

ALBINO PIERRO

SELECTED POEMS

TRANSLATED BY LUIGI BONAFFINI



GUERNICA

Selected Poems of Albino Pierro

Edited and translated by Luigi Bonaffini

Introduction by Giuseppe Jovine

I dedicate this translation to Christopher, Matthew, Emily and Maggie

THE POETRY OF ALBINO PIERRO

Albino Pierro's work has been probed and dissected by a great many critics, perhaps too many, as someone has rightly or wrongly suggested, and at frequent intervals by each individual critic, often conditioned and perhaps irritated by the risk of repeating himself. At any rate, an author with a complex personality, changeable through sudden, unpredictably shifts, can lend himself to the most sophisticated and highly disputable interpretations, and he can consequently generate a great deal of interest in the host of exegetists. Obviously, there is a strict and direct relationship between Pierro's poetic and human personality and Lucania's composite historical and social reality, characterized by the long and tortuous evolutionary and involutory processes of classes molecularly fragmented into categories not always classifiable in a precise and stable ethnic indexing, though groupable, as a general rule, into hegemonic and subaltern sectors. It often happens that poets want to be extrapolated from their historical and environmental context, as if poetry lived without roots, with a mysterious finality, or as if in the poet's action there came into play, as Sinisgalli¹ wrote, only mysterious, incommensurable charges of energy, that live for an instant and are consumed in a flash. There is also this incommensurable element behind each poetic process, but Sinisgalli's imaginary entity that generates the dynamics of the verse, which Sinisgalli himself indicated as J in the pair a+b, letters indicating real entities, comes into play in the tangle of well-defined human events and, in the case in point, of the man from the South, the man from Lucania who suffers and pines away, hopes and despairs, feels pain but joy as well.

Neither Sinisgalli, Scotellaro or Pierro could be explained without the dialectic relationship between "hegemonic" civilization and "subaltern" peasant civilization. When in 1965 I wrote in an essay² that Pierro's cultural history is the cultural history of the Italian bourgeoisie with a catholic-idealistic background, tinged with that quick-change, evangelical, Enlightenment-Romantic populism, which has always produced the politics of social inequalities that the people of Lucania still lament today, it wasn't a pretentious foray into sociological or abstractly ideological terrain, but substantially I was anticipating what others have subsequently argued; what Piromalli, for instance, reiterated in his 1981 essay on Albino Pierro³.

By virtue of those very same, apparently contradictory cultural experiences inherent to the poet's bourgeois psychology, a synthesis took place, a going beyond class which has permitted Pierro to construct a credible poetic world, supported by the

dialectics of precise relationships, real and ideal. For this reason, one should definitely consider drastic Giuliano Manacorda's⁴ judgment, whose assumption is that Pierro's spiritual drama – which in my opinion stems from the contradiction, discovered by Pasolini in other southern poets, between a historicistic objectivization of reality, based on Gramsci's formula of a popular-national literature, and an individual religious introversion – “remains in decadent fashion a violent individual spasm without widening into a consideration of the entire history of man.”

It might even be true that Gramsci's polemic is extraneous to Pierro's world, but one can still document the poet's objective and involved encounter with peasant reality, seen as a precise historical reality, with its own liberating and challenging values, and his attempt to preserve and reestablish traditional human values, recoverable within the scope of a regressive and alienating consumer society. Pierro's return to origins is guided by the intent to reconstruct his own biography, in order to better understand the nature and the sense of a poetic vocation and better define the essential moments of his human history.

Pierro retraces those moments, both in Italian and dialect, with the same register, the same rhythm of the imagination, on the wave of an analogous *andante* of anguished Lucan “blues,” grounded on the antinomies of reasoning delirium and the lyrical evocation of the past, of the obsessive and appeasing sense of life and death. Rather than speaking of a deliberate choice of an expressive medium more attuned to human substance, capable of guaranteeing poetic results superior to those attained in Italian, as does Fernando Figurelli⁵, I would prefer to speak of attempts to search for linguistic equivalencies in dialect, if for no other reason than not to lose sight of the achievements of the poetry in Italian with “Return,” for example, or “Crime at Frascarossa,” and so many other poignant and convincing poems, that reveal the poet's bent, his skill in extracting from language singular possibilities of evocation and expression. The poet himself gives us a hand in our attempt to explain the reasons for the sudden “eruption” of this new poetic voice, without precedent in Lucania's dialect tradition. The first poem in the dialect of Tursi, “Before Leaving,” Pierro tells us, was written non-stop the evening of September 23, 1959; the poet had just returned to Rome from his native town. The early departure, sadder than usual, had exasperated in him the longing for the land he had left reluctantly behind. That first creative “exploit” was followed by an “eruption” of dialect poetry, that issued from his soul, in the poet's words, in a natural stream, as oil gushes from the depths of the earth.

The last 25 “Unpublished Poems” in Italian, added as an appendix to the 1967 “Meeting,” are an introductory assortment of the motifs which will be developed in the subsequent dialect production: the world that vanishes and becomes sweet song, the moon and the coolness of the countryside and the town dreamed in Rome, alienating

city of painful exile, the longing to return to his roots, the search for the comfort of friendly meetings and warm human presences, finally love sung with the voice of one “inebriated by weeping” and feels death close by and a companion to him.

Southernness and magic, Orphic magic, in the actual sense of an aesthetic operation aimed at freeing the spirit with song and asceticism, are the limits within which Pierro insists on wasting away, on ripping his chest open like a pelican, with his natural instinct for self-destruction and rebirth. Death, as Carlo Levi⁶ aptly says, is Pierro’s fundamental theme, but the poet’s gloomy chords are “thanatological counterpoints,” as Pizzuto writes, to the song of life, striving to celebrate the co-presence of the living and the dead in human history; a co-presence which is felt as a real fact, a natural alternation of the modes of being of the human species. This pattern of relationship with one’s dead turns every southerner into a natural minstrel of death, an amusing and mournful mediator between being and non-being, or rather, between the manner of being of the living and the manner of being of the dead. This is why in Pierro, closely bound to his land, nourished with all the juices, with all the humors of southern tradition and culture, characters and things seem to issue from everyday reality and from the subconscious like magical, unreal forms, at times hallucinatory, frightening as in a painting by Bosch or Delvaux or tenderly childlike as in a Cinquecento painting by Starnina, for example, where unpredictable friars peep like elves from the windows of implausible hovels or remain perched on crags or under dwarfish trees, laid down upon the earth rather than planted, as can be seen in the Umbrian or Tuscan countryside, or in the fields around Orvieto or Assisi.

Listen to how Pierro captures a funeral procession in “The Funeral,” which is part of the 1967 *In Tursi’s Abyss*:

..... and then the sudden
gasp of armless, legless men anxious to flee
who roll and tumble mixed like skeins of pitch
with birds stripped bare of any wings or feet.

Here is Bosch and Delvaux! What a shiver! This is Pierro’s disconcerting, unmistakable style: an alternation of mournful silences and of cascades of deafening sounds, a broad range of subtle shades and tones entwining with macabre, sorcerous combinations, at times approaching the grotesque, as in these lines from “In that Street”:

In that street where I always pass

like a dog going out into the night

.....

.....

I found an empty cardboard box
just lying there and very stiff.
Inside it these spindly legs of mine
would fit just right, I think;
and as inside a package,
now that they are half broken,
I could mail them to the Lord
who's still keeping me down in this hell.

Exactly as in a story by Turgenev; or one thinks of Balzac besides Bosch and Delvaux: in his metaphysical longing Pierro paints two little legs as Balzac's Frenhofer paints the tip of the "Belle Noiseuse"'s foot. Those two little legs are enough to recreate the profile, the physical and moral structure of the "dramatis persona."

And from Bosch we move to the delicate touch, the watercolor lightness of Utrillo:

Ah, those little baskets,
all decked with sugar-plums,
hanging from our arms
like cherries from our ears,
we saw them now in the air,
white doves in the wind...

or of Degas, of whom we are reminded by the images of little girls in "Sometimes," from *The Land of Memory*:

Sometimes I dream
the cries of the little girls
who sell peppers and tomatoes
in a basket.
They carry it on their head that sways
and hold it tightly with one hand;
and the raised arm

lifts their tiny dress a little.

At other times there is the light of floral Renaissance grace, as in these line of “Pretty Girls,” from *Knives in the Sun*.

Pretty girls so full of grace
weave me into your leaps and your caresses.

And here is Starnina, to go back to *In Tursi's Abyss*, in these lines from “I Knew How to Sing with the Guitar”:

I'm feeling like a wall
crumbled in the water
dark as pitch and with stones
mixed with plaster rubble.

Who remembers “After the Feast” in *Metaponto*, with the touching lyric bearing the same name, where the poet's individual sorrow becomes a part of and recognizes itself in the broader collective drama?

It seems like I am nailed
to the crumbling cornice of a church
half in ruins.

Death changes humor and dress: at times it becomes a “little sister,” who lies in wait like in the game of hide-and-peek, at times a “lover,” who pursues the poet with a “sweet shiver,” as in a fairy-tale told to children against the backdrop of a landscape where there are no mournful priests in black and yellow copes ready for the *De Profundis*, but little priests “dry as straws,” transparent as Failla's little flying priests; the poet too takes on unusual dimensions in an atmosphere of neo-Romantic enchantment that recalls Prati's “Spell”: at times he feels like “a frightened child who still wants to suckle the breast,” at times like a “chick forgotten in a basket and then thrown from a cliff,” at times like a “dove amid thistles.” Missing in Pierro's menagerie is the hamster, the animal that perhaps suits him best, a minuscule animal, quivering and contractile like a mouse, that curls up and hides in the most unthought-of nooks.

It should be said that the funeral in Pierro has its own irrepressible joyous charge. An acrid smell of dissolution, of sudarium, of shadowy sarcophagi mixes with the

“sweet snow-leaden wind” or the “cool of the countryside.” Under every “wall in ruins” Pierro always senses that “softly / like breath grows the grass”; the macabre astonishment one finds in Bergman (“the things around are too silent; / I call them and they don't answer / and if I watch them fixedly / and then I'm out of breath, / it seems that even my blood is chilled”), is followed by an Olympian resignation, a sublimation, a cathartic tolerance of pain.

All the tears I have shed
have finally cleared
this little murky thing
my life has been....

And there is always a gleam of hope at the end of his journey, even if he goes on “walking with a rope around his neck.” Even if his heart is “hornet's nest,” he is not afraid to touch it, to search its every fiber to draw out a word that can bring light where there was darkness.

The “Farewell” to the readers in *In Tursi's Abyss*, is an invitation to the word that sings and disenchants pain and requires love. One can say that the whole of Pierro's poetry is a plea for love that becomes obsessive. Even in the 1969 *Here Is Death*, a “bouquet of love poems,” as Francesco Gabrieli writes, that comes after *In Tursi's Abyss*, love becomes obsession for purity, as in “The Lovers” of 1963. Love reappears with the same play of illusions and emotional pretenses, of deliriums and soothing amazement, of macabre representations and serene brightness, with the same views of sudden lightbursts and abyssal darkening, and the same richness of metaphors polished with a lathe, patiently trimmed with lacework. Consider these lines from “The Lovers”:

they stood bewildered
like roseate snow upon the mountains,
when the sun sets and wrenches out a moan
from all creation.

Even if I've been left here like a cuckoo
in the snow of a ditch to mourn the dead
and to forsake the moon
and listen to the wind

I only want to tell you for a moment

how very happy it makes me
 in the evening to find always alive
 this love of ours as white as snow.

I just want to wait
 for that enchanted night
 if now you are not here
 and I waste away in this anguish.

The same mix of colors, the same analogical correspondences, the same relationships of light, colors and images, the same emotions we find in *Here Is Death*.

You remembered one by one the things
 of that love of ours so deep
 that we saw them suddenly come out
 like roses in winter

And as I waited for you, breathless,
 death brushed by me

.....
 Then as in a sea of snow
 the world fell silent:
 it only had a sparrow
 with its wings extended in the depths.

You that were crying so hard
 like someone following a funeral

.....
 had turned to clearest glass
 that after a long rain
 is beaded with raindrops.

You were weeping far away
 and I was dying for nothing

It's the same regret for a lost love, that finds its symbol in the unfinished house of *The Lovers*, where the poet dreamed of

a solitary house
with a small and graceful lady

In *Here Is Death* he reiterates the same disappointment:

What a shame!
I had the rooftiles ready,
the beams and boards for the roof
and I wasn't able to complete
this little house of ours that seemed finished

And you discover the same fixation to huddle in the dark; note how the lines from "At a Certain Time" from *Here is Death* recall those of "I Know I Know" in "The Lovers":

I walk very quietly and bent over
as if I were inside a hole
that never ends
and only now I know the darkness
that hides mice underneath the chest

Pierro hides in himself, with a tenacious will to feel alone, to rue more deeply and enjoy the pity for himself and others:

I have trembled for you
thinking that you wanted to wake up,
such in the dream was the fear
that I could disappear

More biting is the foreboding or the presumption of the reciprocity of anguish in these lines:

If I were to die right now
.....
like a nail it would bore
right through my heart
the tears you once shed or still shed
for my love, love.

This impassioned arguing, or should we say this captious quibbling over his own particular emotional reactions or those the poet supposes to be unleashing in the loved one, which is a painful attempt to delve deeply into a human condition, is typical of southern people. So it happens that the poet, while asking for himself an exclusive on love ("Friends, friends, believe me / I don't want to be loved") then takes refuge in a sort of masochistic victimism to hatch a wrenching plea for love:

I've been wasting away so many years
without ever dying within this dream
like a little dove amid a fire.

"To love is the project of getting to be loved," Sartre says; Pierro's project is extremely well-articulated and complex until it degenerates in that conflict that Gianfranco Folena calls *psycho-erotomachia*⁷.

Behind Pierro's erotic "delirium" there is a jealous suffering, a voluptuous turning inward aimed at exorcising pain and death at the very moment that they are invoked. Francesco Gabrieli⁸ speaks of suffering that art transforms into joy (*Kèdesi terpòmeno*) and one could equally speak of suffering and joy that are the mirror image of each other; at any rate it is a known fact that where poetry appears, as Boine aptly said, sorrow disappears; and Pierro's subtle, Petrarchian "*voluptas dolend*" always becomes clear and free before nature's song and the innocence of time lost and found again:

What are we waiting for, love, what are we waiting for
to go away, leaping over ditches?

Pitiful illusion! The return to origins, always contradicted by the expectation of disappointment, by an ancestral sense of fear that dominates the events of *Let Me Sleep*, published in 1971:

Ah, if I am afraid to go back
inside those four walls,
for maybe then we would be
a mirror to each other

And it is through the memory of the town that a physical and moral Leopardian rebirth takes place:

I wake up happy.
 How long I have dreamed
 to find myself in the world
 like a leaf in the shade
 in summertime.

And in nature, in the Lucan landscape, he finds the terms of comparison with his own existential story:

I hear a cricket
 behind the balcony
 and he tries hard, poor thing,
 but I don't know whether to cry or sing

To these psychological antinomies corresponds the composite nature of the poetic language that, as Antonio Pizzuto observes with his irksome fifteenth-century lexicon in the preface to *Let Me Sleep*, becomes in turn “very harsh parlance,” “Orphic sweetness,” “Eleatic essence,” “rough *canto fermo* a la Orlando di Lasso.”

No doubt, “very harsh parlance” for the lexical structures as well as for the figurative complications and anomalies:

There is a small, half-crooked road

 The edge of it you see is like a blade
 twisted amid slaughterhouse cries
 and eye-blurring rust.

Coarse *canto fermo* a la Orlando di Lasso? And why not recall di Lasso's polyphonic richness, the only apparently intricate weave of motifs that entwine and unravel as they light luminous, beguiling monodies.

Ah, that beautiful coolness
 of the water that sipping seemed
 a green sea of leaves,
 a sky full of stars.

These are lines that make one thirsty for waters and sky, hungry for nature, lines stemming from a panic love, from a longing for the unity of being. There is the Eleatic essence!

Yes, the sense of all of Pierro's poetry should be enclosed in this concept. For Eleatic Pierro reality is a fiction, false in the measure in which imagination is not able to implicate it and vilify it in a "shiver of poetry."

Pierro's melancholy stems from the undiminished faith in that "utopian" unification and therefore always remains incessantly subtended to the arc of hope, that mingles with desperation with a Leopardian intensity, without literary pretenses. To remain balanced on the edge of desperation, in a bittersweet familiarity with a sort of liberating sacred madness, is the characterizing trait of Pierro's poetics, confirmed again in the 1973 *Knives in the Sun*"

Gianfranco Contini, in the preface to this book, speaks of a "rosary of small beads of folly, dipped only in the air of memory, where things are scattered asymetrically." I agree. Already in January 1972, in an article in *Basilicata*, repeating what I had already in 1965 in my essay on Pierro, published by *Il Nuovo Cracas*, directed by Mario Dell'Arco, I linked the structure of Pierro's poetic world to the "asymmetry" of sixteenth-century Starnina and to Bosch's hallucinatory compositions.

In *Knives in the Sun* three remains the same fixity, the same penetration of the gaze into the roots of anguish, the same obstinate exploration of the most labyrinthine burrows of the imagination, the same cathartic tension:

If I feel a squeeze in my throat
I look fixedly at a stone
and go inside it.

