday life  
such conditional going in peace  
at the end of the rite.

## Amelia Rosselli

Amelia Rosselli - figlia di Carlo, l'esule antifascista fondatore del movimento "Giustizia e Libertà", poi assassinato da emissari del regime - è nata a Parigi nel 1930. Qui è vissuta sino all'occupazione tedesca, che l'ha costretta a fuggire in Inghilterra e poi negli Stati Uniti. Ha più tardi (nel 1950) fatto ritorno in Italia, stabilendosi a Roma, dove ha vissuto fino alla morte (si è suicidata nel 1996). Musicista, traduttrice, scrittrice in italiano, inglese e francese, ha pubblicato racconti e soprattutto poesie: *Variazioni belliche* (1964), *Serie ospedaliera* (1969), *Documento 1966-1973* (1976), *Impromptu* (1981), *Sleep* (1992, in inglese).

Da "DOCUMENTO" (1966-1973)

\*

È una suoneria costante; un micidiale comprometersi  
una didascalia infruttuosa, e un vento di traverso  
mentre battendo le ciglia sentenziavo una  
saggezza imbrogliata.

Conto di farla finita con le forme, i loro  
bisbigliamenti, i loro contenuti contenenti  
tutta la urgente scatola della mia anima la  
quale indifferente al problema farebbe meglio  
a contenersi. Giocattoli sono le strade e  
infermiere sono le abitudini distrutte da  
un malessere generale.

La gola della montagna si offrì pulita al  
mio desiderio di continuare la menzogna indecifrabile  
come le sigarette che fumo.

\*

La passione mi divorò giustamente  
la passione mi divise fortemente  
la passione mi ricondusse saggiamente  
io saggiamente mi ricondussi  
alla passione saggistica, principiante

It's a constant alarm clock; a lethal compromising  
a fruitless caption, and a cross wind  
while batting my eyelids I formulated a  
tangled wisdom

I plan to do away with forms, their  
whispers, their contents containing  
entirely the strangling box of my soul that  
indifferent to the problem would do well  
to contain itself. Toys are streets and  
nurses are habits destroyed by  
a general sickness.

The gully of the mountain cleanly offered itself to  
my wish to continue my undecipherable lie  
like the cigarettes I smoke

\*

Passion justly devoured me  
passion powerfully divided me  
passion wisely brought me back  
I wisely brought myself back  
to the passion with words, a beginner  
in the dark wood of a boring  
obligation, and the burning passion  
to sit at the table with the great ones

nell'oscuro bosco d'un noioso  
dovere, e la passione che bruciava  
nel sedere a tavola con i grandi  
senza passione o volendola dimenticare  
io che bruciavo di passione  
estinta la passione nel bruciare  
io che bruciavo di dolore nel  
vedere la passione così estinta.  
Estinguere la passione bramosa!  
Distinguere la passione dal  
vero bramare la passione estinta  
estinguere tutto ciò che rima  
con è: estinguere me, la passione  
la passione fortemente bruciante  
che si estinse da sé:  
Estinguere la passione del sé!  
estinguere il verso che rima  
da sé: estinguere perfino me  
estinguere tutte le rime in  
"e": forse vinse la passione  
estinguendo la rima in "e".

without passion or wanting to forget it  
I who burned with passion  
the passion extinguished in the burning  
I who burned with pain at  
seeing passion thus extinguished.  
To extinguish covetous passion!  
To distinguish passion from the  
true yearning for extinguished passion  
extinguish everything that is  
extinguish everything that rhymes  
with is: extinguish myself, the passion  
the passion burning so fiercely  
that it put itself out:  
Extinguish the passion for self!  
extinguish the verse that rhymes  
with itself: even extinguishing me  
extinguish all the rhymes in  
“e”: maybe passion won out  
by extinguishing the rhyme in “e”.

### Luigina Bigon

**Luigina Bigon** was born in Padua, where she currently lives. For most of her life she has dedicated her energies and talent to the artistic ornamentation of high fashion women's shoes. Her creations are exhibited in the Small Egyptian Room of the Villa Foscari-Rossi Museum in Stra, Venice. She is also profoundly interested in poetry and has published three volumes: *Bartering for Dreams* (Clessidra, 1989, English translation by Adeodato Piazza Nicolai), *Blacklight* (Maseratense, 1995) and *Searching for O* (Panda, 2001). She originated and edited the poetry series "...in Verse", publishing the following titles: *Walking...in Verse* (Panda, 1996), *Gelato...in Verse* (Media-diffusion, 1997) and *Eyeglasses...in Verse* (Panda, 1998). Founder, in 1989, of the poetry group UCAI of Padua (Union of Catholic Italian Artists), she was its president until 2004. On occasion of the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Vajont tragedy, she edited the commemorative volume *Vajont. Padua and Its Artists* (Imprimenda, 2003, translated into English by Adeodato Piazza Nicolai).

### I corpi allungati

Salgono le voci al Dio piangente  
lamento, anime e lance  
sotto la gola, inchiodano  
corazze e morsi  
nel violetto senza pace.  
Calano le brume sui colli  
preghiere,  
gocce d'acqua sulle pietre.  
Si alza il velo della memoria,  
un flusso trascende l'accento  
posto a confine tra la materia  
e lo spirito. Voce solitaria  
la parola del mondo  
mi grida dentro, quasi urla.  
Altre genti popolano l'eco  
di un profondo umano  
che si nutre del tempo  
e del luogo, senza misura.  
Vestiti di nero, i corpi allungati  
quasi si perdono nei volti esangui  
di una civiltà che si consuma nello sguardo  
di chi implora giustizia  
non più nell'ora della morte  
ma del perdono.

**The Long Bodies**

Voices lift up to the plangent God  
lament, souls and lances  
beneath the throat, nailing  
breastplates and clamps  
in the violet without peace.  
The mists wrap around the hills  
prayers,  
drops of water on the stones.  
Memory's veil opens up,  
the tide transcends the marker  
placed to divide matter  
from spirit. A lonely voice  
the word of the world  
that rips me within, almost yells.  
Others populate the echo  
of human depth  
feeding itself on the time  
and the place, without end.  
Dressed in black the long bodies  
are almost lost in the drawn faces  
of a people consumed by the look  
of one who is begging for justice  
no longer in the hour of death  
but of forgiveness.

**Paragrafo assurdo**

Vado da ombra ad ombra  
per non scottarmi. Grottesco  
come stare seduti sul ramo  
di un albero a parlare da soli.  
Tutto è talmente lontano  
forse mai appartenuto al mondo  
(attraverso quale fessura  
dovrà passare il cammello?)  
La realtà sfilava sonnambula  
sopra un paese irreali,  
insetti dappertutto - bugie in fiore  
con panorama in prospettiva  
nevai ascetici, linfa superstite.  
Non so se vale la pena  
fingere che tutto sia ideale.  
Paragrafo assurdo:  
non buttare via la pura finzione.

**Quercia o foglia**

Agosto sta volando  
come una foglia  
sopra le cime degli alberi  
e c'è chi soffia sotto  
per farla volare.  
Forse esclude la ragione  
ma il campo si allarga  
ovunque ci sia una  
misura di grandezza,  
e mentre ci si illude  
si perdono le radici.  
E quel filo d'argento  
che lega le anime  
al mondo sparisce  
scolorando nell'aria.  
Vorresti il tuo albero  
quercia di luce  
con le radici  
strette nella terra.



**Absurd Paragraph**

I move from shadow to shadow  
in order not to burn. Grotesque  
like being seated on a tree's  
branch to talk to the self.  
It is so incredibly distant  
maybe never a part of this world  
(across what fissure will  
the camel come to pass?)  
Reality unravels sleepwalking  
across a surreal landscape,  
bugs everywhere – blossoming lies  
with an overview in perspective  
ascetic glaciers, surviving lymph.  
I'm not so sure if it is worth  
making believe it is all ideal.  
An absurd paragraph:  
don't throw away the pure fiction.

**Oak Tree or Leaf**

August flies off  
like a leaf  
across the tree tops  
with someone who blows  
beneath it to make it fly.  
Maybe reason doesn't hold  
but the field is expanding  
wherever there is | one  
measure of greatness,  
and as we delude ourselves  
we lose our roots.  
That silvery filament  
binding spirits  
to the earth | fades away  
into thin air.  
You would like your tree  
as an oak made of light  
with roots  
dug deep into the ground.

**Scia di zolfo**

Dì di sì, di che credi.  
Insistente il falsetto si fa stridulo  
sapendo di mentire (io tu e gli altri).  
Proclami una promessa:  
è solo schermo privo di consistenza  
nemmeno un velo.  
Mattone su mattone costruisci  
il castello invisibile  
con le tante serrature a manico.  
Nemmeno una nuvola.  
La voce crepitante di malizie  
lascia una scia di zolfo  
(zoccoli sullo sterrato  
dopo la pioggia, nell'aria odore  
di terra e di escrementi).  
A cosa credere se tutto è fumo  
e appartiene a longitudini vaghe  
a costruzioni inverosimili  
come i gorghi delle burrasche?  
Non rimane che un feticcio di polvere.

**Vortice di specchi**

Non è lamento di lupo  
a graffiare la porta,  
né strazio di colomba  
a volare sopra l'incudine  
spezzato. Voragine di corvo  
strapiomba il sereno  
ma non spezza le radici.  
Il gesto sonoro segna  
soltanto una melodia malata.  
Lo sconcerto non spaventa  
l'asino, il raglio non ha senso  
anche se di notte la luna  
gli illumina il pelo.  
Alla fine cosa può accadere.  
Nulla. È soltanto un vortice  
di specchi che scortica l'aria.

**Trace of Sulphur**

Say yes, say you believe.  
The half-lie scratches insistently aware  
of its falsehood (me you and the others).  
You pronounce the promise:  
it's just a screen devoid of substance  
not even a veil.  
Brick on brick you build  
the invisible castle  
filled with handles and latches.  
Not even one cloud.  
a voice creaking with malice  
leaves only traces of sulphur  
(hooves on the earth  
after the rain, an aroma of  
humus and shit in the air).  
What to believe in if all is smoke  
that pertains to pale longitudes  
to implausible structures  
like eddies in the storms?  
A fetish of dust hangs behind.

**A Vortex of Mirrors**

It's not a wolf's howling  
that claws at the door,  
nor the dove's mourning  
flying across the shattered  
anvil. A raven's dive  
collapses the calm but  
won't demolish the roots.  
The musical touch signals  
no more than a sickened note  
dissonance that does not frighten  
the donkey, its bray makes no sense  
even if nightly the moon  
lights up its pelt.  
In the end what can happen?  
Nothing. It's only a vortex  
of mirrors flaying the air.

***English Translations of Poems by Giovanni Raboni***

by Michael Palma

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**Michael Palma** has published *The Egg Shape*, *Antibodies*, and *A Fortune in Gold* (poetry); translations of Guido Gozzano, Diego Valeri, and other modern and contemporary Italian poets; and a fully rhymed version of Dante's *Inferno*. His translation of Giovanni Raboni will be published this year by Chelsea Editions.

**Giovanni Raboni**, born in Milan in 1932, worked as an editor and critic. His many volumes of poetry are gathered in *Tutte le poesie (1951-1998)*, which was followed by a final collection, *Barlumi di storia*, in 2002. He also published translations of Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du Mal* and Proust's *A la recherche du temps perdu*, among many others. He died in September 2004.

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## *Giovanni Raboni*

**T**he more I have read, thought about, and translated the poetry of Giovanni Raboni, the more convinced have I become that he is one of the great poets, and perhaps the single greatest Italian poet, of our time. This judgment was confirmed by Mondadori's decision to include him in its *Meridiani* series of standard Italian writers while he was still alive, a fact about which he seemed a bit shy but justifiably quite proud, when I met with him for the second (and last) time in Milan in February 2004—although, sadly, he did not live to see its realization.

W. H. Auden, the English-language writer that in some ways Raboni most resembles, famously set out five criteria for a major poet, which can be summarized here as copiousness, "wide range in subject matter and treatment," "originality of vision and style," mastery of technique, and development. Raboni, I believe, more than fulfills all of these expectations, and it is this depth and variety in his work that I have tried to communicate, both in the book-length selection I am preparing and in the cross-section of that manuscript presented here.

From the terse lyrics of his earliest phase to the experiments with widely varying line lengths and mixtures of colloquial and arcane diction, from the scores of sonnets written in his forties and fifties (a trend toward formalism that reversed the movement of so many of his American contemporaries) to the reminiscent poems of his last collection (itself reminiscent of Lowell's *Day by Day*), his work is a rich blend of constancy and change. In keeping pace with it, I have tried also to keep pace with the smaller effects on which the larger ones often depend—not just the hendecasyllabic undercarriage and the rhymes (where they occur), but also the parallelisms, the alliteration, the abrupt tonal shifts, the restless enjambment that characterizes so many of the sonnets, and so on.

Technique, of course, is merely a means to an end, and it is the ends that I have tried most to reflect—the striking and often quirky angle of insight peculiar to his vision (and now and then simply peculiar); the passionate moral, social, and political concern; the preoccupation, at times almost an obsession, with illness and death; the tenderness of late love. These are the things that impress us most forcefully and remain with us most deeply as we watch Raboni bear witness to the private pains and joys of his life and to the public shames and outrages of his times.

**Risanamento**

Di tutto questo  
non c'è più niente (o forse qualcosa  
s'indovina, c'è ancora qualche strada  
acciottolata a mezzo, un'osteria).  
Qui, diceva mio padre, conveniva  
venirci col coltello... Eh sì, il Naviglio  
è a due passi, la nebbia era più forte  
prima che lo coprissero... Ma quello  
che hanno fatto, distruggere le case,  
distruggere quartieri, qui e altrove,  
a cosa serve? Il male non era  
lì dentro, nelle scale, nei cortili,  
nei ballatoi, lì semmai c'era umido  
da prendersi un malanno. Se mio padre  
fosse vivo, chiederei anche a lui: ti sembra  
che serva? è il modo? A me sembra che il male  
non è mai nelle cose, gli direi.

**Lezioni di economia politica**

Cosa vuoi che ti dica. Più tardi  
può darsi che la maschera si tagli e tu riesca  
a vederli con gli occhi i veri,  
i santi moti del tuo cuore... tardi  
per assecondarli, magari: ma allora,  
a diciotto, diciannove e nessuno  
che ci dicesse sul muso « stronzi », il nostro modo  
di rivoltarci era quello, il conformismo,  
la pacatezza, il freddo disgusto  
per le intemperanze giovanili;  
aver schifo della rivoluzione...  
Uno come lui, capisci, era per forza il nostro uomo  
con i suoi colletti rotondi e duri, la spilla,  
le scarpe da vampiro. E ti ricordi,  
non ne perdevamo una: issati  
sui vecchi banchi (dalle porte-finestre il giardino  
delle Reali Fanciulle o come diavolo  
si chiamavano), immobili, cascando  
di sonno, d'incertezza e insieme  
impalati d'orgoglio, mi sforzavo  
d'essere alla sua altezza, come lui

### Recovery

Of all this  
there's nothing left anymore (or maybe something  
if I had to guess, there's still a street or two  
with cobblestones down the middle, and a bar).  
Down here, my father said, you were well advised  
to carry a knife with you... Ah yes, the Canal  
is just a few steps away, the fog was thicker  
back then, before they covered it... But what  
they've gone and done, destroying all the houses,  
destroying neighborhoods, here and other places,  
what good does it do? The sickness wasn't there  
inside them, in the stairways, in the courtyards,  
in the galleries, if anything it was  
the dampness that could hurt you. If my father  
were alive today, I'd ask him: Does it seem  
good to you? Is this the way? It seems to me  
that the sickness is never in things, I'd say to him.

### Lessons of Political Economy

What do you want me to tell you? Later on  
the mask may be cut away in the end and you'll be able  
to see with your own eyes the natural,  
the hallowed motions of your heart... too late  
to follow them, in all likelihood; but then  
when we were eighteen, nineteen, with no one  
to call us "little shits" right to our faces, our way  
of rebelling was like that, conformity,  
restraint, a cold disgust  
for all the excesses of youth;  
a cultivated disdain for revolution...  
It goes without saying, you understand, that someone  
like him was our man, with his hard round collars,  
his tie-pin, his bloodsucker's shoes. And you recall,  
we didn't miss one of them: sitting up  
at those high old desks (through the French windows  
the garden of the Royal Princesses or whatever  
the hell they called it), immobile, falling asleep  
and into uncertainty but all the same  
stiff with pride, and I made every effort  
to be at his altitude, to be clearheaded

lucido e spassionato – di capire  
 com'è giusto applicare anche ai salari, alle teste  
 degli operai  
 la legge della domanda e dell'offerta.

**Bambino morto di fatica ecc.**

**1**

La porta chiusa alle spalle, nel buio, d'età  
 fra cinque e sei anni sopportando  
 una crescita d'occhi, improvvisamente,  
 nella schiena e – il plafone ribàltasi in piancito  
 e qui, e qui, sul pianerottolo (la porta  
 da dentro chiusa alle spalle) cosa resta da fare  
 se non cercare scampo con la testa cioè  
 incastrarla, tra ferro e ferro, sul vuoto delle scale  
 scabrosamente non riuscendo più a liberarla,  
     minuziosamente arrestando  
 i battiti del cuore  
 per infarto: tipico dei grandi; questo è uno dei modi.

**2**

Adesso che me l'hai detto vedo  
 com'è finito il bambino:  
 un medio grumo di sangue sul pavimento  
 del bagno. E tu che se per caso  
 svenivi, se non c'era nessuno  
 potevi morire dissanguata. Del quale  
 comportamento, suggerisci sentimentale,  
 bisognerebbe ringraziarlo, nessun  
 gentile o bestiale medicastro avendoci messo mano  
 per raschiarlo volontariamente (per nostra volontà)  
     via.  
 Anche così, rifletto, si produce  
 un santino, l'immagine buona, propiziatoria  
 da appendere dall'altra parte del letto in simmetria  
 con quelle da trattare con gli spilli...

**3**

Ha fatto troppo l'amore, dopo, sembra  
 che t'abbia detto; sembra



and dispassionate like him—to understand  
why it was proper procedure to apply even to wages, to  
the heads  
of the laborers, the law of supply and demand.

**Little Boy Dead of Exhaustion Etc.**

**1**

The door closed behind him, in the darkness,  
somewhere  
between five and six years old enduring  
an increase of eyes, out of nowhere,  
in his back and—the ceiling rolling over on the floor  
and here, and here, out on the landing (the door  
closed behind him from inside) what else is there to do  
but look for a way out with his head, that is to say,  
jammed between rail and rail, on the emptiness of the  
stairs  
struggling and failing to work it free again,  
scrupulously stopping  
the beating of his heart  
with an infarction: just like the grownups; it's one of  
their ways.

**2**

Now that you've told me about him I can see  
how the little boy came to die:  
a medium-sized blood clot on the bottom  
of the tub. And you, if by some chance you were  
to faint, if no one else was there  
then you might bleed to death. For which  
behavior, you sentimentally suggest,  
he really should be thanked, no amiable  
or brutal quack having lifted a single finger there  
to willingly (according to our will) scrape it away.  
That's how, I imagine, they go about  
producing a holy card, a lovely, propitiatory image  
to hang from the other side of the bed in symmetry  
with all the ones already pinned up there...

**3**

She made too much love, later on, it seems  
she said to you; it seems



this is the way that babies are made—this  
everybody knows—but sometimes it happens they're  
unmade. With  
love, do you see? (not to me: you're looking to get  
mixed up all by yourself),  
with love, not with indifference, irritation,  
not with the wish to make him go away.

4

A little boy (reading) dead of exhaustion  
in French Switzerland, or maybe I misremember, in  
Piedmont—in the vicinity  
(not in the shadow, absolutely) of  
a thicket  
or else, to get right down to it, of a rock,  
this is what I wanted to say: that his grownup mother  
in having hidden the animal from him (and he, in  
tracking it down, going round  
midnight upon midnight, going round like a lunatic, in  
the end  
dead of exhaustion or overheated or frozen, in the end  
it was impossible to tell)  
didn't think that she was doing any harm.

**Little Person**

Call him while he's sleeping  
and he only flicks an ear.

He suckles in his dreams  
at his dead mamma's breast.

He gnaws biscuits. He adores  
the taste of coffee grounds.

He savors with his paws  
shawls and thick pullovers.

He sleeps on leaves. He uses  
a book for a head cushion.

Sta bene soprattutto  
 in fondo agli armadi, nelle scatole...  
 Con occhi più verdi, tremando  
 spia il viavai dei piccioni.

Si lecca i baffi puntando  
 la mosca che volerà.

### **Gli addii**

Ogni tanto mi sforzo  
 di ricordarli: il ladro di verdura,  
 il matto, la servante au grand coeur,  
 il medico ecc. Strano gioco,  
 ho paura, e assai poco redditizio.  
 Tanto tempo è passato! e io  
 che mi gratto la testa e sto seduto  
 al tavolo di pietra del mulino  
 aspettando il sereno, non  
 sento di quelle spente dolcezze più  
 che un rauco, degradato miagolio.

\*

Invecchiando il corpo vorrebbe un'anima  
 diversa, ma come si fa? non serve  
 prendere calmanti, stordire i nervi  
 e la mente, il problema è proprio l'anima,

l'anima che non vuole pace, l'anima  
 insaziabile, ostinata che ferve  
 per sempre più comicamente impervi  
 labirinti o abissi e si sa che l'anima

non solo è immortale ma immortalmente  
 immatura. Così, temo, non resta  
 che rassegnarsi, finché non s'arresta

la fontanella del respiro niente  
 può cambiare, non è di questo fuoco  
 spegnersi come gli altri a poco a poco.

\*

Andarsene, tornare, due pensieri  
 dolci fino alla morte in tre parole  
 sole, FERROVIE NORD MILANO, ieri

He's at his best inside  
 the bottoms of cupboards, in boxes...  
 He quivers, green eyes marking  
 the to and fro of pigeons.

He licks his whiskers stalking  
 the fly that'll fly away.

### The Farewells

Every once in a while  
 I try to recall them all, the vegetable thief,  
 the madman, and *la servante au grand coeur*,  
 the physican, etc. A curious game,  
 I'm afraid, and one with little enough reward.  
 How much time has gone by! and I  
 who scratch my head and go on sitting here  
 at the stone table of the mill  
 waiting for the sky to clear,  
 all that I still hear now of those dead joys  
 is the noise of a degraded, shrill meow.

\*

The aging body wants a different soul  
 but what can be done for it? It hardly serves  
 to swallow sedatives, to numb the nerves  
 and brain, the problem really is the soul,

the soul that wants no peace, the stubborn soul  
 insatiable in its burning swoops and swerves  
 through ever more laughably difficult drops and curves  
 in chasms or labyrinths, and we know the soul

is not just immortal but immortally  
 immature. I'm afraid it isn't going to quit  
 simply because you're ready to submit,

till the stream of breath dries up it'll never be  
 any different, for as long as this flame's still lit  
 it doesn't die out like others bit by bit.

\*

To go away, to come back home again,  
 two thoughts that will be sweet till death in three  
 distinct words, RAILWAYS NORTH MILAN, back then

limpidamente stampate nel sole

del mattino, ora oscillanti sui poveri  
trampoli del ricordo. Non ci vuole  
molto per capire che i passeggeri  
sanno poco o niente di ciò che duole

nella nostra memoria, che per loro  
Auschwitz è un nome come tanti, un suono  
senza storia. Li sento, più leggeri

dell'aria, sfiorarmi, fendere il buono  
dell'aria, oh non esuli, frontalieri  
dell'aria in viaggio fra la nebbia e l'oro.

