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*Journal of Italian Translation* is an international journal devoted to the translation of literary works from and into Italian-English-Italian dialects. All translations are published with the original text. It also publishes essays and reviews dealing with Italian translation. It is published twice a year: in April and in November.

Submissions should be both printed and in electronic form and they will not be returned. Translations must be accompanied by the original texts, a brief profile of the translator, and a brief profile of the author. All submissions and inquiries should be addressed to *Journal of Italian Translation*, Dept. of Modern Languages and Literatures, 2900 Bedford Ave. Brooklyn, NY 11210 or l.bonaffini@att.net

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#### **Subscription rates:**

U.S. and Canada. Individuals \$25.00 a year, \$40 for 2 years.

Institutions: \$30.00 a year. Single copies \$15.00.

For all mailing overseas, please add \$10 per issue. Payments in U.S. dollars. *Journal of Italian Translation* is grateful to the Sonia Raiziss Giop Charitable Foundation for its generous support. Make checks payable to Journal of Italian Translation

*Journal of Italian Translation* is published under the aegis of the Department of Modern Languages and Literatures of Brooklyn College of the City University of New York

Design and camera-ready text by Legas, PO Box 149, Mineola, NY 11501

ISSN: 1559-8470

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# Journal of Italian Translation

Editor Luigi Bonaffini

Volume I, Number 2, Fall 2006

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

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

#### Alcune considerazioni a proposito dei miei Tarocchi

#### di Nicolò D'Alessandro

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

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

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

## Journal of Italian Translation

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#### Una doppia infedeltà

#### di Angela M. Jeannet

Angela M. Jeannet is Charles A. Dana Professor of Romance Languages, Emerita. She has taught at the University of Colorado (Boulder), Austin College (Sherman, TX), Pennsylvania State University, and Franklin and Marshall College (Lancaster, PA).

Her publications include New World Journeys: Contemporary Italian Writers and the Experience of America (edited and translated with Louise K. Barnett, Greenwood Press, 1977); Parliamo dell'Italia (University Press of America, 1984); Natalia Ginzburg: A Voice of the Twentieth Century (edited with Giuliana Sanguinetti Katz, University of Toronto Press, 2000); Under the Radiant Sun and the Crescent Moon: Italo Calvino's Storytelling (University of Toronto Press, 2000); one volume of poems, In forma di corona (Firenze: L'autore libri, 2001); and several translations, The Edge of Europe by Angela Bianchini (University of Nebraska Press, 2000), Journal by Maria Bellonci (Mondadori, 2002), The Woman Outlaw by Maria Rosa Cutrufelli (Legas Books, 2004), and short stories by Clara Sereni and Elisabetta Rasy (Italica Press, 2004).

She has published numerous articles and book reviews about French and Italian twentieth-century fiction and criticism in Italian and North-American journals. Some brief pieces (in Italian) have appeared in *Tuttestorie* (2001, Rome, Italy).

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

Al giorno d'oggi, contrariamente anche soltanto a 30-40 anni fa, nel campo della traduzione sono più numerosi e agguerriti i non-occidentali e devo dire che trovo più illuminanti le pagine di studiosi nuovi, per esempio i saggi raccolti in *Translation Studies* (*Translation Studies. Perspectives on an Emerging Discipline.* Ed. Alessandra Riccardi. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002) che non gli studi tradizionali. È anche significativo che molti testi sulla traduzione scritti o curati da cinesi, indiani e italiani escano in

veste inglese..... L'egemonia della lingua inglese e della cultura americana presenta nuove sfide a chi viene da altre culture. specialmente con il trasformarsi di assetti politici e sociali che includono migrazioni umane su scala mondiale. Come scrive Margherita Ulrych nella collezione che ho menzionato: "Translation not only reflects but also directs transcultural contacts and exchanges.....it is the means by which ideas, styles, and genres transit from one language and culture to another and is thus a powerful tool in the construction of languages and cultures; it can be the site for resistance by the receiving culture to the permeability of the incoming influence" (199). A questo proposito mi è parso particolarmente interessante il volume di Eugene Chen Eoyang dal titolo "Borrowed Plumage" (Polemical Essays on Translation. Amsterdam-New York: Rodopi, 2003). Nonostante la sensibilità crescente per la complessità del tradurre, però, alcuni studiosi, perfino un George Steiner, tendono ancora a parlare della traduzione in termini primariamente linguistici come rivela l'uso in inglese degli acronimi SL e TL che corrispondono alle espressioni Source Language e Target Language. Si è consapevoli della dimensione culturale solo in seconda istanza.

È curioso poi che chi traduce si veda ancora con gli occhi di un pubblico per il quale tradurre è, per citare Gregory Rabassa in *Translation. The Theory and Practice* (ed. Avadhesh K. Singh. New Delhi: Creative Books, 1996), "a kind of bastard art, an intermediate form, and as such always vulnerable to attack" (21). Invece la presenza di chi traduce sta prendendo sempre più importanza di questi tempi, mano a mano che diventa più evidente la funzione fondamentale di ogni forma di traduzione nel plasmare e rivelare aspetti, eventi e rapporti all'interno del nostro mondo.

Sempre nel volume citato, *Translation Studies*, trovo un articolo che mi servirà d'avvío a un discorso che mi sta a cuore. Lawrence Venuti, traduttore dall'italiano in inglese, cita William Weaver il quale asserisce che "tradurre è in gran parte un'attività irriflessiva, con decisioni che si prendono inconsciamente e con scelte quasi istintive basate sulla conoscenza dell'autore e del periodo storico" (219). Sulla base di questa testimonianza, Venuti inizia un esame della traduzione in chiave psicoanalitica, enumerando le "differenze " irriducibili insite nella traduzione. "Translators...can never entirely avoid the loss that the translating process enforces on the foreign text, on its meanings and structures, figures and

traditions. and translators cannot obviate the gain in their translating, the construction of different meanings, structures, figures and traditions and thereby the creation of textual effects that go far beyond the establishment of a lexicographic equivalence" (*TS* 219). Gli esempi e le analisi che Venuti presenta sono molto meno convincenti delle sue premesse (chi si basa su un metodo specifico spesso lo usa in modo troppo meccanico), ma il suo contributo—per me—porta la discussione nella direzione giusta.

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

Alla base di ogni infedeltà c'è l'amore e la traduzione è un atto d'amore. Ma è un amore dalle cento facce. Per appassionarsi alla traduzione infatti bisogna amare profondamente non solo delle lingue specifiche ma proprio quello strumento multiforme della nostra umanità che è il linguaggio. Nel tradurre si attinge anche, coscientemente o no, alla conoscenza che il corpo ha raccolto e elaborato durante tutta la sua vita. L'amore viene dalla scoperta di un'opera, scoperta che si vuole condividere con chi è al di fuori dei confini del nostro universo. Per esempio, è la passione che prese i giovani americani, come un William Weaver, quando arrivarono a Roma nel 1945 e scoprirono gli scrittori italiani, i Pavese, i Vittorini, i Silone. È la passione delle donne negli ultimi trent'anni che le ha portate a valorizzare de Cespedes, Ginzburg, Morante, Bianchini, Cutrufelli, Maraini. È l'aprirsi e il rivelarsi di paesi di antica civiltà come l'India e la Cina al nostro mondo che era rimasto chiuso nella propria ignoranza e senso di superiorità. Tradurre è la sfida all'incomunicabilità. È una forma di fiducia nell'altro, accompagnata dalla paura di non trovare le parole giuste per raggiungerlo

Come si arriva a tradurre? A chi sogna di costruire la macchina traduttrice perfetta ricordo che essa esiste già in miliardi di copie da migliaia di anni. Di piccole dimensioni, fa il suo lavoro senza neanche accorgersene a cominciare dal momento in cui esce dall'antro in cui è stata costruita. È ogni persona. Odori, suoni,

sensazioni tattili, gesti, colori, diventano rapidamente per ognuno di noi parte di un raffinato complesso interpretativo. Su questo s'innesta la parola, nella versione che rimarrà la più intima, quella che chiamiamo "lingua materna". Eventi—fra cui la lettura—miti, sogni, idee, stili modellano poi l'universo esistenziale di ogni persona. In contatto con altri individui, tradurre l'esperienza in materia linguistica diventa una tecnica/arte di meravigliosa complessità.

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

Che cosa fa chi ama? Cerca di arrivare al cuore, all'essere più profondo dell'altro. Ma rimane sempre un millimetro al di qua. Lo stesso avviene per chi ama qualunque testo. L'impasto di esperienza vitale divenuta espressione linguistica per mano di chi scrive è una complessità che dà le vertigini. Tutto c'entra: il corpo e la mente, l'immaginazione e la concretezza, la storia e il sogno. Si chiama "tradurre" l'uscire da sé, dal proprio universo, ed entrare nella vertigine altrui, un'avventura esaltante e presuntuosa. Uno abbandona il conosciuto—o meglio, ciò che è quasi conosciuto—e cerca di afferrare il quasi sconosciuto. Chi traduce si trova preso fra due universi che lo attraggono e lo eludono. Parlare d'infedeltà, come tanti hanno fatto, non si addice soltanto alla traduzione—la famosa "bella infedele"—ma anche al rapporto con l'universo di chi traduce con l'universo di origine. Si tratta insomma, inevitabilmente, di una doppia infedeltà.

Cosa concludo?

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

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

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

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

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The Magician, China Ink, 70x50 cm.