It's as if the poet were having fun exploring with a surgeon's knife the embryo of a life about to be born. This tenacious delving into origins, in the darkness of origins and of the subconscious is always guided by a presentiment of luminous resurfacing; in his heart there is always

in this hornet's nest
a rage that dreams of honey

even if the impulse toward a descent to hell returns persistent and obsessive:

And I would like to go underground
like a gentle summer rain

Typical and recurrent is this varying of lights and shadows, which are the poetic and existential substance of the poet's life, lived again through the flickering of memory, as

an oneiric apparition:

And my father's voice returns
like a wind in stubble fields
where lighting opens a road
and turns a farmhouse white

Love and death, tears and laughter, joy and sorrow continue to be the terms of Pierro's counter melody in his third *canzoniere*, *A Beautiful Story*, 1976.

Love continues to explode like a skirmish, psycho-erotomachia, and as such it finds its natural means of expression in the thickening of metaphors, in an extremely "estranged," "connotative" language, which unexpectedly finds its roots in the very semiotic structure of dialect. Gianfranco Folena links the dialectics of Pierro's love, grounded on the opposites of violence and tenderness, to erotic Oriental poetry and to Arabian-Persian lyric poetry. I think that we should insist on the ethnic roots of that dialectics. At any rate, it cannot be excluded that Slavic and Albanian languages, widespread in many towns in Southern Italy, have acted as a channel or vehicle for popular Oriental culture. In Pierro, a certain melancholy, inconsolable attitude of the lover or the man who is disconsolate and torn by anguish, can be for instance traced back, even for certain lexical analogies, to these Albanian verses:

Sa disc vëdisja e dish veja ta gropa,
e dish dija ndë më qa namurata

(How I would like to die and throw myself from a cliff / and see if my loved one weeps);
and in these Slavic verses:

Aj ja necem tvoje suze,
ovi srce je sve tvoj

(I don't want your tears, / this heart is all yours)

Si tvoi serce neceda mo;
jena noz cu ti obrat;
na tvoje noge cu po stat,
ja cu umbrit di si ti

(If your heart doesn't want mine / I'll take up a knife; / I'll come to stay by your feet, / I'll

die where you are).

The ritual and choral content of Pierro's love poetry, pointed out by Betocchi himself, is particularly underscored in this book: happiness that grows in a blinding needle-like light that leaves you on the brink of a ravine, the vampirelike desire for the blood of the loved one, in which the poet would like to swim like a drunkard in wine, to die in it, the jaws of anguish that twist the poet like a wet rope entwined with flames, the dazzling light that envelopes the heart dark as the blackness of a cistern, the arms opening and closing like a mountain in the whiteness of the snow, the rusty lock of the loved one's heart that the poet would like to gouge with his nails, are all images linked to the figurative and verbal paroxysm typical of southern dialects. In essence, the music of death and life is attuned to apparently unusual linguistic registers, unique in their harmony and figurative-semantic interrelations, in their metaphorical and analogical projections, which seem seventeenth-century affectations and belong instead to the dynamics of popular speech. The raving syllogizing, as I think I have already mentioned elsewhere, is a necessary instrument of self-liberation, aimed at creating the obsession from which the poetic atmosphere dissolves and purifies. Particularly suited to sustain that obsession is the particular nature and structure of the Lucan dialect, personalized to the limits of communicability, rich with both harsh and melodic chords, of vocalic consonances and contrasts, of interminable proparoxytones counterbalanced by gentle oxytone slowdowns with grave accents, of dark sounds and unaccented endings (dòue=dolore; sòue=sole), that amplify the phonic spaces with ineffable reverberations:

S'è fatte troppe granne 'a cuntantizze
nda sta 'uce a spìngue ca mi cìchite
e mi làssete ntrunche nda na drupe,
mpizze mpizze

Happiness has become too great
in this blinding needle-pointed light
that leaves me all at once on an abyss,
right on the brink.

And elsewhere:

Pò', mèna a mène, aunite ci tràseme,
chi le sàpete addù, come nd'u cée
'a vampa di nu foche e le sinteme

ca nd'u schème ci mòrete 'a cannée

Then, hand in hand, together we go in,
 who knows where, as the flame of a fire
 into the sky and we can feel
 the candle dying in the wail

The result of the combination of the endings *éme-cée-izze* with the rapid and contracted sounds of the articulated prepositions is that abstract music of vibrating and muted alternations, that dodecaphonic atonality that perhaps has induced Pasolini to define Pierro a “wonderful magic flute.” In Pierro there is, in truth, what Boine discovered in Campana: an infinite “musical whirlpool.” Of the Orphic Campana Pierro, who did not know Campana, has the monochord rhythm and the repetitive technique, the frenzy of darkness, death and liberation, expressed with images that seem the counterpart, the oneiric cipher of an existential element interpretable psychoanalytically. The chromatic simultaneity of dark and purple in Campana becomes in Pierro simultaneity of black and white: “the black of ravines” is often combined with the whiteness of snow.

“The delightful madness,” mentioned by Carlo Bo in relation to Campana, in Pierro can be identified in his turning over and over in an interminable “shiver of poetry”; in him we find the same attitude Bo noted in Campana to run after words that “stumble in this same place and seem to have no other aim than their own colors, while in reality they are the measure of an internal vertical song (whirling, I would say for Pierro), most of whose allusions are lost in the darkness, in the silence evoked in such a manner”. The difference being that, while in Campana “everything is directed toward a definitive liberation, we remain in this extreme effort, in a broken movement without center and without links, in a land without memory,” as Carlo Bo adds, in Pierro everything is directed within a circular movement that begins in the land of memory and returns there and plunges in it again, only to leave it once more without interruption.

The “catastrophe,” the solution of Pierro's existential and linguistic problem is a mad orchestration of registers and feelings that are ductile and malleable like thin and tangled threads, incandescent magmas that diverge and then flow together again. A clue to this “catastrophe” is precisely the metaphor. Pierro's entire universe, as Folena points out, is a metaphorical universe. Pierro's metaphors, while “distant,” as Leopardi would say, while proliferating, that is, while unraveling in endless chains, are not “tiresome,” because they “save,” to use Leopardi's terminology again, “the simultaneous multiplicity of ideas, which constitute the pleasure.” And the metaphors around a fabulous or musical nucleus are so insisting, that one gets the impression that the poet is “too content with himself and that abstract music” as De Robertis says about the

twenty-four-year old Petroni of *Verses and Memory*.

It seems that one metaphor draws breath from another and that the poet, like a magician from his hat, extracts from them images and representations at times extraneous to his original intent, signs of a discourse that could go on forever and that keeps on revolving around its own axis or the same object.

In sum, this is Pierro's "artifice," in the Slovskian sense of the term, in the sense, that is, of an autonomous formal construction of the word and of the "signifiers," and finally in the sense of prolonging the perceptive process of the image. This "connotative" process appears particularly evident in *What Am I Going To Do*, published in 1977 by Scheiwiller. Here metaphors thicken to implausibility. I should quote in its entirety the poem from which the title of the book is derived to offer an interpretive key to the reader about to venture into the "raving" tangle of metaphor that follow each other endlessly, but Gennaro Savarese would reproach me again for an excessively profuse and stifling literary memory; let's read the first eight lines:

They are disappearing one by one,
these friends of mine;
and now these crippled days,
heavy as the lead beads
of a necklace,
sink through my heart more slowly
than a freight train
bearing the rage of fangmarks in its wheels.

We are faced with a score made of *lenti*, *mossi* and *andanti*, laboriously constructed, a contagion of symphonic and figurative combinations, a magical play of refractions, an undaunted and suffering will, exhausted in trying to capture in the wave of impalpable music a shiver of essential poetry to hold or follow in its "becoming quiet."

Here in synthesis is Pierro's entire thematics and narrative technique: the sense of light and shadows, life and death, the Bergmanian, squalid solitude of the exile, the unresolved conflict between hope and desperation, which the poet feels he shares with southern people, the transfiguration and connotation of the anguish and joy of living into signs and symbols, in which only with great effort can you perceive the acrobatic links, which should help you to reconstruct a discourse you discern only through flashing images, streaks of lights and colors, fragments of sounds, almost as if it weren't the poet speaking, but nature itself with the multiplicity and uncontrolled simultaneity of its language. Pierro assimilates this unbridled use of metaphors, apparently intellectualistic and harking back to the eighteenth-century (an analysis of the ethnic

and popular elements of *Secentismo* would be a worthwhile undertaking), from the metaphorical mechanisms of popular speech. Popular language is naturally metaphorical: often the dialogue becomes a contest of metaphors, as in certain singsongs, where every refrain is a blossoming of tropes. Metaphors continue to reign supreme in *These Masks*, published by Ed. d'Arte di Roma in 1980, in the image of sorrow that "grips like a wolf's fang piercing the heart" or in the image of "the earthquake that in the frost of fear drowns you in a flash as in a noose knotted with madmen's teeth"; in *Ten Unpublished Poems* (published by Maria Pacini Fazzi di Lucca in 1981), where the town reappears in the poet's imagination through the echo of the bells, "which in the sounds seem skeins of a deaf man's screams"; the echo of the countryside in *I Would Like to Go Back There* (published by Ed. del Girasole, Rome 1982), where the return amid the stubble fields of the town is compared to a lizard hiding in clearings. Finally, in *If Then One Day* (Gruppo Editoriale, Formia 1983), where the cycle and the recurrent relationship of interchangeability between life and death return in the evocation of the comforting mystery of friendship, embodied by Tommaso Fiore, with his great bright face like "a big fire that gently expands and swallows the darkness of night," like the face of another great friend, Manlio Capitolo from "My Mother Was Passing," that appears as a "votive lamp," "gigantic host of light that illuminates the night"; this mythical sublimation or sanctification of friendship is another aspect of love poetry in Pierro, who sees in the inscrutable burning of the mind and the heart the shield behind which the pain of living is purified and acquires a sense. And what counts the most in the end is that Pierro carries on a surprising idiomatic compromise between Italian and dialect. The reader can assimilate in a dialectal key even apparently cultured and literary expressions, by virtue of that very linguistic operation that makes use of "cultured" analogical and metaphorical procedures which can be integrated into dialect. It is a linguistic operation successfully carried out by someone who penetrates the fibers of his own land until he identifies with its myths and history and absorbs, transforms, even reinvents its language, universalizing it and at the same time salvaging the "dialecticality" of the poetic subject. As far as I know, few poets have realized such idiomatic symbiosis with such expressive incisiveness.

Giuseppe Jovine

NOTES

¹Letter to Gianfranco Contini.

²*La poesia di Albino Pierro*, Rome: Il Nuovo Cracas, 1965.

³*Albino Pierro*, Cassino: Ed. Garigliano, 1979.

⁵“Albino Pierro”, *Nostro tempo* (July 1965): 7.

⁶Preface to *Metaponto*, Rome: Il Nuovo Cracas, 1963.

⁷*Testimonianze su Pierro*, Bari: Laterza, 1969.

⁸Introduction to *Nu belle fatte*, 1976.

⁹Preface to *Eccó a morte*, Bari: Laterza, 1969.

20

From *'A terra d'u ricorde*

'A Ravatène

Cchi ci arrivè a la Ravatène
 si nghianete, a pitrizze
 ca pàrete na schèhe appuntillète
 a na timpa sciullète.

Quann'u tempe è sincire,
 nturne nturne 'a terra d'i jaramme
 ci'ampijete a lu sóue com'u specchie,
 e quanne si fè notte c'è nu frusce
 di vente ca s'ammùccete nd'i fosse
 e rivìgghiete u cùcche e ci fè nasce
 nu mère d'èrve.

Pòure cristiène!
 Ci durmìne cch'i ciucce e cch'i purcèlle
 nda chille chèse nivre com'i fòrchie;
 e pure mo lle chiàmene 'biduìne'
 cc'amore ca sú' triste e fèn'a sgrògnue
 a piscunète e a lème di curtèlle.

C'è aria fine, alledàvete,
 quanne vènete 'a 'stète;
 e nun mpòrte si pó' ci fèn''a fére
 e chiàmene u taùte i cuccu-uèlle:
 ll'avères''a viré chille ca fène
 i Ravitanése quanne c'è na zite;
 vi ndippèrese i 'ricchie cchi nun sènte
 catarre manduline e colp-scure,
 scamizze di uagnune e d'urganète
 e battarie e tróne di tammure.

Ma ié le vògghie bbéne 'a Ravatène
 cc'amore ca c'è morta mamma méje:
 le purtàrene ianca supr''a sègge
 cchi mmi nd'i fasce com'a na Maronne
 cc,u Babinèlle mbrazze.

Chi le sàpete u tempe ch'è passète...
e nun tornete ancora a lu pahàzze.

Rabatana

To reach Rabatana
you climb a flinty road
that looks just like a ladder laid
against a crumbling wall of clay.

In clear weather,
everywhere you look this land of gorges
flashes like a mirror in the sun,
and at nightfall you can hear the rustle
of the wind that prowls low in the ditches
rousing the cuckoo, and there it hatches
a sea of grass.

Poor people.
They slept with pigs and asses
in those houses black as caves;
and even now they call them "bedouins"
because they're fierce, and fight
with fists and stones and knife blades.

Up there, when summer comes,
the air is thin;
no matter if the owls makes a racket
and calls out to the coffin:
If you could see the way they carry on
at Rabatana when there is a wedding;
you'd plug your ears so you didn't have to listen
to the guitars and firecrackers, the thrums
of mandolins, the bedlam of accordions
and of children, and thunderclaps of drums.

But I am very fond of Rabatana
because it was up there my mother died:
they carried her all white upon a chair
with me in swaddling cloth,
like a Virgin holding the small Child.

Who knows how many years have passed us by...
and she hasn't yet come back to the palazzo.

Stanotte

Stanotte,
mi riminèj' nd'u lètte
cchi ll'occhie spiritète;
ci uija i'èsse zinne n'ata vòte
e mahète.

Pure mó u vente fiscàite
nd'u strittue d'u Barone,
trimàite u casamente
e nd'u purtone
n'atu chène agguajàite.

Last Night

Last night
I thrashed in my bed,
wild-eyed;
I longed to be a child
and ailing once again.

Now like then
the wind's begun to grate
in the Baron's alley,
the building shook hard
and in the front gate
another dog wailed.

Mbàreche accusi

Su' tante e tante i fóche
supr''a terre,
ma quille ca cchiù mi piàcete
scàttete nd'i sarmente
e si fè gghianche e russe
nu mumente:

mbàreche accusi
stu core méj' ca sònnete
di si ni ì da u munne
nda nu 'ampe.

Maybe So Does

There are so many fires
upon this earth
but the one I like the most
breaks out among the vine shoots
and turns red and white for a moment.

Maybe so does my heart
that dreams
of leaving this world
in a burst of light.

'A jaramme

Ci agghie iùte nu mère nd'i jaramme,
 e quante mi piacite
 di mi cucchè nd'i grutte
 doppe c'avij' scappète
 com'u lèbbre.

U core mi sbattite forte forte
 a sent'u frusce d'u vente,
 e mi mangèj, cchi ll'occhie
 'a timpa ca spicciàite a lu céhe
 e addù ci avì passète
 lèste na cosa nivre com'u spìrite.

Certe jurne, 'a staggione,
 quann'u sóue arraggète d' 'a cuntrore
 lle spirtusàite i cose nd'i caforchie
 cchi lle fè ianche e père com' 'a nive,
 mi sintije cchiù zinne di na frunne
 mmenz'all'acqua d'u mère,
 cchiù sùue di nu grille
 mmenz' 'a vocia d'u munne.

E manche mi mpaurèje
 si mi cugghiite 'a notte e lle facite
 cchiù citte e nivre i fosse, a une a une;
 pure si le guardèje
 nun le sapìje c'avì 'ssùte 'a lune:
 nu fische di paummèlle
 nd' 'a ricchie mi chiamàite cch'i grire,
 mó forte e mó 'untene, di na murra
 di uagninelle.

The Ravine

I went countless times in the ravines,
and how I loved
to stretch out in the caves
after running all over
like a jackrabbit.

My heart quickened
when I heard the sound of the wind,
and with my eyes I ate
the wall of clay melting to sky
where some thing black as a demon
had swiftly flitted by.

On certain summer days,
when in noon's dead hour the fierce sun
drove things out of their shadows
and scoured them white and even like the snow,
I felt smaller than a leaf
adrift upon the sea,
more lonely than a cricket
in the voice of the world.

And I wasn't afraid
even if nightfall caught me, and made
the gullies blacker and quieter, one by one;
and I could'nt tell whether the moon was out
even if looking straight at it:
a shriek of stockdoves in my ears
called out to me with children's shouts,
far and near.

from *I'nnammurète*

I 'nammurète

Si guardàine citte
 e senza fiète
 i 'nammurète.
 Avìne ll'occhie ferme
 e brillante,
 ma u tempe ca passàite vacante
 ci ammunzillàite u scure
 e i trimuìzze d'u chiante.

E t'ècchete na vòte, come ll'èrve
 ca tròvese ncastrète nda nu mure,
 nasclvite 'a paróua,
 po' n'ate, pó' cchiù assèie:
 schitte ca tutt'i vòte
 assimmigghiàite 'a voce
 a na cosa sunnète
 ca le sintise 'a notte e ca pó' tòrnete
 cchiù débbye nd' 'a jurnète.