\*

Mio male, mio bene, così vicini  
ormai che tante volte vi confondo,  
che risse facevate quando il mondo  
era pieno di luce e i teatrini

del cuore non scritturavano ombre  
ma angeli e demoni in carne e ossa  
e da tutte le parti, nella fossa  
di chi rammenta, nelle quinte ingombre

di macerie, nei cessi, nel foyer  
annerito dagli incendi ferveva  
l'incauta vita... Certo, si solleva  
ancora il sipario, ogni sera c'è

spettacolo – ma senza vincitori  
né vinti, senza sangue, senza fiori.

\*

L'autunno ha a volte luci così terse  
e, sugli alberi, rossi di così  
atroce dolcezza che il cuore si  
spezzerebbe vedendoli. In diverse

più innocue incombenze dunque si finge  
assorbito e lascia che siano gli occhi  
a incantarsene, a impregnarsene, sciocchi  
e intrepidi come sono... Poi stinge

in the morning sun imprinted limpidly

and these days wobbling by upon the poor  
stilts of recall. It doesn't take much to see  
that all the passengers know little or  
nothing of things that ache in our memory,

that Auschwitz is just a name to them, just one  
like any other, a sound that doesn't hold  
any history. I feel them, lighter than

the air, as they graze me, split the goodness of  
the air, not exiles but commuters of  
the air in transit between fog and gold.

\*

My good, my evil, by now so close together  
that I confuse you sometimes, I who might  
have angered you when the world was filled with light  
and the little theaters of the heart would never

hire shadows for the roles but filled every one  
with angels and demons of flesh and bone, from all  
sides, in the ditch of the one who may recall,  
in the toilets, in the wings that were overrun

with debris, and in the foyer that was so  
flame-blackened, life was reckless and it blazed...  
Yes, it is true the curtain is still raised,  
and every evening there is still a show—

but now there are no winners in our plays,  
no losers, and no blood, and no bouquets.

\*

At times in autumn there are lights so clear  
and, on the trees, reds of such horribly  
outrageous sweetness that your heart would be  
shattered to see them. And while you appear

preoccupied by a variety  
of more innocuous tasks, you still permit  
your eyes to charm and warm themselves in it,  
brave and foolish as they are... Then gradually

a poco a poco o forse trascolora  
come fa, salendo, la luna, quel  
tetro fulgore, scrudelisce nel  
pulviscolo del tempo, e solo allora

uno ha il coraggio di dire quant'era  
bello – più bello della primavera.

\*

Mai avuto, io, il doppio dei tuoi anni.  
Ma cosa dico? certo che li ho avuti,  
solo che tu non c'eri, eri, vediamo,  
a Padova, o forse Venezia, intenta  
a qualche tua storia d'irresistibile  
ventiduenne – e in fondo cosa importa  
in base a quale calcolo o magia  
la ragazza che eri è diventata  
l'incresciosamente giovane donna  
che sarai finché vivo e io per non perderti  
un malato da vent'anni s'ingegna  
di non morire? Non lasciarmi né ora  
né prima, mi sembra a volte di dire  
non so con che cuore, e a chi delle due.

\*

L'hanno picchiato a sangue, non a morte  
il figlio mezzo scimunito  
della fiorista del paese  
che girava fischiando «Giovinezza»  
due, al massimo tre giorni  
prima del 25 aprile.  
Era fascista? Certo – come quelli  
che l'hanno preso a pugni  
erano uno di Masnago, gli altri  
di Induno: per esserci nati.  
Mai più saremmo stati, li da noi,  
così atrocemente innocenti.



it all begins to fade, but then again  
perhaps it's changing color, as the moon  
rising in its somber splendor soon  
is warmed in time's fine dust, and only then

do you dare to say how beautiful a thing  
it really was—more beautiful than spring.

\*

There was never a time when I was twice your age.  
What am I saying? Of course there was such a time,  
only you weren't here, you were, let's see,  
in Padua, maybe Venice, intent on some  
of your history as an irresistible  
twenty-two-year-old—and really in the end  
what does it matter what calculus or charm  
transformed the young girl that you were into  
the regrettably young woman that you'll be  
for as long as I'm alive, a sick man who  
to keep from losing you has managed now  
for twenty years not to die. Don't leave me now,  
don't leave me first, I sometimes seem to hear,  
but which heart speaks, and to which one of us?

\*

They beat him bloody, though not to death  
the halfwit son of the woman  
who owned the local flower shop  
because he went around whistling "Giovinezza"  
two, no more than three  
days before April 25.  
Was he a Fascist? Of course he was—the way  
that those who pounded him  
were one of them from Masnago and the rest  
from Induno: by being born there.  
Never would those of us who were from those parts  
be so atrociously innocent again.



***English Translations of Poems by Giorgio Caproni***

by Pasquale Verdicchio

---

**Pasquale Verdicchio** has translated the work of Pier Paolo Pasolini, Antonio Porta, Alda Merini and Giorgio Caproni (*The Wall of the Earth*), among others. He is a poet and essayist whose interests range from contemporary poetry to photography, to cinema and music. He teaches at the University of California, San Diego.

**Giorgio Caproni** (1912-1990) Born in Livorno, Caproni is usually considered to be a Ligurian poet given the fact of his family's move to Genova when he was young. Most of his life was however spent in Rome, where he was a teacher. His works, carefully exploration into the sparcity of language and expression, generally have dealt with human relations resultant from war, deracination, existential and spiritual conflict. His poetry has been recognized with major prizes in Italy: *Stanze della funicolare* (Viareggio Prize), *Il muro della terra* (Premio Gatto), *Il Franco cacciatore* (Premio Montale e Premio Feltrinelli). His literary activity included translation from the French of the works of Proust, Baudelaire, Celine, de Maupasant, Genete and Apollinaire. Caproni's first translated collection in English, *the Wall of the Earth*, appeared in 1991 through Guernica Editions. The poems here presented are selected from Caproni's posthumous work *Res amissa* (Mondadori, 1991), edited and introduced by Giorgio Agamben.

---

From  
**RES AMISSA**  
by  
**GIORGIO CAPRONI**

translated by

**Pasquale Verdicchio**

**Res amissa**

Non ne trovo traccia

.....

Venne da me apposta  
(di questo sono certo)  
per farmene dono.

.....

Non ne trovo più traccia.

.....

Rivedo nell'abbandono  
del giorno l'esile faccia  
biancoflautata...

La manica  
in trina...

La grazia,  
Così dolce e allemanica  
nel porgere...

.....

.....

Un vento  
d'urto – un'aria  
quasi silicea agghiaccia  
ora la stanza...

(È lama  
di coltello?

Tormento  
oltre il vetro ed il legno  
-serrato – dell'imposta?)

.....

.....

Non ne scorgo più segno.  
Più traccia.

.....

.....

Chiedo  
alla morgana...

**Res amissa**

I can find no trace of it.

.....

He came to me deliberately  
(of this I am certain)  
to make a gift of it.

.....

I can no longer find trace of it.

.....

I see again in the leaving  
day the thin face  
whitefluted . . .

The sleeve

in lace . . .

The grace,  
so gentle and germanic  
in its offering . . .

.....

.....

A wind  
of impact - an air  
almost siliceous chills  
now the room . . .

(Is it the blade  
of a knife?)

Torment  
beyond the glass and wood  
- closed - of the shutter?)

.....

.....

I can no longer find sign of it.  
No trace.

.....

.....

I ask  
the morgana . . .

Rivedo

esile l'esile faccia  
flautoscomparsa...

Schiude

- remota – l'albeggiante bocca,  
ma non parla.

(Non può

- niente può – dar risposta

.....  
.....

Non spero più di trovarla.

.....

L'ho troppo gelosamente  
(irrecuperabilmente) riposta.

### **I cardini**

I cardini della luce...

Dell'ombra...

Li conosco.

Conosco le cretacee porte  
che danno sul mare. Sul bosco.

Ma i cardini della nascita?

*I cardini della morte?...*

I see again  
thin the slim face  
flutedisappeared . . .

Parts  
- remote - the dawning mouth,  
but does not speak.

(She cannot  
- nothing can - answer.)

.....

.....

I no longer hope to find her.

.....

I have too jealously  
(irrecoverably) hidden her.

### **Reasons**

The reasons for light . . .

For shadow . . .

I know them.

I know the cretaceous doors  
that lead to the sea. The woods.

But the reasons for birth?

*The reasons for death? . . .*

Così, stentoreamente,  
gridava, richiuso, il demente.

(Era, la sua ragione eversa,  
la sola Cosa *non* persa?)

### **L'ignaro**

S'illuse, recuperato  
l'oggetto accuratamente perso,  
d'aver fatto un acquisto.

Fu gioia d'un momento.

*E rimase*

turbato.

Quasi  
come chi si sia a un tratto visto  
spogliato d'una rendita.

(Lui,  
ignaro che ogni ritrovamento  
- sempre - è una perdita.)

### **Il patto**

..... un'ombra  
che stringe la mano d'ombra  
a un'altra ombra...

(In ombra...)

Due ombre che senza lasciare ombra  
d'ombra, nell'ombra



So, straining,  
shouted, shut in, the madman.

(Was, his ruined reason,  
the only Thing *not* lost?)

### **Unaware**

He was under the illusion,  
having found the accurately lost object again,  
of having gained something.

It was a momentary joy.

troubled. *And he was left*

Almost  
like someone who suddenly finds himself  
stripped of an income.

(He,  
unaware that anything found again  
is - always - a loss.)

### **The Agreement**

..... a shadow  
that shakes the hand of shadow  
of another shadow . . .

(In shadow. . .)

Two shadows that without leaving a shadow  
of a shadow, in the shadows

fermano un patto...

(D'ombra...)

Ma I duri corpi viventi?...

Le due compatte masse  
tese – quasi acciaiescenti?...

Dove le due persone  
proiettanti?...

.....

(È dunque  
- il luogo d'ogni congiunzione –  
perpetua parallasse?...)

### **Invenzioni**

Quelle impalpabili voci  
quasi trasparenti...

L'azzurro  
di tutti quegli occhi neri  
- inesistenti? – d'acqua  
e d'ossidiana...

Lontana  
- sempre più lontana –  
da sé, la mente  
ne ha perso il nome...

Angeli  
dissolti?...

Incorporei  
- afoni - corrieri  
di note spente...

come to an agreement . . .

(Of shadow . . .)

But the hard living bodies? . . .

The two compact masses  
taut - almost steelescent? . . .

Where the two projecting  
people? . . .

.....

(It is therefore  
- the place of every conjunction -  
perpetual parallax? . . .)

### **Inventions**

Those impalpable voices  
almost transparent . . .

of all those black eyes  
- non existent? - of water  
and obsidian . . .

The blue

- always more distant -  
from itself, the mind  
has lost the name of it . . .

Distant

dissipated? . . .

Angels

- aphonic - couriers  
of extinguished notes . . .

Incorporeal

Presumibilmente  
soltanto vuote figurazioni  
di suoni senza più suono...

Lumi  
senza accensioni...

*Invenzioni...*

only empty figurations  
of sound without sound . . .

Presumably

without switches . . .

Lamps

*Inventions . . .*

*English Translations of Poems by Guido Gozzano and  
Giovanni Pascoli*

by Geoffrey Brock

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**Geoffrey Brock** is the author of *Weighing Light*, and his poems and translations have appeared in magazines including *Poetry*, *Paris Review*, and *The New Yorker*. His translation of Cesare Pavese's *Disaffections* was named one of the "Best Books of 2003" by the *Los Angeles Times* and received both the PEN Center USA Translation Award and the MLA's Lois Roth Translation Award. He's also the translator of books by Roberto Calasso and Umberto Eco. A former Wallace Stegner Fellow and the recipient of recent fellowships from the NEA and the Guggenheim Foundation, he teaches creative writing and translation at the University of Arkansas. His website is [www.geoffreybrock.com](http://www.geoffreybrock.com).

**Guido Gozzano** was born in Turin in 1883 and died there in 1916, after a long battle with tuberculosis. He was a poet of substantial accomplishment and enormous promise, easily the best of the so-called "Crepuscular" poets. That label, coined by a critic as a slight, suggests a particular attitude toward the past, as if the long day of Italian culture were winding down and nothing remained but dim and fading traces, twilight pieces. In a land that had produced Rome and the Renaissance, Dante and Leopardi, such an attitude was perhaps inevitable and was, in any case, pervasive; it was precisely this sort of *passatismo* against which the *futuristi* would shortly rebel. But Gozzano's poetry also contains the seeds of something much more modern. Like Eliot, he had read his Laforgue, and his monologue "Totò Merùmeni," one of the centerpieces of his second and most important volume, *I colloqui* (1911), anticipates by several years elements of Eliot's "Prufrock." It is tantalizing (and, of course, fruitless) to imagine what the landscape of Italian poetry in the first half of the last century might have looked like had Gozzano not died *nel mezzo del cammin*.

The poem presented here first appeared in a journal in 1913 and was not collected during Gozzano's brief lifetime. Though not typical of his best-known work, it is profoundly beguiling. The "unfound isle," with its "blessed shore" (*Purg.* XXXI 97) and "sacred forest" (*Purg.* XXVIII 2), alludes to the earthly paradise described in the final cantos of *Purgatorio*. (The final line also suggests parallels with another famous journey: it is lifted from Pascoli's long poem about Ulysses, *L'ultimo viaggio*.) If the *Purgatorio* seems today the most modern and human of Dante's canticles, it is partly because it is the only one that, as W.S. Merwin has remarked, takes place "on the earth, as our lives do." For Dante, of course, purgatory is something to transcend, whereas Gozzano, in this poem, seems to deny the possibility of such transcendence. His paradise remains unattainable, a "vain semblance," and his sailors

thus remain condemned to their purgatory—which is to say, to this world: unlike Dante, and like us.

**Giovanni Pascoli** was born in 1855 in San Mauro di Romagna (a town later renamed San Mauro Pascoli in his honor) and died in Bologna, where he had followed Carducci as professor of Italian literature, in 1912. His personal life was famously full of tragedy: his father was shot to death when he was 11, his mother and oldest sister died the following year, and two of his brothers were dead by the time he was 20. In 1891 he published his first collection of poems in Italian and also won the first of thirteen gold medals for his Latin poetry from the Royal Dutch Academy. At his best, his quiet, plain-spoken style provides what Joseph Cary calls “a rough antithesis or even antidote” to the grandeur, or grandiosity, of Carducci and D’Annunzio (the other two members of the great triad that shadows the threshold of twentieth-century Italian poetry). He is known for his poetics of the “fanciullino,” his term for the innocent, non-rational intuition possessed by children and poets and associated with lyricism and creativity, and for his focus on “piccole cose,” small, humble objects, which constitute the essence of Pascoli’s world and which are named with a precision new to Italian poetry. Where Leopardi, a notoriously inexact naturalist, refers generically to “the songs of birds,” Pascoli names the exact species and sometimes, like Audubon, even transcribes its call phonetically. The title of his first book, *Myricae*, is neatly emblematic of this aspect of his poetics: taken from a reference by Virgil to “humilesque myricae” (humble tamarisks), it emphasizes the humble object, properly named. Subsequent books include *Poemetti* (*Shorter poems*, 1897), *Canti di Castelvecchio* (*Songs from Castelvecchio*, 1903), *Poemi conviviali* (*Convivial Poems*, 1904), and several others.

“La cavalla storna” may be Pascoli’s most famous poem, which is not to say his best. Though the poem is built around a central mystery—the identity of his father’s murderer—the poem itself is not, I think, as mysterious as his best poems are. It is not without fascination, but part of its fascination surely lies in our knowledge that it is based on actual events. It may overstate the case to say that it stands in relation to his oeuvre as “O Captain! My Captain!” does to Whitman’s (Pascoli’s is a better poem), but they have much in common: both are about father figures who were shot to death in the mid-1860s, both moistened the eyes of generations of schoolchildren, and, if we read them generously, both are indeed moving, in their fashion. But both also suffer from melodrama that verges on mawkishness. Translation can’t remedy such faults; it can only avoid exacerbating them while trying to do justice to the virtues. In Pascoli’s case (unlike Whitman’s), the poem’s form and tone are virtues: the finely balanced, end-stopped heroic couplets and the gothic air have the effect of distancing the poem’s events, of making them seem the stuff of ancient legend rather than autobiography. It was such qualities that I tried hardest to convey.

---

**Guido Gozzano**

La più bella

**I.**

Ma bella più di tutte l'Isola Non-Trovata:  
quella che il Re di Spagna s'ebbe da suo cugino  
il Re di Portogallo con firma sugellata  
e bulla del Pontefice in gotico latino.

L'Infante fece vela pel regno favoloso,  
vide le fortunate: Iunonia, Gorgo, Hera  
e il Mare di Sargasso e il Mare Tenebroso  
quell'isola cercando... Ma l'isola non c'era.

Invano le galee panciute a vele tonde,  
le caravelle invano armarono la prora:  
con pace del Pontefice l'isola si nasconde,  
e Portogallo e Spagna la cercano tuttora.

**II.**

L'isola esiste. Appare talora di lontano  
tra Teneriffe e Palma, soffusa di mistero:  
«...l'Isola Non-Trovata!» Il buon Canariàno  
dal Picco alto di Teyde l'addita al forestiero.

La segnano le carte antiche dei corsari.  
*...Hifola da-trovarfi? ...Hifola pellegrina?...*  
È l'isola fatata che scivola sui mari;  
talora i naviganti la vedono vicina...

Radono con le prore quella beata riva:  
tra fiori mai veduti sveltano palme somme,  
odora la divina foresta spessa e viva,  
lacrima il cardamomo, trasudano le gomme...

S'annuncia col profumo, come una cortigiana,  
l'Isola Non-Trovata... Ma, se il pilota avanza,  
rapida si dilegua come parvenza vana,  
si tinge dell'azzurro color di lontananza...



Guido Gozzano  
The Loveliest

I.

But loveliest of all, the Unfound Isle:  
the King of Spain received it from his cousin,  
the King of Portugal, with a royal seal  
and the Pope's bull, scrawled in a Gothic Latin.

Seeking the fabled place, the Infante passed  
the Fortunate Isles—Junonia, Gorgo, Hera,  
sailed the Sea of Darkness and the Sargasso,  
eye to his glass... The island was not there.

In vain the sails of the stout galleys swelled,  
in vain they fitted out their caravels:  
with the Pope's peace, the island hid itself;  
Spain seeks it still, and Portugal as well.

II.

The isle exists. Occasionally it appears  
between La Palma and Tenerife, beguiling.  
On Teide's peak, the kind Canaryman steers  
the foreigner's gaze: "There, the Unfound Isle!"

It's marked on the parchment maps of privateers:  
*Wandering ifle?* or *Ifland to-be-found?*  
It's the enchanted isle that rides the waters,  
and sometimes sailors see it close at hand:

Their vessels glide along its blessed shore;  
the dense green sacred forest scents the air;  
over the nameless flowers, huge palms soar;  
cardamom weeps, the rubber trees perspire...

The Unfound Isle, announced by fragrances,  
like courtesans... And like vain semblances,  
when pilots sail too near it vanishes,  
turning that shade of blue that distance is.

**Giovanni Pascoli**

**La cavalla storna**

Nella Torre il silenzio era già alto.  
Sussurravano i pioppi del Rio Salto.

I cavalli normanni alle lor poste  
frangean la biada con rumor di croste.

Là in fondo la cavalla era, selvaggia,  
nata tra i pini su la salsa spiaggia;

che nelle froge avea del mar gli spruzzi  
ancora, e gli urli negli orecchi aguzzi.

Con su la greppia un gomito, da essa  
era mia madre; e le dicea sommessa:

«O cavallina, cavallina storna,  
che portavi colui che non ritorna;

tu capivi il suo cenno ed il suo detto!  
Egli ha lasciato un figlio giovinetto;

il primo d'otto tra miei figli e figlie;  
e la sua mano non toccò mai briglie.

Tu che ti senti ai fianchi l'uragano,  
tu dàì retta alla sua piccola mano.

Tu ch'hai nel cuore la marina brulla,  
tu dàì retta alla sua voce fanciulla».

La cavalla volgea la scarna testa  
verso mia madre, che dicea più mesta:

«O cavallina, cavallina storna,  
che portavi colui che non ritorna;

lo so, lo so, che tu l'amavi forte!  
Con lui c'eri tu sola e la sua morte.

O nata in selve tra l'ondate e il vento,

Giovanni Pascoli

**The Dapple Gray Mare**

The Villa lay beneath the quiet's cover.  
The poplars whispered by the Salto River.

The Norman horses, each in its stall, fed  
on fodder, crunching it like crusty bread.

Beyond them stood the wild mare, who was foaled  
upon a piney coast, salt-licked and cold;

her nostrils carried still that tang of shore,  
and still her cocked ears heard the ocean roar.

A woman leaned beside the horse's head;  
she was my mother. This is what she said:

*O dearest mare, O mare so dapple-gray,  
who bore the man who won't return away—*

*you understood his touch, his words, his mind!  
The man has left a little boy behind*

*(first born of eight) who never handled reins.  
And though your flanks are spurred by hurricanes,*

*heed his small hand. And heed his childlike speech,  
though in your heart there lies a barren beach.*

The gray mare turned her bony head to see  
my mother as she spoke so mournfully:

*O dearest mare, O mare so dapple-gray,  
who bore the man who won't return away—*

*I know, of course: I know you loved him, too!  
He would have died alone there, but for you.*

*After the bit between your teeth went slack,*

tu tenesti nel cuore il tuo spavento;

sentendo lasso nella bocca il morso,  
nel cuor veloce tu premesti il corso:

adagio seguitasti la tua via,  
perché facesse in pace l'agonia...»

La scarna lunga testa era daccanto  
al dolce viso di mia madre in pianto.

«O cavallina, cavallina storna,  
che portavi colui che non ritorna;

oh! due parole egli dovè pur dire!  
E tu capisci, ma non sai ridire.

Tu con le briglie sciolte tra le zampe,  
con dentro gli occhi il fuoco delle vampe,

con negli orecchi l'eco degli scoppi,  
seguitasti la via tra gli alti pioppi:

lo riportavi tra il morir del sole,  
perché udissimo noi le sue parole».

Stava attenta la lunga testa fiera.  
Mia madre l'abbracciò su la criniera.

«O cavallina, cavallina storna,  
portavi a casa sua chi non ritorna!

a me, chi non ritornerà più mai!  
Tu fosti buona... Ma parlar non sai!

Tu non sai, poverina; altri non osa.  
Oh! ma tu devi dirmi una una cosa!

Tu l'hai veduto l'uomo che l'uccise:  
esso t'è qui nelle pupille fise.

Chi fu? Chi è? Ti voglio dire un nome.  
E tu fa cenno. Dio t'insegni, come».

*your heart raced, but you trotted gently back;*

*born beneath pines, between the waves and wind,  
you mastered fear so peace might be his end.*

The gray mare's bony muzzle brushed the side  
of my sweet mother's visage as she cried.

*O dearest mare, O mare so dapple-gray,  
who bore the man who won't return away—*

*whose last few words you know, but can't repeat!  
You brought him back, reins trailing at your feet.*

*The shot in your ears, in your eyes the flame,  
along the whispering poplar road, you came.*

*You bore him through the dying of the day  
so we might hear some last word he might say.*

The mare's long head was listening. In her pain,  
My mother threw her arms around that mane.

*O dearest mare, O mare so dapple-gray,  
you bore him home, the man who went away,*

*who never can come home! Good though you be,  
you cannot (others dare not) speak to me.*

*But oh, there's one — just one! — thing you must tell:  
You saw the killer, yes, you know him well—*

*who is it? I will say a man's name now.  
Give me some signal. God will show you how.*

The horses were no longer champing meal;  
asleep, they dreamed the rolling of the wheel.

They did not stamp their hooves upon the hay:  
asleep, they dreamed the whiteness of the way.

Ora, i cavalli non frangean la biada:  
dormian sognando il bianco della strada.

La paglia non battean con l'unghie vuote:  
dormian sognando il rullo delle ruote.