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

#### by Gaetano Cipolla

Gaetano Cipolla is a well known authority on Sicily. He is a Professor of Italian at St. John's University. He is President and Editor of Arba Sicula, an international organization that promotes Sicilian language and culture, and President of Casa Sicilia. He has translated L'origini di lu munnu, Don Chisciotti and Sanciu Panza and Moral Fables by Giovanni Meli; The Poetry of Nino Martoglio, Malidittu la lingua/Damned Language by Vincenzo Ancona; and Nino Provenzano's *Vinissi/I'd Love to Come...* As publisher/editor of Legas, Dr. Cipolla has founded two series of books dealing with Sicilian culture: "Pueti d'Arba Sicula," which has already published 7 volumes, and "Sicilian Studies" with 12 volumes to its credit. Dr. Cipolla also edited J. Kirk Bonner's Introduction to Sicilian Grammar, and is the author of The Sounds of Sicilian: a Pronunciation Guide, (Legas) available on CD. His most recent works are Siciliana: Studies on the Sicilian Ethos, (2005) a collection of his essays on Sicily and Ninety Love Octaves by Antonio Veneziano, edited, introduced and translated into English verse by G. Cipolla. (2006).

Andrea Camilleri—who seems to have replaced Gesualdo Bufalino and Vincenzo Consolo as the current writer who best expresses the island's "sicelitude"—is enjoying tremendous popularity in Italy. His books seem to be ubiquitous and he seems to have an inexhaustible supply of them stashed away in his desk drawer. So much so that I saw an article in *Arte e Folklore di Sicilia*, a quarterly publication of Catania, which proclaimed in capital letters "Basta, Camilleri!" which I could readily translate with "Enough already, Camilleri!" making a rhyme without attempting to do so. At any rate, everyone who dabbles in translation or has an interest in it when the subject of Camilleri comes up, inevitably asks "how in the world can you translate Camilleri?" Needless to say, I count myself among those who have asked the same

question. The straight and immediate answer that comes to my mind is that you really cannot translate Camilleri, if you expect to present an English-speaking Camilleri. But I would give the same answer to the question "how can you translate Dante, or Petrarch or Calvino?" Theorists of translation can tell you in two hundred pages or more that translation is an impossible task. The reality is, however, that translation has always been part of the literary world and it has been accomplished in various degrees of fidelity since the beginning of time. As a practicing translator I am more interested in the pragmatic aspect of translation that accomplishes every day something that presumably is impossible to do. Thus, it is true, Camilleri is impossible to translate, but I venture to say that his books will in fact be translated one after the other. Already the first translation has come out. It's The Shape of Water, La forma dell'acqua, translated by Stephen Sartarelli and I understand that two more novels will be coming out in April. Many more of Camilleri's books have been translated into French and Spanish. although I have no data on these. I do have a copy of La forme de *l'eau*, by the French translator Serge Quadruppani and I have been comparing it to the English translation to see how the two approached the subject.

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

This kind of linguistic code-switching is not discussed by academic translation theorists and practitioners. No one, at least as far as I have been able to read, has addressed the problem from a theoretical or practical point of view. Luigi Bonaffini in an article on the translation of dialect poetry confirms that the American translators he has studied completely ignore the problem and proceed as if the original texts were written by a monolingual author. But this is a serious problem, especially when you translate from Italian which is unique among the romance languages for having dialects that are not dialects but different languages that boast of a long and important literary tradition. Thus, translation theorists are not much help to us in this endeavor. In my translation of Giovanni Meli's Don Chisciotti and Sanciu Panza I encountered some code-switching that I tried to differentiate from the regular text by using a more archaic/poetic diction than in the normal text. The text of the *Don Chisciotti* is written in Sicilian but on two occasions the Knight of La Mancha quoted Petrarch. To encourage his squire to be more adventurous Don Chisciotti uses one of Petrarch's Italian lines: "un bel morire tutta la vita onora" which I rendered with "a worthy death brings honor to thy life", where the archaic-poetic word "thy" was meant to signal that it was a poetic quotation. But Camilleri's use of Sicilian goes beyond the occasional quotation. It constitutes an intrinsic part of his style and as such its function must be understood before any attempts can be made not to duplicate it—because that is impossible—but to come as close to it as possible. To develop a strategy the translator must understand what Camilleri is trying to accomplish by interjecting the Italianized Sicilian into his narrative. This task is not an easy one and it certainly would require a great more study than I have been able to devote to it. Nevertheless, a few observations can help us to orient ourselves as we attempt to offer solutions to the problem at hand.

With this in mind, I picked out at random a paragraph from one of the thirty stories in *Un mese con Montalbano*, the Sicilian

police inspector whom the French liken to their Inspector Maigret. The story is entitled "La Sigla". Let's read the paragraph:

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

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

The author here is making great demands on the translator. The italicized words are in effect Sicilian words that have been modified to sound Italian by changing a vowel or two, and they can be understood because the author placed them in a context that even non-Sicilians can guess at, even though they may not know the exact meaning. Calorio is thus the shortened form of Calogero, but it is not *Caloriu*, which is the exact Sicilian name. The word paro is the same as paio in Italian, but in Sicilian it would be written as paru. We can guess why Camilleri chose to use "paro" instead of "paio" (it is easier for Sicilian speakers to say "paru" instead of "paio"). The etymological equivalent of pirtusa in Italian is "pertugi" (holes), but in Italian they would identify physical holes in structures, not holes in clothing, as the Sicilian pirtusa does here. "Dimandando la limosina" would be "domandando l'elemosina" in Italian, but "dumannannu a limosina" in Sicilian. The double "d" of "Senza dare fastiddio" identifies it as Sicilian. "Senza spavintare fimmine e picciliddri" in Italian would be "senza

spaventare donne e bambini" and in Sicilian "senza fari scantari fimmini e picciliddri". The "ddri" ending of "picciliddri" identifies the speaker as a person from the area of Agrigento where the cacuminal sound of "ddu" as in "Turiddu" is pronounced as "Turiddru". "Accattarsene" might not be readily understood as the equivalent of "comprarsene" if the context did not come to clarify it. In Sicilian, of course, the verb "accattari" from "acheter" commonly replaces the Italian "comprare." The use of Italianized Sicilian or Sicilianized Italian as the case may be, was originally thought to be an impediment to non-Sicilians. In fact, in the first edition of Il filo di turno, the editor at Mondadori required Camilleri to add a glossary that would explain the Sicilian words to non-Sicilian readers. This feature has been dropped from subsequent books because it is in reality unnecessary for Italians. They can understand the text because Camilleri has become more skilled in placing them in a context that explains them better. Even if the terms are not understood exactly, Italians have a good idea of the possible meanings. At any rate, the presence of these words adds a certain strangeness to the narrative that the translator cannot ignore. The problem for non-Italians reading Camilleri in Italian is probably insurmountable because those who have learned Italian in school in a foreign country are notoriously poor at making connections between words that vary even very slightly from the dictionary meanings. Such people have difficulty equating "limosina" with "elemosina" "paro" with "paio."

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

The use of the form Calorio instead of Calogero has two purposes: it identifies the locus of the action and it suggests that the person has also been adopted as one of their own even though he is a foreigner. We are in Sicily and specifically in a town of which Saint Calogero is the Patron Saint. Vigàta is Camilleri's fictional town, but it could be anywhere from Sciacca to Porto Empedocle. Saint Calogero, if I am not mistaken, is in fact the patron Saint of Sciacca and a few other towns in the Agrigento province. So perhaps a note should point this out. The term "paisi" is so close to "paese" it does not need an explanation, but it begins a series of interjections in Sicilian whose presence is highly subjective and unpredictable. There are cases when the Sicilian term used does not have an Italian counterpart and Camilleri uses it because the

Sicilian is far more expressive and renders better what he had in mind. But in general, there does not seem to be any logic, either linguistically determined or contextually driven for the intrusion of such terms. Their presence does not seem to emerge out of a need to make a particular statement. One could ask Camilleri why he places Sicilian words into his narrative, I am confident he has been asked although I don't know what his response may have been, but even if we knew what he said we would have to assess the effect that their presence has on the reader. I suggest that two of the reasons for the interjections are primarily to add color and to identify the narrator as a Sicilian. Ultimately it seems to me that Camilleri probably speaks like that himself, that is, from time to time, and in an unpredictable manner, he interjects Sicilian words into his speech. If that is so what purpose do the interjections have. I think that Camilleri uses this device for the purpose of making a connection with his listener, of somehow taking the reader into his confidence, by speaking a language that by its restrictive nature constitutes a "secret" jargon that both the writer and his listener understand. It is a method of drawing the readers into the web that he is spinning, an act of captatio benevolentia. Sicilians have been historically conditioned not to speak in their own language to strangers or anyone whom they do not know or trust. Camilleri, I think, is throwing in his Sicilian expressions as hooks to draw readers into his world. As a literary ploy this is not new. Boccaccio establishes the same kind of relationship with his readers, a kind of complicity between author and reader that excludes some of the characters themselves. As Boccaccio lets us be a knowing audience, participants in the joke, Camilleri by using his Sicilianized Italian or Italianized Sicilian is forming a bond with the reader who understands—the trick is that after a while everyone understands—and the use of a different code does not exclude anyone.

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

Calorio's name was not Calorio, but in Vigata everyone knew him with that name. He had come to town, —nobody knows from where—about twenty years back, with a pair of pants more holes than fabric, tied at the waist with a rope,

with a little jacket with so many patches he looked like a Harlequin, barefoot, but with very clean feet. He begged for a living, but discreetly, without bothering anyone, or scaring the women and children. He could hold his wine well, when he could afford to buy a bottle, so much so that nobody ever saw him even slightly drunk, in spite of the fact that there had been times during feast days when he had put away quite a few liters.