Sempe ca si lassàine
 parìne come ll'ombre
 ca ièssene allunghète nd'i mascìje;
 si sintìne nu frusce, appizzutàine
 'a ricchia, e si virìne;
 e si 'ampijàite 'a 'uce si truvàine
 faccia a faccia nd'u russe d'i matine.

Nu jurne,
 - nun vi sapéra dice si nd'u munne
 faci fridde o chiuvìte -
 'ssivìte nda na botte
 'a 'uce di menzejurne.
 Senza ca le sapìne
 i 'nammurète si tinìne 'a mène
 e aunìte ci natàine nd' 'a rise
 ca spànnene i campène d'u paìse.

Nun c'èrene cchiù i scannije;
 si sintine cchiù llègge di nu sante,
 facin'i sonne d'i vacantije
 cucchète supre ll'èrve e ca lle virene
 u céhe e na paùmme
 ca ci pàsete nnante.

Avine arrivète a lu punte juste:
 mó si putina stringe
 si putina vasè
 si putina ntriccè come nd'u foche
 i vampe e com'i pacce
 putina chiange rire e suspirè,
 ma nun fècere nente:
 stavine appapagghiète com' 'a nive
 rusèta d'i muntagne,
 quanne càlete u sóue e a tutt'i cose
 ni scìppete nu lagne.

Chi le sàpete.
 Certe si mpauràine
 di si scrijè tuccannese cc'u fiète;
 i'èrene une cchi ll'ate
 'a mbulla di sapone culurète,
 e mbàreche le sapine
 ca dopp'u foche ièssene i lavine
 d' 'a cinnere e ca i pacce
 si grìrene tropp'assèie
 lle nghiùrene cchi ssèmpe addù nisciune
 ci trasèrete mèie.

Mó nun le sacce addù su',
 si su' vive o su' morte,
 i 'nammurete;
 nun sacce si caminene aunite
 o si u diàue ll'hè veste separète.
 Nun mbogghi'a Die
 ca si fècere zanghe mmenz' 'a vie.

The Lovers

They looked at one other
breathlessly
and in silence,
the two lovers.

Their eyes were steady
and clear,
but hollow time
heaped darkness in them
and shuddering of tears.

And once, like grass
wedged tightly in a wall,
a word was born,
and then another, then many more:
but every time the voice
resembled a thing dreamed
and heard at night
then seen again, but fainter,
in the daylight.

When not together,
they were like shadows
lengthened by a spell;
They pricked their ears at every sound
and saw each other;
and stood in daylight's grace
against the red of morning face to face.

One day,
– I could not tell you whether it was cold
or raining in the world –
the midday sun
suddenly broke out.
Without realizing,
the lovers walked hand in hand
and swam across the smile

spread by the town bells.
There was no anguish now;
they felt lighter than saints,
they dreamed the dreams of
virgins stretched upon the grass,
who see the sky and a dove
passing before them.

They came to the right spot:
now they could embrace
and kiss
they could entwine like flames
within a fire, and cry
and laugh and sigh like madmen,
but they did nothing:
they stood bewildered
like roseate snow upon the mountains,
when the sun sets and wrenches out a moan
from all creation.

Who knows.
No doubt, they were afraid
to disappear should their breaths touch;
they were a colored
soap bubble to each other,
and knew perhaps a stream
of ashes flows after a fire
and that if madmen scream
they're locked forever
where no one ever goes.

I don't know where they are now,
whether alive or dead,
the lovers;
whether they walk together still
or if the devil willed them far apart.
I hope to God
they have not turned to mud

along the road.

Avin' 'a i'esse i morte

Da quanne stè luntène 'a 'nnammurète,
 père nu spiritète.
 U sonne m'hè lassète pur' 'a notte
 e nun le trove 'a papàgne;
 po' vire u campisante d'u paise
 chiine di scattabbotte.

“Si stè bbone nd' 'a terre”
 mi pàrete di sente n'ata vote;
 “s'arrènnene cchi ssèmpe a què i vrangèlle
 d'u munne ca ti stràzzene i capille
 e scuppüüne ll'occhie com'a chille
 d'i pecure purtète a lu macelle”.

Avin' 'a i'esse i morte ca parlàine
 come pàrene duce i 'nnammurète
 a chi chiangite sùue nd'i nuttète.
 Nun s' 'a firàine a sente cchiù sti grire
 e cchi tti dè na mène, tutt'i mène,
 avìne scafurcchiète quillu scure
 cchi arrivintè nu fiore supr'u mure.

Ma mó fè fridde,
 ll'àrbere su' sicche,
 chiovete,
 i ntrunizze su' sfiatète
 e pur'i 'àmpe pàrene mahète.
 Le sèntese nda ll'arie ca ci addòrete
 'a nive; e c'è nu vente ca ci fischete
 cchi tti scafè nd'u core ca ti dòute.

It Must Have Been the Dead

Since the woman I love went away, I seem
a man possessed.

There is no sleep for me even at night
and I can't find a drug to get some rest;
but then I see the cemetery teem
with blooming bloodroots.

“It feels comfortable here in bare ground”,
I seem to hear once more;
“Here the world's claws, that tear out your hair
and peel off your eyes like sheep bound
for the slaughterhouse,
surrender their dominion for all time.”

It must have been the dead who rose to speak,
as lovers softly speak, to one who wept
forsaken in the night.

They could no longer bear to hear those cries,
and to give you a hand, to give you all
their hands, they'd pierced the darkness
to turn into a flower on the wall.

But now it's cold,
the trees have withered,
it's starting to rain,
thunder has no more breath
and even lightning seems frail.
You can smell the snow
in the air; and a shrill wind begins to blow
and to dig deep into your heart in pain.

Trasìste com'u fóche

Pure s'agghie rumèse com'u cucche
nd' 'a nive di nu fosse a chiange u morte
e a nun viré cchiù 'a lune
e a sente u vente
ca mi fischete nturne,
nda chist'ora scafète
tòrnete com'a tanne
na 'uce di staggione
ca le nìchete u verne e nda na botte
sbahànchete i balcone.

Trasìste com'u fóche scintillante
nda na grutta chiatrète
e le purtàste u sóue
nd' 'a cammarella méje
ca i suspire d' 'a morte
avìne fatte zinne e annivrichète.

Ié ti guardèje 'a vesticèlla nóve
e a tti rirìne ll'occhie nd'i paróue.
Pó', cchi vintinove e trente,
ié nun sfurrèje a chiange, amore.

You Came in Like a Fire

Even if I've been left here like a cuckoo
in the snow of a ditch to mourn the dead
and to forsake the moon
and listen to the wind
screeching around me,
in this hollow hour
a light of spring
returns like then
to drown the winter,
and suddenly throws open
all the balconies.

Like a brilliant fire
you came into an icy cave
and brought the sun
inside my room
made small and black
by death gasps.

I looked at your new dress
and your eyes smiled in the words.
And I was very close to tears,
my love.

Nd' 'a gente ca ririte

Nd' 'a gente ca ririte,
quanne ti ni scrijàste
i'ére ammucce te com'u fihicèlle
di pàgghie nda na rote atturccigghiète
di nu traîne vruscète
nd'u funne di na drupe.

Dasupre, com'a na nùue,
a u poste d'i cristiène,
ci s'arraiàite u fume
nd'i scaffittone d'u vente;
e u fiète tussicose di nu foche
già ll'óore ni squagghiàite a lu sóue
nda chille 'ampe fridde di cristalle
d' 'a rise ca scattàite cuntente
com'a na battarie di maschète
e sone di campène.

Hann' 'a i'esse cchiù di mill'anne
ca ié mi sente accusi:
come nd'u terramote di nu trene
ca nun arrivete mèie
ma ca nnatèrne pàsete fiscanne
dasupr'a mmi.

Among People Laughing

Among people laughing,
the day you disappeared,
I was hiding like a blade of straw
in the twisted wheel
of a charred wagon
at the bottom of a cliff.

Overhead, instead of people,
it was the the smoke that brawled
like a cloud
amid the blows of the wind;
and the poisonous breath of a fire
was already melting the gold
of the sun in those cold
flashes of crystal,
of happy laughter snapping
like a battery of firecrackers
and pealings of bells.

It must be a thousand years
I've felt this way:
in the earthquake of a train
that never gets near
but eternally passes over me
roaring.

U nome tue

M'ha' cusute 'a vucca cchi ssèmpe
e mó camine e guarde com'i mute,
nun sacce da quanta tempe.

Na paruuèlla ancora pozze dice:
u nome tue;
e sempe sempe, 'a notte,
le cante chiène chiène.

Schitte ca pó' nd'u fridde e nda nu scure
ca nun spìccene mei,
mi rispònnene: apprime nu trimore
(e mbàreche d' 'a terre) e po' nu schème
di nu chène ca chiàngete 'untène.

Your Name

You've sewn my lips shut for all time
and I don't know how long it's been
I walk dumbstricken and blank-eyed.

There is a single word I can say still:
your name;
and in the night
I always sing it softly.

But then in cold and darkness
without end,
comes the reply: at first a shiver
(maybe the earth's) and then the wail
of a dog whining in the distance.

Sùu cuntente

E va bbóne,
 u munne vète accusì:
 “A chi s'i pìgghiete pìgghiete
 nu vuccóne”.

Schitte ca ié le uìje
 na chèsicèlla sùue
 cchi na patrùna zinne e aggrazzijète
 c'avit' 'a i'èsse ancora cchiù sincire
 dill'ùtima paróue
 ca jttème a la morte disgrazzietà:
 e tu mó nun ci sì', amore,
 e ié camine citte e nun ll'agguàcchie
 stu pulvinère trùue di cristiène
 ca zùmpene si jùnnene e si strìngene
 mpacciùte com'i ciunche senza mène.

Manche ni picca picche lle sente
 i grire di chille pacce:
 camine arraughietà
 ma cuntente
 di ci rumène nfunn'a ttì' nd'u sonne,
 come nfünne a lu mère nu nichète.

I Am Happy

All right,
so goes the world:
“Grab any bite
any way you can.”

But I longed for
a solitary house
run by a small and graceful lady
more sincere
than even the last word
we throw to wretched death:
but now you're not here, my love,
and I walk in silence, and cannot see
this darkling cloud of human dust, strands
that leap and lunge and cling to one another,
driven insane like someone with no hands.

Yet I never hear
those raving screams.
I walk rumped
but happy
to remain in your depths, in dreams,
like a drowned man underneath the sea.

Che gghiurnèta sincire

Che gghiurnèta sincire
dopp'u nferne d'aiére
cchi quillu terramote d'acque e vente
nda sta citète!

C'è mó nu fridde sicche ca rivigghiete
pur'i paùmme càvere e nichète
nda n'abbisse d'amore
e u munne è com'u vosche
c'addòrete di terre e 'uccichète
nd'i schìcciuè dill'acque supr'i rème.

Nisciune nisciune
ti putèreta réje, amore,
si pure tu sapèrese ca vulle
e grèpe e chiùre ll'occhie e po' ti chième
nda quistu fùje fùje di saítte
culurète d'i pulle.

What a Clear Day

What a clear day
after yesterday's hell
quaking of water and wind
in this city!

Now there is a dry, cold air that wakens
even the warm dove
drowning in an abyss of love
and the world is like the woods
that smell of earth and glisten
in the beads of water on the branches.

No one, no one
could hold you back, my love,
if you also knew I am in flames.
I open my eyes, I close them,
and then I call you
in the tinted arrows
of a flight of birds.

Chi t'ha fatte 'a mascije?

Come nun ti n'addònese
ca u tempe scùrrete
e nuie si facéme vècchie?
Chi t'ha fatte 'a mascije
si nun ti mòvese
e po' t'ammùccese
o guàrdese chiatrète?

Ié chiange notte e gghiurne,
e nun mi sèntese;
camine ore e ore mmenz' 'a chèse,
e pó' si ièsse trove a tutt'i bbàgne
nu fume ca ti cìchete e nu vente
ca tàgghiete fiscanne com'i canne.

Who Put a Spell on You?

How can you fail to see
that time goes by
and we get old?
Who put a spell on you
if you don't move
and then you hide
and flash an icy look?

I cry all day and night,
and you don't hear me;
I walk inside the house for hours on end
and everywhere I find, out in the street,
a smoke that blinds me and a slashing wind
that wails and screeches like a brake of reeds.

Nda stu jurne d'i morte

Nda stu jurne d'i morte
ci ìje cc'u pinzére a lu paise
e lle virìje i fosse
scurcète da u vente.

Mi ci chiantèje dritte com'u stozze
nda chille drupe chiine di surìgghiue
e ll'aspittèje 'a notte
rimpett'a Sammaselle
cch'i mène strinte strinte a li capille
ca pó' ci s'attaccàine i jattuuìgghie.

Da quanne ti n'ha' scrijète
pur'u paise méje
lle tróve subbissète.

Mó mí ni torne com'u puurèlle
supr'i vrazze d'u vente;
e nda sti strète di Rome,
addù mi sente zinne,
camine all'ammucciune com'i morte
ca nun vóne cchiù nente.

In This All Souls' day

On this All Souls' Day
I thought of my town
and saw the gullies
stripped bare by the wind.

I used to plant myself straight as a pole
in that ravine teeming with lizards
and awaited nightfall
in front of Sammasello¹
with my hands pressed tightly on my hair
for fear that bats would make their nest in it.

Since you disappeared
even my town
has gone to ruin.

I have just come back from there
like a beggar on the arms of the wind;
and in these streets of Rome,
where I feel like a child,
I walk unseen, like the dead
like them without desires.

Name of the cemetery.

E ll'òrgane ca sònete

E m'ha' lassète sùue com'u zite
nda na chièsia sciullète
ntramente ca sunàine cchi ll'òrgane
e lle rirìne ll'occhie a la Maronne.

Ci agghie carùte come nda nu sonne
nda stu sprufunne
e mó ci stève nchiuvète
cchi ll'osse ianche d'i morte.

E ll'òrgane ca sònete
nun lle sàpete ancora
ca ié le sente e chiange
mó chiène e mó cchiù forte.

And the Organ Playing

And you left me alone
like a bridegroom in a crumbling church
while the organ played
and the eyes of the Virgin smiled.

As in a dream
I fell in this abyss
and now I am nailed in it
with the white bones of the dead.

And the organ playing
still doesn't know
that I hear it and cry
softly,
and sob at times.

Passe nd' 'a vita tue

Passe nd' 'a vita tue
come nd' 'a notta scure
nu gghiòmmere di foche.

U vente le sravóghiete
e u céhe si mittete a gghiurne,
ma i chèse nichète nd'u sonne
nun póne risponne.

Po' mòrene pur'i stèlle
virènne c'arraugghiète
u gghiòmmere si ni vète
cc'u musse d'i uagninèlle.

I Pass Through Your Life

I pass through your life
like a skein of fire
through a dark night.

The wind unravels it
and the sky turns to day,
but the houses drowned in sleep
cannot reply.

Then even the stars die
seeing that the skein
rewound again goes by
with pouts of children.

Chilla notte ncantète

Nda sti jurne di feste
ca ti ntrònene i ricchie di rumore
e u sone d'i zampugne t'accarizzete
u core,
ié vogghe schitte aspittè
chilla notte ncantète
d' 'a Paska 'pifanije,
si tu mó nun ci s'ì
e ié m'accìre
nda sti scannije.

Lle vògghie sente n'ata vòte i tòcche
d'u rilogge nd'i notte d'u paese
e m'agghi' 'a mpaurè ca tutt'i morte
le vènene a truvè stu morte-accìse.

Pó' nd'u fridde ca chiàtrete, si angùune
mi tìrete u linzùue, o cchi nu pére,
agghi' 'a pinzè ca mmenz'a chille morte
avìse stète tu ca mi chiàngise
come nd'u scure chiàngene i uagnune
menz'a lu nfèrne e menze mparavise.

That Enchanted Night

In these days of festival,
your ears deafened by noises,
when the sound of the bagpipes
blandishes your heart,
I just want to wait
for that enchanted
Twelfth Night,
now that you're not here
and I'm wasting away
in this anguish.

I want to hear the clock striking the hour
yet another time in the town's night
and then I'll have to fear that all the dead
will pay a visit to this lifeless body.

Then, if someone should tug on my bedsheet
or my foot, in the cold that stings like ice,
I'll have to imagine that among the dead
it had been really you the one who'd shed
those tears for me, as children weep in shadows
suspended between hell and paradise.

Amore

Amore,
 amore duce e anniputente,
 pure si mó le tègne u core amère,
 ti sente, amore, granne cchiù d'u mère;
 ti sente a tutt'i bbàgne come ll'arie
 c'arravògghiete i cose e lle fè lègge
 e cchiù 'ucente assèi' d'i 'umminàrie.

Amore,
 amore belle com'u sóue,
 chille ca si' nun sacce e nun le trove,
 cchi ti chiamè sicure, na paróue,
 ma sacce c'assimmìgghiese a la rise
 d' 'a Maronna cuntente mparavise,
 e ca si mi virise menze morte
 m'accarizzàise duce cchi nu cante
 ca lle fè molle i pétre e ca ni tòcchete
 u core a li brijànte.