Mia madre alzò nel gran silenzio un dito:  
disse un nome... Sonò alto un nitrito.

My mother raised her hand toward the hushed sky  
and spoke a name. The gray mare's neigh rose high.





***Confronti Poetici/  
Poetic Comparisons***

Section Edited by Luigi Fontanella

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The purpose of this “rubrica” is to feature two poets, an American or Italian-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 English and the Italian translation 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.

**Luigi Fontanella** is Professor of Italian at Stony Brook University. His most recent books are *Azul* (Archinto, 2001); *La parola transfuga* (Cadmo, 2003); *I racconti di Murano di Italo Svevo* (Empiria, 2004); *Pasolini rilegge Pasolini* (Archinto, 2005). He is the editor of *Gradiva*, and the president of IPA (Italian Poetry in America).

**Valerio Magrelli**'s most recent books are *Didascalie per la lettura di un giornale* (Einaudi, 1999), and *Nel condominio di carne* (Einaudi, 2003). In 2002 he was awarded the Feltrinelli Prize for Italian poetry. Magrelli is Professor of French Literature at the University of Cassino.

**Robert Viscusi** is Professor of English and American Literature at CUNY- Brooklyn College, where he has directed the Wolfe Institute for the Humanities since 1982. His most recent books are the novel *Astoria* (Guernica 1995, winner of the American Book Award in 1996), a collection of poems: *A New Geography of Time* (Guernica, 2004), and *Buried Caesars and Other Secrets of Italian American Writing* (SUNY Press, 2006).

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**ROBERT VISCUSI** (from *A New Geography of Time*, Guernica, 2004, p. 53)

### **Goons and Lagoons**

Gangsters in gondolas glide down the streets of Las Vegas.  
 What does it matter that this is a desert?  
 The water is a form of liquidity.  
 The gangsters are my leaders insofar as I am an Italian in America.  
 Desert lakes glitter with pumped cash.  
 Don't tell me I am not special, because I have been to Italy.  
 In the Biblioteca San Marco I have read manuscript codices.  
 The water climbs the marble stairs in the entrance halls.  
 Seaweed hangs from every stone you can see of the library's  
 foundation.  
 Albert Anastasia was murdered in a barber's chair at the Sheraton.  
 He had a brother who was a priest at Saint Lucy's in the Bronx.  
 Father Anastasia didn't speak English too well.  
 We used to go to the Bronx just to make our confessions.  
 The Cadillacs would silently turn the corner of Allerton Avenue.  
 Gangsters in cherrywood coffins would slide into the church.  
 The Island of San Michele in the lagoon is the cemetery.  
 That water eats everything.  
 After a few decades the graves are empty.  
 Venetians one after another have lain in the same graves.  
 In America it is the cities we bury.  
 The money eats them the way water eats corpses.

### **VALERIO MAGRELLI (inedito, 2005)**

Guarda questa bambina  
 che sta imparando a leggere:  
 tende le labbra, si concentra,  
 tira su una parola dopo l'altra,  
 pesca, e la voce fa da canna,  
 fila, si flette, strappa  
 guizzanti queste lettere  
 ora alte nell'aria  
 luccicanti  
 al sole della pronuncia.

**Gonzi e Gondole**

Scivolano gangster in gondola per le strade di Las Vegas.  
Che importa se questo è un deserto?  
L'acqua è una forma di liquidità.  
I gangster sono i miei leader solo perché io sono un italiano in  
America.  
I laghi del deserto luccicano di denarocontante pompato.  
Non dirmi che io non sono speciale, perché sono stato in Italia.  
Alla Biblioteca San Marco ho letto codici e manoscritti.  
L'acqua s'arrampica sulle scale di marmo degli ingressi.  
Alghè appese a ogni pietra delle fondamenta della biblioteca.  
Albert Anastasia fu assassinato su una sedia da barbiere allo  
Sheraton.  
Aveva un fratello prete alla chiesa di Santa Lucia nel Bronx.  
Un prete che non parlava bene l'inglese.  
Noi andavamo nel Bronx solo per confessarci.  
Le cadillac giravano silenziose all'angolo di Allerton Avenue.  
Gangster incapsulati in bare di ciliegio entravano ed uscivano da  
quella chiesa.  
Nell'isola di San Michele, in piena laguna, c'è il cimitero.  
L'acqua divora ogni cosa.  
Dopo appena qualche decennio le tombe si svuotano.  
Veneziani, uno dopo l'altro, sono andati ad occupare quelle stesse  
tombe.  
In America noi seppelliamo le città.  
Il denaro le divora così come l'acqua divora i cadaveri.

VALERIO MAGRELLI (unpublished, 2005)

Look at this child  
who is learning how to read:  
she stretches out her mouth, concentrates,  
pulls up word after word,  
fishing for them, and her voice acts like a rod,  
it spins, bends, tears out  
these darting letters  
finally high in the air  
glittering  
in the sun of pronunciation.



*Oil on canvas.*

## *Traduttori a duello/ Dueling Translators*

Section Edited by Gaetano Cipolla

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It has been said that a text of poetry or prose, translated by ten equally knowledgeable translators, will result in ten different texts. In theory, the different versions should convey what is known as the kernel meaning, that is, the basic message contained in the original text. This section of *Italian Journal of Translation* will test this theory by asking our readers to translate a text chosen by the editors, using whatever style or approach they consider best. The submissions will then be printed with the original text. We will try to publish as many entries as possible, space allowing. For this issue, I selected the following poem by Guido Gozzano. Send your version of this poem and write a paragraph describing your approach. You may submit additional poems or short prose texts that in your estimation pose challenging problems. Send your submissions to me or Luigi Bonaffini.

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### Elogio degli amori ancillari

#### I

Allor che che viene con novelle sue,  
ghermir mi piace l'agile fantesca  
che secretaria antica è fra noi due.

M'accende il riso della bocca fresca,  
l'attesa vana, il motto arguto, l'ora,  
e il profumo d'istoria boccacesca...

Ella m'irride, si dibatte, implora,  
invoca il nome della sua padrona:  
"Ah! Che vergogna! Povera Signora!

Ah! Povera Signora!..." E s'abbandona.

#### II

Gaie figure di decamerone,  
le cameriste dan senza tormento,  
più sana voluttà che le padrone.

Non la scaltrezza del martirio lento,  
non da morbosità polsi riarsi,  
e non il tedioso sentimento

che fa le notti lunghe e i sonni scarsi,  
non dopo voluttà l'anima triste:  
ma un più sereno e maschio sollazzarsi.

Lodo l'amore delle cameriste!



## *Classics Revisited*

### *English Translation of Ugo Foscolo's "Le Grazie" / Traduzione inglese di "Le Grazie" di Ugo Foscolo*

by Joseph Tusiani

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**Joseph Tusiani**, professor emeritus, Lehman College, City University of New York, came to the US in 1947, when he was 23. Naturalized in 1956, he is the translator of classics of Italian of poetry into English verse, and a poet in his own right. The great bulk of his translations includes Michelangelo's *Complete Poems*, Boccaccio's *Nymphs of Fiesole*, Luigi Pulci's *Morgante*, all of Machiavelli's verses, Tasso's *Jerusalem Delivered* and *Creation of the World*, Leopardi's *Canti*. He is the author of collections of verse in English (*Rind and All*, 1962; *The Fifth Season*, 1964; *Gente Mia and Other Poems*, 1978; *Collected Poems 1983-2004*, 2004), in Latin (*Carmina latina*, 1994; *Carmina latina II*, 1998), in Italian (among others, *Il ritorno*, 1992), and in his Gargano dialect (sixteen titles between 1955 and 2004), and of an autobiography in three volumes, *La parola difficile* (1988), *La parola nuova* (1991), *La parola antica* (1992).

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#### **Note on Translation**

Of the two hundred and more Italian poets I rendered into English, no one posed problems that no translator - so I thought - would ever solve. Pulci, Michelangelo, Tasso, and Leopardi seemed at first so untranslatable to me that even the most felicitous approximation would diminish them. Ugo Foscolo's case is unique in that *Le Grazie* is the most polished and elegant Italian poem written in blank verse. Its haunting musicality, in which the subtly shifting dactyls and spondees recreate the magic of the Homeric hexameter, is at times so ethereal, so rarefied, so hypnotic as to make the boldest translator utterly afraid of any attempt at a possible rendering of its enchantment. Lines such as "il vel fuggente biancheggiar fra i mirti," "scoppian dall'inquiete aeree fila, quasi raggi di sol rotti dal nembo," and "agile come in cielo Ebe succinta" present no syntactical obscurity but are so charged with inner grace and melody as to defy description. Yet it is this grace and melody that (*hoc est in votis*) must be maintained if we want to keep Foscolo's poem as pure and singular as it is. *Le Grazie* has also been compared to a spellbinding tapestry with a texture of multicolored threads woven by goddesses' hands. One thing is certain: no other Italian poem is as intimate and astonishing, as fluent and echoing.

Translator's Note: I have based this verse translation of Ugo Foscolo's *Le Grazie* on the edition by Mario Puppo: *Ultime Lettere di Jacopo Ortis e Poesie* (Milan: Mursia, 1965). This translation first appeared in *Canadian Journal of Italian Studies*: «Hymn One. *Venus*», Vol. 5, 1-2, Fall-Winter 1981-1982, pp. 101-8; «Hymn Two. *Vesta*», Vol. 5, 3, Spring 1982, pp. 211-21; «Hymn Three. *Pallas*», Vol. 6, N. 4/Vol. 7, N. 1, 1983, pp. 183-88.

**Inno primo****Venere**

Cantando, o Grazie, degli eterei pregi  
di che il cielo v'adorna, e della gioia  
che vereconde voi date alla terra,  
belle vergini! a voi chieggo l'arcana  
armoniosa melodia pittrice  
della vostra beltà; sì che all'Italia  
afflitta di regali ire straniere  
voli improvviso a rallegrarla il carme.  
Nella convalle fra gli aerei poggi  
di Bellosguardo, ov'io cinta d'un fonte  
limpido fra le quete ombre di mille  
giovinetti cipressi alle tre Dive  
l'ara innalzo, e un fatidico laureto  
in cui men verde serpeggia la vite  
la protegge di tempio, al vago rito  
vieni, o Canova, e agl'inni. Al cor men fece  
dono la bella Dea che in riva d'Arno  
sacra alle tranquille arti custode;  
ed ella d'immortal lume e d'ambrosia  
la santa immagine sua tutta precinse.  
Forse (o ch'io spero!) artefice di Numi,  
nuovo meco darai spirto alle Grazie  
ch'or di tua man sorgon dal marmo. Anch'io  
pingo e spiro a' fantasmi anima eterna:  
sdegno il verso che suona e che non crea;  
perché Febo mi disse: Io Fidia, primo,  
ed Apelle guidai con la mia lira.  
Eran l'Olimpo e il Fulminante e il Fato,  
e del tridente enosigèo tremava  
la genitrice Terra; Amor dagli astri  
Pluto feria: nè ancor v'eran le Grazie.  
Una Diva scorrea lungo il creato  
a fecondarlo, e di Natura avea  
l'austero nome: fra' celesti or gode  
di cento troni, e con più nomi ed are  
le dan rito i mortali; e più le giova  
l'inno che bella Citerea la invoca.  
Perché clemente a noi che mirò afflitti  
travagliarci e adirati, un dì la santa  
Diva, all'uscir de' flutti ove s'immerse  
a ravvivar le gregge di Nerèo,



**Hymn One****Venus**

By singing, Graces, the ethereal worth  
and the adorning heaven-granted bliss  
that, bashful still, you shower on the world,  
beautiful maidens, dare I ask of you  
the magical immortal melody  
that solely may depict your loveliness:  
suddenly Italy, so sorely hurt  
by wrath of foreign sires, will be reached  
by my consoling wingèd song at last.  
Here to the valley mid the airy hills  
of Bellosguardo, in the quiet shade  
of countless youthful cypresses, where I  
have raised to the three Goddesses an altar  
surrounded by an ever-limpid stream  
and solemnly watched over as a shrine  
by fateful laurel trees where through the vine  
less verdant writhes, O my Canova, come:  
come to the lovely rite and to the song.  
'T is but a gift on this my heart bestowed  
by the fair Goddess to whose vigilance  
you consecrated all the tranquil arts  
flourishing still upon this Arno's bank,  
while in ambrosia and immortal glow  
she veiled her holy image utterly.  
Sculptor of Deities, along with me  
maybe (so let me hope) you will soon breathe  
a newer life into the Graces hewn  
out of the marble by your hand. I, too,  
breathe into phantoms an eternal soul;  
I loathe the line that sounds yet fails to live,  
for Phoebus said to me: "I taught Apelles  
as well as Phidias with my lyre first."  
Olympus, Thundering Zeus and Fate alone  
existed when our pregnant Mother Earth  
feared Neptune's trident; Love, high from the stars,  
pierced Pluto, but there were no Graces yet.  
One Goddess only over all creation,  
to make it fecund, ever lightly flew—  
she who was known by Nature's awesome name  
and has a hundred thrones in heaven while  
with varied names and altars here on earth

apparì con le Grazie; e le raccolse  
l'onda Ionia primiera, onda che amica  
del lito ameno e dell'ospite musco  
da Citera ogni dì vien desiosa  
a' materni miei colli: ivi fanciullo  
la Deità di Venere adorai.  
Salve, Zacinto! All'antenoree prode,  
de' santi Lari Idei ultimo albergo  
e de' miei padri, darò i carmi e l'ossa,  
e a te il pensier: chè piamente a queste  
Dee non favella chi la patria obblia.  
Sacra città è Zacinto. Eran suoi templi,  
era ne' colli suoi l'ombra de' boschi  
sacri al tripudio di Dīana e al coro;  
pria che Nettuno al reo Laomedonte  
munisse Ilio di torri inclite in guerra.  
Bella è Zacinto. A lei versan tesori  
l'angliche navi; a lei dall'alto manda  
i più vitali rai l'eterno sole;  
candide nubi a lei Giove concede,  
e selve ampie d'ulivi, e liberali  
i colli di Līeo: rosea salute  
prometton l'aure, da' spontanei fiori  
alimentate, e da' perpetui cedri.  
Splendea tutto quel mar quando sostenne  
su la conchiglia assise e vezzeggiate  
dalla Diva le Grazie: e a sommo il flutto,  
quante alla prima prima aura di Zefiro  
le frotte delle vaghe api prorompono,  
e più e più succedenti invade ronzano  
a far lunghi di sé ãerei grappoli,  
van aliando su' nettarei calici  
e del mèle futuro in cor s'allegnano,  
tante a fior dell'immensa onda raggiante  
ardian mostrarsi a mezzo il petto ignude  
le amorose Nereidi oceanine;  
e a drappelli agilissime seguendo  
la Gioia alata, degli Dei foriera,  
gittavan perle, dell'ingenue Grazie  
il bacio le Nereidi sospirando.  
Poi come l'orme della Diva e il riso  
delle vergini sue fèr di Citera  
sacro il lito, un'ignota violetta  
spuntò a' piè de' cipressi; e d'improvviso  
molte purpuree rose amabilmente

we mortals worship her, who welcomes most  
the hymn that calls her Cytherea the Fair.

‘T was she, the holy Goddess, who, one day,  
tenderly pitying our wrathful strife,  
at last together with the Graces rose  
out of the waters whereto she had plunged  
to charge the flocks of Nereus with life.  
Glad, the Ionian waves first welcomed them—  
the waves that, friendly to the beauteous sand  
as well as to its hospitable moss,  
longingly come from Cythera each day  
to my maternal hills where as a child  
the deity of Venus I adored.

Hail, Zante: To the Antenorian shores,  
last refuge of the household Gods of Troy  
and of my ancestors, will I commend  
my song and bones; to thee alone my thought,  
for with the Graces no one can converse  
who impiously forsakes his native land.  
A holy town is Zante. Once her temples  
and hillocks harbored the restoring shade  
of woodlands sacred to Diana’s chorus  
and festival, before God Neptune strengthened  
with siege-resisting towers Ilium  
for wicked-hearted King Laomedon.  
Most beautiful is Zante. British ships  
pour ample treasures on her; from the sky  
the timeless sun sheds its most vital rays  
on her alone while Jove grants lustrous clouds,  
wonder of olive-groves, and boundless hills  
teeming with vines: a rosy healthiness  
is in the air, kept fragrant evermore  
by ever-verdant cedars and wild blooms.  
The whole sea shone the very day it held  
the three fair Graces balanced on a shell  
and sweetly fondled by the Goddess: there,  
on every wave’s crest, just as many swarms  
of restless bees onrush and, borne aloft  
by the first fragile breath of Zephyrus,  
others and others come in buzzing hives,  
which, forming endless clusters in the air,  
hover above the nectar of each bud  
dreaming of future honey blissfully,  
so many atop the wide, bright billows were  
the loving lovely Nereids of the deep:

si conversero in candide. Fu quindi  
religione di libar col latte  
cinto di bianche rose, e cantar gl'inni  
sotto a' cipressi, e d'offerire all'ara  
le perle, e il primo fior nunzio d'aprile.  
L'una tosto alla Dea col radiante  
pettine asterge mollemente e intreccia  
le chiome dell'azzurra onda stillanti.  
L'altra ancella a le pure aure concede,  
a rifiorire i prati a primavera,  
l'ambrosio umore ond'è irrorato il petto  
della figlia di Giove; vereconda  
la lor sorella ricompone il peplo  
su le membra divine, e le contende  
di que' mortali attoniti al desio.  
Non prieghi d'inni o danze d'imenei,  
ma de' veltri perpetuo l'ululato  
tutta l'isola udia, e un suon di dardi  
e gli uomini sul vinto orso rissosi,  
e de' piagati cacciatori il grido.  
Cerere invan donato avea l'aratro  
a que' feroci: invan d'oltre l'Eufrate  
chiamò un di Bassarèo, giovine dio,  
a ingentilir di pampini le rupi.  
Il pio strumento irrugginia su' brevi  
solchi, sdegnato; e divorata, innanzi  
che i grappoli recenti imporporasse  
a' rai d'autunno, era la vite: e solo  
quando apparian le Grazie, i cacciatori  
e le vergini squallide, e i fanciulli  
l'arco e 'l terror deponeano, ammirando.  
Con mezze in mar le rote iva frattanto  
lambendo il lito la conchiglia, e al lito  
pur con le braccia la spingean le molli  
Nettunine. Spontanee s'aggiogarono  
alla biga gentil due delle cerva  
che ne' boschi dittei schive di nozze  
Cintia a' freni educava; e poi che dome  
aveale a' cocchi suoi, pasceano immuni  
da mortale saetta. Ivi per sorte  
vagolando fuggiasche eran venute  
le avventurose, e corsero ministre  
al viaggio di Venere. Improvvisa  
Iri che segue i Zefiri col volo  
s'assise auriga, e drizzò il corso all'istmo

following, near and nimble, in the wake  
of wingèd Joy, the Gods' sole harbinger,  
pearl after pearl, in throngs, about they strew,  
each of them sighing—lucky Nereids—  
for the ingenuous Graces' happy kiss.

Then as the Goddess' footprint and the smile  
of her escorting virgin maidens made  
Cythera' shore a land of loveliness,  
an unknown violet was seen to sprout  
down at the foot of every cypress tree  
while many roses that were purple-hued  
turned of a sudden innocently white.  
Thus a most hallowed ritual was born—  
libating milk out of white-rose-trimmed cups  
and singing hymns beneath the cypress shade  
while casting on the holy altar pearls  
with the first blossom that announces April.

With a refulgent comb one of them—look—  
most languorously braids Joves's daughter's hair,  
still dripping of the sea's still azure foam.  
The other maiden, bidding every meadow  
quickly reburgeon into Spring at last,  
sprinkles the air with each ambrosian drop  
that keeps Venus's breast still dewy-wet.  
Bashful, their sister lets the peplos fall  
upon the holy limbs, concealing them  
from the desire of man's ecstatic gaze.

No suppliant song nor hymeneal dance  
but lengthy ululations of wild hounds  
resounded through the isle, with din of darts  
and men at fight over the vanquished bear  
and cries of wounded hunters in between.  
In vain had Ceres to those ruthless brutes  
given her plough; in vain had she, one day,  
begged from beyond Euphrates Bassareus,  
a youthful god, to soften the hard rock  
with gentleness of tendrils. In great ire  
within its narrow groove the sacred tool  
was left to rust while tendrils were devoured  
before their recent bunches stood a chance  
to ripen purple in the autumn sun.  
'T was only when the Graces first appeared,  
hunters and squalid virgins and young lads  
laid bows and fear aside, and watched in awe.

Meanwhile, its wheels still half inside the sea,

del Laconio paese. Ancor Citèra  
 del golfo intorno non sedea regina:  
 dove or miri le vele alte su l'onda,  
 pendea negra una selva, ed esiliato  
 n'era ogni Dio da' figli della terra  
 duellanti a predarsi; e i vincitori  
 d'umane carni s'imbandian convito.  
 Videro il cocchio e misero un ruggito,  
 palleggiando la clava. Al petto strinse  
 sotto al suo manto accolte, le tremanti  
 sue giovinette, e: Ti sommergi, o selva!  
 Venere disse, e fu sommersa. Ahi tali  
 forse eran tutti i primi avi dell'uomo!  
 Quindi in noi serpe, ah! miseri, un natio  
 delirar di battaglia; e se pietose  
 nol placano le Dee, spesso riarde  
 ostentando trofeo l'ossa fraterne.  
 Ch'io non le veggia almeno or che in Italia  
 fra le messi biancheggiano insepolti!  
 Ma chi de' Numi esercitava impero  
 su gli uomini ferini, e quai ministri  
 aveva in terra il primo dì che al mondo  
 le belle Dive Citerea concesse?  
 Alta ed orrenda n'è la storia; e noi  
 quaggiù fra le terrene ombre vaganti  
 dalla fama n'udiam timido avviso.  
 Abbellitela or voi, Grazie, che siete  
 presenti a tutto, e Dee tutto sapete.  
 Quando i pianeti dispensò agli Dei  
 Giove padre, il più splendido ei s'ellesse,  
 e toccò in sorte a Citerea il più bello,  
 e l'altissimo a Pallade, e le genti  
 di que' mondi beate abitatrici  
 sentir l'imperio del lor proprio Nume.  
 Ma senza Nume rimanea negletto  
 il picciol globo della terra, e nati  
 alle prede i suoi figli ed alla guerra,  
 e dopo breve di sacri alla morte.

.....

Il bel cocchio vegnente, e il doloroso  
 premio de' lor vicini arti più miti  
 persuase a' Laconi. Eran da prima  
 per l'intentata selva e l'oceano  
 dalla Grecia divisi; e quando eretta  
 agli ospitali Numi ebbero un'ara,

pushed by the fair Neptunians with their hands,  
lightly the shell was skimming still the shore  
when very gently two most gentle does  
willingly to the chariot yoked themselves.  
To Cynthia they belonged: the Goddess kept them  
in her Dictean forests where, immune  
to mortal arrows, they in freedom grazed.  
Venture had brought the nimbly faring pair  
right there that morning; so they quickly ran  
to aid the Goddess' journey. Suddenly  
Iris, who views with Zephyrs in their flight,  
sat down as charioteer and onward aimed  
toward the Laconian isthmus. Cythera  
was not yet queen of the encircling gulf:  
where now you watch but sails high on the waves  
a thick, black woodland hung where not one god  
was welcomed by the children of the earth  
who fought each other for each other's prey  
with human flesh ever the victor's meal.  
Seeing the chariot, they wildly roared,  
wielding their clubs in anger. Promptly Venus,  
cuddling the shivering virgins to her breast  
under her cloak, "Plunge down, thou forest:," bade,  
and of that forest there was trace no more.  
Such were, alas, man's primal ancestors!  
Hence a delirious readiness to fight  
instinctively lies dormant in us all,  
which, if the pitying Graces curb it not,  
often rekindles and most wretchedly  
flaunts as its trophy but fraternal bones.  
Ah, these may I not see now that in Italy  
they bleach unburied in the golden wheat.