Few would argue that this is not a faithful rendition of the Italian text, in terms of the information conveyed. What is missing is the writer's voice, his gently mocking tone that emerges from his problematic use of the dialect. Having lost the metalinguistic component, i.e. the use of the dialect, the rendition is definitely flatter than the original. What options are open to a translator? It seems to me that if he wants to maintain a multilevel linguistic code he must couch his rendition with a least two, and possibly more, linguistic codes that would be accessible to the readers. If the audience for the novel is English, the translator could try to use standard English with American English as subtext. If he is American he might utilize expressions and idiomatic sentences that can be identified with a local dialect to render the Sicilianized Italian expressions. For example, whenever possible he might interject Brooklinese or a local jargon of some kind into the stream of standard American English. Naturally the risk is great that the translator would introduce an alien dimensions into the novel, disregarding the fact that the action takes place in Sicily and such interjections would be considered out of sync with the environment. Failing this option, it seems to me, the only option left for the translator is to develop his own multiple level language made up of sequences that he himself considers normal and interjecting from time to time expressions that deviate in a consistent way from the dominant language. The types of deviation naturally would depend on the translator's background and preparation. But the deviations would not have to coincide with Camilleri's own departures from standard Italian. An attempt to make the deviations coincide with Camilleri's would probably be counterproductive. The translator would have to listen to his own voice and from time to time revert to his own subcode in a way that would mimic Camilleri's own procedure. With this in mind let us try a different rendition of the passage we have already translated.

'The following might be an improvement:

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

The italicized words were chosen to convey a subtext normally associated with a slangy, folksy, homespun, Southern vocabulary that mimics though not in an obvious way what Camilleri is doing. Questionable grammatical structures like "never bothering nobody" or the use of local jargon "womenfolk and young'uns" or colloquial terms like "scare up," "pickled," or scraped along" produce a multivoiced narrative that is akin to Camilleri's. No doubt this is only an approximation of Camilleri's style. No translator expects a perfect correspondance between his version and the original. Translation is like riding a seesaw with the translator sitting on one end and the original author on the other. The translator's goal is to keep pace with the author, but he cannot help to rise higher at times or sink lower than the author. It is impossible to synchronize his movements so that they match perfectly with the author's. The important thing is to maintain a balance that allows peaks and valleys on either side. Some time the translator will overshoot the target, sometimes he will come up short. The important thing is to remain within an acceptable range of the author's text.

The sample translation of Camilleri's text was simply meant to point the way. I think that after a while the translator would develop a sub language that would serve him well whenever his fancy called for it. But it would be almost like speaking in falsetto. The danger to overdue it, of course, would be ever present. This danger must have dawned on Camilleri himself, for as his stories develop, he seems to lighten the dosage of the code-switching to a

bare minimum and often dropping it altogether. In the *Forma dell'acqua* for example, in the last few chapters, except for one or two words, Camilleri uses standard Italian, almost as if he forgot to throw in a few of his trademark words or perhaps because he wanted to develop his detective conclusions and the words would have been a distraction.

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

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

"Questo Pecorilla è un cornuto" proclamò.

"Un grandissimo cornuto" rinforzò Pino.

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

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

- —Ce Pecorilla est un cornard, proclama-t-il.
- —Un cornard de premiere grandeur, rajouta Pino.

And here is Sartarelli's rendition:

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

"That Pecorilla is a bastard," he announced.

"A fucking bastard," clarified Pino.

As you can see, neither translator has acknowledged the codeswitching or made an attempt to go beyond the surface meaning of the words and even at that level one could be picky and find unfelicitous renderings. Monsieur Quadruppani actually has Saro and Pino pulling a two wheeled "carriole" behind them when they are pushing it in front of them. "Carriole" is a Provençal word described as having two wheels, thus not equivalent to the onewheel Italian "carriola" with which he probably wanted to mimick Camilleri's code-switching. In the process, however, he mistranslated the sentence. One could argue minor points in both translations, but let's take one word that both translated in a similar fashion: "mutangheri" Surely it means more than "sans mot dire" and "without speaking". The word does not exist in Italian, but it's understood because of the context. In Sicilian it means more than "taciturn," "unspeaking," it means an unwillingness to speak, a sullenness brought about by being engrossed in one's thoughts, by mulling over things. It also means an inability to speak. Mutangaru in the region of Agrigento describes also a deaf-mute who cannot speak clearly because he cannot hear. I would have said "brooding silently," or "in bleak silence" or "stubbornly silent" or something like that. The word "ammuttando" is also more than "pushing" or the French "pulling" because the Sicilian is more than "spingere". The word is strangely onomatopeic. I can't seem to pronounce it without moving my body forward, which is exactly why Camilleri chose it. He wanted to convey the considerable energy required to make the carts move forward. Simply *pushing* or *pulling* would not do.

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

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

"That Pecorilla is a cuckold!" he blurted out.

"A major cuckold," Pino added.

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



The Tower, China Ink, 70x50 cm.

## Eliot, Pound, Waley, Sayers: Notes Towards a Politics of Translation 1920-1960 by Daniela Caselli

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

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

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

The essay is divided into three sections, which analyse 'the character, virtues and vices of the Latin tragedies themselves'; the

directions in which these tragedies influence Elizabethan drama; and 'the part they played in extending the influence of Seneca and their actual merit as translations and as poetry.'2 Eliot wants to revive Seneca because no other author has been equally vilified in modern times and loved during the Renaissance; this Seneca is not Dante's 'Seneca morale', but the one usually chastised for his excess and bombast, the 'bad influence' on Renaissance literature. Seneca's tragedies, meant to be spoken rather than staged, are part of a 'non-theatrical drama' which is labelled by Eliot a 'curious freak', and linked, not unproblematically, to the notion of 'race': 'the theatre is a gift which has not been vouchsafed to every race, even of the highest culture. It has been given to the Hindus, the Japanese, the Greeks; the English, the French, and the Spanish, at moments; in less measure to the Teutons and the Scandinavians. It was not given to the Romans, or generously to their successors, the Italians.'3 The classic association between Latin countries and instinct justifies the Romans' weakness for lowly comedy and circus and the Italians' love for the Commedia dell'Arte and the puppet show. Moreoever, the questionable link between 'race' and genre allows Eliot to read Seneca as the product of Nero's decadent era and as a representative of a Roman 'latinità' characterised by a conflict between passion and duty (the only one present in Seneca) and by rhetoric (a sign of modernity for Eliot): Seneca does not epitomise bad taste, he embodies the Latin era.

This begrudging vindication soon develops into the arguments that Seneca's responsibility for the 'Tragedy of Blood' (that is, for the horrors usually claimed to disfigure Elizabethan drama) has been overestimated; his role in initiating a rhetoric of bombast 'misconstrued'; and his influence on Shakespeare and his contemporaries 'undervalued'. Seneca's influence is not on the plots of the Tragedy of Blood and Kyd's Spanish Tragedy, which derive instead from contemporary French and, above all, from Italian theatre, 'blood-thirsty in the extreme' and characterised by marvellous machinery and luxurious settings, revolving as it does around the spectacular and the sensational. Italian theatre had for Eliot everything it needed to dazzle the imagination 'of unsophisticated northeners emerging into a period of prosperity and luxury.'5

This rather predictable move in Eliot's argument is based on the links between Italian character, sophistication, and cruelty – a constant association in English literature, which has made ample use of Italy as a form of release of restraint.<sup>6</sup> Seneca is not a direct influence on English theatre; rather, Italian theatre has offered to Kyd and Peele their blood-thirsty plots. Seneca's influence, too big to be ignored, is on the language; without it, it would be impossible to even conceive of Elizabethan theatre. Most importantly, his influence derives from the translations of his tragedies which circulated at the time: the *Tenne Tragedies* (1559 e il 1566). Among them, Troas (1559), Thyestes (1560) and Hercules Furens (1561) by Jasper Heywood, Oedipus of Alexander Nevyle (1563), Octavia of Nuce, Agamemnon, Medea, Hercules Oetaus and Hyppolitus of John Studley (1566 and 1567). The publication of Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey's Aeneid in 1557 provides Elizabethan drama with its 'blank verse', immediately put to use into the English versions of Seneca's tragedies, which could not translate the solemn qualities of the Senecan iambic into the 'old fourteener' or the 'heroic couplet', and which therefore contributed both to the birth of the 'blank verse' and to the poetical renewal of the Elizabethan period. Such renewal is also based on radical modifications to the Seneca's texts: in Heywood's translation of the *Troas*, for instance, what was a simple mention of Achilles' ghost becomes a soliloguy of 13 stanzas, conceived for the stage and boasting a rhetorical quality which Peele could not have equalled. Heywood and Studley still use the fourteener, but they juxtapose it to the blank verse in the chorus – which gives the translators an opportunity for adding, reducing, omitting and substituting in order to increase the dramatic effect thus creating a contrast between old and new. The Tragedy of Blood was born thanks to Heywood's translations, which marked the boundary between old and new versification.

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

in Chapman's *Iliad*, and will settle only much later, in the sobriety of Dryden and Hobbes.

Eliot reads the translations in the *Tenne Tragedies* as a historical passage from the old Tudor language, still chained to Chaucerian models, to the Elizabethan one, based on Seneca. Violence, excess, passion, and rhetorical are all linked to a sophisticated 'foreigness', that of Italy, following an ideological move which can be indeed traced back to the Elizabethan period. From Webster to Shakespeare, from Byron's carnival to Forster's Tuscany, 'italianità', excess, passion, violence, and rhetoric remain closely connected, and opposed to an idea of 'Englishness' as decorum, measure, but – surely – also as a limitation.<sup>7</sup>

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

The birth of Englishness coincides with the birth of theatre, or, better, of a 'theatrical drama', a drama of action and not only of language, and prepares the ground for a Shakespeare who would be unthinkable without such translations. The Elizabethan period is thus the foundation of a notion of Englishness,<sup>8</sup> it is the historical locus in which tradition recognises its own origins. Tradition springs out of a cultural innovation which translation makes possible. Since for Eliot 'few things that can happen to a nation are more important then the invention of a new form of verse',<sup>9</sup> when he introduces Pounds' *Selected Poems* he links his own free verse to the Elizabethan theatre, establishing a connection between his own originality and a period which simultaneously represents the origin, the change, and the development of a nation.<sup>10</sup>