Amore,
 amore funne cchiù d'u céhe,
 ca mi grapìse ll'occhie nd'i matine,
 stu munne mó mi pàrete cichète
 com'a na palla nivre di carvone,
 e fùjete nnatèrne arraughhiète
 senza di si vutè com'a nu surde
 e ié le curre appresse e fazze i picce
 d'i uagninèlle mahète.

Amore,
 amore forte cchiù d'u vente
 ca srarichìte ll'àrbere e lle sciòllete
 i chèse e ca lle límite i muntagne,
 dannille sempe a tutte quante i cose
 ni picche di stu fiète di gjajànte
 e pó' na 'uce aguèle com'u 'ampe

ca s'abbràzzete i spine mmenz'i rose.

Amore,
amore granne cchiù d'u mère;
amore,
amore forte cchiù d'u vente,
nun ti scurdè ca pure nd'i turmente
ci agghie vruscète e vrósce nda stu fóche
com' 'a frasca ntriccète a ll'ate frasche
pure cchi chille ca mi guardàine stòrte
e pure mó mi uèrene già morte.

Amore,
amore duce e anniputente,
com'agghi' 'a fè cchi nu ringraziamente?

Love

Love,
sweet, all-powerful love,
even if now my heart is drunk with bitterness
I feel you, love, wider than the sea;
I feel you everywhere, the way I feel the air
that embraces all things and makes them weightless
and brighter than the bonfires of a fair.

Love,
love as beautiful as the sun,
I don't know what you are, and I can't find
a word with which to call you without dread,
but I do know that you are like the smile
of the Virgin who is happy in paradise,
and if you ever were to see me half dead
you would caress me gently with your song
that softens even stones and can beguile
a bandit's heart.

Love,
deeper than the sky,
love that with the morning light opened my eyes,
now this world appears to me as blind
as a black ball of coal, and never turning
it flees before me deaf and crumpled, while I
run after it
and throw tantrums like a bedridden child.

Love,
stronger than the wind
love that uproots trees, that crushes houses
and flattens mountains, always give
a little of your mighty breath
to every thing on earth, and then
the even brightness of a bolt of lightning,
that will embrace the thorns among the roses.

Love,
love wider than the sea;
love,
love stronger than the wind,
don't forget that even in my anguish
I have burned and burn within this flame
like a branch entwined with other branches,
even with those whose eyes were quick to blame
and even now would rather see me dead.

Love,
sweet, all-powerful love,
what must I do to thank you?

64

from *Metaponte*

U jurne di santa Lucia

U jurne di santa Lucia,
 quanne i'ère mahète a ll'occhiecèlle,
 le cacceje d' 'a sacca 'a fijurèlle
 e quète quète ije e m'arrasèje
 nd'u scure cchi ci chiange
 e, nginucchète come nda na chièsie,
 le stringìje a lu core e le vasèje.

Mo ca ll'agghie pirdute,
 - e m'arricorde schitte di na chèpe
 menza chiùchète e di na vranhicèlle
 d'auìve e di chill'occhie
 nivre nivre e 'ucente nda nu piatte -
 uéra turnè nd'u scure n'ata vòte,
 cc'u macature frische nnant'a ll'occhie
 ca m'attacàine strinte e ca passàite
 dasupr'i lègge e mi ndippàite i ricchie.

Ah quante i'èrete mmègghie,
 santa Lucia méje,
 quillu chiante sincire di uagnune
 di quiste mo ch'è trùue
 come ll'acque ca tròvese chiatrète
 supr'i vitre azzanghète,
 o com'u chiante ca s'è fatte 'urde
 supr' 'a faccia d'i morte mmenz'i strète.

Tanne pinzèje a u sóue,
 mó nun penze cchiù a nènte;
 tanne le sapìje c'avère stète
 n'ata vòte nd'i fosse
 cchi ci juchè cc' 'a frèccia e a pitrète;
 mó penze ca si spiccete stu chiante
 rumagne schitte ié e lu campisante.

St. Lucy's Day

On St. Lucy's day,
when I was a small child with ailing eyes,
I would take out her image from my pocket
and withdraw very quietly so I could cry
within the darkness, and on my knees
as if I were in church,
I held it tight against my heart and kissed it.

Now that I have lost it,
– and I remember only a head inclined
slightly to the side
and a small olive branch,
and those black eyes that glistened in a dish –
I would like to go back into that darkness
with that cool handkerchief tied over my eyes,
that went around my temples and my ears.

Ah, St. Lucy,
how much better those sincere tears
of childhood than are these, now muddy
as the water you see frozen
upon a dusty glasspane,
or as the tears that stained
the faces of the dead along the streets.

Back then I thought of the sun,
I think of nothing now;
then I knew I'd be going
into the gullies again
to play with stones and arrows;
now I think that if these tears should end
only I and the graveyard would remain.

A maièstra

Nun ll'agghie viste cchiù 'a maièstra méje.
 Mó àt' 'a i'esse vecchie
 o ié sùu sempe zinne
 si óje nda na lettre
 m'hè mannète nu vèse.

Na giòvene cchiù belle
 nun ll'agghie cchiù ncuntrète nda tant'anne:
 avì na faccia fine
 rusète come ll'ostie
 quanne sònete 'a chièsie u matutine.

Sintènne a zia méje
 ca m'i liggite 'a lèttre
 avìje già turnète a lu paìse,
 nda chille steticèlle senza 'uce
 e supr'a quillu porc ca scamàite
 mbrugghiète nda na zuca sott'a nùie
 come ngàne l'avissete u curtèlle.
 E mi sfurràite 'a rise
 pinzanne a quillu màntice di carne
 ca si sfiatàite
 e a nui' ca mpaurète
 ci avìme fatte tante nu munzèlle.

Pó' le virìj' nda ll'arie,
 tèle e quèle,
 'a faccicèlla rusète
 come ll'ostie nd 'a chièsie quanne u sóue
 ci tràsete 'a matine
 cch'i vitre d'i finestre culurète:
 schitte c' 'a serannotte i'èr' vicine;
 e quillu scure 'urde c'arrivàite
 a cannète di fume
 da 'a porta annivrichète nnant' 'a strète
 come 'a vucca d'u forne,

già lle facite i cose e chilla facce
arripicchiète e zinne e cchi na cére
di chi 'ssivite pacce.

E pure u tauline
addù ci stavije appuggète
i'èr' come nu vrascére ca le tròvese
cchi tante 'cruce, 'a matine,
e 'a palette di ferre, da nu lète,
nd' 'a cinnere chiatrète.

The Schoolteacher

I never saw my schoolteacher again.
Now she must be old
or I am still a child
if in a letter
she sent me a kiss today.

In all these years I have yet to meet
a more beautiful young woman:
she had a face so delicate,
pale-rose as the Holy Host
when the church bell rings at break of day.

As I listened to my aunt
read me the letter,
I was already back in my hometown,
in those dim narrow streets
looking down at that pig that kept on yowling,
tangled in a rope beneath us, pinned down,
as though he had a knife thrust in his throat.
And I wanted to laugh
thinking of those bellows of flesh
suddenly go limp
and of us, who in our fright
had tumbled into a tall heap.

Then I would see it in the air,
just as it was,
a face as roseate
as a Host in church when the morning sun
shines through the stained-glass windows:
but night was drawing near;
and that foul darkness pouring out
in flues of smoke
from the blackened door
that gaped onto the street
like the mouth of an oven,

already made that face, all things,
appear crumpled and small,
and cloaked them with an air of madness.

And even the table
on which I used to lean
was like a brazier
that bears the marks
of many crosses in the morning²,
and with the iron fire-shovel to the side,
in the cold ashes.

²Crosses were marked in the ashes to keep away evil spirits.

Le porte scritte nfàcce

Le porte scritte nfàcce
come vrósce dainte.

Com'agghi' 'a fè, Maronna méie,
com'agghi' 'a fè?
L'agghie lassète u païse
ca mi davite u respire d'u céhe,
e mó, nda sta citète,
mi sbàttene nd'u musse schitt'i mure,
m'abbrucuuine i cose e tanta grire
com'a na virminère.

Ié quèse quèse mi mpàure
si mi ci vóte nturne:
mi pàrete ca ll'occhie d'i cristiène
ti cògghiene a pitrète,
e quanne si fè gghiurne
mi si mbrògghiene i pére nda na zuche
ca stringete cchiù forte di na mène.

Com'agghi' 'a fè, Maronna méje,
com'agghi' 'a fè?
Mó le mànchete u fiète
a stu poure core scantète
e pìsete cchiù d'u munne
'a mascre ca mi mitte
cchi nun paré cchiù a ll'ate na minnìtte.

It's Written on My Face

The fire burning within
shows plainly in my eyes.

What am I going to do, Mother of God,
what am I going to do?
I've left the town
that gave me the wide breathing of the sky,
and in this city now
the walls alone crash hard against my face;
the things of the world, the endless shouts
plague me like nests of worms.

If I turn my head
I feel almost afraid:
people's eyes
seem to be casting stones,
and at the break of dawn
my feet become entangled in a rope
that grips even more tightly than a hand.

What am I going to do, Mother of God,
what am I going to do?
This poor frightened heart
is gasping for breath now
and the mask I wear
so I won't seem a wreckage
is heavier than the world itself to bear.

Metaponte

Ci su, tante billizze,
 a Metaponte,
 ca s'abbràzzene mute sottaterre.
 Di tutte sti cose antiche
 lle sèntese u rìspire,
 come quanne a lu scure
 t'appoggese cc' ricchie
 a na singhe di mure.

C'è na chiène ca nun spiccete mèie,
 a Metaponte;
 e quanne nd'i staggione
 si còcete a lu sóue,
 arrivèntete granne cchiù d'u mère
 come fùssete vitre nda n'abbàgghie
 ca s'i gnùttete i cose
 e tu nun virese
 manche nu fihicèlle di pàgghie.

Ié crére ca pure mó,
 u filòseme antiche,
 c'avì na jamma d'íore
 e ca stavite
 nda nu stesse mumente a què e allè,
 ci jòchete cuntente, quanne è notte,
 cchi nu mère di stelle;
 e nda quillu iancore accussì duce,
 sintènnese chiamè come cc' 'a voce
 di nn'organe affuchète nd'i muntagne,
 lle pàrete ca stè cchi nivichè.

Eppure,
 nda tutte chille billizze,
 vire ca ci su ssèmpe e ca ci tòrnene
 come ll'ombre ca pàssene nd'u specchie
 o com'i nüuicèlle ianche e nivre

nd'i jurnète di vente,
 chille pòure chène nfriddüùte
 cch'i ricchie vasce
 e 'a cura mmenz'i jamme
 cchi ll'occhie fatte zinne e chiangiüüenne
 e quèse chiène di sagne;
 e pó, come scafète nda na pétre,
 lle trove i cristiène ca stavìne
 arraughietà e citte com'i morte
 ca nun sàpene cchiù chigghi'è nu lagne.
 Schitte ca nun c'è cchiù
 quill'òmmene cicrillóne
 ca caminàite a crok e le tiràite
 cc'u cirre nnant'a ll'occhie na carriole;
 e manche cchiù lle sente
 i parüuèlle ncantète
 ca pó' dicìte a mmi com'a nu tète
 quanne turnèj, cuntente a lu palse
 o quanne l'aspittèj'a n'atu tréne
 cchi ghiì, a lu stùrie
 com'a nu morte-accise.

Stève facègne vecchie,
 Maronna mèje;
 e óje, si ci penze,
 nun sacce dice bbóne quante cose
 ci àne passète e pàssene mmischète
 a quillu fiète sàpie ca ti ncàntete
 e t'i pòrtete i morte.
 E doppe ca sùu spinnète
 e tegne i pile ianche nd'i mustazze,
 ci uéra chiange a la logne
 e forte forte
 nda chilla chiène
 e proprie allè, nd'u menze
 di tutte chille cruce ca s'ammùccene
 nd' 'a 'uce d'i billizze mó arrasète
 aunìte a quillu trene ca virìje

sempe mpuntète e ca le tegne a mmènte
 com'a na zuca tise nd'i scannìje
 di na murra di gente
 ca senze na paróue ss'appinnine
 e lle facìne com'a tanta nnóre
 cchi tutte chille mène arrussichète.

A Metaponte,
 mbàreche schitte cchi ll'ate,
 si ll'hène 'a chèpa frische o su' cuntente,
 c'è stu sapore antiche c'assincìrete
 e mirichiùte ll'occhie cchi na 'uce
 ca ti scènnete a u core duce duce;
 c'è stu fiète d'i morte ca ti cùntene
 i billizze di tanne e mó scurdète,
 ma ié quanne ci passe père a Criste
 doppe ca ll'anne schiuvète.

Sempe ca torne mi ci sente sèmpe
 cc' 'a raspa ngàne di nu chiante e strinte
 a tutte quante chille cristiène
 d' 'a razza méje
 ca pure mó ci stène
 com'i chène tutt'osse e menze sagne,
 annivrichète e ferme com'i strazze
 e citte citte com'a tanta morte
 ca nun sàpene cchiù chigghi'è nu lagne.
 Nun sacce cché facére, Criste,
 cchi lle fè ni picca picche cuntènte
 tutte sti frète méje
 ca mo nd'u sonne lle sente!
 A piscicchiue,
 lle funnichére u sagne
 e pur'i còppue dill'occhie
 mi juchére:
 ma nun pozze fè nente.
 “Chiacchiere” mi dïcete,
 e a lu stesse mumente,

nd'u sprufunne d'u core na scannìje.
 “Schitte i uagnone tòrte
 si scòrdene c' 'a fére
 nvéce di t'appacè portete 'a morte”.

Già furèrete assèie,
 furèrete,
 si l'averese 'a uija
 di ti ni i' griranne nd'i notte
 come nd'u vente i spìrite:
 da tutte chille fòrchie scure scure
 scafète a què e allè nda chilla chiène
 sintèrese risponne na canzòne
 accumpagnète da nu *cupe-cupe*:
*“Grapille ll'occhie, uaglió, ca pó ' t'accirete,
 si c'éte 'a nive, u lupe.”*

Ah Maronna Maronne,
 nun ti ni prèmete proprie
 di stu sudore di morte
 ca da quanne agghie nète
 ancora nun m'ha' stujète!
 E cché lle pigghie a ffè stu picca fiète
 pinzanne a tante billizze
 ca s'abbràzzene mute sottaterre?
 Da tanta tempe u sonne m'hè lassète
 e m'hè scurute ll'occhie ca ririne
 si mó nd'u munne camine
 com'a sti frète méje arruinète.
 Va bbóne va bbóne
 ca schitt'allè mi si grapète 'a porte
 d' 'a chèsà mméje e m'i tiràite i spine
 ca mi davìne 'a morte;
 ca ll'hène sempe sempe na paróue
 e ti su, sempe amiche

si lle chiàmese duce e l'accarizzese
 i cosicèlle antiche;

ma avògghie di le sente cchiù vicine
u respire 'untène d'i jarammele
ca pàrlene cch'i grille, a lu paìse,
quanne ièssete 'a lune;
avogghie di sapé ca pur'i fiume
e tutte quant'i grire d'i uagnune
cch'i 'uce d'i finestre supr'i fosse
na vote m'aspittàine cuntente
e ci arrivàine come nda nu sonne
supr'i vrazze d'u vente:

a Metaponte,

u jurne ca ci passe,
nun mi ni pòzze ancora scurdè
di quillu campanèlle sempe aguèle
ca mi parlàite schitte di nu trene
come cchi dice:

“Sàpese?

I cose belle o brutte
nda sta chiène,
ci pone stè nnaterne tèle e quèle”.

Metaponto

There are so many wonders,
in Metaponto,
that silently embrace beneath the earth.
You feel the breath
of all these ancient things
as if in the darkness
you were to put your ear
against a crack upon a wall.

There is a plain that never ends,
in Metaponto;
and when in summer
it swelters in the sun,
it looms vaster than the sea
like a shimmer of glass
that enshrouds everything
in radiant light
and you can't see
a single blade of grass.

I think that even now
the ancient,
golden-thighed philosopher,
who could be in two places
at one time,
still frolics there
with a sea of stars
when darkness falls;
and in that lacy whiteness
he hears a call
like the voice of an organ
drowning among the mountains,
and it seems to him
that it's about to snow.

And yet,

amidst those wonders,
I see those ragged dogs chilled to the bone,
wandering there as always, their ears
low to the ground and their tails tucked
between their legs, their eyes grown
small and teary and almost filled with blood,
and they come back
like shadows that flit across a mirror
or like small clouds, white and black
against a windy day;
and then, as if carved in stone,
I find those people standing there
rumped and silent as the dead,
incapable of breathing out a moan.
But you no longer see
that mountain of a man
who pulled a wheel-barrow
with his head bowed
and a shock of hair over his eyes;
and I don't hear
the magical words he used to say to me,
like a father,
when I went back, so happy, to my town
or when I waited for another train
to go to boarding school
like a dead soul in pain.

I'm getting old,
Mother of God;
and if I think back
today it's hard to tell how many things
have passed and pass, mixed
with that gentle breath that enchants you
and brings you the dead.
And though I'm bald
and have white hairs in my moustache,
I want to weep
long and hard

in that plain
and right there, among all those crosses hid
in the light of the wonders now forsaken
with that train
that I saw forever motionless
and remember as a rope stretched taut amid
the sorrows of a multitude of people
who swung on it in silence
and made a myriad knots
with their reddened hands.