But who, of all the Gods, could ever tame  
those beast-like humans? And what help had he  
here on this earth upon the very dawn  
Venus released her Graces to the World?  
High and horrendous is the tale of it,  
of which a timid echo Fame disclosed  
to us still groping in our native dark.  
Embellish it, you Graces who were there,  
and, being Goddesses, know all things well.

When Father Jove distributed the stars  
among the Gods, he kept the brightest one,  
gave Cytherea the fairest, and Athena  
the highest of them all: the happy throngs

vider tosto le pompe e le amoroſe  
 gare e i regi conviti; e d'ogni parte  
 correan d'Asia i guerrieri e i prenci argivi  
 alla reggia di Leda. Ah non ti foſſi  
 irato Amor! e ben di te ſovente  
 io mi dorrò, da che le Grazie affliggi.  
 Per te all'arti eleganti ed a' felici  
 ozi, per te laſcivi affetti, e molli  
 ozi, e ſpergiuri a' Greci; e poi la dura  
 vita, e nude a sudar nella paleſtra  
 [ſottentrar] le fanciulle onde ſalvarſi  
 Amor da te. Ma quando eri per anche  
 delle Grazie non invido fratello  
 Sparta fioriva. Qui di Fare il golfo  
 cinto d'armonioſi antri a' delfini,  
 qui Sparta e le fluenti dell'Eurota  
 grate a' cigni; e Meſſene offria ſecuri  
 ne' ſuoi boſchetti alle tortore i nidi;  
 qui d'Augia 'l pelaghetto, inviolato  
 al peſcator, da che di mirti ombrato  
 era lavacro al bel corpo di Leda  
 e della ſua figlia divina. E Amicle  
 terra di fiori non baſtava ai ſerti  
 delle vergini ſpoſe; dal paeſe  
 venian cantando i giovani alle nozze.  
 Non de' deſtrieri nitidi l'amore  
 li rattenne, non Laa che fra tre monti  
 ama le caccie e i riti di Diana,  
 né la Maremma Elea ricca di peſce.  
 E non lunge è Briſea, donde il propinquo  
 Taigeto intese ſtrepitar l'arcano  
 tripudio e i riti, onde il femminile coro  
 placò Lio, e intercedean le Grazie.

.....  
 Ma dove, o caſte Dee, ditemi dove  
 la prima ara vi piacque, onde ſe invano  
 or la chieggo alla terra, almen l'antica  
 religione del bel loco io ſenta.  
 Tutte velate, procedendo all'alta  
 Dorio che di lontan gli Arcadi vede,  
 le Dive mie vennero a Trio: l'Alfeo  
 arretrò l'onda, e die' a' lor paſſi il guado  
 che anc'oggi il pellegrin varca ed adora.  
 Fe' manifeſta quel portento a' Greci  
 la Deità; ſentirono da lunge



that firsts inhabited those very worlds  
felt soon the empire of their deity.  
But with no deity, forlorn and lost  
the little globe of this our earth lay still  
with all its children born for war and prey  
and, after a brief season, doomed to die.

---

The fair approaching chariot and the harsh  
fate that had struck their neighbors in a flash  
taught the Laconians more peaceful arts.  
Untrodden forests and the ocean bed  
until that very day had kept them all  
utterly sundered from the rest of Greece;  
but as they raised an altar to the Gods  
opulence, regal banquets, and love jousts  
at once they knew, and soon from everywhere  
princes of Argos, warriors of Asia  
hastened to Leda's court. Why did you then  
yield, Love, to anger? If you still afflict  
the Graces so, how will you win my heart?  
Sweet ways and idle bliss were born of you,  
who also stirred the senses with such lust  
as brooded treason 'gainst the Greeks at once.  
To save themselves from all your might, O Love,  
stark-naked maidens with great toil and sweat  
hardened their limbs in fighting manliness.  
And yet, so long as envy failed to force you  
against the Graces, your own sisters, Sparta  
flourished in splendor. Here was Pharae's gulf,  
around which dolphins find their sounding dens.  
Yea, Sparta with Eurota's streams was here—  
swans' cherished home; and here Messene lent  
safe refuge in her woods to turtle-doves;  
here, too, was seen Augeas' little sea  
never by fishermen disturbed again  
since shading myrtle trees around it grew—  
the bathing spot for Leda's beauteous form  
and for her divine daughter's dainty limbs.  
Nor could Amyclae, land of wreaths, provide  
as many buds as there were virgin brides:  
the grooms, a-singing, to the nuptials came,  
for neither love of dauntless steeds nor Las,  
where at the foot of three high mountains sprang  
Diana's rituals and hunting chase,

odorosa spirar l'aura celeste.  
 De' Beoti al confin siede Aspledone:  
 città che l'aureo sol veste di luce  
 quando riede all'ocaso; ivi non lunge  
 sta sull'immensa minièa pianura  
 la beata Orcomèno, ove il primiero,  
 dalle ninfe alternato e da' garzoni,  
 amabil inno udirono le Grazie.

.....

Così cantaro; e Citerea svelossi;  
 e quanti allor garzoni e giovinette  
 vider la Deità furon beati,  
 e di Driadi col nome e di Silvani  
 fur compagni di Febo. Oggi le umane  
 orme evitando, e de' poeti il volgo,  
 che con lira inesperta a sé li chiama,  
 invisibili e muti per le selve  
 vagano. Come quando esce un'Erinne  
 a gioir delle terre arse dal verno,  
 maligna, e lava le sua membra a' fonti  
 dell'Islanda esecrati, ove più tristi  
 fuman sulfuree l'acque; o a groelandi  
 laghi, lambiti di [sulfuree] vampe,  
 la teda alluma, e al ciel sereno aspira;  
 finge perfida pria roseo splendore,  
 e lei deluse appellano col vago  
 nome di boreale alba le genti;  
 quella scorre, le nuvole in Chimere  
 orrende, e in imminenti armi converte  
 fiammeggianti; e calar senti per l'aura  
 dal muto nembo l'aquile agitate,  
 che veggion nel lor regno angui, e sedenti  
 leoni, e ulular l'ombre de' lupi.  
 Inondati di sangue errano al guardo  
 delle città i pianeti, e van raggiando  
 timidamente per l'aereo caos;  
 tutta d'incendio la celeste volta  
 s'infiamma, e sotto a quell'inafausta luce  
 rosseggia immensa l'iperborea terra.  
 Quinci l'invida Dea gl'inseminati  
 campi mira, e dal gelo l'oceàno  
 a' nocchieri conteso; ed oggi forse  
 per la Scizia calpesta armi e vessilli,  
 e d'itali guerrier corpi incompianti.

.....

nor even fish-replete Elea could  
ever restrain their ardor. Also near,  
Brisea lies, whence the Taygetus heard  
the loud-exultant clangor of the rites  
whereby a female chorus, strengthened by  
the interceding Graces, soothed Lyaeus.

.....  
But where, chaste Goddesses, oh, tell me where  
you saw the primal altar dear to you,  
so that, if never shall I find its like  
upon this earth, I may at least feel in me  
the old religion of its dazzling site.

Utterly veiled, proceeding toward the lofty  
Dorion scanning far Arcadia,  
my Goddesses reached Thuria: Alpheus  
withdrew his waves, thus laying at their feet  
an easy ford that to this very day  
a pilgrim crosses worshiping in awe –  
a portent that to all the Greeks revealed  
the mighty sky: from far away indeed  
they felt the fragrant breathing of the Gods.

Right where Boeotia ends, starts Aspledon,  
a city mantled by the setting sun  
in raimen'ts of pure gold; not far from there,  
right in the boundless Minyan plainland, lies  
blest Orchomenus where the Graces heard  
the first entrancing hymn, half sung by nymphs  
and half by youths in alternating strains.

.....  
When their hymn ended, Cytherea shone  
in her unclouded deity: the nymphs  
and all the youths that saw her knew full bliss  
and, but as Dryads and as Sylvans known,  
faithfully followed Phoebus ever since.  
Shunning all human vestiges, and deaf  
to vulgar poets whose unskillful lyre  
lures them in vain, through woods they wander still,  
invisible and silent all of them.  
Just as a Fury now released from hell,  
eager to feast on winter-frozen ground,  
bathes in Icelandic execrable streams  
where waters reek most putrid and most foul  
or, searching for blue skies, lights up her torch  
from the live sulphur of Greenlandic lakes;

E giunte  
le Dive appiè de' monti, alla sdegnosa  
Diana Iride il cocchio e mansuete  
le cervè addusse, amabil dono, in Creta.  
Cintia fu sempre delle Grazie amica,  
e ognor con esse fu tutela al core  
dell'ingenuè fanciulle ed agl'infanti.  
E solette radean lievi le falde  
dell'Ida irriguo di sorgenti; e quando  
fur più al Cielo propinque, ove una luce  
rosea le vette al sacro monte asperge,  
e donde sembran tutte auree le stelle,  
alle vergini sue che la seguieno  
mandò in core la Dea queste parole:  
- Assai beato, o giovinette, è il regno  
de' Celesti ov'io riedo; a la infelice  
Terra ed a' figli suoi voi rimanete  
confortatrici; sol per voi sovr'essa  
ogni lor dono pioveranno i Numi.  
E se vindici sien più che clementi,  
allor fra' nembì e i fulmini del Padre,  
vi guiderò a placarli. Al partir mio  
tale udirete un'armonia dall'alto,  
che diffusa da voi farà più liete  
le nate a delirar vite mortali,  
più deste all'Arti e men tremanti al grido  
che le promette a morte. Ospizio amico  
talor sienvi gli Elisi; e sorridete  
a' vati, se cogliean puri l'alloro,  
ed a' precinzi indulgenti, ed alle pie  
giovani madri che a straniero latte  
non concedean gl'infanti, e alle donzelle  
che occulto amor trasse innocenti al rogo,  
e a' giovinetti per la patria estinti.  
Siate immortali, eternamente belle! -  
Più non parlava, ma spargea co' raggi  
de le pupille sue sopra le figlie  
eterno il lume della fresca aurora,  
e si partiva: e la seguian cogli occhi  
di lagrime soffusi, e lei da l'alto  
vedean conversa, e questa voce udiro:  
- Daranno a voi dolor novello i Fati  
e gioia eterna. - E sparve; e trasvolando  
due primi cieli, s'avvolgea nel puro  
lume dell'astro suo. L'udì Armonia

wicked, she feigns a rosy splendor first  
(people are baffled, and a gentle name—  
Aurora Borealis—give to her);  
Then, moving onward, she transmutes all clouds  
into Chimaeras and horrendous flames  
of overhanging swords: the silent storm  
causes the frightened eagles down to plunge  
from their high realm where sudden snakes are seen  
couching with lions and wolves' whining shades.  
The city's glance perceives blood-dripping stars  
up in the airy chaos shyly burn:  
one conflagration wins the firmament  
and underneath that evil-boding light  
the hyperborean boundless earth glows red.  
The envious Goddess scans the unsown fields  
and the wide-frozen seas that steersmen shun,  
and at this very moment maybe treads  
on arms and banners through the Scythian land  
and on Italian still unburied braves.

.....  
When our fair Deities at last arrived  
in Crete, most willing at its mountain's foot  
Iris surrendered chariot and does  
to fierce Diana as a gift of love:  
Cynthia, whereupon, swore timeless faith  
to the three Graces from that very day,  
ever to watch with them over the hearts  
of candid girls as well as candid lads.  
Thus very lonely they were seen to roam  
Mount Ida's base where fountainheads abound  
until they climbed, one day, as near the Sky  
as they could go—right where a rosy sheen  
sprinkles the holy mountain's lofty tops  
wherefrom the stars are viewed as lustrous gold.  
'T was then the Goddess rained these glowing words  
into her loyal virgins' very hearts:  
"Most blessed, happy maidens, is the realm  
of the Celestials whereto I return;  
but here you must remain, here to console  
the luckless Earth with all her hapless sons.  
For you alone will every God bestow  
his every gift upon her lavishly,  
and you, should Heaven's ire outweigh its ruth,  
will I take there to placate all its storms  
and Zeus's thunderbolts. When I am gone

e giubilando l'etere commosse.  
 Chè quando Citerea torna a' beati  
 cori, Armonia su per le vie stellate  
 move plauso alla Dea pel cui favore  
 temprò un dì l'universo . . . . .  
 Come nel chiostro vergine romita,  
 se gli azzurri del cielo, e la splendente  
 Luna, e il silenzio delle stelle adora,  
 sente il Nume, ed al cembalo s'asside,  
 e del piè e delle dita e dell'errante  
 estro e degli occhi vigili alle note  
 sollecita il suo cembalo ispirata,  
 ma se improvvisè rimembranze Amore  
 in cor le manda, scorrono più lente  
 sovra i tasti le dita, e d'improvviso  
 quella soave melodia che posa  
 secreta ne' vocali alvei del legno,  
 flebile e lenta all'aüre s'aggira;  
 così l'alta armonia che . . . . .  
 discorreva da' Cieli . . . . .  
 Udiro intente  
 le Grazie; e in cor quell'armonia fatale  
 albergàro, e correat su per la terra  
 a spirarla a' mortali. E da quel giorno  
 dolce ei sentian per l'anima un incanto,  
 lucido in mente ogni pensiero, e quanto  
 udian essi o vedean vago e diverso  
 diletta i lor occhi, e ad imitarlo  
 prendean industri e divenia più bello.  
 Quando l'Ore e le Grazie di soave  
 luce diversa coloriano i campi,  
 e gli augelletti le seguiano e lieto  
 facean tenore al gemere del rivo  
 e de' boschetti al fremito, il mortale  
 emulò que' colori; e mentre il mare  
 fra i nemi, o l'agitò Marte fra l'armi,  
 mirò il fonte, i boschetti, udì gli augelli  
 pinti, e godea della pace de' campi.  
 . . . . .  
 E l'arte  
 agevolmente, all'armonia che udiva,  
 diede eleganza alla materia; il bronzo  
 quasi foglia arrendevole d'acanto  
 ghirlandò le colonne; e ornato e legge  
 ebber travi e macigni, e gian concordi

such harmonies shall reach you from above  
as will, prolonged by you, give more delight  
to man's brief life created but to fret,  
thus making it more heedful of the arts  
and less afraid of all-possessing death.  
Let the Elysian Fields—should there be need—  
be your sole friendly haven; ever smile  
on bards whose laurel wreaths are purely earned,  
on freedom-minded princes, on young mothers  
who do not yield their babes to alien breasts,  
on naive maidens innocently thrust  
by hidden love on an untimely pyre;  
and smile on youngsters fallen for their land.  
Be beautiful, and live for evermore!"  
She spoke no longer, but her radiant eyes  
scattered upon her daughters then and there  
the deathless glimmer of the new-born Dawn  
before she fled. In tears they watched her go,  
and as from high above at them she waved  
they heard this final message: "From the Fates  
grief and endless triumph you will have."  
She vanished; flying through the first two heavens,  
she reached the crowning light of her own star.  
Harmony heard her come and with her joy  
moved the entire universe to song,  
for every time sweet Venus shares the bliss  
of her abode again, dear Harmony  
along the starry ways applauds the one  
whose tender sovereignty reshaped the world.  
As a young lonesome maiden in her room,  
watching ecstatic in the spotless sky  
the splendent Moon and every silent star,  
feels the inspiring Deity and sits  
down at her harpsichord which, in her new  
excitement, with her feet and hands and eyes  
she fast attunes to the awaiting note;  
but, if deep in her heart Love comes to rouse  
remembrances of joy, her fingers run  
less rapid on the keyboard, causing soon  
the tender melody that lies concealed  
right at the vocal bottom of the wood  
to wander slow and feeble in the air:  
so did the mystic harmony descend  
from Heaven.....  
Keenly the Graces heard, and in their hearts

curvati in arco aereo imitanti  
il firmamento. Ma più assai felice  
tu che primiero la tua donna in marmo  
effigiasti: Amor da prima in core  
t'infiammò del desio che disvelata  
volea bellezza, e profanata agli occhi  
degli uomini. Ma venner teco assise  
le Grazie, e tal diffusero venendo  
avvenenza in quel volto e leggiadria  
per quelle forme, col molle concento  
si gentili spirarono gli affetti  
della giovine nuda; e non l'amica  
ma venerasti Citerea nel marmo.  
E non che ornar di canto, e chi può tutte  
ridir l'opre de' Numi? Impaziente  
il vagante inno mio fugge ove incontri  
graziose le menti ad ascoltarlo;  
pur non so dirvi, o belle suore, addio,  
e mi detta più alteri inni il pensiero.  
Ma e dove or io vi seguirò, se il Fato  
ah da gran giorni omai profughe in terra  
alla Grecia vi tolse, e se l'Italia  
che v'è patria seconda i doni vostri  
misera ostenta e il vostro nume oblia?  
Pur molti ingenui de' suoi figli ancora  
a voi tendon le palme. Io finché viva  
ombra daranno a Bellosguardo i lauri,  
ne farò tetto all'ara vostra, e offerta  
di quanti pomi educa l'anno, e quante  
fragranze ama destar l'alba d'aprile,  
e il fonte e queste pure aure e i cipressi  
e segreto il mio pianto e la sdegnosa  
lira, e i silenzi vi fien sacri e l'arti.  
Fra l'arti io coronato e fra le Muse,  
alla patria dirò come indulgenti  
tornate ospiti a lei, sì che più grata  
in più splendida reggia e con solenni  
pompe v'onori: udrà come redenta  
fu due volte per voi, quando la fiamma  
pose Vesta sul Tebro e poi Minerva  
diede a Flora per voi l'attico ulivo.  
Venite, o Dee, spirate Dee, spandete  
la Deità materna, e novamente  
deriveranno l'armonia gl'ingegni  
dall'Olimpo in Italia: e da voi solo,



treasured that fateful song while running fast  
from land to land to breathe it into men.  
And ever since men felt within their souls  
an incantation, all their thoughts shone bright,  
and every novel thing they heard or saw  
in beauty grew and most delighted them  
if but they tried to imitate its awe.  
When with the Graces all the fleeting Hours  
colored with varied lights the countryside,  
and small birds followed them with carefree sounds  
of rivulets and forests, mortal eyes  
began to copy all those happy hues  
and, while the ocean floor was storm-harassed  
or agitated by still warring Mars,  
looking on rills and woods, they could enjoy  
but painted wings and rustic scenery.

.....  
Easily Art, which heeded Harmony,  
made matter elegant: bronze like a leaf  
of meek acanthus wreathed the columns' height,  
and beams and marble blocks gained frieze and law  
till, curved in nimble arches, they reflected  
with equal melody the firmament.  
But, oh, much happier are you who could  
sculpture your lady's effigy in stone.  
Love first engendered in your deepest heart  
a yearning for her beauty wholly bare  
which man's profaning eyes failed to adore.  
For where you sat the Graces sat with you,  
and on those features, on that very face  
such graceful beauty their live breathing left,  
such gentle feelings with their gentle song  
did they inspire to her nakedness,  
instead of your true friend you recognized  
Venus herself within the marble core.  
Hard though it be to decorate with song,  
can any man divulge the Gods' events?  
Impatiently this erring hymn of mine  
shuns the most gracious minds eager to hear;  
yet, my fair Sisters, I cannot depart  
while this my thought dictates much prouder songs.

But whither shall I ever follow you  
if Fate has snatched you from your native Greece,  
and Italy, your second home, can boast  
but of your beauty, heedless of your might?

né dar premio potete altro più bello,  
sol da voi chiederem, Grazie, un sorriso.

### **Vesta - Inno secondo**

#### **I**

Tre vaghissime donne a cui le trecce  
infiora di felici itale rose  
giovinezza, e per cui splende più bello  
sul lor sembiante il giorno, all'ara vostra  
sacerdotesse, o care Grazie, io guido.  
Qui e voi che Marte non rapì alle madri  
correte, e voi che muti impallidite  
nel penetrare della Dea pensosa,  
giovineti d'Esperia. Era più lieta  
Urania un dì, quando le Grazie a lei  
il gran peplo fregiavano. Con esse  
qui Galileo sedeva a spiar l'astro  
della loro regina; e il disviava  
col notturno rumor l'acqua remota,  
che sotto a' pioppi delle rive d'Arno  
furtiva e argentea gli volava al guardo.

Yet of her guiltless children many still  
 look up to you. So long as living shades  
 keep Bellosguardo's laurel trees alive,  
 to your bright altar will I offer them  
 together with the fruit the seasons yield,  
 together with the scents first April stirs,  
 mixed with pure rills and cypresses and airs  
 and also with my tears and timid lyre,  
 thus binding arts and silence to one rite.  
 Crowned both a painter and a poet, I  
 shall tell my land your mercy's risen hour,  
 that she may once again now honor you  
 with ampler gratitude and greater pomp  
 in a more splendid Court: thus will she know  
 how twice she was redeemed by your bright worth  
 when on the Tiber Vesta laid her torch  
 and Pallas gave to Flora for your sake  
 the Attic olive tree. Come, Deities,  
 and oh, dear Goddesses, upon the earth  
 cast your maternal tenderness again.  
 So here in Italy the greatest minds  
 will from Olympus draw their harmony,  
 for, as you cannot give a greater gift,  
 give us, O Graces, but your happy smile.

### Hymn Two *Vesta*

#### I

Belovèd Graces, to your altar now  
 some most enchanting priestesses I lead—  
 three ladies whose long tresses Youth enwreathes  
 with radiant Italian roses while  
 a fairer daylight on their faces shines.

Here, come here quickly, you Hesperian lads  
 Mars has not snatched from loving mothers' breasts,  
 and you who, pallid and in silence dwell  
 deep in the pensive Goddess' holy shrine.  
 Happier was Urania when the Graces  
 adorned her lengthy peplos with their hands.  
 Here Galileo sat with them, intent  
 on studying the planet of their queen  
 yet soon distracted by the nightly murmur  
 of distant waters hiding silver-hued  
 under the poplars of the Arno's banks.

Qui a lui l'alba, la luna e il sol mostrava,  
gareggiando di tinte, or le severe  
nubi su la cerulea alpe sedenti,  
or il piano che fugge alle tirrene  
Nereidi, immensa di città e di selve  
scena e di templi e d'arator beati,  
or cento colli, onde Appennin corona  
d'ulivi e d'antri e di marmoree ville  
l'elegante città, dove con Flora  
le Grazie han serti e amabile idioma.  
Date principio, o giovinetti, al rito,  
e da' festoni della sacra soglia  
dilungate i profani. Ite, insolenti  
genii d'Amore, e voi livido coro  
di Momo, e voi che a prezzo Ascra attingete.  
Qui né oscena malia, né plauso infido  
può, né dardo attoscato: oltre quest'ara,  
cari al volgo e a' tiranni, ite, profani.  
Dolce alle Grazie è la virginea voce  
e la timida offerta: uscite or voi  
dalle stanze materne ove solinghe  
Amor v'insidia, o donzellette, uscite:  
gioia promette e manda pianto Amore.  
Qui su l'ara le rose e le colombe  
deponete, e tre calici spumanti  
di latte inghirlandato; e fin che il rito  
v'appelli al canto, tacite sedete:  
sacro è il silenzio a' vati, e vi fa belle  
più del sorriso. E tu che ardisci in terra  
vestir d'eterna giovinezza il marmo,  
or l'armonia della bellezza, il vivo  
spirar de' vezzi nelle tre ministre,  
che all'arpa io guido agl'inni e alle carole,  
vedrai qui al certo; e tu potrai lasciarle  
immortali fra noi, pria che all'Eliso  
su l'ali occulte fuggano degli anni.  
Leggiadramente d'un ornato ostello,  
che a lei d'Arno futura abitatrice  
i pennelli posando edificava  
il bel fabbro d'Urbino, esce la prima  
vaga mortale, e siede all'ara; e il bisso  
liberale acconsente ogni contorno  
di sue forme eleganti; e fra il candore  
delle dita s'avvivano le rose,  
mentre accanto al suo petto agita l'arpa.