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

#### **Pound**

In his introduction to Ezra Pound's literary essays, T.S. Eliot claims that 'any pioneer of a revolution in poetry – and Mr. Pound is more responsible for the XXth Century revolution in poetry than is any other individual – is sure to attack some venerated names.'<sup>11</sup> This is the well-known picture of Pound as a revolutionary, an image which Pound himself promoted and reproduced in his theories of translation focused on the shock of the new. Some of Pound's writings on translation, less known than his essay on Cavalcanti, can be helpful to reconsider the image of Pound as a solitary genius who, again in Eliot's words, 'invented' Chinese poetry 'as we know it today'.<sup>12</sup>

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

Pound's 1919 essay *The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry*<sup>13</sup> in which he transcribes and develops the late Ernest Fenollosa's notes, is an early theorisation of how the Chinese written character can be a source of innovation thanks to its non-arbitrary relation between thing and word:

But Chinese notation is something much more than arbitrary symbols. It is based upon a vivid shorthand picture of the operation of nature. In the algebraic figure and in the spoken word there is no natural connection between thing and sign: all depends upon sheer convention. But the Chinese method follows natural suggestion. [...] One superiority of verbal poetry as an art rests in its getting back to the fundamental reality of *time*. Chinese poetry has the unique advantage of combining both elements. It speaks at once with the vividness of painting, and with the mobility of sound. It is, in some sense, more objective than either, more dram[a]tic [sic]. In reading Chinese we do not seem to be juggling mental counters, but to be watching *things* work out their own fate.<sup>14</sup>

The hybrid nature attributed to the Chinese character enables Pound to believe that 'the Chinese written language has not only absorbed the poetic substance of nature and built with it a second world of metaphor, but has, through its very pictorial visibility, been able to retain its original creative poetry with far more vigour and vividness that any phonetic language.' The Chinese written character thus seems to possess the energy towards which poetry aspires and which attempts to reproduce by crowding – since it has no better tools – the highest number of meanings into one word or one line. 16

Energy, a very important concept within Pound's process of innovation and one which finds a home in the Chinese character, will lead him to claim in 1937 that his 'version' of Confucius' *Ta Hio* is his 'most important work in the last three decades.'<sup>17</sup> In this essay Pound asserts that a 'diseased' and 'degraded' West is in urgent need of Confucius; connecting Confucian will and Dantean *directio voluntatis*, and ranging through a wide spectrum of medical metaphors spanning from the hypodermic needle to the straight jacket, Pound hails the forty-six characters of the *Ta Hio* as the beginning of a process of renewal which will invigorate a paradoxically ill-fed West. Translation, the moving across cultures, and the publication of works with both original and facing translation are thus presented as a way of regenerating the West linguistically and culturally.

The necessary character of the *Ta Hio* will be violently expanded upon in the essay 'Mang Tsze (The Ethics of Mencius)', <sup>18</sup> in which Pound defends his previous work from the accusations of having modernised Confucius and distinguishes between inclusion and ambiguity in translation. Pound's attacks against what he calls 'under-translation' (paradoxically seen as a sign of the translator's lack of humbleness) can be traced back to the difference he drew in 1920 between two kinds of obscurity in translation, one unjustifiably linked to the expression and one inherent in the 'thing', and thus defended in the name of modernist experimentalism:

Obscurities *not* inherent in the matter, obscurities due not to the thing but to the wording are a botch, and are not worth preserving in a translation. The work lives not by them but despite them. Obscurities inherent in the thing occur when the author is piercing, or trying to pierce

into, uncharted regions; when he is trying to express things not yet current, not yet worn into phrases; when he is ahead of the emotional, or philosophic sense (as a painter might be ahead of the colour sense) of his contemporaries.<sup>19</sup>

In Pound avant-garde and translation are experimental activities which ought to be 'before their time', and yet they are closely connected to reactionary ideological positions. Through Dante's Latin (whose *directio voluntatis* is evoked more than once) and ancient Greek, Pound claims that Mang Tsze, against Christian ethics, is in favour of an economy of abundance; through a sinister and violent anti-semitic attack, the author distinguishes between such an economy and what he describes as 'the semitic excess'. This is exemplary of the very problematic role which translation plays in Pound. What Pound describes as Mang Tsze's 'original' text, which is praised as Confucian because 'totalitarian',<sup>20</sup> is opposed to the 'semitic insanity' and to Socrates. It will have, according to Pound, 'a fresh impact on to more thoughtful minds.'<sup>21</sup>

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

Confucio ed il suo più grande commentatore Menzio, hanno un significato per noi oggi in Italia. Hanno una funzione nel programma educativo del Fascismo anche se non ce ne rendiamo pienamente conto. Mussolini e Hitler per magnifico intuito seguono le dottrine di Confucio. Re Vittorio Emanuele è un sovrano confuciano. Non basta leggere una sola volta una sua versione, bisogna, come io stesso continuo a fare, leggere e rileggere il testo originale e ideogrammico col commento accanto.' [Confucius and his greatest commentator, Mang Tsze, are significant for us in Italy. They have a role within the fascist educational programme even though we might not fully realise this. Mussolini and Hitler thanks to their magnificent intuition follow Confucius' doctrines. King Vittorio Emanuele is a Confucian sovereign. It is not enough to read once his translation, one must - as I do - read and reread the original text written in ideograms with its facing commentary].<sup>22</sup>

Pound's trajectory goes from the Chinese character's dyna-

mism to the power of the fascist anti-semitic State.<sup>23</sup> The essay on Mang Tsze and its later ramifications raise the classic problem of the paradoxical proximity of avant-garde and fascism in modernism. 24 In Pound, a past which is both geographically and temporally distant (twentieth-century Provence, thirteenth-century Tuscany, and the China of Confucius or Mang Tsze) is used to advocate for an urgent solution to the problem of a diseased and decadent society.<sup>25</sup> In this way, translating is ideologically aligned with a reactionary dynamism which coincides with order, hierarchy, and authoritarianism. China's alterity is transformed into a totalitarian model to emulate, producing a structure able to survive only by debasing another kind of alterity, which in Pound is Jewishness: following a classic reactionary model, Pound defines 'semitism' as the omnipresent threat, origin of a degraded and diseased society which can aspire to its renewal only by blindly obeying a totalitarian regime. Such a regime is represented by Confucius and Mang Tsze, who represent a different kind of otherness able to rejuvenate a decadent society. Such Confucius and Mang Tsze are eminently Poundian characters, who are said to be different but mirror what is already there: the totalitarian state.26

#### III. The invisible translator: Arthur Waley

Arthur Waley is the first twentieth-century writer to translate the great names in Chinese and Japanese poetry, giving shape to a picture of the East which will dominate the West for over a century. He is also the figure most frequently juxtaposed to Pound's modernist take on the Orient.<sup>27</sup> A comparison between Waley and Pound casts some light on the different connections that these two writers establish between translation and national identity; it will also question the frequent role of Pound as the only mediator between West and East in histories of literature.

Octavio Paz, in *Nineteen Ways of Looking at Wang Wei*, claims that he has never been persuaded by Pound's theories of translation, but that he has always been fascinated by his activity as a translator, and in particular as a translator of Chinese poetry. Such a division enables Paz to praise the fresh quality of Pound's translations while rejecting the more problematic ideological implications of his theories of translation. Paz follows Eliot in saying that Pound invented Chinese poetry in the West, and both agree that Pound's great contribution has been to destroy the myth that trans-

lation can bring back an untainted idea of the original. For Eliot, the original is matter *an sich*, unknowable by definition: thus, every translation must be rethought as an interpretive exercise bound to its own time, able to enrich and renew the existing poetic tradition.<sup>28</sup> Pound the 'fabbro' [forger] and the artifex, rather than the theoretician, is rescued by the critical tradition: he is the artist who, according to Hugh Kenner's famous definition, 'never translates into something which already exists in English.'<sup>29</sup>

To avoid cleansing Pound's reputation as a practitioner from the debris of his anti-semitic theorisations and to redefine the link between translation and totalitarianism, it is politically useful to look at Arthur Waley (1889-1966).30 Poet and translator at the margins of the Bloomsbury group, Waley has often been fashioned in literary histories as the anti-Pound: if Pound is the source of modern poetic revolution thanks to his translations able to invent the Orient, Waley is the learned translator from the Chinese and the Japanese, laboriously and painstakingly constructing the first bridge between modern East and West. Critics Ivan Morris and Jonathan Spence have attempted to vindicate Waley's importance in having altered forever the way in which the twentieth century conceives of the Orient by drawing attention to how twentieth century artists from Bertold Brecht (Chinesische Gedichte, 1939) to Blair Fairchild (Songs from the Chinese, 1922), Aaron Copland (Old Poems, 1923), and Benjamin Britten (Songs from the Chinese, 1957),<sup>31</sup> had access to the East exclusively through Waley's translations.

Morris and Spence also underline how Waley remained a marginal figure in Bloomsbury; he determinately shun from fame,<sup>32</sup> as can be observed in the interview Waley gave to the BBC in 1963, which has led critics like Paz to claim that Waley is an important figure but that his many talents were 'less intense' than those of Pound.<sup>33</sup> Critic Wai-lim Yip follows the existing critical opposition of Pound and Waley too when he describes Pound's translating as 'breaking through verbal barriers into the core of the poem'<sup>34</sup> while dismissing Waley as someone who 'endorsed the theory of literal translation'.<sup>35</sup> Precision, erudition, and care to detail quickly become the attributes which damn Waley with faint praise: such qualities are soon transformed into an academic limitation useful to prop up the figure of a Pound able to move 'beyond' language, of 'breaking syntactical barriers', and of reaching that mythical poetic centre which in Yip seems to transcend language itself.

Waley possibly contributed to casting himself as the anti-Pound when in a talk at the British Museum in 1918 he harshly criticises Pound's translation of Li Po, mocking his incompetence (famously, Pound only translated with the help of cribs) and presenting alternative translations. This anecdote is not aimed at reclaiming Waley as the 'real' or reliable translator whilst dismissing Pound's amateurishness, but at drawing attention to how Fenollosa's fin-de-siècle Orientalism (from which Pound derives his theories) can be contextualised by looking at how China inherited the role of ellenic ethical and aesthetical ideal constructed by the generation preceding that of Pound and Waley. Once Pound's solitary figure is set against this tradition and against the backdrop of the metrical, rhythmical and structural changes introduced by Waley in the poetry he translates, he can be read not as being 'ahead of his time', but as part of a more complex literary and cultural landscape.