In Metaponto,
perhaps for others only,
if they are still content or have no cares,
there is this ancient fragrance that can clear
and restore your eyes with a soft light
descending very gently in your heart;
there is the breath of the dead, with their tales
of all the ancient wonders now forgotten;
yet every time I'm there I seem like Christ
soon after they have freed him from his nails.

Whenever I go back I always feel
the rasp of crying in my throat
and I feel close to all
the many people of my blood
who are still there today
like dogs, thin-blooded and all bones,
blackened and motionless like rags
and wholly silent like a throng of dead men
incapable of breathing out a moan.
O Christ, I'd go to the end of the earth
to make sure they have one moment's bliss,
all these brothers of mine
who talk to me in my dreams!
I'd sink my blood
in streams
and I would stake

my very eyelids:
but I can't do a thing.

"Idle talk",
an anguish tells me in the meantime
in my heart's depths.
"Only wayward boys
forget that noise brings death
instead of peace."

It would already be a lot,
it would be a lot
if you had the fever
to go shouting in the night
like ghosts in the wind:
from all those darkened lairs
dug here and there along that plain
you'd hear a song reply,
accompanied by a *putipù*:
"*Open your eyes, my boy, because
the wolf will kill you, if there is snow.*"

Ah, Mother of God, Mother of God,
you really do not care
about this deathly sweat
that you have yet to wipe
since the day of my birth!
And what's the use of taking this brief breath
thinking of all the many wonders
that silently embrace beneath the earth?
It's been so long my dreams have vanished
and dimmed these eyes that used to laugh before
if now I walk across the world
like these, my broken brothers.
It's true, it's true
that it was only there the door
of my house opened,
and pulled out the ends

of thorns that gave me death;
that ancient things
always have a word for you and will
always be your friends
if you call them softly and caress them;
but you keep yearning to feel closer still
to the distant breath of the ravines
that talk to the crickets in the town
when the moon comes out;
you long to think that even running streams
and all the rowdy children's shouts
with the lighted windows high above the gullies
together waited for me happily once
and arrived as in a dream
borne on the arms of the wind:
 in Metaponto,
whenever I go by,
I still cannot forget
that little bell that never changed,
that spoke to me only of a train
as if to say:
 “You know?
things beautiful or ugly, in this plain,
can remain eternally the same.”

From *Nd'u picciarelle di Turse*

I morte a San Francische

Ié proprie nun le sapìje
 ca nd'u cummente di San Francische,
 a lu paise méje,
 avìne scafète i morte da i mure
 dli chilla chièsia sfunnète,
 e ghiittète cchi nterra com'a chène
 o com'a osse di ciucce
 nd'i pétre e nd'i piscóne d'u Canèe.
 Stu fatte
 m'à cuntète nu furastére,
 e ié ancora nun lle sacce
 si ci agghi' 'a crére.

M'è ditte:

“Sènne da chilla chièsia
 mi sintìe tante curiuse
 e nun sapìe cché fè:
 mi mnicàite 'a raggia,
 e gghiùste nfronte l'avére sparète
 a u prime c'avére affruntète.
 Manche a la guerra, uagnù,
 lassèrene i morte cchi nterra;
 manche a nu nimice a morte,
 si ni iaccàste 'a chèpe cchi n'accète
 e rinnucìste a stozze e a pitazze,
 ni vutèrese i spalle com'a strazze

nd'i vrangelle d'u vente ca lle ièttete
 a fracichè nd'i fosse o supre ll'Irmice
 di nu paazze”.

“Eppure, a la Ravatène”

uìja risponne a lu forastére,
 “c'è nu prèvete bbone;
 vè sempe sempe aunite cch'i puurèlle,
 stu previticchie;
 màngete accusì picche

e pàrete na cannicèlle,
 tante s'è fatte sicche.
 I'è ghiille
 ca le tènete 'a chiève di San Francische;
 schitte ille ci dicete 'a missa,
 e lle fè ghiille 'a festa
 cchi chille quatte stròppue di barracche
 e chille quatte bandiste
 ca sunàne nd'i sciolle
 ci fàine nasce 'a 'uce ca spannivite,
 a Pasca, Gese Criste”.

Don Sauató mi sèntese?
 Le sàpese, si o no,
 ca mo nda San Francische
 àne scafète ll'osse d'i morte?
 E si proprie nisciune t'i dicivite,
 come po gghi'esse mèi
 ca tu ancora nun l'ha' sunnète?
 O pènzese ca i spìrite
 ièssene schitte 'a notte come ll'ombre
 d'i 'nammurète?

Ma po si na pizóche ti parlàvite
 citte citte nd' 'a 'ricchie,
 ci iste tu, sì o no, da menzignore?
 ti strafacciaste a curre a la caserma
 cchi tante di ligna dafóre?
 Proprie nente nente,
 nda quillu iurne brutte e disgraziète,
 t'anne ditte i iaramme
 ca su' cchiù antiche d' 'a morte?
 Ah ca tu mbàreche lle sintisse nd'u vente
 tutte chille grire ammatassète
 di chi ancora ci chiangete e gghiastèmete
 'a mahasorte!

T'aviss' 'a mpaurè,
 cc'amore ca ci crèrese averamente

ca ci ànne 'ssùte i spirite nda San Francische?

Ma su' proprie ll'osse d'i morte
siminète cchi nterra, don Sauató.

Sente, sente,

chille ca m'è cuntète u furastére,
tante ca ié mo ancora nun lle sacce
si ci agghi' 'a crere:

“Agghie viste na chèpe di morte
cch'i rente fracichète e menze virde
e tant'osse spizzète e sfarinète
ca si mmiscàine a trève e a cannihére
a cavicrogne e a zippere vruscète.
C'èrete pur'u schèetre lucente
– e avit' 'a i'esse di na uagninelle
tante parète zinne – ca rirète;

e, ni picca cchiù allè, na vesticelle,
tèle e quèle a nu strazze ca ammulète
le minnuite u forne; e nda na nicchia,
ci stavite cuntente na Maronna”.

Chi è stète, don Sauató, chi è stete?

diciammille a mmi chi è stète.

Nisciune mi lèvete d' 'a chèpe

ca tu le sàpese, e come,

chi l'è fatte rirenne sta minnitte.

Avit' 'a avè picone e martelle, u mort-accise,

e avite 'a i'esse sùue, chilla notte,

com'a chi s'abbiete a bon'ore

e arrivete nd'u vosche quanne è scure

e pó come nd' 'a porta d'u paravise

cchi mène e pére scàfete u trisore.

Ma nisciune rispònnete.

Mó, nda San Francische,

pure i picca vitre d'u finistrone,

addù c'èrete ll'organe,

nun si truncuine nd'u vente;

nun sèntese cchiù na voce
 e i martelle d' 'a forgia
 ca lle inghiène i fosse di Maurigge
 come di risicelle di uagnune;
 e pure u fiume luntène
 s'at' 'a i'èsse mpuntète
 ntramente c'atturte atturte,
 spijene i iaramme senza fiète.

Poura Ravatène!

L'agghie truvète sempe com'u cuc
 appujète e cch'i scille atturcigghiète
 a cucuzze di timpe nmenz'i frène.
 Come doppe mill'anne,
 pure mó mi pàrete di carvone
 e mbàreche mo cchiù nun lle sintèrete,
 nsurdute da nu tempe sempe aguele,
 'a vocia méja e u sóne
 ca ni scippèj' cc' 'a pétra a la campène.
 Manche 'a Maronna ca è rumèse ntatte,
 cc' 'a curone e cc'u mante di brillante,
 nda chilla nicchia,
 si n'addonete cchiù ca ci su' i morte;
 rírete duce e nsonne,
 e nun s'abbàscete mèi
 com'u cée luntène;
 stè cc' 'a faccia vutète a u finistrone
 addù c'èrete ll'organe,
 e virete schitte ll'erva
 e i paumme salvagge, quanne è gghiurne;
 pó, quanne si fè notte,
 cùntete a une a une schitte stelle.

Quante arrivintèrete cchiù cuntente,
 'a Maronna,
 si angùune ni vutèrete e chiichèrete
 ni picca picca 'a chèpe cchiù a què;
 sùbbite virèrete 'a vesticelle

di chilla pòura uagninelle,
com'u 'ampe d'u specchie ca ti cìchete
si tu lle fèi girè come nd'i iocche
a la 'uce d'u sóue;
e cchi fè preste preste,
lle sbattèrete i mène e lle chiamèrete
i mòneche cappuccine,
ca ssèrene cantanne e cc'u cirogge,
e ca pó, nda quatte vrazzète,
prima ca guardèrese a lu rilogge,
avèrene alliggrèrete tutt cose
cchi na fùà di vent e cc' 'alligrizze
d'i uagnune ca fàine cozzuatùmmue,
di pette e di pinnine nda na strète,
doppe ch'è nivichète.

The Dead in St. Francis's

I really didn't know
that in the convent of St. Francis,
in my town,
they had dug the dead out of the walls
of that crumbling church,
and thrown them on the ground
like dogs or like the bones
of asses amid the stones
and boulders of the Channel.
I heard this
from a stranger,
and I am still not sure
I can believe it.

He said:
"I felt very odd
coming out of that church
and didn't know what to do:
I was in a such a rage
I could have shot the first person I met
right between the eyes.
My friends, not even in war time
they would have left the dead upon the ground;
you would have never turned your back on someone,
as if he were a dishrag in the clutches
of the wind, that lets it drop
to rot at the bottom of a pit
or on a rooftop;
not even a mortal enemy, if you split
his head wide open with an ax
and hacked him into tiny bits and pieces.

"And yet in Rabatana,"
I meant to tell the stranger,
"there is this one good priest;
he always walks together with the poor

this pint-sized priest;
he eats so little
and looks like a thin straw, he is
so lean.
He's the one who holds
St. Francis' keys;
he's the one person who says mass up there,
and he's the one who looks after the feast
with those four sorry stalls,
and those four bandsmen
who play among the ruins
and give rise to the light that Jesus Christ
dispensed at Easter.”

Don Salvatore, do you hear me?
don't you know
that now in St. Francis'
they have dug up the bones of the dead?
And if really no one's told you,
how can it ever be
you haven't dreamed it yet?
Or do you think that ghosts
come out at nighttime only
like lovers' shadows?

But then, if a pious old lady
did whisper in your ear,
have you ever gone to see
the Monsignor? Have you?
Did you run like mad to go call the cops,
with your tongue hanging?
Didn't the ravines, more ancient
than death itself, say
anything to you, anything at all,
on that foul, on that grievous day?
Ah, maybe you heard them in the wind,
all the tangled shouts
of those who still lament and curse

their evil lot!

Will you be afraid,
because you really do believe
that ghosts came out inside St. Francis'?
But they are truly the bones of the dead
strewn on the ground, don Salvatore.
Listen, listen
to what the stranger said,
and even now I still don't know
whether I can believe it: "I've seen
a dead man's skull
with its teeth all rotten and half green
and lots of bones, shattered and ground to dust,
that were mingled with chandeliers and rafters
with plaster flakes and twigs burned to a cinder.
There was a glinting skeleton as well – it must
have been a little girl's,
it looked so very small – that laughed;
and, lying next to it,
a tiny dress just like a washcloth moistened
to dampen a hot oven; and in a niche
stood a Virgin looking very pleased."

Who was it, don Salvatore, who?
tell me who it was.
No one can tell me
that you did not know
who did this evil thing and laughed about it.
That fiend from hell
must have had pick and shovel,
and he must have been alone, that night,
as one who sets out very early for
the distant woods, and reaches them at twilight;
then, as if at heaven's door,
he digs for treasure with his hands and feet.
But no one answers.
Now, in St. Francis',
even the few panes of the large window

where the organ stood, no longer quiver
in the wind;
you hear no voices now,
nor the hammers of the forge
that seemed to fill
Mauriggio's gorges
with children's laughter;
and even the far river
must have stood still,
while everywhere
breathless ravines keep watching.

Poor Rabatana!
I always found it like a cuckoo,
perched and with its wings enlaced
around crests of clay amid the landslides.
It still seems made of coal
as though a thousand years had passed,
and maybe now it would not hear my voice,
the sound a stone can wring out of a bell,
deafened by a time eternally the same.
Even the Virgin, who has remained intact
with her crown and with her diamond mantle,
within that niche,
no longer notices the dead;
maybe she' smiling softly in a dream,
and never stoops
like the distant sky; her face
is turned to the large window
where the organ stood,
and sees only the grass
and the wild doves, during the day;
then, when darkness falls,
one by one she counts only the stars.

How much happier
would the Virgin be,
if someone were to turn and bend her head

a fraction to this side;
at once she'd see
that poor girl's tiny dress
like the flash of glass
that blinds you if you twist it
as in a game played in the naked sun;
and to make haste,
she'd clap her hands and call
the Capuchin friars,
who would come out with songs and candles,
and then, with a few rapid motions,
before you looked up at the clock,
would put everything to rights
with the wind's speed and the lightheartedness
of children tumbling
up and down the street
after a snowfall.

U mort*a Ernesto de Martino*

Apprime, a lu paise,
 si c'èrete nu mort,
 ll'accumpagnàite 'a banda
 e Dumìniche u Cumme cch'i rastrelle.
 M'è rumèse nd' 'a 'ricchie
 u sóne d'u bumbardine
 tagghiète ntrunc come da n'accète
 da "u nzùmmete" d'i piattine
 ca s'allungàite trimuàne a chiange
 nd'i vovicèlle ianche d'i clarine.
 Mó tutt cose è cangète,
 nun mporte si duce duce,
 ma ci su' sempe i prèvete
 e u sacristène cc' 'a cruce
 appresse a na fihéra di uagnune
 ca le rèjene mbrazze 'a cronicelle
 di ferre ngiallanute com' 'a lune.

Le pòrtene u taùte supr'i muscke
 e arruzzuùine i pére d'i zaccuèe,
 cchi ttacce e suprattacce, com'a cchiumme:
 ti pàrete ca pàssene i vitture
 ca vène fóre, 'a notte, quanne chiòvete,
 e ca scìppene, com'a piscunète,
 da u sonne, chille pòure signure.
 E quanne su' nd'u strittue d'u Barone,
 le gìrene u taùte chiène chiène;
 su' cchiù vicine ancora chille grire
 scattète nda nu mère di suspire:
 Oh scasce méja granne; oh bene d' 'a mamma.

'A cruce quèse tòcchete i finestre
 e chille ca ci chiàngene arranzète;
 l'inghiete 'a strète 'a folla com'u mère

ca nghianete annivrichète.

Pó, quanne su' nd' 'a chiazza, cchiù affuchète,
le sèntese, e a la logne, n'atu grire:

Bene d'u tète sue, bene d'u tète,
tante ca mó le càngene u culore
nda chille facce a bumme, ianche e russe
prèvete e previticchie ca pó càntene
cchiù sincire e cchiù forte di nu trone.

Ti scàntese ca i vitre d'i balcune
nd'u grèpe e chiure trèmene e lampijene;
ca pur'i pétre chiàngene nd'i strète
cchi tutte ll'ate cose, e ci cannijene
cristiène senza vrazze e senza iamme
ca uèrena scappè e s'arruzzuuine
mmischète com'a ghiòmmere di pice
a pulle senza pére e senza scille.

Pó come nd'i muntagne ti rispònnene
tante voce si ièttese nu grire,
ti pàrete ca u tocche d' 'a campène
i'è martelle di forge nd'i scintille,
e ca pó nturne u nivre d'i iaramme
lle nfùete nda ll'arie tante splrite
ca si iùnnene e spìngene cchi gghi'èsse,
dasupre ll'ate, u prime ca l'accirete
quillu rumore cupe di chi trùzzete
cc' 'a chèpe a lu taùte, e pó si ràschete
'a facce, e pó si stràzzete i capille.

Ah scannije, scannije;
mó vlrese tutte ianche,
e nun ci frùscete u vente
o nu suspire
di Die.

The Funeral

Before, if there was
a funeral in town,
the band would follow,
and so did with his rakes
Domenico the Dwarf.
I can still hear the deep
sound of the saxhorn
cut clean as with an ax
by the crash of cymbals
that lengthened quivering to weep
in the white thin voices of the clarinets.
Now everything has changed
even if the change's been slow,
but the priests are still around
and the sextons with the cross
walking behind young boys in a long row
holding small moon-yellow
iron crowns.

They carry the casket on their shoulders
and the peasants' feet trundle like lead
in their heavy shoes and hobnailed heels:
they make the sound that country wagons make,
when they come out at night, in the light rain,
and like pelted stones violently wrench
the luckless high society from their sleep.
And when they reach the Baron's alleyway,
they're forced to turn the casket very slowly;
closer than ever are those piercing cries
bursting within an endless sea of sighs:
Oh great misfortune; oh mother's dearest love."

The cross now almost grazes the high windows
and those who weep there as they lean outside;
the crowd pours out into the narrow street
and swells like the sea surging in black waves.

Then, when they reach the square, you hear
another cry, more strangled, longer still:
“Father's love, father's dearest love,”
so that now the red-and-white, puffed faces
of priests and altar boys begin to lose
their color, as their song resounds more clear
and louder than the sudden crack of thunder.
You're frightened by the glasspanes of the balconies
that flash and quiver as they close and open;
that even stones are weeping in the street
in oneness with all things, and then the sudden
gasp of armless, legless men anxious to flee
who roll and tumble mixed like skeins of pitch
with birds stripped bare of any wings or feet.