Here he was shown by moon or rising sun  
severe clouds sitting on cerulean hills  
or the whole plainland stretching as far down  
as the Tyrrhenian Sea—a boundless stage  
of blissful ploughmen, temples, towns and woods—  
or countless hillocks whence the Apennines  
adorn with olive groves and marble homes  
the splendid city where the Graces live  
and share with Flora idiom and wreaths.  
Mark the beginning of the rite, you lads,  
and from the garlands on the threshold strewn  
the uninitiated keep away.  
Away, you sneering genii of Love,  
away, O Momus' livid throng, with all  
of you who purchase even Ascrea's peak:  
No obscene magic here, no wicked praise,  
no poisoned dart avails: now you who serve  
the mob and tyranny, this altar shun!  
Dear to the Graces is the virgin voice  
and timid offering: so leave, you too,  
O lovely maidens, the maternal rooms  
where Love will stalk your very loneliness:  
Love promises great bliss, bestows but tears.  
Lay on this altar turtle-doves along  
with roses and three chalices of milk,  
bright-garlanded; and till the sacred rite  
invites you to the song, in silence wait:  
silence, so sacred to the bards, endears you  
more than a smile. And you, who dare on earth  
dress barren marble with eternal youth,  
today, I'm certain of it, you will see  
beauty's own harmony, the living breath  
that is the charm of the three priestesses  
I'm bringing to the dances and the hymns:  
you will be able thus to leave them here  
immortal in our midst before they flee,  
on time's dark wings, to their Elysium.  
Gracefully out of a most graceful home,  
which, gladly laying his fair brush aside,  
the handsome master from Urbino built  
for one about to choose the Arno's bank,  
the first fair mortal to the altar comes.  
A silken veil most lavishly reveals  
her matchless contours; her white fingers grow  
suddenly bright as roses newly born

Scoppian dall'inquiete aeree fila,  
quasi raggi di sol rotti dal nembo,  
gioia insieme e pietà, poi che sonanti  
rimembran come il ciel l'uomo concesse  
alle gioie e agli affanni onde gli sia  
librato e vario di sua vita il volo,  
e come alla virtù guidi il dolore,  
e il sorriso e il sospiro errin sul labbro  
delle Grazie, e a chi son fauste e presenti,  
dolce in core ei s'allegri e dolce gema.  
Pari un concerto, se pur vera è fama,  
un dì Aspasia tessea lungo l'Ilisso:  
era allor delle Dee sacerdotessa,  
e intento al suono Socrate libava  
sorridente a quell'ara, e col pensiero  
quasi a' sereni dell'Olimpo alzossi.  
Quinci il veglio mirò volgersi obliqua,  
affrettando or la via su per le nubi,  
or ne' gorgi letèi precipitarsi  
di Fortuna la rapida quadriga  
da' viventi inseguita; e quel pietoso  
gridò invano dall'alto: A cieca duce  
siete seguaci, o miseri! e vi scorge  
dove in bando è pietà, dove il Tonante  
più adirate le folgori abbandona  
su la timida terra. O nati al pianto  
e alla fatica, se virtù vi è guida,  
dalla fonte del duol sorge il conforto.  
Ah ma nemico è un altro Dio di pace,  
più che Fortuna, e gl'innocenti assale.  
Ve' come l'arpa di costei sen duole!  
Duolsi che a tante verginette il seno  
sflori, e di pianto alle carole in mezzo,  
invidioso Amor bagni i lor occhi.  
Per sé gode frattanto ella che amore  
per sé l'altera giovane non teme.  
Ben l'ode e su l'ardenti ali s'affretta  
alle vendette il Nume: e a quelle note  
a un tratto l'inclemente arco gli cade.  
E i montanini Zefiri fuggiaschi  
docili al suono aleggiano più ratti  
dalle linfe di Fiesole e dai cedri,  
a rallegrare le giunchiglie ond'ella  
oggi, o Grazie, per voi l'arpa inghirlanda,

as to her breast she holds the quavering harp.  
Out of the restless airy strings break forth,  
like rays of sun by sudden tempest torn,  
mercy and mirth together: in their sound  
they will recall how Heaven granted man  
triumph and trouble, thus to make his life  
an ever-varied, ever-balanced flight;  
how grief alone to manly virtue leads;  
how smile and sigh touch both the Graces' lips,  
and those who feel their happy presence lodge  
sweet joy and sweet lament deep in their hearts.  
Aspasia one day, if fame is true,  
'long the Ilissus sang a likely song:  
a priestess of the Goddesses was she  
when, heedful of that sound, Socrates smiled  
and, while abating at the altar, reached  
(or almost) calm Olympus with his thought.  
Hence the old man saw Fortune's chariot,  
chased by all people, through the clouds now rush  
and now plunge down into Lethean waves,  
so that, to pity moved, in vain he cried,  
"Blind is your leader, O you wretched men;  
she leads you where no mercy ever dwells  
and whence in his worst wrath thundering Zeus  
drops all his bolts upon the frightened earth;  
Men, born to tears and toil, if virtue still  
can guide you, from your grief is solace born.  
Ah, more than Fortune, still another God  
abhors sweet peace and fights the innocent.  
See how the lady's harp is anguish—rent:  
She's anguish-rent that envious Love should touch  
so many maidens' hearts and, in the midst  
of their sweet dancing, wet their eyes with tears  
But happy for herself she seems to all,  
most proudly feeling still immune and free.  
Hearing her boast, on wings ablaze the God  
prepares his sudden vengeance: at those notes  
he lets his unrelenting bow fall down.  
Faster than ever, by that music won,  
the mountain's ever-fleeting Zephyrs leave  
Fiesole's nymphs and cedars to bring joy,  
O Graces, to the jonquils she has woven  
around her harp to honor you, and make  
this hymn I sing still dearer to your hearts.  
Behold: Attuning feet and hands and eyes

e a voi quest'inno mio guida più caro.  
Già del piè delle dita e dell'errante  
estro, e degli occhi vigili alle corde  
ispirata sollecita le note  
che pingon come l'armonia diè moto  
agli astri, all'onda eterea e alla natante  
terra per l'oceàno, e come franse  
l'uniforme creato in mille volti  
co' raggi e l'ombre e il ricongiunse in uno,  
e i suoni all'aere, e diè i colori al sole,  
e l'alterno continüo tenore  
alla fortuna agitatrice e al tempo;  
si che le cose dissonanti insieme  
rendan concento d'armonia divina  
e innalzino le menti oltre la terra.  
Come quando più gaio Euro provòca  
sull'alba il queto Lario, e a quel sussurro  
canta il nocchiero e allegransi i propinqui  
liuti, e molle il fläuto si duole  
d'innamorati giovani e di ninfe  
su le gondole erranti; e dalle sponde  
risponde il pastorel con la sua piva:  
per entro i colli rintonano i corni  
terror del cavriol, mentre in cadenza  
di Lecco il malleo domator del bronzo  
tuona dagli antri ardenti; stupefatto  
perde le reti il pescatore, ed ode.  
Tal dell'arpa diffuso erra il concento  
per la nostra convalle; e mentre posa  
la sonatrice, ancora odo i colli.  
Or le recate, o vergini, i canestri  
e le rose e gli allori a cui materni  
nell'ombrifero Pitti irrigatori  
fur gli etruschi Silvani, a far più vago  
il giovin seno alle mortali etrusche,  
emule d'avvenenza e di ghirlande;  
soave affanno al pellegrin se inoltra  
improvviso ne' lucidi teatri,  
e quell'intenta voluttà del canto  
ed errare un desio dolce d'amore  
mira ne' vólti femminili, e l'aura  
pregna di fiori gli confonde il core.  
Recate insieme, o vergini, le conche  
dell'alabastro, provvido di fresca  
linfa e di vita, ahi breve! a' montanini



in prompt obedience to the waiting chords,  
she prods, inspired, every single note  
till all of them depict how Harmony  
first set in motion stars, ethereal waves,  
and this earth floating on the ocean; how  
with rays and shadows it broke then the wide  
but uniform creation into thousands  
of faces, quickly blended into one;  
and how it joined each color with the sun,  
and with the air each sound, and thus with time  
and vexing fortune all vicissitudes,  
so that, discordant though they be, all things  
might render a concordant hymn to Heaven  
lifting the human mind above the earth.  
Just as when Eurus with his joyous breath  
rouses the restless Larius at dawn,  
and soon the boatman at that murmur sings  
the nearing lutes rejoice, and languidly  
the flutes of loving lads and nymphs reply  
from wandering gondole: in the meantime  
a little shepherd's bagpipe from the shore  
echoes once more; from hill to hill the horn  
brings terror to the deer; from caves ablaze  
Lecco's bronze-taming hammer soon rebounds,  
and, losing now his nets, the fisherman  
listens, astounded, to the happy song:  
so through our valleys does the melody,  
roused by the harpsichord, so dearly sound  
that, even when the harpsichordist rests,  
the knolls around her still enraptured hear  
Now bring to her, young virgins, laurel wreaths  
and roses watered in the Pitti's shades  
by Etruscan Sylvans for the greater grace  
of fair Etruscans' youth-enamored breasts  
ever desirous of new buds and charm:  
baffled and sweetly tempted, foreigners  
who our well-lighted theaters explore  
are by the song's voluptuousness so swayed,  
so taken by that sweet desire of love  
wandering sweetly on our women's faces,  
a whiff of flowers floating in the air  
perturbs their hearts. And all together here,  
dear maidens, bring the alabaster basins  
wherein you keep the fresh but fleeting life  
for mountain jasmine and for violet,

gelsomini, e alla mammola dogliosa  
 di non morir sul seno alla fuggiasca  
 ninfa di Pratolino, o sospirata  
 dal solitario venticel notturno.  
 Date il rustico giglio, e se men alte  
 ha le forme fraterne, il manto veste  
 degli amaranti inviolato: unite  
 aurei giacinti e azzurri alle giunchiglie  
 di Bellosguardo che all'amante suo  
 coglie Pomona, e a' garofani alteri  
 della prole diversa e delle pompe,  
 e a' fiori che dagli orti dell'Aurora  
 novella preda a' nostri liti addussero  
 vittoriosi i Zefiri su l'ale,  
 e or fra' cedri al suo talamo imminenti  
 d'ospite amore e di tepori industri  
 questa gentil sacerdotessa educa.  
 Spira soave e armonioso agli occhi  
 quanto all'anima il suon, splendono i serti  
 che di tanti color mesce e d'odori;  
 ma il fior che altero del lor nome han fatto  
 dodici Dei ne scevra, e il dona all'ara  
 pur sorridendo; e in cor tacita prega:  
 che di quei fiori ond'è nudrice, e l'arpa  
 ne incorona per voi, ven piaccia alcuno  
 inserir, belle Dee, nella ghirlanda  
 la quale ogni anno il dì sesto d'aprile  
 delle rose di lagrime innaffiate  
 in val di Sorga, o belle Dee, tessete  
 a recarle alla madre.

## II

Ora Polinnia alata Dea che molte  
 lire a un tempo percote, e più d'ogni altra  
 Musa possiede orti celesti, intenda  
 anche le lodi de' suoi fiori; or quando  
 la bella donna, delle Dee seconda  
 sacerdotessa, vien recando un favo.  
 Nostro e disdetto alle altre genti è il rito  
 per memoria de' favi, onde in Italia  
 con perenne ronzio fanno tesoro  
 divine api alle Grazie: e chi ne assaggia  
 parla caro alla patria. Ah voi narrate  
 come avete quel dono! E chi la fama  
 a noi fra l'ombre della terra erranti

sorry not yet to die upon the breast  
of Pratinò's ever-running nymph  
or shunned by lonely breezes of the night.  
Give the wild lily that, although it shows  
its kindred forms less high, can dazzle still  
in the pure mantle of the amaranth;  
mix all sky-blue and golden hyacinths  
with Bellosguardo's jonquils that Pomona  
still for her lover picks, with all the proud  
carnations ever new in shades and shapes,  
and with the blooms that on victorious wings  
the Zephyrs from Dawn's garden snatched and rought –  
a recent trophy—to our very shores,  
and now this gentle priestess gently grows  
with artful heat and hospitable love  
among the cedars hanging o'er her home.  
Harmonious and soft both to the sight  
and to the soul the very sound exhales;  
bright shine the wreaths that of so many hues  
as well as many fragrances are wrought;  
and yet the flower that twelve Gods have made  
proud of their names can sever all of them  
and place them on the altar with a smile,  
praying that, out of all the blooms she grows  
and decks her harp with just to honor you,  
one you may pick, fair Goddesses, to blend  
into the garland that on April sixth,  
O lovely Deities, in Sorga's vale  
out of all roses wet with tears you weave  
for Venus, your own mother.

## II

Let now Polymnia, the wingèd Goddess  
that plucks many a lyre at one time  
and, more than any other Muse, in heaven  
owns flower gardens, understand the praises  
of all her wreaths now that the lovely lady,  
the second priestess of the Goddesses,  
comes to the altar with a honeycomb.  
Our own, not other nations', is the rite  
that celebrates the honeycomb's old lore,  
wherefore in Italy heavenly bees  
with endless murmur to the Graces yield  
abundant honey: he who tastes of it

può abbellir se non voi, Grazie, che siete  
presenti a tutto, e Dee tutto sapete?

Quattro volte l'Aurora era salita  
su l'oriente a riveder le Grazie,  
dacché nacquero al mondo; e Giano antico,  
padre d'Italia, e l'adriaca Anfitrite  
inviavan lor doni, e un drappelletto  
di Naiadi e fanciulle eridanine,  
e quante i pomi d'Aniene e i fonti  
godean d'Arno e di Tebro, e quante avea  
Ninfe il mar d'Aretusa; e le guidavi  
tu, più che giglio nivea Galatea.

.....

E cantar Febo pieno d'inni un carme.  
Vaticinò, com'ei lo spirto, e varia  
daranno ai vati l'armonia del plettro  
le sue liete sorelle, e Amore il pianto  
che lusinghi a pietà l'alme gentili,  
e il giovine Lïeo scevra d'acerbe  
cure la vita, e Pallade i consigli,  
Giove la gloria, e tutti i Numi eterno  
poscia l'alloro; ma le Grazie il mèle  
persüadente graziosi affetti,  
onde pia con gli Dei torni la terra.  
E cantando vedea lieto agitarsi  
esalando profumi, il verdeggiante  
bosco d'Olimpo, e rifiorir le rose,  
e [scorrere] di nèttare i torrenti,  
e risplendere il cielo, e delle Dive  
raggiar più bella l'immortal bellezza;  
però che il Padre sorrideva, e inerme  
a piè del trono l'aquila s'assise.

.....

Inaccessa agli Dei splende una fiamma  
solitaria nell'ultimo de' cieli,  
per proprio foco eterna; unico Nume  
la veneranda Deità di Vesta  
vi s'appressa, e deriva indi una pura  
luce che, mista allo splendor del sole,  
tinge gli aerei campi di zaffiro,  
e i mari, allor che ondeggiano al tranquillo  
spirto del vento facili a' nocchieri,  
e di chiaror dolcissimo consola  
con quel lume le notti, e a qual più s'apre

dearly converses with his fatherland.  
Oh, tell us how that gift was yours alone.  
Who else, O Graces, can embellish fame  
for us, still groping in this earthly dusk;  
who else but you, who were already there,  
and, being Goddesses, know all things well?  
Once more to see the Graces since their birth  
bright Dawn had climbed four times the eastern sky:  
father of Italy, old Janus then,  
and Adriatic Amphitrite sent  
their gifts along with Eridanian girls  
and Naiads, with the dwellers who enjoyed  
Aniene's trees, Arno's and Tiber's springs,  
and all the nymphs from Arethusa's sea—  
and it was you escorted them all there,  
O whiter-much-than-lilies Galatea.

.....  
Till Phoebus sang a hymn-repleted song,  
He prophesied how bards would take the soul  
from him, from his glad sisters the sweet lyre  
from Love the weeping that would lure a gentle  
spirit to ruth, from young Lyaeus life  
devoid of cares, from Pallas good advice,  
and from all Gods the laurel afterwards;  
but from the Graces would the honey flow,  
inspiring gracious feelings apt once more  
to reconcile with Heaven this our earth.  
He noticed, as he sang, the fragrance-breathing  
excitement of the green Olympian woods,  
the nectar-running streams, the roses' birth,  
the splendor of the skies, and the far brighter  
immortal beauty of the Goddesses:  
indeed the Father smiled on this while, harmless,  
his eagle rested underneath his throne.  
Unreachable to all the Deities,  
in the last heaven shines a lonely flame  
which its own fire makes eternal: there  
the awesome Goddess Vesta climbs alone  
to fetch a cloudless light that with the sun's  
paints in pure sapphire the whole firmament  
and the whole sea, now in the tranquil breeze  
waving most easy to the seaman's eyes,  
and comforts with its sweetest clarity  
each solitary night wherein the humblest  
flower that burgeons to bedeck the earth

modesto fiore a decorar la terra  
 molli tinte comparte, invidiate  
 dalla rosa superba.

.....

Dite, o garzoni, a chi mortale, e voi,  
 donzelle, dite a qual fanciulla un giorno  
 più di quel mèl le Dee furon cortesi.  
 N'ebbe primiero un cieco; e sullo scudo  
 di Vulcano mirò moversi il mondo,  
 e l'alto Ilio diruto, e per l'ignoto  
 pelago la solinga itaca vela,  
 e tutto Olimpo gli s'apri alla mente  
 e Cipria vide e delle Grazie il cinto.  
 Ma quando quel sapor venne a Corinna  
 sul labbro, vinse tra l'elèe quadrighe  
 di Pindaro i destrier, benché Elicona  
 li dissetasse, e li pascea di foco  
 Eolo, e prenunzia un'aquila correva,  
 e de' suoi freni li adornava il Sole.

.....

Di quel mèl la fragranza errò improvvisa  
 sul talamo all'eolia fanciulla,  
 e il cor dal petto le balzò e la lira  
 ed aggiogando i passerì, scendea  
 Venere dall'Olimpo, e delle sue  
 ambrosie dita le tergeva il pianto.  
 Indarno Imetto  
 le richiama dal dì che a fior dell'onda  
 ergea, beate volatrici, il coro  
 eliconio seguìeno, obbedienti  
 all'elegia del fuggitivo Apollo.  
 Però che quando su la Grecia inerte  
 Marte sfrenò le tartare cavalle  
 depredatrici, e coronò la schiatta  
 barbara d'Ottomano, allor l'Italia  
 fu giardino alle Muse, e qui lo stuolo  
 fabro dell'aureo mèl pose a sua prole  
 il felice alvear. Né le Febee  
 api (sebben le altre api abbia crudeli)  
 fuggono i lai della invisibil Ninfa,  
 che ognor delusa d'amorosa speme,  
 pur geme per le quete aure diffusa,  
 e il suo altero nemico ama e richiama;  
 tanta dolcezza infusero le Grazie,  
 per pietà della Ninfa, alle sue voci,

is granted hues so soft the proud rose envies.  
Now tell, O lads, and you, sweet maidens, tell  
unto what mortal man, unto what lass  
the Goddesses most kindly gave, one day,  
most of that honey. A blind man came first:  
on Vulcan's shield he saw the world revolve,  
high Ilium in ruins, and, outcast  
on unknown seas, the lone Ithacan sail:  
the whole Olympus to his vision burst,  
baring the Cyprian and the Graces' zone.  
But when that savor soothed Corinna's lips,  
mid the Elean coaches it outsped  
Pindaric steeds whose thirst Helicon quenched:  
Eolus fed them with his fire, the Sun  
adorned them with his spurs and, high above,  
speeding ahead, an eagle showed the way.

.....  
The sudden fragrance of that honey sprinkled  
the nuptial bed of the Eolian girl:  
Her lyre quavered and her heart leapt up  
when in a chariot, drawn by sparrows, down  
came Venus to wipe out her every tear  
with her ambrosian fingers. Ah, in vain  
has the Hymettus called them home again  
since the first dawn when, on swift wings of bliss  
skimming the high Aegean waves, behind  
the Heliconian chorus came the Graces,  
heedful of Phoebus' fleeting elegy.  
For after Mars on slothful Greece unleashed  
the all-marauding mares of Tartary,  
and Ottoman's barbaric sons were crowned,  
Italy gave the Muses a new home,  
and those who spun that golden honey placed  
its happy beehive for her children here.  
Not that the bees of Phoebus (others, too,  
are cruel equally) shun the laments  
of the unseen and ever-hopeless Nymph  
who, self-expanding through the quiet air,  
vents her despair, and calls and calls again,  
though unrequited, her despising foe;  
but so much sweetness did the graces breathe,  
for the Nymph's sake, into her every word  
that, utterly forgetful of their work,  
those bees, now idle here in Italy,  
listen to but the echo that can make

che le lor api immemori dell'opra,  
 oziose in Italia odono l'eco  
 che al par de' carmi fe' dolce la rima.  
 Quell'angelette scesero da prima  
 ove assai preda di torrenti al mare  
 porta Eridàno. Ivi la fata Alcina  
 di lor sorti presàga avea disperso  
 molti agresti amaranti; e lungo il fiume  
 gran ciel prendea con negre ombre un'incolta  
 selva di lauri: su' lor tronchi Atlante  
 di Ruggiero scrivea gli avi e le imprese,  
 e di spettri guerrier muta una schiera  
 e donne innamorate ivan col mago,  
 aspettando il cantor; e questi i favi  
 vide quivi deposti, e si mietea  
 tutti gli allori; ma de' fior d'Alcina  
 più grazioso distillava il mèle,  
 e il libò solo un lepido poeta,  
 che insiem narrò d'Angelica gli affanni.  
 Ma non men cara l'api amano l'ombra  
 del sublime cipresso, ove appendea  
 la sua cetra Torquato, allor che ardendo  
 forsennato egli errò per le foreste  
 "sì che insieme movea pietate e riso  
 "nelle gentili Ninfe e ne' pastori:  
 "né già cose scrivea degne di riso  
 "se ben cose facea degne di riso".  
 ...Deh! perché torse  
 i suoi passi da voi, liete in udirlo  
 cantar o Erminia, e il pio sepolcro e l'armi?  
 Né disdegno di voi, ma più fatale  
 Nume alla reggia il risospinse e al pianto.  
 ...A tal ventura  
 fur destinate le gentili alate  
 che riposâr sull'Eridano il volo.  
 Mentre nel Lilibeo mare la fata  
 dava promesse, e l'attendea cortese  
 a quante all'Adria indi posaro il volo  
 angiolette Febee, l'altro drappello  
 che, per antico amor Flora seguendo,  
 tendea per le tirrene aure il suo corso,  
 trovò simile a Cerere una donna  
 su la foce dell'Arno; e l'attendea  
 portando in man purpurei gigli e frondi  
 fresche d'ulivo. Avea riposo al fianco



a rhyme as pleasant as the song itself.  
Those wingèd, winsome bees descended first  
right where the mighty Eridanus brings  
its largest prey of torrents to the sea.  
There fate-presaging sorceress Alcina  
had copiously strewn wild amaranths,  
and there, along the very stream, a thick  
forest of laurels veiled much of the sky  
with its black shadow: on their trunks Atlante  
would carve Ruggiero's ancestors and deeds;  
and there a silent throng of phantom knights  
and loving ladies with a sorcerer  
awaited still their singer: there he saw  
the honeycombs at his disposal placed,  
and made a harvest of all laurel trees.  
But the best honey from Alcina's wreaths  
was left for but one poet yet to taste –  
the witty bard that also sang with it  
lovelorn Angelica's unhappy woes.  
Yet no less dear is to the bees the shade  
of the tall cypress where Torquato hung  
his harp when, madly burning, through the woods  
he wandered "moving shepherds and sweet nymphs  
to pity and to laughter at one time;  
no longer did he write what made man laugh—  
he only did what made man only laugh."