In his interview to Roy Fuller in 1963 and in the 1960 introduction to the reprint of *A Hundred and Seventy Chinese Poems* (published in 1962), Waley discusses his own activity as a translator in terms that are quite different from the image of the quiet, laborious craftsman which we encounter in the history of literature. Waley humbly compares the translator with the musician, who is supposed to interpret rather than compose; he also refuses the notion of genius which underlies Pound's oeuvre.<sup>38</sup> However, he rejects what Lawrence Venuti calls 'the translator's invisibility',<sup>39</sup> vindicating instead his role in renewing modern British poetry. By recounting an apparently harmless anecdote in which at a party he was once violently accused of having 'revolutionised English poetry', ruining it with his unconventional poetic strategies, Waley fashions himself as an important figure within modernism.

Not dissimilarly to what Eliot does in his essay on Seneca, Waley places translation at the centre of modern British poetry, and claims that his 'sprung rhythm' does not come from Eliot (via Hopkins) but directly from his translations from the Chinese, thus opening up a possible an alternative genealogy of modernist verse.<sup>40</sup>

For Eliot, English poetry springs from the clash between the non-dramatic pre-Elizabethan period and the influence of an italianised Seneca created in translation; for Waley, it is the problem of translating the rhythms of Chinese poetry which led him to break with traditional poetic models and contribute to a modernism not linked to Eliot's Hopkins or to Pound's 'make it new', but to

the geographical and historical difference encountered in ancient China and Japan.

Pound's genius can be constituted in criticism and self-criticism as unique and absolute precisely because – and not in spite of – the link between cultural renewal, fascism, anti-semitism, and authoritarian positions. A re-evaluation of Waley, a minor figure in the histories of the twentieth century, can help us instead to rethink the ideological implications in the notion of genius, and open up new interpretations focused on observing how innovation in poetry is not only formal, but also epistemological, and lead us to revision literary tradition from the point of view of translation.

#### IV. Dorothy L. Sayers, Dante, and the 'common reader'

Dorothy L. Sayers (1893-1957), poet and scholar,<sup>41</sup> is mostly renown for her detective stories.<sup>42</sup> She is also the author of the translation of the *Divina Commedia* for Penguin (*Inferno* 1949, *Purgatorio* 1955 and *Paradiso* completed after Sayers's death by Barbara Reynolds in 1962).<sup>43</sup> In her posthumously published essay entitled 'The Art of Translating Dante' (1965),<sup>44</sup> Sayers sketches a history of translations of Dante in England, quoting from a range of translations, discussing their merits and faults, and developing a theory of translation based on the practice of translating.<sup>45</sup>

Sayers highlights how Dante's role changes in time; for instance, Boyd, caught up in his efforts to 'improve' the *Commedia* <sup>46</sup>, describes Dante as 'wild' and 'wanting in connection'; in later years, some passages from the *Inferno*, among which the Paolo and Francesca and the Conte Ugolino episodes, achieve a canonical role thanks to the gothic re-evaluation. Sayers also connects the importance of Dante to the influence which the wars of independence in Italy had over England, triggering the Romantic Revival and its creation of the middle ages as a place of Christian faith and artistic beauty.

Sayers makes ample use of quotations in order to evaluate each time the difficulties of translating. She condemns the often lamented lack of terza rima in English as an excuse to avoid tackling what she calls the 'national habit' of thinking in quatrains rather than in tercets. She then reformulates the possibilities of terza tima in English and uses Bickersteth as an example of a translator who uses rhyme to revitalise the line; she opposes this to the problems she find in the 1943 Laurence Binyon's translation and, in the end, pro-

poses her own translations as a possible solution.

Should we happen to be suspicious of this teleological arrangement, in which her own translations appear as the apex, Sayers demonstrates to be fully aware of this risk, as she had done in a previous essay titled 'On Translating the Divina Commedia',<sup>47</sup> originally a paper given in 1954 at Girton College, Cambridge. Sayers here humorously reflects on the position of each translator of Dante: if a translator presumes to be able to be better than all his predecessors he risks appearing a 'presumptuous ass', but if he humbly asserts of not being able to be better than them, then he *is* a presumptuous ass, as he is unable to give his readers a reasons for buying his inferior translations.<sup>48</sup>

Eliot claims, as we have seen, that the original is unknowable insofar as it is matter *an sich*, always and only interpretable, and thus translatable; Sayers instead thinks of the original as plenitude, which the translation can never quite reproduce. For Sayers, something is always lost in translation. Although her position seems rather more conventional, Sayers surprisingly reaches conclusions similar to Eliot's, albeit going through a different route: she sees translation as an interpretive act characteristic of its age, always linked to its own historical moment, always part of an infinite series of attempts. Unlike Pound, who foresees a cultural role for his translations, Sayers refuses to theorise translation 'a priory' and claims that any translator would be lucky to 'live up to a quarter of his own theory'.<sup>49</sup>

But what are her objectives in translating Dante? She wants to produce a 'popular' translation, a translation able to reach the 'common reader'. This, of course, links translation with national identity, since she uses Dante to make a diagnosis of her contemporary England. Until the preceding generation Dante was well known, but today, says Sayers, to be 'literate' does not mean to be 'educated' and Dante must be made understandable, readable, and economically affordable. This new audience is described with a vocabulary which brings us back to Virginia Woolf, since Sayers refers to a 'common reader' and underlines the connection between art consumption and material conditions, just like Woolf does in *Three Guineas*. At one guinea a canticle, three well-commented canticles, says Sayers, are not a sum which the common reader will not be able to afford. The reader in Sayers also refers to a female readership, as shown not only by the allusions to Woolf but also by

the quotation chosen by Sayers to describe it: 'non solamente maschi ma femmine, che sono molti in questa lingua, volgari e non letterati' (not only male but also female, who are many in this language, speaking in vernacular and not educated).<sup>52</sup>

Sayers's translation wants to face a new image of modernity, on the one hand criticising the 'misplaced reverence' towards Dante which transforms 'hypertrophic decorum' into the rule of translating,<sup>53</sup> and on the other vindicating Dante as great poet in order to stimulate other translators to use the widest range of styles available to them, not to be afraid of rhyme,<sup>54</sup> and not to italianise their beats, estranging the English language in a series of endless special effects. This essay invites its readers to appreciate the comic together with the solemn aspects of Dante's work and to look at how they alternate and merge. For Sayers it is in practice and not in theory that translation survives or dies.<sup>55</sup>

Translating becomes in Sayers a way to rethink literary and cultural history, which gradually becomes also a social history of modern England, and a way to reconsider how highbrow literature can be made available to the common reader without dumbing it down. Such a dichotomy, of course, is resisted also in her own practice, which alternates translating Dante to writing about the adventures of her detective Lord Peter Whimsey.

### **Conclusions**

The essays on translation by Eliot, Pound, Waley and Sayers indicate how between the 1920s and the 1960s translation mediates not only ideas of origin but also of change and modernity. Sayers and Waley's fame will probably always be linked to their work as translators rather than as poets in their own right, unlike Eliot and Pound. And yet, an analysis of the politics of translation upheld by the four authors may be the beginning of an alternative history of literature from the point of view of translation. Such a history of literature may appear at fist less appealing, deprived as it would be of solitary geniuses; it would have the advantage, however, of being able to account for the complex historical texture which makes mediation and negotiation the basis not only of translation, but also of literary renewal.

A different version of the article appeared in *Traduzione e poesia nell'Europa del Novecento*, ed.Anna Dolfi (Rome: Bulzoni, 2004), 69-90.

#### **Notes**

- 1. T.S. Eliot, 'Elizabethan Dramatists' (London: Faber and Faber, 1968 [1963]), p. 6.
  - 2. T.S. Eliot, 'Elizabethan', p. 11.
  - 3. T.S. Eliot, 'Elizabethan', p. 17.
  - 4. T.S. Eliot, 'Elizabethan', p. 27.
  - 5. T.S. Eliot, 'Elizabethan', p. 32.
- 6. T.S. Eliot, 'Elizabethan', p. 33. Suffice it to think of Shakespeare's Italy and of Byron's carnivals, but also of contemporary British crime fiction set in Italy, such as that produced by Michael Dibdin, or of Jeanette Winterson's Venetian 'passions'.
- 7. Michele Marrapodi et. al (eds.), Shakespeare's Italy: Functions of Italian Locations in Renaissance Drama (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993).
- 8. Antony Easthope, *Englishness and National Culture* (London: Routledge, 1988); Philip Dodd and Robert Colls (eds.) *Englishness* (London: Routledge, 1987); Paul Langford, *Englishness Identified* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); Gary Taylor, *Reinventing Shakespeare* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1990); Alessandra Marzola, *Englishness* (Florence: Carocci, 1999).
  - 9. T.S. Eliot, 'Elizabethan', p. 53.
- 10. Ezra Pound, *Selected Poems*, edited and with an introduction by T.S. Eliot (London: Faber and Faber, 1928), pp. x-xi.
- 11. Literary Essays of Ezra Pound (London: Faber and Faber, 1974 [1954]), p. xi.
  - 12. Ezra Pound, Selected Poems, p. xvii.
- 13. Ernest Fenellosa and Ezra Pound The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry, Little Review, 6:5, (September 1919), pp. 62-64; reprinted in Ezra Pound's Poetry and Prose, Contributions to Periodicals, eds. Lea Baechler, James Longenbach and Walton A. Litz (New York: Garland, 1991), vol. III, pp. 326-328; 331-336; 346-351; 361-364. Among the many works by Pound on the East see Cathai (London: Elkin Mathews, 1915), translated as Catai, ed. Mary de Rachelwiltz (Milan: Scheiwiller, 1987); Plays Modelled on the No, (1916) ed. Donald Gallup (Toledo: Friends of the University of Toledo Libraries, 1987); Ezra Pound and Ernest Fenollosa, 'Noh' or Accomplishment: A Study of the Classical Stage of Japan (London: Macmillan, 1916); Confucio. Ta Hsueh. Ta S'eu. Dai Gaku. Studio integrale, Italian version by Ezra Pound and Alberto Luchini (Rapallo, 1942); Testamento di Confucio, versione italiana di Ezra Pound e Alberto Luchini (Venezia: Casa delle edizioni popolari, 1942); Confucio. Studio integrale dell'asse che non vacilla, (1928) con una nota di Achilles Fang (Milan, 1955). See also Ezra Pound and Japan. Letters and Essays, ed. Samehide Kodama (Redding Ridge: Black Swan, 1987) and Makoto Ueda, Zeami, Basho, Yeats, Pound. A Study in Japanese and English Poetics (The Hague: Mouton, 1965).
  - 14. 'The Chinese Written Character', p. 332.
  - 15. 'The Chinese', pp. 349-50.
  - 16. 'The Chinese', p. 362.