Then, as between two mountains, myriad voices
answer if you let out a cry, the toll
of churchbells seems a forger's hammer
amidst the sparks of fire, and everywhere
the blackness of ravines appears to sling
a multitude of ghosts into the air
who lunge and push and press to be the first,
above all others there, to kill the mournful
thump of those who crash their heads against
the casket, and then claw at their faces,
and then tear out their hair.

Ah, anguish, anguish;
now you see everything white,
and no wind whispers
nor does the sigh
of God.

Sùu scantète

Sùu scantète,
 e nun guéra 'ssl cchiù.
 Don Albine si n'è scriète,
 quillu don Albine ca cantàite
 com'i pulle nd'u vosche
 e ca com'u vente passàite.

Sere notte e matine
 ci stavite di chèse e di putéje
 nda chille strète ca si facine d'óore,
 e si ci pàsete mó,
 i'è come nda nu forne chiatrète
 u nivre di na mappine.

Sante Rocche méje, sante Rocche méje,
 a tti Gese Criste ti mannàvite
 nu belle canagghióne affizziunète
 ca t'alliccàite i carne scurcète;
 a mmi mi mannàvite i tacce
 cchi chiste pére scàvize,
 ca pó arrivèntene iacce
 si, doppe ca carlve vuc-sutte,
 duce duce mi iàvize.
 Ié sùu scantète, sùu scantète,
 anime d'u prijatòrie,
 e nun guéra 'ssi cchiù:
 don Albine si n'è scriète
 quillu don Albine ca cantàite
 com'i pulle nd'u vosche,
 e ca com'u vente passàite.

I Am Afraid

I am afraid,
and I won't go out anymore.
Don Albino has disappeared,
the same don Albino who before
sang like a bird in a forest
and went by like the wind.

Evenings, nights, mornings,
he felt at home along those streets
that used to turn to gold,
and if he goes there now,
he's like a rag's black grit
inside a freezing oven.

St. Rocco, St. Rocco,
Jesus Christ sent you
an affectionate dog
to lick your flayed raw flesh;
to me he sent only nails
for these bare feet
which will turn to ice
if I fall on my face
and slowly rise again.

I am afraid, I am afraid,
souls of purgatory,
and I won't go out anymore.
don Albino has disappeared,
the same don Albino who before
sang like a bird in a forest,
and went by like the wind.

Sempe sempe

Chiange,
e caminè cc' 'a zuca nganne:
chiste è tutte.

Pó, quanne mi cucche,
mi diche duce duce nd'u scure
sutt'i cuperte:
“Chi le sàpete si crèi. . . ”;
e accusì lle chiure ll'occhie,
ma nd'u sonne tòrnete cchiù assèi,
'a paure.

Sempe sempe,
notte e ghiurne,
mi fischene pétre nturne.

Always, Always

To weep,
and walk with a rope around my neck:
that is all.

Then, when I go to sleep,
I say to myself softly in the dark,
beneath the covers:
“Tomorrow maybe, who knows...”;
and so I close my eyes,
but the fear grows
stronger than ever in my dreams.

Always, always,
night and day,
stones hiss by all around me.

I signe di cruce

Ié mi stenne nda ll'ombre,
Il'ate fùjene nd'u sóue;
c'éte allè u sonne duce d' 'a morte
a què ci vùllene schitte paróue.

Ci fùe pure ié com'a na canne
nda chilla bella 'uce,
ma nvece di nu flaute
lle sintirene i schème di nu pacce.

Sucutète, allore, mi ni scappèje
fuchète, e com'a stozze,
cchi tante signe di cruce
ca pure mó su' nivre supr' 'a facce.

The Signs of the Cross

I stretch out in the shade,
others flee in the sun;
there, death's gentle sleep,
here only simmering words.

Like a reed, I also stood
within that radiant light,
but instead of a flute
they heard a madman's plight.

Then, persecuted, I took flight
afame and torn to pieces,
so many signs of the cross
still black across my face.

Nd'u terramote d'u vente

Mó ca nun c'è cchiù nente cchi mmi,
 mi sente arrauggiète nda na frunne
 supr'a nu mère di càvice;
 e forte forte uéra chiamè,
 ma pó m'agghi' 'a stè attente, cca, nd' 'a fua,
 nu schicciue mi putèreta cichè.

E vève,
 e nda quillu iancore tante granne
 come di tutte ll'osse d'i morte
 m'accùpene ll'ombre nivre
 di cristiène vistute a lutte;
 e quanta vecchie, pó, quante scianchète,
 m'abbissene nd'i trimore,
 nvece di m'aiutè.

E accusi torne nd'u terramote d'u vente
 ca nun mi lassàite mèi, 'a notte,
 e ca tante vote, nd'u scure,
 chière e tunne dicite, u disgrazziète:

“I'è chista 'a vita tua: nu turmente
 ca t'at' 'a fè sbatte 'a chèpe a lu mure”.

In the Wind's Earthquake

Now that I have nothing left
I am wrapped in a leaf
over a sea of lime;
and I want to cry out very loud,
but I must be careful; in the strain
the spray from it could blind me .

And I go,
and in that immense whiteness that seems born
from all the bones of the dead
the black shadows of people dressed in mourning
suffocate me;
then, instead of giving me a hand, throngs
of old men, of cripples, hurl me
into an abyss of shudders.

So I return to the earthquake of the wind,
that never left me at night, the wretch
that a hundred times in the dark
said to me straight out:

“Your life is this: a torment that will make you
violently crash your head against the wall.”

from *Eccó 'a morte?*

Aiére

Aiére nun ha' vinute,
e a mmi ca t'aspittèj' cannijàne
passàite 'a morte cchi ncolle
e si facìte u fridde cchiù granne.

Pó come nda nu mère di nive
si fècete citte u munne:
avì schitte nu passarelle
cch'i scille tise a lu funne.

Yesterday

Yesterday you didn't come
and as I waited for you, breathless,
death brushed by me
and it turned bitter cold.

Then as in a sea of snow
the world fell silent:
it only had a sparrow
with its wings extended in the depths.

U vese di menziurne

Steve aspittanne a menziurne
e tu le sàpese eccó.

“Ci màrchene dui minute”
accussì mi dlcete u rilogge
ca mbàreche pure tu
suspيرانne mó guàrdese nd' 'a logge.

U v'ì u v'ì ca scàttete, u v'ì
nda fische di sirene e nda campene
u grire di menziurne,
e nda quillu stesse mumente
u nivre ca tinìme nnante ll'occhie
si squàgghiete nd'u vese ca si mannème.

Pó si spirdéme nd'u cée
c'avvampichite cuntente:
passàvite 'a rise di nu sante,
o fùete u vente?

Midday Kiss

I was waiting for noon,
and you know why.

“Two minutes still to go”
so the clock tells me now
maybe you're watching too
on the veranda and sigh.

Look, look there, amid bells
and sirens' sounds the midday cry
rings out,
and at that very moment
the dark before our eyes
melts in our distant kiss.

Then we lose ourselves within the sky
that's happily in flames:
was it a saint's smile
or the wind going by?

S'è fatte scure

S'è fatte scure e ll'albere su' tise
 com'i vrazze c'aspèttene na cose;
 tu nun ci si', amore, stasere,
 e nun ci vène a dorme i passarelle.

Aprime ci cantàine a migghièrè
 e assinciràine ll'arie,
 pó quanne ci stavine citte citte
 le cummigghiàine u cée i stellicelle.

E tutte quante 'a notte ci iucàine
 come cchi na murra d'angiuuicchie
 ca l'avine lassète u paravise
 ma schitte cchi ni picche.

Ah, stu scure ca nfòllete
 e sti pòure chiante tise tise
 com'i vrazze c'aspèttene na cose;
 manche stasere, amore, tu ci si',
 e nun ci vène a dorme com'apprime
 cuntente i passerelle;

mó u nivre di stu cée è nu cichète
 ca lle chiangete i stelle.

Darkness Has Fallen

Darkness has fallen, and the trees
are stretching out like waiting arms;
tonight you're not here with me, my love,
and the sparrows will not come back to sleep.

They sang here by the thousands
and once lightened the air;
then, when keeping wholly silent,
they shrouded stars and sky.

They played with them all night
like a band of angels
come down from paradise
but only for a little while.

Ah, this gathering darkness
and these poor trees
stretched taut like waiting arms;
even tonight you're not with me, my love,
and the sparrows no longer return
to sleep here happily
as they used to once;

now this sky's blackness
is a blind man mourning the stars.

Dui paróue

Sonne dui paróue
c'averen' 'a i'esse i cchiù belle
e nente cchiù:

“Amore méje”
mbàreche ànn' 'a i'esse chiste,
si lle dicese tu.

Two Words

I dream two words
the most beautiful,
that's all I do:

“My love”
maybe these are the ones,
if said by you.

Ancore aspette

Ancore aspette e pàrene mill'anne
ca nun lle sente cchiù na paruuèlle:
accussì i timpe franète
ca pó di vitre pàrene nd'u càvere
d' 'a stète,
nu schicciuicchie sònnene dill'acqua
d'u mère ca ll'è lassète.

120

from *Famme dorme*

U grille a lu balcone

Tutt'i sere - mó ca i'éte 'a staggione -
 quanne mi vève a cucchè,
 sente nu grille ca scàmete
 drét'u balcone;
 e s'aiùtete, u puurelle,
 ma nun sacce si a chiange o a cantè.

Po', tutte na vote,
 nda quillu belle frische di tróue,
 lle chiure ll'occhie e penze
 a quanne c'èrete u sóue;
 e u vente mòvete i frunne,
 e c'è nn'addore di ncenze,
 e, senze ca mi n'addogne,
 nd'u sonne sprufunne.

Ah, fùssete 'a Maronne ca quanne móre
 n'atu grillicelle com'a quiste
 mi davìssete duce i pinzére
 di chi si ni vè fóre;
 ni vutére cchi ssempe, a sta citète,
 i spalle, e, com'a spìrite ca fùjete
 nda nu paise morte, i'ére appresse
 a na murra di gente c'a lu campe
 s'abbijete cantanne nd' 'a nuttète.

The Cricket at the Balcony

Now that it's summertime,
every evening when I go to bed
I hear a cricket's wail
behind the balcony; the poor thing
tries hard, but I don't know
if it's to weep or sing.

All of a sudden then
in that cool air of October,
I close my eyes and think of when
the sun was out;
and the wind stirs the leaves
and there is a scent of incense,
and I sink into deep slumber
unaware of my lost senses.

Ah, I only hope to God that when I die
a cricket just like this one
will gently pass to me the thoughts of those
who go out to the fields;
I'd turn my back for ever on this city,
and like a ghost
in flight through a dead town,
I'd follow the host
of people who set out singing in the night
toward the countryside.

I cose citte

Sti cose citte,
stu chiante ca s'ammùccete
mó ca i'è notte,
mi d'icene ca tornete
u uagninelle ca i'ére:
nun c'éte 'a rise com'a tanne
ma ié le sacce scunfunnète
e vive com'a mmi
nda nn'atu grire cchiù granne.

Po' lle sente ca tutte dui
ci iòchene com'a frète
nda chilla vocicelle amère e duce
di nu flauticchie di canne.

Silent Things

These silent things
this secret weeping,
now that it's night,
tell me the boy I used to be
is coming back;
there is no laughter now
but I know he's far off
and alive like me
within a greater cry.

Then I hear the two of them
playing like brothers
in the thin, bittersweet voice
of a reed pipe.

Nun ci pozze accustè

Nun ci pozze accustè cchiù a lu paise.
Picca prime di ci arrivè
a mène manche di chi ci azzòppete,
c'è na streticelle menze torte.
Quillu picca stozze ca si ni virete
i'è com'a nu curtelle atturcighiète
nd'i grire di na chianche e nda na rùzzine
ca ti fàine ll'occhie appannète.
I'è proprie allè ca girene u taùte
cc'u morte c'at' 'a ì' a lu campisante,
e i'éte allè ca mó s'è fatte pétre
quillu mère trùue di chiante.
Nun ci pozze accustè cchiù a lu paise,
mó sùu tante débbye nda stu core,
e proprie come ll'arie mi trapànete
quillu curtelle antiche di dolore.

I Can't Go Near

I can't go near my town again.
Just before you get there,
there is a small, half-crooked road
wending to the left.
The edge of it you see is like a blade
twisted amidst shrill slaughterhouse cries
and eye-blurring rust.
That's the spot where they turn the coffin
that carries the body to the graveyard,
and it is there that now
that murky sea of tears has turned to stone.
I can't go near my town again,
now that my heart has grown
so very faint, and the same ancient knife of pain
runs me through like air.

Cché m'aspèttete?

Chi le sàpete cché m'aspèttete.
 U taùte, è certe, ma apprime?
 Figne a mó spine e pétre,
 pétre e spine.
 Le putéra cuntè supr'i dicite
 i vote ca nn'aria duce
 m'è grapute ll'occhie, 'a matine.

Uéra sapé chi è ca mi vó morte
 e nun ll'hète u curagge di mi dice,
 nun lle facére nente, giure,
 tante, pure ille è nu nfilice.
 Sempe accusl stu munne:
 nu strùmmue ca sònete nd'u palme
 d' 'a mène d'i uagnune,
 po' na pétre ca fischete,
 n'accette
 ca facèrete a stozze pur' 'a lune.

Ma chigghi'é ca m'aspèttete,
 chigghi'éte?
 U taùte è certe, e va bbóne,
 ma apprime?
 Na pétra nfronte
 o na zuchèta nfacce?
 Schitte na cosa uéra dice a Die:
 “Falle i'èsse cchiù picche, nda stu munne,
 'a pacciarle”.

What Is in Store for Me?

Who knows what is in store for me.
The coffin, certainly, but before?
So far, stones and thorns,
thorns and stones.
I could count on my fingers
the times a gentle breath opened my eyes,
in the morning.

I'd really like to know who wants me dead
and cannot find the courage yet to tell me
I wouldn't do anything to him, I swear;
he too must be unhappy anyway.
That's the way of the world:
a spinning top that drones
in the palm of a boy's hand,
then the hiss of a stone,
an ax
that could hack the moon itself to pieces.

But what's in store,
what is it?
The coffin is certain, yes,
but before?
A stone between the eyes
or a lash across the face?
Only one thing I'd say to God:
"In this world, let folly be far less
than it is now."

Nisciune le sèntete

Proprie nun le sacce
 come fène ll'ate a dorme,
 e come fазze pure ié,
 si a ogne pizze di munne
 c'éte u fiète di chi mòrete.

Come fène a gghi'esse citte,
 sti notte,
 e tutt'i cose a stè ferme,
 si ll'hète 'a voce di nu scante,
 'a terra,
 e abbruccuine i verme.

E nisciune le sèntete u chiante
 nda sti campène a martelle.
 Nun pàrene sciartàgghie?
 Si mbrògghiene e si sbrògghiene
 schitte nda dui paroue.
 Si po' arrivèntene mille,
 nu milione,
 su' sempe sempe chille,
 dui ntutte:
 Mó móre.

No One Hears It

I really don't know
how others can sleep,
and how can I,
if every corner of the world
hides the breath of the dying.

How the nights here
can be silent,
and all things be still,
if the earth
has the voice of fear,
and worms are teeming.

And no one hears
the weeping in these death knells.
Don't they sound like a stammer?
They get tangled and untangled
in three words only.
If then they became
thousands, a million,
they'd always be the same,
three in all:
"I am dying."

Na catarra luntene

“Ca vó ittè u sagne”
dicì duce duce
na voce di porche nd' 'a notte,
e com'a na màscra di Carnuère
forte forte ririte;
o Chiangite?

Na cosicella nivre s'annacàite
e na bacchetta ianche facì sign
ma a chi?
a nu cristiène o a nu ciucce,
a nu sorge o a na iatte?

E si facì cchiù citte u scure
nda chille pétre e piscone,
e nu pòure chenicèlle scantète
si ni ì' mure mure,
e nisciune nisciune rispunnìite
a chille menze iastéme,
e chiuvìte.

Na catarra luntene
uìta sapé cché séme.

A Distant Guitar

“Let him sweat blood”
a piggish voice
said softly in the night,
and burst out laughing
like a Carnival mask;
or was it crying?

Something small and black was swaying
and a white wand motioned,
but to whom?
a man or an ass,
a mouse or a cat?

And the dark silence deepened
amid those stones and boulders,
and a poor frightened cur
scampered by a wall,
and no one, no one answered
those half-curses,
and rain began to fall.

A faroff guitar
wanted to know what we are.

Com' 'a musche

Certe mumente chiange com' 'a musche
 nd'u palme di na mène ca si chiùrete
 e pure ié m'aspette di ci sbatte
 scantète nda nu vitre ca s'ascùrete.

E nda stu scure come di na chèse
 di paise scurdète mi ci affoche,
 uéra grirè ma schiùppete nu vese
 di nu morte ca mmitete a lu iocche.

E mi vènete 'a rise
 e vire zumpè nu ialle
 c' 'a notte, po', nd'u grire si rivìgghiete
 supr'a nu père di partaialle:
 nu iallucce arraggète ca i cchiù belle
 cùntete cuntente e a une a une
 a pizzuète lle plgghiete.