Ah, why did he  
meander, O sweet bees, away from you,  
who liked to hear him sing Erminia's flight  
and pious arms and holy sepulcher?  
No hate of you—a fatal Power brought him  
back to a princely court and to new tears.

Such was the venture  
of all those ever-gentle, pinioned bees  
destined to halt their flight upon the Po.  
While from the Lilybaean Sea the Fairy  
with many soon-kept promises allured  
every Phoebean creature come to rest  
finally on the Adriatic shores,  
the other swarm that, borne by Flora's love,  
had only aimed at the Tyrrhenian sky,  
right on the Arno's estuary found  
a lady that had long been waiting there:  
Ceres-resembling, in her hands she held  
vermilion lilies and fresh olive sprouts.

un'etrusca colonna, a sé dinanzi  
 di favi desioso un alveare.  
 Molte intorno a' suoi piè verdi le spighe  
 spuntavano, e perian molte immature  
 fra gli emuli papaveri; mal nota,  
 benché fosse divina, era l'Ancella  
 alle pecchie immortali. Essa agli Dei  
 non tornò mai, da che scendea ne' primi  
 dì noiosi dell'uomo; e il riconforta  
 ma le presenti ore gl'invola; ha nome  
 Speranza e men infida ama i coloni.  
 Già negli ultimi cieli iva compiendo  
 il settimo de' grandi anni Saturno  
 col suo pianeta, da che a noi la Donna  
 precorrendo le Muse era tornata  
 per consiglio di Pallade, a recarne  
 l'ara fatale ove scolpite in oro  
 le brevi rifulgean libere leggi,  
 madri dell'arti onde fu bella Atene.

.....  
 Ecco prostrata una foresta, e fianchi  
 rudi d'alpe, e masse ferree immani  
 al braccio de' Ciclòpi, a fondar tempio  
 che ceda tardo a' muti urti del tempo.  
 E al suono che invisibili spandeano  
 le Grazie intorno, assunsero nell'opra  
 nuova speme i viventi: e l'Architetto  
 meravigliando della sua fatica,  
 quasi nubi lievissime, di terra  
 ferro e abeti vedea sorgere e marmi,  
 a sue leggi arrendevoli, e posarsi  
 convessi in arco aereo imitanti  
 il firmamento. Attonite le Muse  
 come vennero poscia alla divina  
 mole il guardo levando, indarno altrove  
 col memore pensier ivan cercando  
 se altrove Palla, .....  
 o quando in Grecia di celeste acanto  
 ghirlandò le colonne, o quando in Roma  
 gli archi adornava a ritornar vittrice  
 trionfando con candide cavalle,  
 miracolo sì fatto avesse all'arti  
 mai suggerito. Quando poi la Speme  
 veleggiando su l'Arno in una nave  
 l'api recò e l'ancora là dove

Resting one side on an Etruscan column,  
 she gazed on something right in front of her—  
 a beehive longing still for honeycombs.  
 Full many a verdant spear of wheat burst forth  
 down at her feet while others, not yet ripe,  
 amongst the vying poppies perished soon:  
 though of celestial origin, the Handmaid  
 was hardly known to the immortal bees.  
 Never has she returned among the Gods  
 since she came down on man's first tedious days;  
 man she consoles but steals his present hours:  
 her name (she smiles on farmers most) is Hope.  
 In the last heavens Saturn with his planet  
 was in the seventh of his lengthy years  
 when, as forerunner of the Nine, the Handmaid,  
 by Pallas so advised, returned to us  
 bringing the sacred altar where in gold  
 were carved and shone the free and simple laws  
 that made the arts and Athens beautiful.

.....  
 Behold, a forest down is being felled  
 along with marble blocks and measureless  
 masses of iron by Cyclopes' hands:  
 a temple here must rise that will for long  
 withstand the silent buffetings of time.  
 At the sound scattered by the unseen Graces  
 the living with new hope join in the deed:  
 marveling at his work, the Architect  
 sees, like thin clouds, fir trunks and iron beams  
 and marble matter, docile to his laws,  
 rise quickly from the earth and only rest  
 when, curved in airy arches, they reflect  
 the firmament. The Muses, all enrapt,  
 lift now their eyes to the imposing dome  
 and with nostalgic thoughts try to recall  
 if Pallas elsewhere .....  
 either in Greece, when the divine acanthus  
 garlanded every column, or in Rome  
 when, entering victorious on white steeds,  
 she decked its arches with triumphal leaves,  
 had with her presence so inspired the arts  
 as to behold such glory born at last.  
 When, sailing toward the Arno on her ship,  
 Hope afterwards brought there all of her bees—  
 there where the Muses' regal mansion would

sorger poscia dovea delle bell'arti  
 sovra mille colonne una gentile  
 reggia alle Muse, . . . corser l'api  
 a un'indistinta di novelle piante  
 soavità che intorno al tempio oliva.

Un mirto  
 che suo dall'alto Beatrice ammira,  
 venerando spendeva; e dalla cima  
 battea le penne un Genio disdegnoso  
 che il passato esplorando e l'avvenire  
 cieli e abissi cercava, e popolato  
 d'anime in mezzo a tutte l'acque un monte;  
 poi, tornando, spargea folgori e lieti  
 raggi, e speme e terrore e pentimento  
 ne' mortali; e verissime sciagure  
 all'Italia cantava. Appresso al mirto  
 fiorian le rose che le Grazie ogni anno  
 ne' colli euganei van cogliendo, e un serto  
 molle di pianto il dì sesto d'aprile  
 ne recano alla Madre. A queste intorno  
 dolcemente ronzarono, e sentiro  
 come forse d'Eliso era venuto  
 ad innestare il cespo ei che più ch'altri  
 libò il mèl sacro su l'Imetto, e primo  
 fe' del celeste amor celebre il rito.  
 Pur con molti frutteti e con l'orezzo  
 le sviò de' quercioli una valletta  
 dove le Ninfe alle mie Dee seguaci  
 non son Genii mentiti. Io dal mio poggio  
 quando tacciono i venti fra le torri  
 della vaga Firenze, odo un Silvano  
 ospite ignoto a' taciti eremiti  
 del vicino Oliveto: ei sul meriggio  
 fa sua casa un frascato, e a suon d'avena  
 le pecorelle sue chiama alla fonte.  
 Chiama due brune giovani la sera,  
 né piegar erba mi parean ballando.  
 Esso mena la danza. N'eran molte  
 sotto l'alpe di Fiesole a una valle  
 che da sei montagnette ond'è ricinta  
 scende a sembianza di teatro acheo.  
 Affrico allegro ruscelletto accorse  
 a' lor prieghi dal monte, e fe' la valle  
 limpida d'un freschissimo laghetto.

upon a thousand columns some day rise—  
dashed all those bees, attracted by a faint  
fragrance of new-born plants around the shrine.

A sacred myrtle tree,  
which Beatrice from heaven calls her own,  
was shining there, and from its very top,  
beating his wings, a wrathful Genius, scanning  
both past and future, sought abyss and skies  
and, in the midst of all the seas, a mountain  
inhabited by souls; then, back on earth,  
upon the mortals cast he thunderbolts  
and happy rays, repentance, hope and fright,  
singing to Italy disasters true.

Close to that myrtle tree those roses bloomed,  
which every year on the Euganean hills  
the Graces pick and weave a wreath thereof  
to offer, wet with tears, on April sixth,  
to their own Mother. Sweetly round those buds  
murmured the bees, and felt the rosebush grafted  
by him who tasted on th' Hymettus' peak  
the sacred honey more than others, singing,  
first, the religion of celestial love.

And yet, despite the orchards and the shade,  
a tiny dell of youthful oak trees swayed them  
where, loyal to my Goddesses, the nymphs  
are not mendacious Genii.

From this hill,  
when through the towers of my lovely Florence  
the winds are still, I hear a sylvan guest  
unknown in yonder silent hermitage  
of nearby Oliveto: he, past noon,  
makes shady twigs his home, and with his oat  
calls one by one his little sheep to drink.  
At evening, then, two dark-haired maidens come,  
who hardly bend the grasses as they dance  
( 't is he who leads them there). Beneath the hill  
of Fiesole too many maidens dwelt  
in a fair dell that from six circling mountains  
like an Achean theater descends.  
Mindful of all their callings from above,  
Africo, carefree rivulet, replied  
and, forming there the coolest little lake,  
made the entire little valley bright.  
Not yet had Fiammetta heard of Nymphs  
when, telling tales of courtesy and love,

Nulla per anco delle Ninfe inteso  
avea Fiammetta allor ch'ivi a diporto  
novellando d'amori e cortesie  
con le amiche sedeva, o s'immergea,  
te, Amor, fuggendo e tu ve la spiavi,  
dentro le cristalline onde più bella.  
Fur poi svelati in que' diporti i vaghi  
misteri, e Dioneo re del drappello  
le Grazie afflisce. Persegui i colombi  
che stavan su le dense ali sospesi  
a guardia d'una grotta: invan gementi  
sotto il flagel del mirto onde gl'incalza  
gli fan ombra dattorno, e gli fan prieghi  
che non s'accosti; sanguinanti e inermi  
sgombran con penne trepidanti al cielo.  
Dalla grotta i recessi empie la luna,  
e fra un mucchio di gigli addormentata  
svela a un Fauno confusa una Napea.  
Gioi il protervo dell'esempio, e spera  
alletterne Fiammetta; e pregò tutti  
allor d'aita i Satiri canuti,  
e quante emule ninfe eran da' giochi  
e da' misteri escluse: e quegli arguti  
oziano ogni notte a Dioneo  
di scherzi e d'antri e talami di fiori  
ridissero novelle. Or vive un libro  
dettato dagli Dei; ma sfortunata  
la damigella che mai tocchi il libro!  
Tosto smarrita del natio pudore  
avrà la rosa; né il rossore ad arte  
può innamorar chi sol le Grazie ha in core.  
O giovinette Dee, gioia dell'inno,  
per voi la bella donna i riti vostri  
imita e le terrene api lusinga  
nel felsineo pendio d'onde il pastore  
mira Astrea che or del ciel gode e de' tardi  
alberghi di Nereo; d'indiche piante  
e di catalpe onde i suoi Lari ombreggia  
sedi appresta e sollazzi alle vaganti  
schiere, o le accoglie ne' fecondi orezzi  
d'armonioso speco inviolate  
dal gelo e dall'estiva ira e da' nemi.  
La bella donna di sua mano i lattei  
calici del limone, e la pudica  
delle viole, e il timo amor dell'api,

with her own friends for pastime there she sat  
or plunged into those waters, shunning you,  
O Love, who spied upon her furtively,  
and found her fairer in the crystal foam.  
The wondrous mysteries were then revealed  
in that diversion whereby Dioneo,  
king of the group, displeased the Graces' sight.  
Away he chased the turtle-doves that watched  
on full-spread wings the entrance to a cave:  
moaning in vain beneath the myrtle's lashing,  
they cast their shadows 'round him, begging him  
not to draw near, but, armless, fast they flee  
on bleeding wings in terror to the sky.  
The moon that floods the sunken cave with light  
shows on a bunch of lilies a Napea  
asleep and blended in a Faun's embrace.  
By that example spurred, the daring lad  
hoped to ensnare Fiammetta, and invoked  
as many white-haired Satyrs as he knew  
with all the envious nymphs until then banned  
from all that playing, all that mystery;  
witty and shrewd and idle, every night  
to Dioneo they recounted tales  
of fun and caves and nuptial beds of blooms.  
Dictated by the Gods, a book still lives,  
but hapless is the lass that touches it:  
her rose will quickly lose its native hue,  
and never will the Graces fall in love  
with artful blushing on a woman's cheeks.  
O youthful Goddesses, my hymn's one joy,  
for you the lovely lady now renews  
your holy rites and lures the earthly bees  
to her Felsinean hillock whence the shepherd  
watches Astrea in love with sky and sea.  
Shading her hearth with most exotic plants,  
her home she lends for fun to wandering throngs  
or she invites them to the healthy shade  
of her harmonious cottage never touched  
by winter's frost or summer's wrathful storm.  
With her own hand the lovely lady wets  
the milky calyxes of lemon buds,  
shy violets, and thyme, to bees so dear;  
as balm of dew she begs from peaceful stars  
and consecrates new honeycombs to you,  
deep in her heart she sighes a silent prayer.

innaffia, e il fior delle rugiade invoca  
dalle stelle tranquille, e impetra i favi  
che vi consacra e in cor tacita prega.  
Con lei pregate, donzelle, e meco  
voi, garzoni, miratela. Il segreto  
sospiro, il riso del suo labbro, il dolce  
foco esultante nelle sue pupille  
faccianvi accorti di che preghi, e come  
l'ascoltino le Dee. E certo impetra  
che delle Dee l'amabile consiglio  
da lei s'adempia. I preghi che dal Cielo  
per pietà de' mortali han le divine  
vergini caste, non a voi li danno,  
giovani vati e artefici eleganti,  
bensì a qual più gentil donna le imita.  
A lei correte, e di soavi affetti  
ispiratrici e immagini leggiadre  
sentirete le Grazie. Ah vi rimembri  
che inverecondo le spaventa Amore!

### III

Torna deh! torna al suon, donna dell'arpa;  
guarda la tua bella compagna; e viene  
ultima al rito a tesser danze all'ara.  
Pur la città cui Pale empie di paschi  
con l'urne industri tanta valle, e pingui  
di mille pioppe aerèe al sussurro,  
ombrano i buoi le chiuse, or la richiama  
alle feste notturne e fra quegli orti  
freschi di frondi e intorno aurei di cocchi  
lungo i rivi d'Olona. E già tornava  
questa gentile al suo molle paese;  
così imminente omai freme Bellona  
che al Tebro, all'Arno, ov'è più sacra Italia,  
non un'ara trovò, dove alle Grazie  
rendere il voto d'una regia sposa.  
Ma udi 'l canto, udi l'arpa; e a noi si volse  
agile come in cielo Ebe succinta.  
Sostien del braccio un giovinetto cigno,  
e togliesi di fronte una catena  
vaga di perle a cingerne l'augello.  
Quei lento al collo suo del flessuoso  
collo s'attorce, e di lei sente a ciocche  
neri su le sue lattee piume i crini  
scorrer disciolti, e più lieto la mira



Pray, gracious maidens, with her, and with me,  
O lads, just look at her. Her secret sigh,  
the smile upon her lips, the tranquil flame  
exulting in her eyes should tell you what  
she prays for, and how fast the Goddesses  
listen to her. Surely she begs the Three  
to help her do their lovely will on earth.  
The worth that Heaven, sorry for mankind,  
bestows on the chaste virgins from the sky  
will never fall on you, O artisans  
and youthful bards of futile elegance,  
but only on the gentlest lady eager  
to imitate them. Therefore, run to her,  
and you will sense the Graces as they breathe  
feelings of love and images of grace.  
Remember: Love unchaste they ever dread.

### III

Come, lady with the harp, and play again!  
Look at your lovely friend, arriving last:  
she'll dance around the altar in this rite.  
The town whose plainland Pales fills with pastures  
through industrious canals and countless poplars  
singing sublimely in the lofty air  
(fat oxen shade its outskirts) calls her back  
to its nocturnal splendor in the midst  
of gardens fresh with trees and golden-bright  
with chariots along th' Olona's banks.  
Once more the pleasure of her country home  
this gentle one was seeking, for so near  
is still Bellona's cry she could not find  
either upon the Tiber or the Arno—  
where the more sacred Italy abides –  
a single altar whence a regal bride  
could lift her prayer to the Goddesses.  
But then she heard the song, she heard the harp:  
swiftly she turned to us just as in heaven  
Hebe in her long, tucked-up dress would do.  
Perched on her arm, she holds a youthful Swan;  
now from her forehead she removes a chain,  
pearl-studded, and soon binds the bird with it.  
Slowly the Swan, with undulating grace  
winding his neck around her neck, now feels  
her raven hair on his white plumage loose,

mentr'ella scioglie a questi detti il labbro:  
 Grata agli Dei del reduce marito  
 da' fiumi algenti ov'hanno patria i cigni,  
 alle virginee Deità consacra  
 l'alta Regina mia candido un cigno  
 Accogliete, o garzoni, e su le chiare  
 acque vaganti intorno all'ara e al bosco  
 deponete l'augello, e sia del nostro  
 fonte signor; e i suoi atti venusti  
 gli rendan l'onde e il suo candore, e goda  
 di sé, quasi dicendo a chi lo mira,  
 simbol son io della beltà. Sfrondate  
 ilari carolando, o verginette,  
 il mirteto e i rosai lungo i meandri  
 del ruscello, versate sul ruscello,  
 versateli, e al fuggente nuotatore  
 che veleggia con pure ali di neve,  
 fate inciampi di fiori, e qual più ameno  
 fiore a voi sceglia col puniceo rostro,  
 vel ponete nel seno. A quanti alati  
 godon l'erbe del par l'aere e i laghi  
 amabil sire è il cigno, e con l'impero  
 modesto delle grazie i suoi vassalli  
 regge, ed agli altri volator sorride,  
 e lieto le sdegnose aquile ammira.  
 Sovra l'òmero suo guizzan securi  
 gli argentei pesci, ed ospite leale  
 il vagheggiano, s'ei visita all'alba  
 le lor ime correnti, desioso  
 di più freschi lavacri, onde rifulga  
 sopra le piume sue nitido il sole.  
 Fioritelo di gigli.

Al vago rito

Donna l'invia, che nella villa amena  
 de' tigli (amabil pianta, e a' molli orecchi  
 propizia, e al santo coniugale amore)  
 nudrialo afflitta; e a lei dal pelaghetto  
 lieto accorrea, agitandole l'acque  
 sotto i lauri tranquille. O di clementi  
 virtù ornamento nella reggia insùbre!  
 Finché piacque agli Dei, o agl'infelici  
 cara tutela, e di tre regie Grazie  
 genitrice gentil, bella fra tutte  
 figlie di regi, e agl'Immortali amica!  
 Tutto il Cielo t'udia quando al marito

and looks upon her with much greater bliss  
as she begins to move her lips to say:  
“Grateful to Heaven for her man’s return  
from the cold rivers, fatherland of swans,  
my noble Queen to the three virgin Graces  
is offering the whiteness of this Swan.”  
Welcome the Bird, O lads, and lay him down  
on the clear waters murmuring around  
the altar and the forest: let him be  
lord of our stream, and let the waves bring forth  
his graceful ways and innocence. To all  
who gaze upon him may this happy Swan  
say, “I am beauty’s symbol.” Happily  
dancing, O graceful maidens, pluck the leaves  
of every rosebush, every myrtle tree  
along the winding stream, and cast them all  
over the stream itself, thus laying stumbles  
of blossoms right before the fleeting bird  
sailing on pinions of pure, dazzling snow,  
and, dearly treasuring the sweetest bud  
he chooses for you with his purple beak,  
conceal it on your breast. Of all the birds  
that love air, lakes and meadows equally,  
the Swan is gentle king: most affably  
he rules his subjects in the Graces’ realm,  
smiles at his wingèd mates and joyfully  
watches the scornful eagles overhead.  
Over his back the fish in sliver spree  
most safely wriggle, loving him as guest  
when he at daybreak tries their deeper waves  
in search of fresher cleansings that may lure  
upon his feathers the new-risen sun.  
Crown him with lilies!

For the beauteous rite  
he was donated by Her Ladyship,  
who in her villa fresh with linden trees  
(lovable plants propitious to cool shades  
as well as sanctity of wedded love)  
in sadness nourished him: from the small lake  
the Swan had run to her, causing a ripple  
on the immobile waters underneath  
her laurel trees. O virtues’ ornament  
there in her royal palace of Milan!  
O (while the Gods allowed it) ever-pleasant  
harbor to weeping mortals, gentle mother

guerreggiante a impedir l'Elba ai nemici  
 pregavi lenta l'invisibil Parca  
 che accompagna gli Eroi, vaticinando  
 l'inno funereo e l'alto avello e l'armi  
 più terse e giunti alla quadriga i bianchi  
 destrieri eterni a correre l'Eliso.  
 Ma come Marte, quando entro le navi  
 rispingeva gli Achei, vide sul vallo  
 fra un turbine di dardi Aiace solo,  
 fumar di sangue; e ove diruto il muro  
 dava più varco a' Teucri, ivi attraverso  
 piantarsi; e al suon de' brandi, onde intronato  
 avea l'elmo e lo scudo, i vincitori  
 impaurir del grido; e rincalzarli  
 fra le dardanie faci arso e splendente;  
 scagliar rotta la spada, e trarsi l'elmo  
 e fulminar immobile col guardo  
 Ettore, che perplesso ivi si tenne:  
 tal dell'Ausonio Re l'inclito alunno  
 fra il lutto e il tempestar lungo di Borea  
 si fe' vallo dell'Elba, e minacciando  
 il trionfo indugiava e le rapine  
 dello Scita ramingo oltre la Neva.  
 Quinci indignato il sol torce il suo carro,  
 quando Orione predator dell'Austro  
 sovra l'Orsa precipita e abbandona  
 corrucciosi i suoi turbini e il terrore  
 sul deserto de' ghiacci orridi, d'alto  
 silenzio e d'ossa e armate esuli larve.  
 Sdegnan chi a' fasti di fortuna applaude  
 le Dive mie, e sol fan bello il lauro  
 quando Sventura ne corona i prenci.  
 Ma più alle Dive mie piace quel carne  
 che d'egregia beltà l'alma e le forme  
 con la pittrice melodia ravviva.

Spesso per l'altre età, se l'idioma  
 d'Italia correrà puro a' nepoti,  
 (è vostro, e voi, deh! lo serbate, o Grazie!)  
 tento ritrar ne' versi miei la sacra  
 danzatrice, men bella allor che siede,  
 men di te bella, o gentil sonatrice,  
 men amabil di te quando favelli,  
 o nutrice dell'api. Ma se danza,  
 vedila! tutta l'armonia del suono

to three sweet regal Graces, the most fair  
of the king's daughters, deathless Heaven's friend!  
All the Gods heard your plea when for your husband,  
at war to keep the foe from Elba away,  
you raised your prayer to the unseen Fate  
that, marching with the heroes, prophesies  
a hymn, a lofty tomb, most shining arms,  
and, yoked to their quadriga, snow-white steeds  
to tread, eternal, the Elysian Fields.

But as, when pushing the Achaeans back  
onto their ships, Mars on the wall saw Ajax,  
bleeding, alone within a storm of darts,  
stand where a breach had made more Trojans rush,  
and, in the midst of swords resounding high  
on shield and helmet, frighten with his shout  
and chase the winners through Dardanian flames  
that made him most resplendent as he burned,  
until he hurled his broken blade at last,  
removed his helmet, and with flashing gaze  
made Hector stop, perplexed: in such a way  
the lustrous pupil of Ausonia's King  
through Boreas' wailing and lugubrious storm  
made Elba his own wall whence a while longer  
beyond the Neva with his threat he kept  
the Scythians' triumphant plundering.  
The Sun now sways his chariot from here,  
mad when Orion with his preying winds  
precipitously falls upon the Bear  
unleashing all its wrathful, dreadful gales  
on deserts of horrendous glaciers, high  
silence, and bones, and ghosts of warring men.

My Goddesses abhor those who exalt  
Fortune's bright lavishness: they only make  
splendid the wreath that crowns grief-tested kings.  
But, most of all, my Goddesses delight  
in hymns that with depictive melody  
waken to lofty beauty soul and flesh.