- 17. Ezra Pound, 'Immediate Need for Confucius', *Aryan Path*, (August 1937), reprinted in *Selected Prose, 1909-1965* (London: Faber and Faber, 1973), pp. 89-94, p. 89.
- 18. Ezra Pound, 'Mang-Tsze (The Ethics of Mencius)', in *Selected Prose*, pp. 95-111.
- 19. Ezra Pound, *Translators of Greek: Early Translation of Homer* in *Instigations of Ezra Pound Together with an Essay on the Chinese Written Character by Ernest Fenellosa* (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1920), reprinted in *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound*, pp. 249-275, pp. 268-269. See also *The Spirit of Romance* (Norfolk (Connecticut): New Directions, 1953), in which Pound writes: 'I resolved [...] that I would know the dynamic content from the shell, that I would know what was accounted poetry everywhere, what part of poetry was 'indestructible', what part *could not be lost* by translation, and scarcely less important what effects were obtainable in *one* language only and were utterly incapable of being translated.' p. 5.
  - 20. 'The Confucian is totalitarian', in Mang-Tsze, p. 99.
  - 21. 'The Confucian', p. 110.
- 22. 'Confucio filosofo statale', *Meridiano di Roma*, 6: 9 (11 May 1941), pp. [1]-2, ristampato in *Ezra Pound's Poetry and Prose*, vol. VIII, pp. 119-120, p. 119.
- 23. 'Alla comprensione della forza e del tono giusto del pensiero di Confucio, una comprensione della natura dell'ideogramma è indispensabile. L'ideogramma rappresenta più di una parola; cioè per tradurlo bisogna qualche volta adoperare tutta una frase. E in questa frase bisogna qualche volta indicare la fonte, ed il fondo dell'idea "graffiata".' 'Ta Hio', in *Meridiano di Roma*, 6: 46 (16 November 1941), p. 7; in *Ezra Pound's Poetry and Prose*, vol. VIII, pp. 149-150, p. 149.
- 24. Charles Ferrall, *Modernist Writing and Reactionary Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).
- 25. 'The first great distinction between Chinese taste and our own is that the Chinese *like* poetry that they have to think about, and even poetry that they have to puzzle over. This latter taste has occasionally broken out in Europe, notably in twelfth-century Provence and thirteenth-century Tuscany, but it has never held its own for very long.' 'Chinese Poetry', in *Today*, 3: 14 (April 1918), pp. 54-57; in *Ezra Pound's Poetry and Prose*, vol. III, pp. 84-86, p. 85.
- 26. Anthony Julius, *T.S. Eliot, Anti-Semitism, and Literary Form* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).
  - 27. Edward W. Said, Orientalism (New York: Pantheon, 1978).
  - 28. Hugh Kenner, 'Introduction', Selected Poems, pp. xvi-xviii.
- 29. Ezra Pound: Translations, with an introduction by Hugh Kenner (Norfolk (Ct): New Directions, 1979 [1954]), p. 9; my translation. The comparison between Waley and Pound is also made by Charles Tomlinson in his *The Oxford Book of Verse in English Translation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), pp. xiii-xvii.

- 30. Among his many translations I would like to list here: A Hundred and Seventy Chinese Poems (Londra: Constable & Co, 1918 [1917]); More Translations from the Chinese (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1919); The Poet Li Po Ad 701-762 (London: East and West Ltd, 1919); Japanese Poetry. The «Uta» (Oxford: Clarendon, 1919); The Nô Plays of Japan (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1921); Zen Buddhism and Its Relation to Art (London: Benn, 1923); An Introduction to the Study of Chinese Painting (London: Benn, 1923); The Temple and Other Poems (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1923); The Pillow Book of Sei Shônagen (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1928); Translations from the Chinese, illustrated by Cyrus LeRoy Baldridge (New York: A.A. Knopf [1941], 1964); The Tale of Genji (New York: Modern Library, 1960), translated into Italian as Il Racconto di Genji (Milan: Bompiani, 1947).
- 31. Francis A. Johns, *A Bibliography of Arthur Waley* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1968), p. 18.
- 32. Jonathan Spence in 'The Explorer Who Never Left Home Arthur Waley', in *Renditions*, 5 (Autumn 1975), pp. 75-80, p. 75. Waley worked as curator of the Oriental Sub-Department of Prints and Drawings of the British Museum between 1913 and 1929.
- 33. Octavio Paz and Eliot Weinberger, *Nineteen Ways of Looking at Wang Wei. How a Chinese Poem is Translated* (Berkeley, CA: Group West-Moyers Bell, 1987), p. 35.
- 34. Wai-lim Yip, *Ezra Pound's Cathai* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), p. 101.
- 35. It remains unclear what Wai-Lim Yip means by literal translation. Wai-lim Yip, *Ezra Pound's Cathai*, p. 89, note 26.
- 36. 'Arthur Waley was apparently very unhappy with Pound's translation [of Li Po], and he decided to show Pound a few things by retranslating Li Po's poems that Pound had rendered. These are found in a paper that he read before the China Society at the School of Oriental Studies in London, on November 21, 1918.' Yip, *Ezra Pound's Cathai*, p. 88. Yip describes how Achilles Fang first observed that Waley's speech was an attack against Pound in his article 'Fenollosa and Pound', *Harvard Journal of Asian Studies*, 20; 2 (June 1957), pp. 213-238, p. 221.
- 37. 'The Explorer Who Never Left Home', p. 76; Spence quotes Waley's introduction to his first book, *A Hundred and Seventy Chinese Poems* (1917) to argue in favour of a view of China in which friendship dominates over romantic love. Waley was a harsh critic of his own early positions in the 1962 re-edition.
- 38. 'It is not, after all, as though the translator has to be or even had better be a creative genius', *Madly Singing in the Mountain. An Appreciation and Anthology of Arthur Waley*, ed. Ivan Morris (London: Allen and Unwin, 1972), p. 157.
  - 39. Madly Singing, p. 156.
  - 40. Paz, Nineteenth Ways of Looking.

- 41. On Dorothy L. Sayers, see James Brabazon, Dorothy L. Sayers, The Life of a Corageous Woman, with a preface by Anthony Fleming and an introductory note by P.D. James (London: Gallancz, 1981), reprinted in 1988 as Dorothy L. Sayers, a Biography; Barbara Reynolds, Dorothy L. Sayers, Her Life and Her Soul (London: Sceptre, 1998); Trevor H. Hall, Dorothy L. Sayers, Nine Literary Studies (London: Duckworth, 1980); Ralph E. Hone, Dorothy L. Sayers, A Literary Biography (Kent (Ohio) and London: Kent State University Press, 1979); Terrance L. Lewis, Dorothy L. Sayers's Whimsey and the Interwar British Society (Lewiston (NY) Lampeter: Edwin Mellen Press, 1994); Barbara Reynolds, The Passionate Intellect: Dorothy Sayers Encounter with Dante (Kent (Ohio) and London: Kent State University Press, 1988); Catherine Kenney, The Remarkable Case of Dorothy L. Sayers, (Kent (Ohio) and London: Kent State University Press, 1990); Janet Hitchman, Such a Strange Lady, an Introduction to Dorothy L. Sayers, 1893-1957 (London: New English Library, 1975); As Her Whimsey Took Her. Critical Essays on the Works of Dorothy L. Sayers, ed. Margaret P. Hannay (Kent (Ohio) and London: Kent State University Press, 1980); Robert B. Harmon and Margaret A. Burger, An Annotated Guide to the Works of Dorothy L. Sayers (New York and London: Garland, 1977); Colleen B. Gilbert, A Bibliography of the Works of Dorothy L. Sayers (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1979).
- 42. Among her most famous detective stories are *Gaudy Nights, Busman's Honeymoon, Strong Poison, Unnatural Death, Five Red Herrings*, and *Murder Must Advertised*; Lord Peter Whimsey is Sayer's aristocratic but 'modern' detective.
- 43. The Divine Comedy. Hell, translated by Dorothy L. Sayers (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1949); The Divine Comedy. Purgatory, 1955; The Divine Comedy. Paradise, 1962. See also Dorothy L. Sayers, The Mind of the Matter (London: Methuen, 1941); Introductory Papers on Dante (London: Methuen, 1954); Further Papers on Dante (London: Methuen, 1957): The Poetry of Search and the Poetry of Statement and Other Posthumous Essays on Literature, Religion and Language (London: Victor Gollancz, 1963); Unpopular Opinions (London: Victor Gollancz, 1946); Why Work? An Address (London: Methuen, 1942); Correspondence, Selections. The Letters of Dorothy L: Sayers, ed. Barbara Reynolds, with a preface by P.D. James, 3 vols. (Cambridge: Dorothy L. Sayers Society, 1998).
- 44. Dorothy L. Sayers, 'The Art of Translating Dante', in *Nottingham Medieval Studies. Dante Centenary Number*, ed. Louis Thorpe, vol. 9, 1965, pp. 15-31.
- 45. She claims that Jonathan Richardson (1665-1745) was the first Englishman after Chaucher to translate passages from the *Commedia*; Thomas Gray's version follows, written between 1737 and 1740 (but only published in 1884), after which we have the first complete translation by William Higgins, who only published a few passages in 1760. Sayers then analyses terza rima translations: the first done by William Hayley in 1782; then the first complete translation in terza rima, by Henry Boyd in 1802; and finally that of 'Dante' Cary (Henry Francis Cary, 1772-1844), published in its entirety in 1812, and for years the reference text for Dante's readers in England. Sayers then analy-

ses the golden age of translation for Dante, the Victorian period, in which at least twenty translations of the *Commedia* were published between 1833 and 1915; she then concludes with a reading of Bickersteth's learned translation and J.D. Sinclair's prose translation.