E averamente ié père nu sóue
 nda 'ampe d'óore e na hiummèra virde
 nda nn'ariecella duce ca s'accittete
 supr'a nn'ùtime frusce di paróue.

Like a Fly

There are times when I weep like a fly
in the palm of a hand that starts to close
and terrified, I too expect to crash
against a quickly darkening pane of glass.

And within this darkness I slowly drown,
as in a house of a small forgotten town;
I want to cry out, but suddenly a corpse
smacks off a kiss and dares me to a game.

I want to laugh
and see a rooster leap
awakening at night within the scream
atop an orange tree:
a raging cockerel that counts all his beauties
happy as can be
and pecks at them one by one.

And I really seem a sun
amid flashes of gold and a green stream
in a sweet air that falls into a hush
over the final whisper of a word.

U tempe ca pàssete

Stu tempe ca pàssete
i'è nu grire nd'u scure,
e ci crèscete
e ci si fè sempe cchiù granne.

A què e allè na scintille
assimmìgghiete a nu 'ampe
ca nd'u fridde vàsete e accarìzzete
nu mure.
Ci uèrete fè nasce u sóue,
allessupre,
e com'a nu belle cristiène
ca mi uéreta parlè;
ma le chiàmete u vente u terramote,
e prime ca m'arrivene a lu core
su' già ndrubbichète i paróue.

Time Passing

This time that passes
is a cry in the dark,
and it grows there,
ever widening.

Here and there a spark
seems a flash of lightning
that kisses and caresses a wall
in the cold air.
It wants to give birth to the sun
up there,
like a handsome person
eager to talk to me;
but the wind summons an earthquake,
and the words are already buried
before they reach my heart.

Cc' 'a porta aperte

Dorme cc' 'a porta aperte
 come si avissit' 'a vinì une
 - morte o vive, nun lle sacce -
 e mó ca ci penze, u rilogge,
 nd' 'a notte scàttete ll'une.

Nun tegne nu specchie nd' 'a càmmera,
 e lle uéra sapé com'è fatte
 stu ianche dill'occhie;
 nun pozze dorme e lle sente
 ca dafóre scàmene i iatte.

Chigghi'è ca tegne nd'u sagne?
 Nun ll'agghie 'a frève e mi vròscete,
 e manche u vente le uérete
 si ni ittére nu lagne.

Nun c'è nisciune nd' 'a chèse,
 su' com'u pinzére sti mure,
 ancora nun dorme e nun sacce
 si chiange o si agghie paure.

With the Door Open

I sleep with the door open
as though expecting someone
— don't know whether dead or alive —
and as I think about it in the night
the clock strikes one.

I have no mirror in the room,
and I really want to look
at the white of these eyes;
I can't sleep and I hear
cats brawling outside.

What runs through my veins?
I have no fever yet I burn,
not even the wind would deign
to carry a moan I hurled at it.

There's no one in the house,
the walls are like thoughts,
I still can't sleep and don't know
whether I'm weeping or afraid.

From *Curtelle a lu sóue*

Tre voce tre pacce

Tre voce tre pacce
 – e mbàreche si ricrijàine –
 nun diche i cristiène ma i cose
 ca 'nfacce mi guardàine.

Si tuzzuùise a la porte
 di n'amiche ca i'è morte,
 le scàstrese cchi ll'ugne nu piscone
 menze affunnète nd' 'a nive
 doppe nu belle acquazzone:
 chill'ervicèlle ca stavì dasupre
 si mmìschete a lu zanghe,
 e i verme pó' nd'u nivre su' cuntente
 di i'èsse a lu poste d'u ianche.

'A prima voce mi parìte
 chille di une ca durmìte:
 c'èrete e nun c'èrete, a stu munne,
 e ié, aunìte cchi gghille,
 appapagghiète mbàreche carìje
 com'a tróue na frunne.

'A siconde i'èrete nu martelle
 e lle facì mó' tante na battariè
 mó' arrivintàite 'a scille di nu sóne
 ca duce l'accarìzzete u paise
 quanne nd'i strìttue, 'a notte, ci si gràpene
 ll'occhie d'i iattarelle.

E a terze? Chi le sàpete. Na cose
 ca nda nu vitre ràspete e s'affòchete,
 e tu scantète pènzese a na rose
 ca trùzzete chiatrète supr'i specchie

di na cascìottua rutte e pó' nd'u 'ampe
ci abbivìscete e mòrete.

E ti ni uérese scappé,
e t'i cùsete ll'occhie na paure
ca pó' tu pure strinte a chille pacce
rumànese nd'u scure.

Three Voices Three Madmen

Three voices three madmen
– and maybe they were pleased –
I don't mean the people but the things
that looked me in the face.

If you knock on the door
of a friend who has died,
you pry with your nails
a boulder half buried in the snow
after a heavy downpour:
the tender grass that cloaks it
mingles with the mud
and in the black of night
the worms are glad
to have escaped the white.

The first voice sounded
like that of a man asleep:
it was and it wasn't in this world,
and I, along with him, deep,
perhaps bewildered swirled
as foliage in October.

The second was a hammer
that now made a loud din,
now was a wing of sound
that gently stroked the town
when kittens' eyes, at night, unclosed
within the narrow streets.

And the third? Who knows.
Something that rasps against a glass and drowns,
and in your fright you think about a rose

that lashes chilled with cold upon the mirrors
of a broken case, and in the flash of light
it comes to sudden life and dies.

And you want to flee, and your eyes
are sewn shut by the fear
that you too will remain here
huddled among those madmen in the dark.

Schitte d'i cruce

Ci àt' 'a i'èsse na cundanne,
si mi 'nnammore schitte d'i cruce;
eppure,
i'è na cundanna duce:

nda tanta dolore
nu terramote e pó'
nmenz'i pétre u trisore.

Only Crosses

It must be a punishment,
if I fall in love with crosses only;
and yet
it is sweet punishment:

amidst so many moans
an earthquake, and then
a treasure among stones.

Torne da n'atu munne

Torne da n'atu munne:
accussi le l'assete e nun lle chiàngete
'a terra vruscète, na frunne.

Troppe assèi
ci agghie rumèse allè,
e chi le sàpete si mó'
le ngarre bbóne 'a strète.

Chi ci si ndrubbichète nda na chèse
e a picca a picca mòrete nd'u lutte,
sì e no si n'addònete, pò',
quanne gràpete 'a porte,
ca pure ille ni ièssete
cchiù citte d'u morte.

I Return from Another World

I return from another world:
so does a leaf leave the burnt earth
without regrets.

I have stayed there
much too long,
and now who knows
if I can find my way.

A man who buries himself in a house
and slowly dies in mourning,
afterwards barely notices,
when he opens the door,
that he too is coming out
quieter than a corpse.

From *Nu belle fatte*

Mbàreche mi vó'

Mbàreche mi vó',
e già mi sònnesse, 'a notte.
Ié pure,
accumminze a trimè nd' 'a site,
e mi mpàure.
Mi iunnére dasupr'a tti,
e tutte quante t'i suchére, u sagne,
nda na vlppeta schitte e senza fiète,
com'a chi mbrièche ci s'ammùssete
a na vutte iacchète
e uèreta natè nd'u vine russe,
cchi ci murì.

Perhaps You Want Me

Perhaps you want me,
and already dream of me at night.
I too
begin to tremble in my thirst,
and am afraid. I'd fling
myself upon you,
and suck your blood to the last drop,
in one long gulp and in one breath,
as one who's drunk and clings
to a cracked cask
aching to swim in the red wine,
to die in it.

Le sàpese tu

E lle grèpe ll'occhie,
e n'ata vote ti vite
cchiù mmègghie ca nd'u sonne.
Ci ha' stète averamente, e ferme,
addi mi,
com' 'a pétre nd' 'a càvece,
e ci ha' rumèse cchiù nfunne
d'u core d' 'a notte,
addù nun ci ràschete u vente.
Le sàpese tu
chille ca t'agghie fatte,
si mó dòrmese cuntente
e manche cchiù le sèntese
u schème d'i iatte.

E si chiste, apprime, com'a spirite
ti facìne dannè e t'i trincuuàine
u lette e pó' ittàine
tanta fridde nd'u scure
mó duce ll'occhie ti rìrete,
e arie arrivèntene i mure.

You Know

I open my eyes,
and I see you clearer
than in a dream again.
You have truly been with me,
and firm,
as stone in mortar,
and you have lingered there
deeper than the heart of night,
where no wind chafes.
You know
what I have done to you
if now you sleep contentedly
and can no longer hear
the wails of cats.

And if at first, like ghosts,
they drove you mad,
and shook your bed,
casting such bitter cold into the dark,
now your eyes wear
the softest smile,
and the walls are turning into air.

“Sì”

Nu vèse
nun furèrete accusibelle.
U picca fiète ca ci vóte
cchi dè voce a stu frusce,
rivigghièrete pure i morte.
Nun è paróue di Die
u 'ampe ca le tàgghiete 'ucente
u scure dí na vie?
M'ha' ditte “sì” e baste, no?
E nun ti ni scurdè, mó, crammatine,
si averamente ti mpàurese
di ci murì zicchète com'u sorge
nda n'arruine.
Ma ié ll'agghie 'a spiranza
e ha' stète proprie tu ca l'ha' scafète,
tu ca da sta cruce
m'ha' sunnète sempe schiuvète.

“Yes”

A kiss
wouldn't be as beautiful.
The little breath it takes
to lend voice to this sound,
would wake
even the dead.
Isn't God's word
the flash of light that cuts
into the blackness of a street?
You did say “yes” to me,
and wasn't that enough?
And don't forget it, now, tomorrow morning,
if you are really afraid of dying,
crushed like a mouse
beneath stone rubble.
But I have hopes
and it is you who unearthed them,
you who dreamed I'd be forever freed
from the nails of this cross.

Nun ci uèrete niente

Nun ci uèrete niente.
Abbastèrete di le tucchè
quillu fihecèlle ammuccète,
e tu,
doppe nu belle chiante,
ti sintèrese cuntente.
Ma ié nun lle vogghie spizzé quillu fihe;
mi mpàure di ci caré
nda nu spacche di terre
ca le gràpete u terramote.
Tante e tanta vote
mi ci agghie truvète zicchète
nda sti tinàgghie
ca tàgghiene pure u ferre
com'a fihe di pagghie.

It Wouldn't Take Much

It wouldn't take much.
It would be enough to touch
that hidden thread,
and you,
after a good cry,
would feel content.
But I don't want to break that thread;
I'm afraid of falling
into the crevice
opened by the earthquake.
How many times
have I been crushed
between those claws
that shear even iron
like a blade of straw.

Sùue sùue

Ci avères' 'a vini sùue sùue
dasupr'a mmi,
come nd'u vosche ll'acque scintillante
di na suriènte
ca, sciffuàgne, ll'èrve le cattùgghiete
addù s'accittete u vente.
Nun ni virèrese cchiù scurzone
ca màngene paumme
e pó' cuntente ci abbàllene
nda nu circhie di foche;
ma schitte fiore nascèrene
e paummèlle e na vocia 'untène
ca purtèrete 'a rise di na feste
nd'u frusce di na campène.

All Alone

You should come all alone
and cover me,
as in the woods the glistening
water of a spring
that with its flow tickles the grass
where the wind's fallen.
You would no longer see
snakes devouring doves
in happy dance
around a flaming carousel;
but only flowers bloom,
and butterflies,
and a far voice would bring
a happy laughter
in the pealing of a bell.

160

from *Com'agghi, 'a fè?*

Pur'a mmi, mó

Quante mi ci ricrije nda stu frische
 ma pó', tutte na vote, sfurre a chiange:
 penze all'ervicèlle
 ca nd' 'a stète ci vròscete zicchète
 sott'a na chianche,
 e a tutte chille morte
 ca nun ci'a fène a ssì da sottaterre
 cchi ci turnè, cchiù belle,
 nd' 'a chèsà llóre,
 come nd'u cée ll'arche, quanne chiòvete,
 e pó' nd'i nùue ci mòrete
 abbrazzète a lu sóue.

Pur'a mmi, mó,
 nda ll'occhie mi ci ràspete n'abbàgghie
 e ié menze cichète mi ci mmìsche
 a tanta fihe 'ucente
 ca ntriccète iòchene e scafòrchiene
 nda nu mure di iacce:
 u muragghione àvete e sciullète
 d' 'a chèsà mméje,
 d'addù mi ni scappèje, o mi ni ssìje,
 sempe com'a nu pacce.

E chi m'avit' 'a dice ca mó
 mi ci avère mbrugghiète pure ié
 nda nu gghiòmmere nivre di paise
 ca stè pirenne e pàrete nd'u fosse
 nu morte-accise?
 Chi s'i putita sunnè
 ca pó' cuntente avère voste i'esse
 nu mascière triste ca ci zùmpete
 com'a na iatta russe supre ll'irmice

nda quillu scure fitte cchiù d' 'a morte
addù nun ci rispònnete nisciune?

Ma pó' sturdute come nda nu fische
di vente,
mi scàfete arraggète
na uije di scille
cchi ci murì nda ll'arie, o supr' 'a lune,
o com' 'a schicciuucchie
dill'acque nda nu sicchie
ca supr'u foche pènnete vacante
e mmenz'a quillu chiante
di nu mère di grille.

Against My Eyes As Well

I do enjoy being out in the fresh air
but then I find myself suddenly in tears;
I think of the frail grass
that burns in summer crushed
under a slab of stone,
and of all those who have died
and cannot find their way out of the ground
to return to their houses
made more handsome still,
as in the sky the rainbow when it rains,
and then dies in the clouds
within the sun's embrace.

A dazzling light
now grates against my eyes
as well, and I mix half blinded
with myriad brilliant threads
entangled in a dance
to pierce a wall of ice:
my house's crumbling high wall,
through which time after time
I made my escape,
or rushed out like a madman.

Who could have guessed that now
I too would become snarled
in the black skein
of this dying town
that seems a body slain
at the bottom of a ditch?
Who could have ever dreamed
that I would long to be
an evil sorcerer who leaps

like a red cat on rooftiles
into that dark blacker than death,
from where no one replies?

But then, stunned
as through a hissing wind,
a craving for wings
digs furiously within,
so I can die in the air or on the moon,
or like a thin
trickle of water in
an empty pail
that dangles on a flame
and amid the wail
of a thousand crickets.

Com'agghi' 'a fè?

Si ni stène scrijàne tutte quante,
 st'amice méje;
 e mó, sti iurne scianghète,
 pisante com'a ll'àcine di chiumme
 di na ngannacche,
 nd'u core ci s'affunnene cchiù musce
 d'u tréne-merce
 ca ll'è nd'i rote 'a raggia d'i zannète.

Apprime di ci trasi
 nda chilla furnèce,
 si facine sempe cchiù fridde
 cc' 'a vie,
 e lle pirdine chilla picca 'uce
 ca, mbàreche nd'u 'ampe, ti parlàite
 cchiù d'u diàue ca di Die.

E com'agghi, 'a fè, mó, com'agghi' 'a fè,
 mó ca sùu nu puurelle
 e mi ci rasche ll'occhie a nu taùte?
 Addù mi ni putéra scrijè, addù:
 nda na grutta fatète o mmenz'i sciolle
 c'a lu vente ci nàtene nd' 'ardigue,
 si tutt cose, mó, pàrete 'a mazze
 di nu furgère,
 ca scintillanne fischete e ci azzòppete
 nda nu mère di spìngue o nda nu mure
 di vitre ca pó' si rùppete
 e ti sciòllete ncolle?

Eppure nun si scannijete, u cirvelle,
 o amère ci s'acciète

nda quillu picce ianche d' 'a lune
ca pó' manche ti v'irte,
ma nda n'atu iancore e n'atu fridde
lle sèntete ca tòrnete vicine
na risecèlla 'untène
ca nvéce di murì si fè cchiù belle
nd'i tocche di na campène.

What Am I Going to Do?

They are disappearing one by one,
these friends of mine;
and now these crippled days,
heavy as the lead beads
of a necklace,
sink through my heart more slowly
than a freight train
bearing the rage of fangmarks in its wheels.

Before they went
into that furnace,
they grew colder and colder
on the way,
and lost that little light
that in its flash maybe
spoke more of the devil than of God.

What am I going to do, what am I going to do
now that I'm so heartsick
and scrape my eyes against a coffin?
Where, where could I ever vanish to:
in a magic cave or among the ruins
that swim amid the nettles in the wind,
if everything now seems a blacksmith's maul,
that hisses in a shimmer and then plunges
within a sea of pins
or into a wall of glass,
that soon will shatter
and crash on top of you?

And yet the mind doesn't despair,
nor comes to a sad end

within that white wail of the moon
that doesn't even notice you,
but in another glare
and in another cold
hears a distant laughter drawing near
that doesn't die,
but grows more beautiful
in the peals of a bell.

Quanne?

E cuntente m'aiute e nun mi stanche
di sciabbuè cch'i diete, nda ll'arie,
a tarantelle.

I mène,
ll'hène 'a forze di na pétre
ca nfuète fischete arraggète
e tròzzete a nu mure,
ma su' nvéce martelle
c'appizzutète uèrena scafè
cchi ci truvè na voce o na scintille
nd'u scure.