Oft for the future ages—if the tongue  
of Italy retain its purity  
( 't is yours, O Graces; therefore keep it so)—  
in these my very lines I try to limn  
the sacred dancing lady, oh, less fair  
when she sits down, less beautiful than you,  
O gentle harpsichordist, less endearing  
than you, O foster mother of the bees,

scorre dal suo bel corpo, dal sorriso  
 della sua bocca; e un moto, un atto, un vezzo  
 manda agli sguardi venustà improvvisa.  
 E chi pinger la può? Mentre a ritrarla  
 pongo industrie lo sguardo, ecco m'elude,  
 e le carole che lente disegna  
 affretta rapidissima, e s'invola  
 sorvolando su' fiori; appena veggio  
 il vel fuggente biancheggiar fra' mirti.

**Inno terzo**  
**Pallade -**

**I**

Pari al numero lor volino gl'inni  
 alle vergini sante, armoniosi  
 del peregrino suono uno e diverso  
 di tre favelle. Intento odi, Canova;  
 ch'io mi veggio d'intorno errar l'incenso,  
 qual si spandea sull'are a' versi arcani  
 d'Anfione: presente ecco il nitrito  
 de' corsieri dircèi; benché Ippocrene  
 li dissetasse, e li pascea dell'aure  
 Eolo, e prenunzia un'aquila volava,  
 e de' suoi freni li adornava il Sole,  
 pur que' vaganti Pindaro contenne  
 presso il Cefiso, ed adorò le Grazie.  
 Fanciulle, udite, udite: un lazio Carme  
 vien danzando imenei dall'isoletta  
 di Sirmione per l'argenteo Garda  
 sonante con altera onda marina,  
 da che le nozze di Pelèo, cantate  
 nella reggia del mar, l'aureo Catullo  
 al suo Garda cantò. Sacri poeti,  
 a me date voi l'arte, a me de' vostri  
 idiomi gli spirti, e co' toscani  
 modi seguaci adorerò più ardito  
 le note istorie, e quelle onde a me solo  
 siete cortesi allor che dagli antichi  
 sepolcri m'apparite, illuminando  
 d'elisia luce i solitari campi  
 ove l'errante Fantasia mi porta  
 a discernere il vero. Or ne preceda  
 Clio, la più casta delle Muse, e chiami  
 consolatrici sue meco le Grazie.

.....

while still you speak. But if she dances, oh,  
the whole harmonious power of the sound  
explodes through her fair body and her smile:  
each lovely gesture, every graceful turn  
gives unexpected pleasure to the eyes.  
But who can ever paint her? Ah, the more  
I try to hold her beauty in my glance,  
the more she baffles me: her dancing steps,  
until now slow, become a sudden whirl  
and just as breeze on blooms she vanishes:  
I hardly see her veil now disappear  
as a white gleam among the myrtle trees.

**Hymn Three**  
**Pallas**

**I**

Let now the hymns in equal number soar  
to yonder holy virgins with the wondrous  
sound of the same yet diverse music of  
three languages. Canova, hear me still:  
I feel the incense all about me spread  
such as was strewn on altars when Amphion's  
mysterious lines were sung: the neighing's here  
of the Dircean steeds which Hippocrene  
refreshed with its own streams, Eolus fed  
with winds, and the Sun quickened with his spurs  
while, high above, an eagle showed the way.  
'T was Pindar tamed the others, running wild  
near the Cephisus, and adored the Graces.  
And listen, girls, you too: a Latin Hymn  
out of the little isle of Sirmio  
comes with a rhythm of a wedding feast  
over the Garda of the silver light,  
whose waters proudly sound as sea-born waves  
since golden-voiced Catullus told his lake  
of Peleus' nuptials sung beneath the sea.

Give, sacred poets, all your art to me,  
to me the spirit of your different tongues,  
and, bolder than before, I will adorn  
with Tuscan elegance the well-known tales  
and those that you reveal to me alone  
as you appear out of the ancient tombs  
casting Elysian light on lonely lands  
whereto my wandering fantasy has brought me,

Come se a' raggi d'Espero amorosi  
 fuor d'una mirtea macchia escon secrete  
 e tortorelle mormorando a' baci,  
 guata dall'ombra l'upupa e sen duole,  
 fuggono quelle impaurite al bosco;  
 così le Grazie si fuggian tremando.  
 Fu lor ventura che Minerva allora  
 risaliva que' balzi, al bellicoso  
 Scita togliendo il nume suo. Di stragi  
 su' canuti, e di vergini rapite,  
 stolto! il trionfo profanò che in guerra  
 giusta il favore della Dea gli porse.  
 Delle Grazie s'avvide e della fuga  
 immantinente, e dietro ad un'opaca  
 rupe il cocchio lasciava, e le sue quattro  
 leonine poledre; ivi lo scudo  
 depose, e la fatale ègida, e l'elmo,  
 e inerme agli occhi delle Grazie apparve.  
 - Scendete, disse, o vergini, scendete  
 al mar, e venerate ivi la Madre;  
 e dolce un lutto per Orfeo nel core  
 vi manderà, che obblierete il vostro  
 terror, tanto ch'io rieda a offrirvi un dono,  
 né più vi offenda Amore. - E tosto al corso  
 diè la quadriga, e la rattenne a un'alta  
 reggia che al par d'Atene ebbe già cara;  
 or questa sola ha in pregio, or quando i Fati  
 non lasciano ad Atene altro che il nome.

## II

.....  
 E a me un avviso Eufrosine, cantando,  
 porge, un avviso che da Febo un giorno  
 sotto le palme di Cirene apprese.  
 Innamorato, nel pierio fonte  
 guardò Tiresia giovinetto i fulvi  
 capei di Palla, liberi dall'elmo,  
 coprir le rosee disarmate spalle;  
 senti l'aura celeste, e mirò l'onde  
 lambir a gara della Diva il piede,  
 e spruzzar riverenti e paurose  
 la sudata cervice e il casto petto,  
 che i lunghi crin discorrenti dal collo  
 coprian, siccome li moveano l'aure.  
 Ma né più rimirò dalle natie



searching for truth. Let Clio come now first –  
the chastest of the Muses – and with me  
let her invoke the Graces' soothing ease.

.....  
As in the glimmer of the Evening Star  
from the dark thickness of the myrtle trees  
murmuring turtle-doves come forth to kiss  
till, watched by the resentful hoopoe, back  
into the forest terrified they flee:  
in such a way the frightened Graces ran.  
But luckily for them, right at that time  
Minerva climbed those very hills again  
to take her mighty deity away  
from fighting Scythians whose victory,  
which she had granted for a rightful war,  
had madly been profaned by rape of women  
and slaughter of unarmed white-haired old men.  
Noticing the three Graces in their flight,  
behind a darkened rock she hid at once  
the four lionine mares that pulled her coach;  
helmet and shield and breastplate she laid down  
and wholly bare before the Graces stood.  
“Go down,” she said, “dear virgins, to the sea,  
go down, and worship your own Mother there.  
Such a sweet grief for Orpheus's death  
will she inspire in your hearts, you'll soon  
forget your terror till I here return  
with a dear present for you; nor will Love  
offend you any longer.” Thus she spurred  
her fast quadriga forward till she reached  
a lofty royal palace dear to her  
as much as Athens – her sole cherished home  
now that the Fates gave Athens but a name.

II

.....  
Singing, Euphrosyne now counsels me  
as she herself was counseled long ago  
by Phoebus underneath Cyrene's palms.

Enamored, down in the Pierian spring  
youthful Tiresias, one day, caught sight  
of Pallas' sunlit hair that, helmet-free,  
fell loose upon her rosy shoulders bare:  
a breeze from heaven felt he as he saw  
the waves that vied to kiss the Goddess' feet

cime eliconie il cocchio aureo del Sole,  
 né per la coronèa selva di pioppi  
 guidò a' ludi i garzoni, o alle carole  
 l'anfionie fanciulle; e i capri e i cervi  
 tenean securi le beote valli,  
 chè non più il dardo suo dritto fischiava,  
 però che la divina ira di Palla  
 al cacciator col cenno onnipotente  
 avvinse i lumi di perpetua notte.  
 Tal destino è ne' fati. Ahi! senza pianto  
 l'uomo non vede la beltà celeste.

### III

.....  
 Isola è in mezzo all'oceàn, là dove  
 sorge più curvo agli astri; immensa terra,  
 come è grido vetusto, un dì beata  
 d'eterne messi e di mortali altrice.  
 Invan la chiede all'onde oggi il nocchiero,  
 or i nostri invocando or dell'avverso  
 polo gli astri; e se illuso è dal desio,  
 mira albeggiar i suoi monti da lunge,  
 e affretta i venti, e per l'antica fama  
 Atlantide l'appella. Ma da Febo  
 detta è Palladio Ciel, che da la santa  
 Palla Minerva agli abitanti irata,  
 cui il ricco suolo e gl'imenei lascivi  
 fean pigri all'arti e sconoscenti a Giove,  
 dentro l'Asia gli espulse, e l'aurea terra  
 cinse di ciel pervio soltanto ai Numi.  
 Onde, qualvolta per desio di stragi  
 si fan guerra i mortali, e alla divina  
 libertà danno impuri ostie di sangue;  
 o danno a prezzo anima e brandi all'ire  
 di tiranni stranieri, o a fera impresa  
 seguon avido re che ad innocenti  
 popoli appresta ceppi e lutto a' suoi;  
 allor concede le Gorgòni a Marte  
 Pallade, e sola tien l'asta paterna  
 con che i regi precorre alla difesa  
 delle leggi e dell'are, e per cui splende  
 a' magnanimi eroi sacro il trionfo.  
 Poi nell'isola sua fugge Minerva,  
 e tutte Dee minori, a cui diè Giove  
 d'esserle care alunne, a ogni gentile

and, reverent and hesitant, then sprinkled  
her still-perspiring face and virgin breast  
which her long-streaming hair, tossed by the wind,  
protected from man's gaze. But nevermore  
was he to watch the chariot of the Sun  
golden above his native Helicon  
nor would he through Coronis' poplar trees  
lead youngsters any longer to the game  
or Amphionian maidens to the dance.  
Through the Boeotian valleys rams and deer  
roamed safely ever since, for nevermore  
did his dart whistle straight up in the air:  
heeding the might of her omnipotence,  
Athena's godly wrath had then and there  
bandaged the hunter's eyes with endless night.  
Such is the Fates' decree. Through tears alone  
must man behold celestial beauty here,

### III

There is an island in mid-ocean, right  
where its most rounded waves rise to the stars –  
according to old tales a boundless land  
one day inhabited by men and blessed  
with everlasting vegetation. Now,  
although invoking stars of either pole,  
the seaman cannot see it any more;  
only, if still deluded by desire,  
from far away he scans its whitened peak  
and, therefore trying to outspeed the winds,  
he calls Atlantis what Apollo named  
Heaven of Pallas, for it was Minerva  
who, fully angered by those dwellers made  
by wealthy soil and most lascivious love  
thankless to Jove and heedless of the arts,  
expelled them all into the Asian woods,  
girding our golden planet with a sky  
accessible to Deities alone.  
Therefore, whenever thirst for bloodshed makes  
these mortal creatures one another fight  
or when to heavenly freedom they lift up  
unholy hosts of blood or for a price  
yield soul and sword to wrath of foreign kings  
or follow in ferocious enterprises  
a greedy tyrant eager to enchain  
innocent nations and oppress his own:

studio ammaestra: e quivi casti i balli,  
quivi son puri i canti, e senza brina  
i fiori e verdi i prati, ed aureo il giorno  
sempre, e stellate e limpide le notti.  
Chiamò d'intorno a sé le Dive, e a tutte  
compartì l'opre del promesso dono  
alle timide Grazie. Ognuna intenta  
agl'imperî correa: Pallade in mezzo  
con le azzurre pupille amabilmente  
signoreggiava il suo virgineo coro.  
Attenuando i rai aurei del sole,  
volgeano i fusi nitidi tre nude  
Ore, e del velo distendean l'ordito.  
Venner le Parche di purpurei pepli  
velate e il crin di quercia; e di più trame  
raggianti, adamantine, al par de l'etre  
e fluide e pervie e intatte mai da Morte,  
trame onde filan degli Dei la vita,  
le tre presàghe riempiean la spola.  
Né men dell'altre innamorata, all'opra  
Iri scese fra' Zefiri; e per l'alto  
le vaganti accogliea lucide nubi  
gareggianti di tinte, e sul telaio  
pioveale a Flora a effigiar quel velo;  
e più tinte assumean riso e fragranza  
e mille volti dalla man di Flora.  
E tu, Psiche, sedevi, e spesso in core,  
senz'aprir labbro, ridicendo: "Ahi, quante  
gioie promette, e manda pianto Amore!",  
raddensavi col pettine la tela.  
E allor faconde di Talia le corde,  
e Tersicore Dea, che a te dintorno  
fea tripudio di ballo e ti guardava,  
eran conforto a' tuoi pensieri e a l'opra.  
Correa limpido insiem d'Èrato il canto  
da que' suoni guidato; e come il canto  
Flora intendeva, e sì pingea con l'ago.  
Mesci, odorosa Dea, rosee le fila;  
e nel mezzo del velo ardita balli,  
canti fra 'l coro delle sue speranze  
Giovinezza: percote a spessi tocchi  
antico un plettro il Tempo; e la danzante  
discende un clivo onde nessun risale.  
Le Grazie a' piedi suoi destano fiori,  
a fiorir sue ghirlande: e quando il biondo

't is then, surrendering to Mars her Gorgons,  
Athena brandishes her father's spear  
whereby, preceding monarchs, she defends  
altars and laws, thus rendering a true  
and noble hero's triumph ever bright.  
Back to her island then Minerva runs,  
where many minor Goddesses, by Jove  
sent as dear pupils to her, she instructs  
in every gentle task: chaste dancing there  
is seen, chaste music heard; no frost offends  
ever the flowers or the verdant lawns;  
in golden sunshine the whole day remains  
with ever-limpid, ever-starry nights.

She bade her Goddesses around her come,  
and then assigned to all part of the work  
for the completion of the gift already  
promised to the shy Graces solemnly.  
Each, most attentive, to her bidding ran.  
Right in the middle, Pallas amiably  
over her virgins watched with chaste, blue eyes.

Spinning the golden sun, ray after ray,  
three naked Hours their lustrous spindles twirled,  
lengthening thus the texture of a veil.  
With oak-leaves aureoled, in purple clad,  
came the foreseeing Fates, and soon they filled  
the long-awaiting spool with threads as bright  
and varied and celestial as the sky,  
fluent and pervious yet Death-untouched –  
threads all the Gods employ when spinning life.  
No less enamored than the others, down  
came Iris with the Breezes to that toil:  
reaching for wandering, refulgent clouds  
with one another vying for new tints,  
she down to Flora rained them one by one,  
hers to depict the veil with; Flora's touch  
lent them new sheen and fragrance as they took  
on countless faces. And you, too, sat down,  
O Psyche, often saying in your heart,  
though uttering no sound, "O Love! O Love!  
You promise pleasure but give only tears,"  
and with a comb you thickened every thread  
while, comforting your work and all your thoughts,  
with eloquence Thalia plucked her chords  
and heavenly Terpsichore, enrapt,  
in boundless jubilation danced about you.

crin t'abbandoni e perderai 'l tuo nome,  
vivran que' fiori, o Giovinezza, e intorno  
l'urna funerea spireranno odore.  
Or mesci, amabil Dea, nivee le fila;  
e ad un lato del velo Espero sorga  
dal lavor di tue dita; escono errando  
fra l'ombre e i raggi fuor d'un mirteo bosco  
due tortorelle mormorando ai baci;  
mirale occulto un rosignuol, e ascolta  
silenzioso, e poi canta imenei:  
fuggono quelle vereconde al bosco.  
Mesci, madre dei fior, lauri alle fila;  
e sul contrario lato erri co' specchi  
dell'alba il sogno; e mandi a le pupille  
sopite del guerrier miseri i volti  
de la madre e del padre allor che all'are  
recan lagrime e voti; e quei si desta,  
e i prigionieri suoi guarda e sospira.  
Mesci, o Flora gentile, oro alle fila;  
e il destro lembo istoriato esulti  
d'un festante convito: il Genio in volta  
prime coroni agli esuli le tazze.  
Or libera è la gioia, ilare il biasmo,  
e candida è la lode. A parte siede  
bello il Silenzio arguto in viso e accenna  
che non volino i detti oltre le soglie.  
Mesci cerulee, Dea, mesci le fila;  
e pinta il lembo estremo abbia una donna  
che con l'ombre e i silenzi unica veglia;  
nutre una lampa su la culla, e teme  
non i vagiti del suo primo infante  
sien presagi di morte; e in quell'errore  
non manda a tutto il cielo altro che pianti.  
Beata! ancor non sa quanto agl'infanti  
provido è il sonno eterno, e que' vagiti  
presagi son di dolorosa vita.  
Come d'Èrato al canto ebbe perfetti  
Flora i trapunti, ghirlandò l'Aurora  
gli aerei fluttuanti orli del velo  
d'ignote rose a noi; sol la fragranza,  
se vicino è un Iddio, scende alla terra.  
E fra l'altre immortali ultima venne  
rugiadosa la bionda Ebe, costretti  
in mille nodi fra le perle i crini,  
silenziosa, e l'anfora converse:

Escorted by those sounds, Erato's song  
soared limpid in the air, and with her needle  
Flora depicted what the singing meant.

Weave, fragrant Goddess, weave now rosy threads,  
and, painted in the middle of the veil,  
let ever-daring, ever-dancing Youth  
join in the singing chorus of her hopes.  
Time oft and dully strikes his ancient lyre  
while down a hill that no one climbs again  
the dancing maiden's coming. At her feet  
the Graces waken blossoms, that she may  
replenish all her garlands happily.  
Oh, when your hair will lose its golden glow,  
and you, sweet Youth, will lose your very name,  
living and living still, those very flowers  
around a tomb will shed their final scent.  
Now, lovely Goddess, weave snow-dazzling threads,  
and from your fingers' effort let at once  
Hesperus on the veil's right side arise:  
through rays and shadows out of myrtle trees  
murmuring turtle-doves come forth to kiss;  
unseen, a nightingale sees them, instead,  
listens in silence and then sings of love:  
bashful, into the forest back they flee.  
Mother of wreaths, weave laurel leaves with hreads,  
and let Dream linger on the veil's left side  
with Dawn's own mirrors, flashing on the weary  
eyes of a sleeping warrior the grieving  
images of a mother and a father  
offering at the altar vows and tears:  
suddenly he awakes and with a sigh  
looks at poor prisoners he still must guard.

Weave, gentle Flora, gold along with threads,  
and let the painted right side now exult  
with a most joyous banquet: fast about,  
let Genius crown the exiles' goblets first.  
Now free is all the joy, cheerful the blame,  
and genuine the praise. There in a corner  
beautiful Silence sits alone and stares,  
wittily warning all to keep their words  
under the secret safety of the roof.  
Weave, Goddess, now, weave now cerulean threads,  
and let the painted left side now reveal  
a woman in the darkness still awake:  
holding a lamp over a cradle lit,

e dell'altre la vaga opra fatale  
 rorò d'ambrosia; e fu quel velo eterno.  
 Poi su le tre di Citerea Gemelle  
 tutte le Dive il diffondeano; ed elle  
 fra le fiamme d'amore invano intatte  
 a rallegrar la terra; e si velate  
 apparian come pria vergini nude.

.....

E il velo delle Dee manda improvviso  
 un suon, qual di lontana arpa, che scorre  
 sopra i vanni de' Zeffiri soave;  
 qual venia dall'Egeo per l'isolette  
 un'ignota armonia, poi che al reciso  
 capo e al bel crin d'Orfeo la vaga lira  
 annodaro scagliandola nell'onde  
 le delire Baccanti; e sospirando  
 con l'Ionio propinquo il sacro Egeo  
 quell'armonia serbava, e l'isolette  
 stupefatte l'udiro e i continenti.

.....

Addio, Grazie: son vostri, e non verranno  
 soli quest'inni a voi, né il vago rito  
 obblieremo di Firenze ai poggi  
 quando ritorni April. L'arpa dorata  
 di novello concento adoreranno,  
 disegneran più amabili carole  
 e più beato manderanno il carme  
 le tre avvenenti ancelle vostre all'ara:  
 e il fonte, e la frondosa ara e i cipressi,  
 e i serti e i favi vi fien sacri, e i cigni  
 votivi, e allegri i giovanili canti  
 e i sospir delle Ninfe. Intanto, o belle  
 o dell'arcano vergini custodi  
 celesti, un voto del mio core udite.  
 Date candidi giorni a lei che sola,  
 da che più lieti mi fioriano gli anni,  
 m'arse divina d'immortale amore.  
 Sola vive al cor mio cura soave,  
 sola e secreta spargerà le chiome  
 sopra il sepolcro mio, quando lontano  
 non prescrivano i fati anche il sepolcro.  
 Vaga e felice i balli e le fanciulle  
 di nera treccia insigni e di sen colmo,  
 sul molle clivo di Brianza un giorno  
 guidar la vidi; oggi le vesti allegre



her dear first infant's wailings she mistakes  
for presages of death, and in that error  
sends nothing but her weeping to the sky.  
Blessèd is she, who has not yet been told  
that infants would prefer eternal sleep,  
and that their cries bespeak a life of woe.

As Flora at the song of Erato  
perfected her embroidery, bright Dawn  
wreathed the whole veil's soft-waving, airy hems  
with roses we know not — whose scent alone,  
only if God is near, can reach the earth.  
And, last of all immortal Goddesses,  
blonde Hebe full of dew descended there:  
her hair held fast by myriads of pearls,  
she emptied the whole amphora she brought  
and, silent still, with sweet ambrosia sprinkled  
the fated, famous toil of all the other  
Divinities: that veil eternal grew.

Finally all the Goddesses displayed  
before the Graces the whole wondrous work;  
in Love's high flames in the meantime unscorched,  
around they wandered to cheer up the earth  
and, though so veiled, bare virgins were they still.

The holy veil gives out a sudden sound  
as of a distant harp most dearly borne  
on Zephyrs' wings: in such a guise, one day,  
throughout the isles of the Aegean Sea  
an unknown harmony was faintly heard  
after the fierce Bacchantes bound the lyre  
that once was Orpheus' to his handsome hair  
sad plunged it down into the flowing waves:  
sighing together with the near Ionian,  
instantly the Aegean's holy tide  
echoed that melody till every isle  
and Continent was full of all its awe.

Graces, farewell. Our festive hymns are yours,  
but you will have much more lest we forget  
upon the hills of Florence this sweet rite  
when April's here again. Your three enchanting  
maidens around the altar will adorn  
the golden harp with still a modern sound;  
still more delightful dances will they weave,  
and a more blissful song raise to you still.  
Spring, leafy altar, votive swan and wreath,  
dark cypress trees and golden honeycombs,

obliò lenta e il suo vedovo coro.  
E se alla Luna e all'etere stellato  
più azzurro il scintillante Eupili ondeggia,  
il guarda avvolta in lungo velo, e plora  
col rosignuol, finché l'Aurora il chiami  
a men soave tacito lamento.  
A lei da presso il piè volgete, o Grazie,  
e nel mirarvi, o Dee, tornino i grandi  
occhi fatali al lor natio sorriso.

youngsters' glad hynms and nymphs' amorous sighs –  
may all this be most sacred unto you.  
Listen meanwhile, O fair, celestial guardians  
of the mysterious deep, to this my prayer.  
Give days of calmness to the only one  
who, since my years in greater gladness bloomed,  
divinely burned me with immortal love.  
Alone she lives, dear burden to my heart,  
just as alone and dear she will unbind  
her tresses on my sepulcher unless  
Fate also sets my tomb out of man's reach.  
One day I saw her, beautiful and blest,  
on the sweet hillock of Brianza lead  
dark-haired, full-breasted maidens to the dance;  
today, instead, she has forsaken all  
her cheerful dresses and her girls' lament.  
And if with bluer light the Eupili  
shines to the Moon and to the starry air,  
clad in long raiments, she still looks at him,  
and with the nightingale still sadly weeps  
till Dawn recalls him to a lesser grief.  
Graces, come down and walk along with her,  
and while, O Goddesses, she looks at you,  
let her big, fatal eyes return at once  
to the familiar beauty of their smile.