- 46. For an interesting parallel with Shakespeare's reception in Italy see Angela Locatelli, *L'eloquenza e gli incantesimi*. *Interpretazioni shakespeariane* (Milan: Guerini e Associati, 1988).
- 47. Dorothy L. Sayers, 'On Translating the Divina Commedia', *Nottingham Medieval Studies*, 2, 1958, pp. 38-66.
  - 48. 'On Translating', p. 38.
  - 49. 'On Translating', p. 39.
- 50. Virginia Woolf, *The Common Reader* (London: Hogarth Press, 1925) and *The Common Reader. Second Series* (London: Hogarth Press, 1932).
  - 51. Virginia Woolf, Three Guineas (London: Hogarth Press, 1938).
  - 52. 'On Translating', p. 41.
  - 53. 'On Translating', p. 52.
  - 54. 'On Translating', p. 54.
- 55. By quoting from Longfellow, Cary, and Bickersteth, Sayers looks at the passage from *Paradiso* XI in which the quick 'scalzarsi' of Bernardo followed by Egidio and Silvestro has created so many problems for translators. Her practical solution is then offered. 'On Translating', p. 61.





The Emperor, China ink, 70x50 cm.

#### Alla cieca

## by Claudio Magris

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

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

## Translator's Note<sup>1</sup>

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

says, novels are expanded gravestones. If *Alla cieca* can be said to be an expanded commemorative stone, a *lapide dilatata*, the novella *Lei dunque capirà* is indeed lapidary by contrast: a few brief lines carved simply and incisively on the marble of the page.

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

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

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

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

# [Capitolo 8]

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

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

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

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

from the Novel Alla cieca
by Claudio Magris (Garzanti, 2005)
English Translation by Anne Milano Appel

## [Chapter 8]

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## [Capitolo 18]

Mi scusi di nuovo, dottore, è stato solo un capogiro, per un momento non ho visto più nulla, solo un pulviscolo abbagliante che mi feriva gli occhi. Capita. Adesso è passato e tutto è chiaro, come il volto di Maria. Colpa di quella porta girevole, a vetri, del them – Clune, Stephenson, Davies, and now even that Dan Sprod, who thinks he's so smart. It's true that I wrote that I was the only one of my siblings not to be nursed by my mother – I went and checked – and so they had a great time with my having lacked the breast, surely I do not have to explain these obsessions to you, since they are common even in here... Aside from the fact that it is not I who says that, it is Thomas, in the *Adventures of Thomas Walter* – I wrote that novel in prison, in Newgate, even that pedantic biographer of mine says so, and I invented all of it – Oh God, all of it, no one ever invents anything, for that matter, and when one writes "I"... yet how could one say "he" instead, since it is an even greater lie than "I"? You don't mean to tell me that he's the one you're talking to now...

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

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

# [Chapter 18]

Forgive me again, doctor, it was only a sudden dizziness, for a moment I couldn't see anything anymore, just a dazzling dust mote that was hurting my eyes. It happens. Now it's gone and everything is clear, like Maria's face. The fault of that revolving door,

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Perhaps I never loved her as much as I did at that moment, when I lied about returning and embarked on the search for the fleece; while she held my hands a moment longer, and at the same time, gentle yet resolute, helped me disengage mine – Hypsipyle bidding farewell to Jason: "Go, and may the gods grant that you return with your companions safe and sound, bringing the king the golden fleece, as you wish and hold dear. But this island and the scepter that was my father's will be yours, if in the future, hav-

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

### [Capitolo 39]

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

Ho capito che il viso di queste donne che accompagnano gli uomini sul mare dev'essere levigato, sereno, imperturbabile; guai se mostrasse passione, personalità. Del resto, chi potrebbe azzardarsi a esibire una personalità? Solo un buffone, fatto di fasulla e interscambiabile carne anziché di buon legno che non truffa – se è quercia è quercia e se è cirmolo è cirmolo, non c'è trucco, mentre

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

### [Chapter 39]

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

I realized that the face of these women who accompany men at sea must be polished, serene, imperturbable; woe if it were to show passion, personality. Besides, who would dare display a personality? Only a fool, made of phony, interchangeable flesh rather la carne, specialmente quella umana, è sempre sofisticata. In ogni caso, gli uomini sospesi sugli abissi hanno già troppa furia nel cuore e chiedono serenità ossia impersonalità incolore come l'acqua.

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

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

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

#### [Capitolo 79]

Vede come me la cavo bene, con queste donne di legno che mi date da modellare, così mi distraggo e non mi vengono brutte idee than of good wood that doesn't con you – if it's oak it's oak and if it's pine it's pine, there's no ruse, while flesh, especially human flesh, is always deceptive. In any case, men suspended over the depths already have too much fury in their hearts and require serenity, namely, impersonality as colorless as water.

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

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

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

per la testa? A proposito, so di uno che aveva tagliato la testa alla polena della sua nave; sarà stata una vendetta d'amore, ma io queste cose non le capisco \_. se ci si lascia, vuoi dire che ci si doveva lasciare, no? Con le donne, gli uomini, le polene, le rivoluzioni, quando è finita, è finita. Anche con Maria – no, con Maria non finirà mai, è questo il disastro – Certo che con le polene, a leggere le sto-rie scritte in questo calendario - sì, lo so, catalogo, insomma un libro, gliel'ho gia detto che con quelle illustrazioni e fotografie di donne con le tette seminude mi ricorda i calendari dei barbieri di una volta - con quelle donne dì legno, dicevo, bisogna andarci cauti, guardi cosa scrive la didascalia di questa qui, Atalanta, si chiama, sta a La Spezia, e per lei si sono ammazzati ben due uomini, il custode che passava ore ad accarezzarla e a baciarla, e poi si è sfracellato buttandosi giù nel bacino di carenaggio, e un ufficiale tedesco, un certo Kurtz, che se l'è addirittura portata in camera prima di spararsi. Ma dico, hanno più sale in zucca i marinai che ne approfittano solo per sfogarsi un po', è comprensibile, con tutti quei mesi per mare, il viaggio fin quaggiù è lungo, e allora si può capire, ma almeno niente tragedie, è già tanto... E invece queste maligne vorrebbero la tua perdizione, la tua tragedia... polene maledette, streghe, magari messe a bruciare insieme alla streghe vive, come quella donna fiamminga che serviva da modella, arse tutte e due sul rogo, mentre lo scultore se 1'è cavata con le due mani mozzate.

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

#### [Capitolo 84]

Questa è Galatea. È stata trovata su una spiaggia africana dopo il naufragio, ed è stata adorata dagli indigeni come una dea; altre sono finite a adornare locande e taverne, così i marinai si sentivano un po' a casa anche quando scendevano a terra.

Vede, le polene le hanno sfrattate dal mare e si barcamenano come possono, ne ho scoperta più d'una sotto l'acconciatura esposta

## [Chapter 79]

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

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

# [Chapter 84]

This is Galatea. She was found on an African beach following a shipwreck, and was worshipped like a goddess by the aborigines; other figures ended up adorning inns and taverns, so that the sailin vetrina da un parrucchiere o sotto il vestito in un negozio d'abbigliamento — ben mascherata, un manichino come si deve, ma a me non è sfuggita. Però ho fatto finta di niente, ognuno si arrangia come può. Una, legga qui, quella della *Rebecca*, una baleniera di New Bedford, l'abbiamo sepolta fra i sassi in riva al mare. Sotto le ossa dell'onda, si dice in Islanda, abbiamo bevuto la birra in suo onore, la sua birra funebre; pure le donne devono averla, è giusto, ci siamo ubriacati e abbiamo cantato sulla sua tomba di rena e di sassi l'ufficio dei defunti. Anche sconcezze, come è giusto; la morte è sconcia e il dolore è sconcio. Vorrei pisciare sulla mia tomba, su una tomba bisogna annaffiare i fiori, no? Lo faccio anche, quando nessuno mi vede, là nel parco di Saint David.

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

Così è sparita in quel mare scuro, in quell'ombra. Ma ho letto che qualche volta le polene naufragate ritornano. Ma-ria è sparita nel mare aperto, la nave è dileguata all'orizzonte e quando ho sentito dire che stava ritornando in por-to ho anche sentito dire che tornava senza di lei – lei non c'era più, l'avranno buttata fuori bordo a tradimento, certo come potevo pensare che una piccola spinta...

Ho letto, nel catalogo, di uno scultore che aveva scelto la sua bellissima donna quale modello per la figura di prua della nave su cui lei partiva per un lungo viaggio – per lei, poco dopo, il più lungo di tutti, è morta. Lui ogni giorno guardava sconsolato il mare, non poteva credere che fosse morta e quando la nave è rientrata in porto ha visto, ritta in prua, la polena, identica a lei – si è gettato in acqua per an-darle incontro, smanioso di abbracciarla, ma è andato sot-

ors might feel a little more at home even when they were on land.