Ah, sti pacce, sti pacce,
ca rusichìne i pétre com'a zùccre;
a vrazzète,
ll'avèren, 'a ittè nda na iaramme,
lle sacce,
fiscanne fiscanne;
ma ié cchiù toste mbàreche d'u ciucce
ca manche si ll'accìrese vè nnante,
nchiuvète ci rumagne nd' 'a spiranze
di nni fè 'ustre ll'occhie
cchi na'uce
c'assincirè lle uèrete nd'u zanghe
u nivre di na cruce.

Quanne, quanne
m'i uése dice quanne,
mi putéra sente cchiù sùue
di mó ca iètte u bbàgne?

When?

And yet I feel content and don't get tired
of slashing with my fingers through the air,
tarantella-like.

The hands
have the power of a stone
that whizzes in a fury once it's thrown
and crashes into a wall,
but they instead are sharply pointed hammers
that want to dig
to find a voice or spark
within the dark.

Ah, these madmen, these madmen
that gnaw
on stones like sugar;
By the armful,
I know,
they should be flung into ravines,
hissing, hissing;
but maybe more stubborn than an ass
that will not budge, even if you kill him,
I still remain up here nailed to the hope
of making their eyes glimmer
with a light yearning to undim
the blackness of a cross
there in the mud.

When, will you tell me when
I could feel more alone
than now that I am my own
tireless town crier?

Aquè ti vògghie

Nu scheme fitte nda ll'arie
 ci si fè pétre e pìsete
 cchiù assèi di na muntagne,
 e ié ca mi ci zicche dasutte
 pó' duce mi ci scrafagne
 nda na uije arraggète di mi ni ì.

Ma addù – aquè ti vògghie – addù?
 Nisciune le sàpete,
 e manche u Pataterne, mbàreche:
 tanta grannizze nd'u cée
 s'arravogghiene e grìrene nd'i ragge
 dill'occhie sue,
 si mmìskene vruscianne
 a ll'ate cchiù ziche d' 'a terre
 ca pàrete nu banne
 di foche nd'u linne sicche
 ca duce na chianozze lle scjàvite
 e afforze taccariàvite na serre:

mbàreche accussì nd' 'a stète
 tutte na vote vròscete a lu sóue
 nu mère di ristucce
 o di tanta core scantète
 ca tutt'aunite mòrene nd' 'a 'ucce.

That's the Question

A moan clotted in air
turns to stone
and weighs heavier than a mountain,
and I who am pressed beneath
get slowly crushed
in a fierce frenzy to escape.

But where to – that's the question – where?
No one knows,
perhaps not even the Almighty:
so many wonders in the skies
get tangled and cry out
in the radiance of his eyes,
and mingle in a blaze
with the smaller ones
upon the earth below
that seems a tide of fire in dry wood
shaved gently by a plane
and strenuously cut to pieces by a saw:

So in the summer maybe
suddenly burns a sea
of stubbles in the sun
or of so many frightened hearts
that suddenly die as one.

Uéra murì e nun guéra murì

Uéra murì e nun guéra murì,
 e père u vente ca chiichete ll'àrbere
 figne nterre e pó, scappete
 cchi nni cuntè nu fatte,
 chi le sàpete a chi.

Stu pinzére,
 nun lle spìccete cchiù di rusichè
 pure nda st'osse;
 e grìrete
 cc'u fische di na zuche
 ca pó' nda ll'occhie mi cògghiete
 cc' 'a vampa di na scuppètte.

E strarìpete u russe
 e arrivèntete u munne schitte mène
 ca fène a stozze u sóue,
 e, nda nu ióche,
 – come cc' 'a nive, mbàreche i uagnune,
 a pallète, –
 lle virese nda ll'arie ca ci vòhene
 aqqù nu gghiommaricchie e allè nu gghiòmmere
 di fóche.

(Ma da 'untène u vente
 cc' 'a voce di nu frète:
 “Ié proprie com'a tti,
 uéra murì e nun guéra murì”).

I Want to Die Yet I Don't Want to Die.

I want to die yet I don't want to die,
and I seem the wind that bends
the trees low to the ground,
and then runs off to tell a tale.
To whom, God only knows.

This thought
never stops gnawing
at my bones;
and it cries out
in the hiss of a rope
that strikes me in the eye
with the flash of a shotgun.

And the red spills over
and the world turns wholly into hands
that tear the sun to shreds,
and in a game,
— as maybe children
playing with snowballs, —
you see a small skein of fire
and further on a larger skein
flying through the air.

(But from afar the wind's
fraternal voice:
"I'm just like you,
I want to die yet I don't want to die").

from *Sti mascre*

Sti mascre

E sonne u terramote ca nd'u jacce
d'u scante nda nu 'ampe ti ci affòchete
come nda nu càppie
ca ll'hè cchi nnóre
i rènte di nu pacce.

Schitte n'arie, uagnù,
le uéra fè trimè bbóne sta terre
cchi lle truvè na vota cchiù sincire,
sti mascre,
ca pure quanne dòrmene
s'ammùccene arraggète nda na scille
rusète d'angiuuicchie e pó, nda ll'óore
d' 'a rise o di nu grire.

These Masks

And I dream of the earthquake
that in the chill of fright
will drown you in a flash of light,
as in a noose knotted
with a madman's teeth.

My friends, I'd like to make
this earth shudder for a while,
to find some sincerity for once
behind these masks,
which even in their sleep
hide angrily behind a rosy
angel wing, and in the gold
of a scream or smile.

Schitte zanne

Zanne,
schitte zanne a rusichè
nun sacce si di sorge o di cignèhe
supr'a sta terre.

E nisciune ci pènzete
ca, ntramente ci trùzzene,
murenne si strafaccene nd' 'a guerre,
i cristiène.

E mi chiàtrete u fridde
e nda na prucissione di taùte
ci truzze pure ié ma cchi nu tocche
scantète di campène.

Only Fangs

Fangs,
only fangs that gnaw
I don't know whether
they're mice or boars
upon this earth.

And no one reflects
that as men clash
they crash to the ground,
dying in war.

And the cold chills me
and I too crash
against a train of coffins,
but in a startled peal of bells.

Nu pacce

Nu pacce,
nun mòrete mèi a què:
ci nàscete e ci rumànete
come ll'èrve nd'i mure di na chèse
addù ci si fè toste
e allè pizzute
e sempe cchiù tagghiènte
pó' ci scàfete.

E nun ti lassetè cchiù,
e appresse appresse ti vènete
citte com'a nu spìrite
ca ti fè torce 'a vucche, 'a notte,
nd'u sonne.

E u scure ti ci arravògghiete
nda na cose ca rìrete.

A Madman

A madman
never dies here:
he's born and stays here
like grass between two walls
where it hardens
and then digs in
spiked
and ever sharper.

And he never leaves you,
and shadows you
quiet as a ghost
that makes you wring your mouth in sleep,
at night.

And darkness wraps you
in something that laughs.

184

from *Dieci poesie inedite*

I'è ncürte Natèhe

I'è ncürte Natèhe
 e pure auàgne
 mi ni stève 'untène da u paìse.

Mó nda sti cose nturne ci su' ll'ombre
 di chi grirànne zùmpete cuntente
 dasupr'i 'umminàrie,
 nda chille vampe russe ca s'allògnene
 e nd'u scure c'i jèttene i scintille,
 ma stu Natèhe, óje, cchi mmi,
 i'è nu vente fridde
 ca da 'untène arrìvete e lle cògghiete,
 a furbicète,
 na chianticèlla sicchète.

E avogghie a sunè i zampugne, avogghie:
 stu schème arruzzunute
 nun sacce si di pècure o di ferre
 nda na lastra di vitre,
 i'è com'u chiante o 'a rise di nu mute.
 e pure sti frusciazze di campène
 ca nd'i sone ti pàrene matasse
 d'i grire di nu surde,
 si ni vène 'untène
 e nda nu céhe
 ca uèreta i'èsse sempe cchiù granne
 e nun s'abbùttete mèie
 di morte e di stelle:

(nu céhe, pó', ca manche si n'addònete
 si chiàngete acquebbàsce nu cristiène
 cchiù morte ca vive

186

e manche n'arie le virete
nu pòure passarelle
ca chiatrète ci ràspete nd' 'a nive).

It's Almost Christmas

It's almost Christmas
and once again this year
I'm far away from my town.

Now among these things around me are the shadows
of those who leap with happy shouts
over the bonfires,
in those red flames that lengthen
and scatter their sparks into the darkness,
but for me this Christmas, today,
is a cold wind
that comes from far away
and scissor-handed snips
a wilted shoot.

Let the bagpipes play on
as they will: this rusted moan on glass,
whether from sheep or iron I can't tell,
is like the whine or laughter of a mute;
and even this ringing din of bells,
that in their chimes seem skeins
of deaf men's screams, moves far,
across a sky that longs to be wider still,
and never has its fill
of deaths and stars:

(a sky that doesn't even notice
if a man who's more dead than alive
is weeping here below,
nor does it ever see
a wretched sparrow
rasping frozen in the snow).

Manche ni une cchiù

Di tante belle cose c'agghie fatte,
manche ni une cchiù ci n'è rumèse;
e, camina camina, mó, nd'i strète,
ci trove schitte fosse e nente chèse.

Nun pozze rire e manche pozze chiange,
e nun lle pozze fè chille ca uére:
ié ca sunnèje d'arrivè a lu céhe,
mo, nda stu fridde, tréme e mi ci cange.

E, sì e no, ci ièssete nu sonne
ca m'i fè sente, doppe, n'ate picche,
'a vampèta d'u sóue. E pó', cchiù sicche
di nu foche, mi tòrnete 'a paróue.

Not a Single One

Of all the good things that I have ever done
there's none remaining, not a single one;
and in my endless walks along the streets,
I find no houses now, but only pits.

I cannot laugh, yet neither can I cry,
the road I seek is not the one I take:
I who dreamed of once reaching the sky
in this bitter cold now change and shake.

And, yes and no, just for a little while
I'll catch a nap that soon will let me feel
the fierce blaze of the sun. And at the heel,
the word returns to me sharper than fire.

from *Ci uéra turnè*

Mi tàgghiete

Mi tàgghiete cc'u fridde
u fihe di nu pinzére
ma nun si virete u sagne:

mbàreche accussì na 'uce
nd'u rasùue d'u vente si fè gghianche
senza manche nu lagne.

The Edge of a Thought

The edge of a thought
cuts me with the cold
but you can't see the blood:

maybe that's how a light
turns white in the wind's blade
without even a wail.

Sonne i mute

C'éte u lagne di nu cucche
nda sti pétre fitte e scure
di citète e a mmi nd' 'a vucche
ci si mbrògghiete 'a paure.

Mi ni iére a nn'ata bbàne
cchi mmi sente scarcirète
ma assimmigghie pó, a na canne
ca s'ammùccete chiichète;

e accusi i'é sempe notte,
nun ci agguàcchie, acciampichije,
come quanne nda nu fosse
mi scirràite 'a massarie.

Ah ci fusse averamente
nda chill'arie e nd'i ristucce:
nun sintére cchiù stu fridde
c'amminàzzete cc' 'a 'ucce;

na risète mi cugghièrete
com' 'a frécce a na campène,
e 'a paróue mi turnèrete
ca ti pòrtete 'untène.

Ma ié pure fазze u cucche
nda sti pétre fitte e scure;
sonne i mute ma nd' 'a vucche
i'è nu diàue mó 'a paure.

I Dream of Mutes

A cuckoo's wail rings near
among the black and thick
stones of the city, and the fear
knots in my mouth and sticks.

I'd find another hillside
to feel that I have been freed
but then look like a reed
that bends over and hides.

and so it's always night,
I can't see straight, I stumble
as when down in a ditch
the farmhouse scolded me.

Ah, if I were really back
in that air, those stubbles:
I would not feel this cold
that threatens so much trouble;

and a laughter would strike me
like the sling of a bell
and the word would return
to take me in its spell.

Like a cuckoo, I too go out
among stones black and thick;
I dream of mutes, but the fear sticks
like a devil in my mouth.

At' 'a spiccè sta notte

Ci agghi' 'a turnè cchi ssèmpe addù ci scùrrete,
 come nd'i ddrùpe ll'acque, 'a vita méje;
 e nun mporte si allè pó' ci si jùnnete
 'a morte ngàgne a chi nun lle pó réje.

Ci agghi' 'a passè u rasùue nda chill'èrve
 e 'a terre agghi' 'a assuzzè com'u cristalle.
 ah quant'è brutte a gghi'èsse schitte serve,
 mó ca nd'u munne fène tutte u jalle.

E pó' come nd' 'a fùua di na serre
 ca pure i pétre tàgghiete e s'aiùtete
 a nun ci si spizzè, ié, nda na guerre,
 ll'agghi' 'a sgrinè stu vente ca mi ddrùpete.

E nn'agghi' 'a rijalè pó' tanta scille
 a chi i'è dèbbue e sùue com'a mmi;
 àt' 'a spiccè sta notte e nd'i scintille
 nnaterne ci agghi' 'a stè sempe accussì.

This Night Will End

I will return forever where my life
courses like water within mountain gorges
and it doesn't really matter if death lunges
at a man's throat if he can't brook its strife.

I'll pass a razor on that grass, to shave
and burnish the earth's surface crystal-smooth;
the worst of fates must be to be a slave
now that everyone wants to rule the roost.

And then, as in the fury of a saw
that slices even stones and still can manage
not to snap in two, amidst this war
I'll break the wind that wants to ravage me.

And so I will give many, many a wing
to those like me who're weak and lonely,
this night will end and then amid the gleaming
sparks, I will remain this way eternally.

198

from *Si pó' nu jurne*

Pure mó

Nda stu céhe trùue,
le sente u rasche di na vocia morte,
e pense a tti
ca tante belle e duce mi parlàise,
'a matine,
e pó', tutte na vote,
com' 'a vampa d'u sóue nda nu vitre,
nda ll'occhie mi vasàise.

Mó mi vàsete u scure
e nun c'è cchiù alligrizze nda stu core.
Ma addù si' mó tu, addù si'?
Nun le sacce e nun ti vire,
eppure sùu certe ca pure mó
tu pènzese a mmi.

Even Now

Across this murky sky
I hear the rasp of a dead voice,
and think of you
lovely and gentle as you spoke to me
in the morning,
and then, like the sun's flame on glass,
suddenly left a kiss upon my eyes.

Now it's the dark that kisses me
and my heart is without joy.
But where are you now, where?
I don't know, I can't see you,
and yet I am certain even now
you think of me.

Mi fазze 'a cruce

Mi fазze 'a cruce e zumpe e mi ni scorde
c'acquè mi ci scrafagne nda sti mure,
e a nu rilogge pó' ni dève 'a corde
e aspette ca ci sònete nd'u scure.

Uéra turnè di notte – com'u grille
ca pirdivite 'a strète – a lu paìse,
e allè uéra pittè – cchi tanta scille
culurète, e chiangènne, - u paravise.

Ci uéra stè cch'i morte, com' 'a nive
supre ll'ìrmice, u verne, cchi mmi sente
n'ata vote nd'i joche ma cchiù vive
d'u frische d' 'a staggione senza vente.

E allè uéra schiuvè, sempe sunnanne,
'a porte ca si gràpete a la 'uce,
come nd' 'a murre d'i uagnùne quanne
forte rirìje e nun purtèj' 'a cruce.

I Cross Myself

I cross myself, I have a start and soon forget
that I am being crushed within this room,
and then I wind the clock again and wait
for it to start to ring in the deep gloom.

At night I'd like to go - like a cricket
that has lost his way - back to my birthplace,
to paint my paradise with a palette
of colored wings, and tears upon my face.

I'd like to mingle in the wintertime,
like snow upon the roof, with all the dead,
to feel at play again but more alive
than cool air in a summer without wind.

And there, still dreaming, I would like to pry
the nails out of the door open to daylight,
as amid a throng of children, when I
was without a cross and my laughter bright.

Sonne supra sonne

Sonne supra sonne e pó nu scure
ca si rivìgghiete,
come nd'u jacce di na cosa morte:
chist'acquè, sicure,
ci uita dorme sempe, nd' 'a chèse,
e mbàreche com'u vente
ammuccète nd'i nùue o com'a chi
si nfùcete cuntente,
e pó' ci rìrete,
sutt'i cuperte.

E averamente, 'a notte, le sintije
ca ci si riminàite cc'u frusce
duce di na pitrùzzue nd'u vitre,
proprie dasutt'u lette.

Ma cché gghi'èrete,
manche mó le sacce;
m'arricorde schitte ca lle tinije
u fiète muzze e ll'occhie spiritète
nda quillu scure,
ntramente ca ntriccète ci spingìne
sempe cchiù forte i mène supr'u core
ca mi scasciàite u pette.

Sleep Over Sleep

Sleep over sleep and then
a darkness that stirs,
as in the chill of something dead:
this one, of course,
always wanted to sleep here, in the house,
maybe like the wind
lurking in the clouds
or someone who is content
to slip under the covers
and starts to laugh there.

And at night I really heard it,
turning with the soft rustle
of pebbles on glass,
right underneath the bed.

But what it was,
I don't know even now;
I remember only
holding my breath,
and my eyes wild within that darkness,
while entwined hands
pressed harder and harder on my heart
that was bursting my chest.