***Book Reviews***

Simonetta Agnello Hornby. *The Almond Picker*. Translated by Alastair McEwen. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005. Pp. x + 315.

With his translation of the novel *La mennulara* (published by Feltrinelli in 2002), Alastair McEwen gives English speakers the chance to experience an enticing slice of life in Sicily in the 1960s. Taking place over just one month in the small hill town of Roccacolomba, *The Almond Picker* offers a prismatic portrait of Maria Rosalia Inzerillo through the reactions of numerous townspeople as they learn of her death. Known as “la mennulara,” (Sicilian for almond picker), Inzerillo was the domestic of a wealthy family, in addition to being a mysterious figure around town. Rumors regarding her true nature run the gamut, from an illiterate and insubordinate servant to the lover of her boss, to a drug smuggler with ties to the mafia. Everyone in town seems to know only a small piece of the story - if that much - and no one can see beyond their own noses to the truth. Each character adds another piece to the narrative puzzle until the surprising truth is revealed. With this - her debut novel - Hornby has produced an intriguing story full of colorful characters, one that surely merits comparison with some of her Sicilian literary predecessors, namely Verga and De Roberto.

Simonetta Agnello Hornby was born in Sicily but has lived in London for over 30 years and therefore makes a nod to her new home in the dedication of the translation, which is quite different from that of the original. The Italian version is simply “alla British Airways,” whereas the translation is dedicated as follows: “I owe the ‘illumination’ that led me to this novel to a delay in the Palermo-London flight of 2 September 2000. For this reason - and perhaps also for the aerial link that permits me to keep up the connections with both my countries - British Airways has a special place in this book.” This same text appears in the back of the Italian version, included among the acknowledgements, but in the English version it is placed at the very front of the book, so that Hornby may reach out to her British readers (the translation was also published in the United Kingdom by Viking in 2005) and establish a personal relationship with them, drawing them into the intimate setting of the story as well.

Indeed, McEwen’s translation reflects his own British usage and the result is a very appropriate European feel to the language. Overall, the reader does not get the sense of reading a translation, but of a British novel written some forty years ago. There is no question that McEwen - whose other translations include numerous works by Umberto Eco, as well Tabucchi, Veronesi, and Baricco - is an accomplished translator who has mastered George Steiner’s concept of hermeneutic motion in translation (*After Babel* [Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998]). In this work, McEwen has gone beyond Steiner’s first three stages of *trust*, *aggression* and *incorporation* to the final stage, *restitution*. That is to say that he allows the beauty and character of the original language to show through in the translation,

rather than providing a sterile version in which the original language is assimilated into the language of the translation, thereby disappearing completely. This is no easy feat with *The Almond Picker*, because McEwen must actually acknowledge the linguistic variation between Italian and the Sicilian dialect spoken by many characters in the novel, including Mennulara herself. This task was made somewhat easier for him by the author, who chose not to include too much Sicilian dialogue. The use of Sicilian is referred to more often than it is actually included, but the differences between the two languages are very important from a sociolinguistic standpoint – Italian is the refined language of the upper class in Sicily at the time, whereas Sicilian is the rough speech of the uneducated and the illiterate, like Mennulara. An interesting example of this distinction appears on page 200 of the translation:

“You’re right: it’s not easy to explain her. There’s no doubt that she was remarkably intelligent and she had even acquired a degree of learning: a complex woman. At home we used to laugh at her secrecy. My father, who in the carabinieri, would say that if she had been born a man she would have become a mafia boss; he said she was a *fimmina di panza*, a woman who could keep her mouth shut.’

Gerlando Mancuso spoke the gentle Italian of the mainland, with a French *r*, but he pronounced the Sicilian expression perfectly. Gian Maria pointed this out tactfully. ‘Unfortunately, we were born and brought up in the north. I have never been in Sicily, but we kept up the dialect to communicate with Aunt Rosalia, who stubbornly refused to speak Italian. I think she was ashamed of her lack of education and her limited knowledge of etiquette.’ Again Mancuso feared that he had spoken out of turn, giving the impression that a Sicilian accent was unusual, and turning to Lilla he added, ‘If I may say so, signora Bolla, your Sicilian accent shows through delightfully in your perfect Italian.’”

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Lucio Mariani. *Echoes of Memory: Selected Poems of Lucio Mariani*. Bilingual Edition. Translated by Anthony Molino. Middletown (CT): Wesleyan University Press, 2003. Pp. 118.

*Echoes of Memory* includes an introductory translator’s note, as well as an afterword by Thomas Harrison. The text offers the reader the original Italian with a facing English translation. When possible, I find, it is always best to include the original language, along with the target lan-

guage. This becomes especially important with Mariani's poetry, for his linguistic richness and his use of mythologies (old and new), when contrasted with the English-language rendition, make for an exceptional exercise in the whole process of translation, which entails more than just conversion from one lexical term to its equivalent in another language.. Because Mariani's cultural and historical references might escape the non-Italian, Molino has rightly chosen to include a list of brief notes at the end of the volume. One, however, could argue that his gloss is inconsistent in its intent. For example, he includes an explanation of the city of Elea (in the poem "Ombre dei martiri"), but does not mention the other city cited along with it, Miletus. For that matter, if Elea needs a brief note, should not the mention of the Cimmerians (in "Ephesus") merit one, as well?

Molino's endeavor, at any rate, is commendable. After all, Mariani's poetry speaks as much of antiquity as it does of contemporary society, and is therefore replete with archaic terms as much as with unusual coinages that reflect a man comfortable in moving between the two worlds. The translator is forced to accommodate a whole range of polysemous expressions, all the while paying mind to structures that equally betray Mariani's dual allegiances. In his afterword, Harrison notes Mariani's "remoteness," which "is harbored in time and culture. It calls for archaeological excavation, a critique of tradition. Like *Janus bifrons*, Mariani the Roman has double vision, looking forward and backward" (p. 111). I would argue further that Mariani is organic and yet isolated, like a man alone on a cold planet (somewhere) making connections with humanity through memories of even the most banal detail as well as through classical allusions. For, what is an allusion but an 'echo of memory'. For this reason, I wonder if Mariani could be likened to Quasimodo in his own time; the Quasimodo of *Acque e terre*, of *Erato e Apollion*. Generally speaking, Mariani's verses are difficult and reveal a sort of hermetic quality (though not necessarily in the political sense) of a Quasimodo or a Montale. However, occasionally his sensibility for post-modern affect reveals itself in lines of utter nonsense like: "Per lui / l'amo talvolta e l'ancora comunque / son superfetazioni" ("For him, / the hook, at times, and the anchor / always, are superfetations.").

Judging the quality of Molino's translations is another matter. He values fidelity to structure, verse length and nuance. For example, in "Alfabeti della resa" ("Alphabets of Surrender"), Molino offers a clever solution for imitating Mariani's anaphora in the original. "Piú voci" ("Several Voices") serves as an example of attention to verse length: where Mariani had left "sento" on a line of its own (without the optional subject pronoun, "io"), Molino chose to mirror this in the English, even at the risk of seeming grammatically awkward, with "felt." His insistence works to instill the same sense of quiet obliviousness 'felt' in pondering the "workings of silence." (This remains consistent with Molino's ability to handle verbal phrases quite well.) In terms of lexicon, Molino chooses to keep the



more obscure terms like “caique” and “meltemi” (for “caicco” and “meltemi,” respectively) in his poem “Mikonos,” rather than opting for more accessible, if not less accurate, terminologies for the corresponding boat and wind. In the same poem, he also recognizes the limits of the translator as he avoids a rendition of “lagartiglie”; instead, he shifts the untranslatable modulation of “lizards” into the adjective, opting for “brownish” in place of ‘brown’ for “brune.” In “Morte di cane” (“Dog’s Death”), though “whimsy” is not a direct equivalent of “allegria,” Molino elects the word so that it will form an alliteration with “war” to mirror that found in Mariani’s “allegria e guerra.” But this attention, even fidelity, to detail is quite irregularly applied.

One drawback of Molino’s translations figures as the general drawback of all translators. At times, reticent to reduce their own value, translators highlight themselves instead of the original writer’s intent. That is, if the equivalence of the languages facilitates the translation as a natural, logical transfer from original to target, a translator almost feels obligated to impede that flow; even when a perfectly good equivalent exists a variant will be chosen. In one case, perhaps Molino does it for the sake of euphony or realism, rendering the ‘I’ in “e io là nello stesso abbandono / del cane grattato” with the ‘me’ in “and me, mellow as a dog / whose back has been stroked.” He renders “platano” first as “sycamore” in “Vienna 29 febbraio” and then as merely “tree” in “Faire part.” Why use two options, none of which is the plane-tree? One might question the failure to include an equivalent of “magistero” in the line “per magistero naturale” from “Odisseide”; in the English, this expression becomes “by its very nature.” Why not include an approximation of “magistero?” Why insist on “brier” for “tralcio” in “L’eternità” when Molino had proven his mettle with more difficult vocabulary? This may be all well and good, but in other cases, avoiding the direct equivalent changes the meaning, causing the reader to miss a potential thematic connection. When, in “Lettera” (“Letter”), Molino translates the “songino” as “blackberry” instead of as the valerian plant, or the setwall, he was not simply replacing the name of a plant which would have seemed obscure to English speakers with a more well-known one. For in the same poem the “tiglio” (linden tree) appears four lines later. The fact that both plants are known for their causing sleepiness is missed because the first term was changed to a different plant, and the linden tree was altogether changed to simply “berries” – an aspect of many a non-specific plant. Again, in “Miele” (“Honey”), Molino inexplicably avoids an ‘easy’ equivalent. For “sciarra ignobile” he writes “muck and mayhem.” Nothing of the moist, organic nature of muck is found in “sciarra” (admittedly, an uncommon term, but one for which “mayhem” seemed appropriate enough). Yet, many of these examples can be understandable, for often as a translator works his craft, a new work emerges. There must have been something in the integral text that allowed for this insight in Molino’s interpretation/translation. What is less excus-

able, however, is a complete misreading or misunderstanding of the text. In “Verso un concerto in Val d’Orcia” (“Concert-going, Orcia Valley”), we find such a case. Molino, perhaps in haste, translated “al tessere dei merli e delle bigie” as “In a weave of blackbirds and chariots.” He has mistaken barred warblers for chariots. No doubt the similarity of “bigie” (warblers, *sylvia nisoria*) to “bighe” (chariots) was heightened by the reference to “legendary battle” in the successive line.

Weighed in the whole of the work, however, it will be up to a reader to decide if these are slight matters or heavy ones. But these examples which I have just cited are few and far between in the course of Molino’s work. His translations, overall, are more than adequate. In fact, as I have already noted, the fact that he even attempted to transcribe Mariani into English speaks volumes on his confidence and range in Italian. If one were to be dissuaded from reading Molino’s translations based on these few objective criticisms of some of the linguistic inconsistencies found within them, one would be missing an important voice in Italian poetry; a voice which reminds us that in every line we write, we are old and new, constantly re-evaluating the power of rhetoric. In this sense, Mariani reminds us to avoid surrendering to the codifications of language in his “Alphabets of Surrender”: “salvo un grave allarme che detta nuovi alfabeti della resa / e fa piangere a ognuno il suo poema” (“If not for the grave alarm that sounds new alphabets of surrender / And prompts each of us to cry the poem that is ours alone.”).

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Dante, Alighieri. *Inferno*. Trans. Robert Hollander and Jean Hollander, intro., and notes Robert Hollander. New York: Doubleday, 2000.

Dante, Alighieri. *Purgatorio*. Trans. Robert Hollander and Jean Hollander, intro., and notes Robert Hollander. New York: Doubleday, 2003.

Translation is a challenging and complex enterprise often resulting in failure. Even the most excellent effort, at best, accurately approximates the communicative power and beauty of the original. In an attempt to find the right balance between rhyme and tone, sense and syntax, too often the translator sacrifices one for the sake of the other. In the case of the “poema sacro”, Dante’s *Commedia*, the challenges and complexities are compounded by its intricate form, “terza rima” and polymorphic sense.

Given the fact that so many will only know Dante in English, the choice of translation is most crucial. The decision of which translation to choose is further complicated by the fact that through the years, several fine translations have surfaced. John Sinclair’s (1939), Robert Durling’s (1996), and Charles Singleton’s (1970) prose versions are well-recognized standards. The list of verse translations is a longer one and includes those by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1867), John Ciardi (1954), Robert

Pinskey (1994), Mark Musa (1995), Allen Mandelbaum (1980), Michael Palma, and the one presently under review, Robert Hollander and Jean Hollander's, *Inferno* (2000), *Purgatorio* (2003).

The collaborative effort of a renowned Dante scholar, Robert Hollander, and poet, Jean Hollander, this new verse translation with facing-page Italian text, is a crisp, clear, and graceful rendition of the first two canticles of Dante's masterpiece. With an original intent to "clean up" John D. Sinclair's prose translation of its archaism, the end result is a harmonious balance between sense and syntax, accuracy and poetry, a synthesis between scholarship and grace. Without pretense of replicating the Italian original, the Hollanders unveil Dante to the English speaking reader with the least amount of distortion possible, thus, their use of free verse. Remaining faithful both to the sense and feeling of the original, without compromising the naturalness of English syntax, the translation accomplishes the not so easy task of rendering the vitality, force and briskness of Dante's idiom, while avoiding forced poetry, dismissing such expressions as, "the good master said." A few examples from *Inferno* and *Purgatorio* will serve to convey the clarity and poetic beauty of this translation.

Hollanders' faultless and emphatic "wretchedness" (*miseria*) fully captures Francesca's moral tragic pathos as she recalls happier times: "...There is no greater sorrow/than to recall our time of joy/ in wretchedness- and this your teacher knows." (*Inferno* 5, 121-123). Compare Longfellow's less pregnant "misery", and archaic "thy Teacher": "...There is no greater sorrow/Than to be mindful of the happy time/ In misery, and that thy Teacher knows", and Ciardi's feeble "pain" and more obscure "double grief" "The double grief of a lost bliss/ is to recall its happy hour in pain."

Farinata's majestic pride in *Inferno* X is succinctly exposed with Hollanders' choice of "utter scorn" (*gran dispetto*), "chest" (*petto*), "brow" (*fronte*), also depicting a clear image of the deliberate and composed movement of his rising torso, "was rising" for (*s'ergea*): "And he was rising, lifting chest and brow/ as though he held all Hell in utter scorn." Here again, Longfellow resorts to a more antiquated "despite" "uprose", and rhetorical "breast" "front." Ciardi's less weighty "disrespect" diminishes the sense, requiring him to add "great chest great brow" so as to convey the depth of Farinata's pride, just as his less accurate "he rose" leads him to add "above the flame." Other such examples are also found in *Purgatorio*.

In *Purgatorio* XXX, 139-141, Hollander accurately renders the sense of the Italian text without sacrificing poetry. Beatrice's depth of love and commitment are clearly conveyed as she recounts for the angels her descent to Limbo for the sake of Dante's salvation: "And so I visited the threshold of the dead/ and, weeping, offered up my prayers to the one who has conducted him this far." Compare the Italian, "Per questo visitai l'uscio d'i morti,/e a colui che l'ha qua su' condotto,/ li preghi miei, piangendo, furon porti." Conciseness and naturalness of sound are

achieved with: “And so” “Per questo”, “threshold” “l’uscio”, and “to the one who has conducted him this far” “e a colui che l’ha qua su’ condotto.” For the same *terzina*, Singleton uses the less accurate “gate” and medieval “hither”, while Mandelbaum chooses “gateway”, and gives a rather unclear if not awkward rendition: “..to him who guided him above/my prayers were offered, even as I wept.”

It is my hope that the above examples have sufficed to convince the prospective reader of the great merits of this translation. In addition to clarity, precision, and eloquence, it also offers an informative introduction, canto outlines, and in-depth notes, drawn from Robert Hollander’s many years of scholarship and teaching. The Hollanders’ translation is a true work of mastery, a gift of poetry offered in a spirit of grace to novices and professionals alike.

We anxiously await the Hollanders’ translation of *Paradiso*—Robert Hollander is presently completing the commentary to the third canticle.

#### FINA MODESTO

***Humanism and secularization from Petrarch to Valla***, by Riccardo Fubini. Translated by Martha King. Durham: Duke University Press, 2003, pp. viii + 306.

Riccardo Fubini, professor of Renaissance History at the University of Florence, has authored several fundamental studies on Italian Humanism. This volume, first published in Rome in 1990 and originally entitled *Umanesimo e secolarizzazione da Petrarca a Valla*, serves as a collection of essays on Italian Humanism, almost all of which had been previously published in journals and symposia proceedings between 1966 and 1987. Although composed of individual essays, this is, without doubt, a coherently argued book. Dedicated to writers of great stature such as Petrarca, Poggio Bracciolini, Lorenzo Valla, Flavio Biondo and Leonardo Bruni, this volume concentrates on a unique topic of research which Fubini defines as the following: “My primary aim is to identify an ideological movement that develops out of Petrarch’s work and that is given its most precise and structured configuration by the aforementioned authors of the first half of the fifteenth century” (p. 1).

The movement analyzed by Fubini is not Humanism in its entirety, but, rather, only a part of it: “I have not intended to propose a paradigm of humanism in my discussion of the humanist movement from Petrarch to Valla; indeed quite the opposite. Existing simultaneously and in competition is a patristic humanism that finds its most authoritative voice in Ambrogio Traversari, as well as a genuine expression in the letters of Francesco Pizolpasso” (p. 7). In particular, Fubini is strongly interested in defining the intellectual movement that, in the first half of the fifteenth century proposed and defended a secular model of culture. The Italian

historian states very clearly that the secularization of culture defended by Bruni, Bracciolini and Valla must not be interpreted as a condemnation of religion, but rather as a criticism of the principle of authority dogmatically imposed by the Church and by its cultural institutions. According to Fubini, secularization consists both in a strong reaction, begun with Petrarch, against the late-medieval Aristotelism and in a criticism of the medieval Christian tradition and its rigid scholastic method: "Such insistence on Petrarch's influence also requires the explanation of an important term in the title of this collection, that is, the concept of "secularization". This term is not intended to denote any kind of an all-embracing *Weltanschauung*. Still less is it to be understood as the opposite of "religiousness," even though in the sphere of secularized culture religious devotion seems weakened and at times even absent. This investigation is not concerned with religious sentiments (or even with those irreligious), but rather with indirect cultural aspects. The opposite of "secularization," as it is defined here, would be "prescriptive," to be understood in the sense of a culture that obeys canons established by the common agreement of ecclesiastical, ethical, and educational institutions" (pp. 2-3).

In other words, *Humanism and Secularization from Petrarch to Valla* describes and documents the rise of "an avant-garde culture, establishing itself outside a definite institutional base, conscious of its separate existence and marked by the refusal of age-old scholastic and ecclesiastical traditions" (p. 44). Each of the five essays in the English version (which, as we will see, is different from the Italian edition) is devoted to a particular episode that represents a significant moment of discussion of the idea of authority. In the first chapter "Consciousness of the Latin Language among Humanists. *Did the Romans Speak Latin?*", the debate between Leonardo Bruni and Flavio Biondo on the true nature of Latin spoken and written in ancient Rome shows that the humanists had a pragmatic idea of language that was opposed to the grammatical and rhetorical categorizations of the scholastic tradition. The second chapter ("Humanist Intentions and Patristic References. *Some Thoughts on the Moral Writings of the Humanists*") is devoted to the innovative use of classical authors and of the Church Fathers' writings shown in the works of Petrarch, Bruni, Bracciolini and Valla. Chapters Three and Four are on Poggio Bracciolini's production ("Poggio Bracciolini and San Bernardino. *The Themes and Motives of a Polemic*"; "The Theater of the World in the Moral and Historical Thought of Poggio Bracciolini"). In the first essay, Fubini analyzes the individualism of Poggio and his polemic – witnessed in the dialogue *De Avaritia* – against the rigid morality of the Observant movement and, in particular, against the teaching of the Franciscan Observant preacher Bernardino da Siena. In the second essay, Fubini composes a complex and articulate portrait of Bracciolini and his literary and historical production, with special attention paid to the dialogue *De variegata fortuna*. The last chapter "An Analysis of Lorenzo Valla" *De Voluptate. His Sojourn in Pavia and the Composition of the Dia-*

logue”) describes the history of the composition of the famous *De voluptate* and its “ideological dissidence” (p. 172).

In this volume, Fubini not only shows his encyclopedic knowledge, but he also distinguishes himself for the profound analysis of the complex cultural phenomenon that was Humanism, and provides us with an important lesson of critical methodology.

The translation is very clear and precise despite the complexity of the original characterized by an evident preference for digressions as well as for long and articulated sentences. It is noteworthy that all the quotations have been translated into English (while instead, in the original edition, they remain in Latin). Thanks to this precious translation (enriched also by numerous bibliographical updates), Fubini’s fascinating and seminal work is now available for a broader public, and not restricted to Italian readers. Moreover, it is unfortunate that the English edition does not reproduce exactly the Italian volume in which there are several chapters and appendixes that have not been translated. For the sake of precision, the missing chapters are as follows: the section entitled “La coscienza del latino. Postscriptum”, in which Fubini wrote a fundamental discussion of Mirko Tavoni’s volume, *Latino, grammatica, volgare. Storia di una questione*, (1984); the chapter “Tra umanesimo e concili. L’epistolario di Francesco Pizolpasso” and the “Appendice” in which Fubini published important letters between the humanists Pier Candido Decembrio and Nicola di Acciapaccia; a very short “Appendice” to the aforementioned chapter “The Theater of the World in the Moral and Historical Thought of Poggio Bracciolini” in which an unpublished version of Poggio’s proem to the *Istorie fiorentine* is presented; lastly, the chapter “L’orazione di Poggio Bracciolini a Costanza sui vizi del clero (1917). Premessa e testo”.

I hope that this book will be followed by translations of other essays published in Italy and yet still little known in America beyond a restricted group of specialists. I am not only thinking about the other fundamental volumes by Riccardo Fubini (*Italia quattrocentesca. Politica e diplomazia nell’età di Lorenzo il Magnifico*, Milano 1994; *L’umanesimo italiano e i suoi storici. Origini rinascimentali-critica moderna*, Milano 2001; *Storiografia dell’Umanesimo in Italia da Leonardo Bruni ad Annio da Viterbo*, Roma 2003), but am also referring to the groundbreaking studies of Italian scholars such as Mario Martelli (*Angelo Poliziano. Storia e metastoria*, Lecce, 1995 e *Letteratura fiorentina del Quattrocento. Il filtro degli anni sessanta*, Firenze, 1996), and Francesco Bausi (*Machiavelli*, Roma, 2005).

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1. During this period of time, Fubini also published the editions of Voltaire’s works (1964) and Poggio Bracciolini’s writings (1964-69). He also edited the first two volumes of the monumental edition of the epistolary of Lorenzo dei Medici (1977)..

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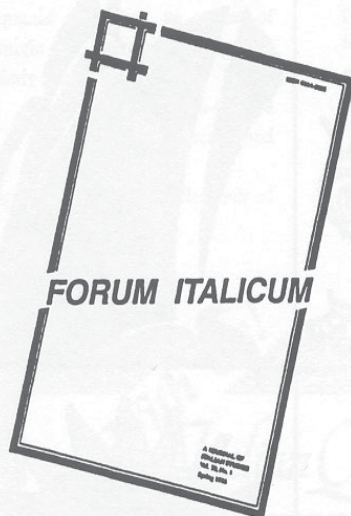
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