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

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

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

I read, in the catalog, of one sculptor who had chosen his beau-

to. Gonfio, stordito, acqua nel naso nella bocca nelle orecchie, impossibile veder passare la nave, se lei c'era o non c'era. Non c'era, Euridice sparisce; guardi che bella, questa Euridice che si asciuga le lacrime con un lembo del mantello che l'avvolge. Sta anche lei a La Spezia, scrivono sotto; vediamo se mi riesce di rifarla bene, quel mantello è l'acqua buia, la notte, il fondo del mare, me lo tirerò sulla testa e staremo là sotto, vicini, abbracciati...

Note

1.See Anne Milano Appel, "Plowing Magris' Sea: Blindly, With Eyes Wide Open", Forum Italicum, v. 40, no. 2, Fall 2006.

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

#### LE ARANCE D'ORO

# by Luigi Capuana Translated by Santi Buscemi

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

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

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

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

## A Note on Translation

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

#### LE ARANCE D'ORO

### di Luigi Capuana

Si racconta che c'era una volta un Re, il quale avea dietro il palazzo reale un magnifico giardino. Non vi mancava albero di sorta; ma il più raro e il più pregiato, era quello che produceva le arance d'oro.

Quando arrivava la stagione delle arance, il Re vi metteva a guardia una sentinella notte e giorno; e tutte le mattine scendeva lui stesso a osservare coi suoi occhi se mai mancasse una foglia.

Una mattina va in giardino, e trova la sentinella addormentata. Guarda l'albero... Le arance d'oro non c'eran più!-

Sentinella sciagurata, pagherai colla tua testa.

- Maestà, non ci ho colpa. È venuto un cardellino, si è posato sopra un ramo e si è messo a cantare. Canta, canta, canta, mi si aggravavano gli occhi. Lo scacciai da quel ramo, ma andò a posarsi sopra un altro. Canta, canta, canta, non mi reggevo dal sonno. Lo scacciai anche di lì, e appena cessava di cantare, il mio sonno svaniva. Ma si posò in cima all'albero, e canta, canta, canta..., ho dormito finora!

Il Re non gli fece nulla.

Alla nuova stagione, incaricò della guardia il Reuccio in persona.

Una mattina va in giardino e trova il Reuccio addormentato. Guarda l'albero...; le arance d'oro non c'eran più!

Figuriamoci la sua collera!

- Come? Ti sei addormentato anche tu?
- Maestà, non ci ho colpa. È venuto un cardellino, si è posato sopra un ramo e si è messo a cantare. Canta, canta, canta, mi s'aggravavano gli occhi. Gli dissi: cardellino traditore, col Reuccio non ti giova! Ed esso a canzonarmi: il Reuccio dorme! il Reuccio dorme! Cardellino traditore, col Reuccio non ti giova! Ed esso a canzonarmi: il Reuccio fa la nanna! il Reuccio fa la nanna! E canta, canta, canta..., ho dormito finora!

Il Re volle provarsi lui stesso; e arrivata la stagione si mise a far

#### THE GOLDEN ORANGES

## by Luigi Capuana

It is said that there was once a king, who had a magnificent garden behind his royal palace. Every type of tree could be found in the garden, but the rarest and most valued was the one that produced golden oranges.

When the season for the oranges arrived, the king ordered a sentry to guard it night and day. And every morning he came down himself to inspect the oranges with his own eyes to make sure that not even one leaf was missing.

One morning, he went into the garden and found the sentry asleep. He looked at the tree...The golden oranges were gone!

"Oh, wretched sentry, you will pay with your head."

"Majesty, it is not my fault." A goldfinch landed on a branch and began to sing. He sang, and sang, and sang so much that my eyes became heavy. I drove him from that branch, but he then flew to another. He sang, and sang, and sang so much that I could not fight off my sleepiness. I drove him from that branch too, and as soon as he stopped singing, my sleepiness disappeared. However, he then perched on the top of the tree and he sang, and sang, and sang. I have been sleeping until this very moment!"

The king did not hurt the man.

The next season, he placed the prince himself in charge of guarding the tree.

One morning he went into the garden and found the prince asleep. He looked at the tree...the golden oranges were gone!

Imagine his anger!

"What? Even you fell asleep?"

"Majesty, it is not my fault," said the prince. A goldfinch landed on a branch and began to sing. He sang, and sang, and sang so much that my eyes became heavy. I told him, "Traitorous goldfinch, don't fool with the prince!" But he simply mocked me: "The prince is falling asleep! The prince is falling asleep." "Traitorous goldfinch,' I said, 'don't fool with the prince!" But he simply mocked me: 'The prince is falling asleep! The prince is falling asleep!' And he sang, and sang, and sang...I have been sleeping until this very moment!"

la guardia. Quando le arance furon mature, ecco il cardellino che si posa sopra un ramo, e comincia a cantare. Il Re avrebbe voluto tirargli, ma faceva buio come in una gola. Intanto aveva una gran voglia di dormire!

- Cardellino traditore, questa volta non ti giova! - Ma durava fatica a tener aperti gli occhi.

Il cardellino cominciò a canzonarlo:

- Pss! Pss! Il Re dorme! Pss! Pss! Il Re dorme!

E canta, canta, il Re s'addormentava peggio d'un ghiro anche lui.

La mattina apriva gli occhi: le arance d'oro non ci eran più! Allora fece un bando per tutti i suoi Stati:

- Chi gli portasse, vivo o morto, quel cardellino, riceverebbe per mancia una mula carica d'oro.

Passarono sei mesi, e non si vide nessuno.

Finalmente un giorno si presenta un contadinotto molto male in arnese:

- Maestà, lo volete davvero quel cardellino? Promettetemi la mano della Reginotta, e in men di tre giorni l'avrete.

Il Re lo prese per le spalle, e lo messe fuor dell'uscio.

Il giorno appresso quegli tornò:

- Maestà, lo volete davvero quel cardellino? Promettetemi la mano della Reginotta, e in men di tre giorni l'avrete.

Il Re lo prese per le spalle, gli diè una pedata e lo messe fuor dell'uscio.

Ma il giorno appresso, quello, cocciuto, ritornava:

- Maestà, lo volete davvero il cardellino? Promettetemi la mano della Reginotta, e in men di tre giorni l'avrete.

Il Re, stizzito, chiamò una guardia e lo fece condurre in prigione.

Intanto ordinava si facesse attorno all'albero una rete di ferro; con quelle sbarre grosse, non c'era più bisogno di sentinella. Ma quando le arance furon mature, una mattina va in giardino...; l'arance d'oro non c'eran più.

Figuriamoci la sua collera! Dovette, per forza, mettersi d'accordo con quel contadinotto.-

Portami vivo il cardellino e la Reginotta sarà tua.

The king wanted to try guarding the tree himself. And when the oranges ripened, the goldfinch perched on a branch and began to sing. The king wanted to pull him down, but the garden was covered in darkness and the king felt very sleepy.

"Traitorous goldfinch, this time you will not succeed," but he had a hard time keeping his eyes open.

The goldfinch began to make fun of him:

"Hush! Hush! The king is sleeping! Hush! Hush! The king is sleeping!"

And as he sang, and sang, the king himself fell into a deep sleep.

In the morning, he opened his eyes; the golden oranges were gone!

Therefore, he proclaimed throughout his realm:

"Whoever brings me this goldfinch, dead or alive, will receive a mule loaded with gold as a reward."

However, six months later, no one had come forward.

Finally, one day there appeared a crusty old peasant, who was shabbily dressed:

"Majesty, do you truly want that goldfinch? Promise me the hand of the princess, and in less than three days you shall have him."

The king grabbed him by the shoulders and threw him out the door.

The next day, he returned.

"Majesty, do you truly want that goldfinch? Promise me the hand of the princess, and in less than three days you shall have him."

The king grabbed him by the shoulders, gave him a strong kick, and put him out the door.

However, the peasant was stubborn, and the next day he returned.

"Majesty, do you truly want that goldfinch? Promise me the hand of the princess, and in less than three days you shall have him."

Annoyed, the king called for a guard and had the peasant thrown into prison.

Meanwhile, he ordered that an iron net be built around the tree; such a barrier eliminated the need for a guard. When the oranges had ripened, the king went into the garden one - Maestà, fra tre giorni.

E prima che i tre giorni passassero era già di ritorno.

- Maestà, eccolo qui. La Reginotta ora è mia.

Il Re si fece scuro. Doveva dare la Reginotta a quello zoticone?-Vuoi delle gioie? Vuoi dell'oro? Ne avrai finché vorrai. Ma quanto alla Reginotta, nettati la bocca.

- Maestà, il patto fu questo.
- Vuoi delle gioie? Vuoi dell'oro?
- Tenetevi ogni cosa. Sarà quel che sarà!E andò via.

Il Re disse al cardellino:- Ora che ti ho tra le mani, ti vo' martoriare.

Il cardellino strillava, sentendosi strappare le penne ad una ad una.

-Dove son riposte le arance d'oro?-

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

- Non ti farò più nulla.
- Le arance d'oro sono riposte dentro la Grotta delle sette porte. Ma c'è il mercante, col berrettino rosso, che fa la guardia. Bisogna sapere il motto; e lo sanno due soli: il mercante e quel contadino che mi ha preso.

Il Re mandò a chiamare il contadino.

- Facciamo un altro patto. Vorrei entrare nella Grotta delle sette porte, e non so il motto. Se me lo sveli, la Reginotta sarà tua.-

Parola di Re?-

Parola di Re!

- Maestà, il motto è questo:
- "Secca risecca! Apriti, Cecca."
- Va bene.

Il Re andò, disse il motto, e la Grotta s'aperse. Il contadino rimase fuori ad attenderlo. In quella grotta i diamanti, a mucchi per terra, abbagliavano. Vistosi solo, sua Maestà si chinava e se ne riempiva le tasche. Ma nella stanza appresso, i diamanti, sempre a mucchi, eran più grossi e più belli. Il Re si vuotava le tasche, e tornava a riempirsele di questi. Così fino all'ultima stanza, dove, in un angolo, si vedevano ammonticchiate le arance d'oro del giardino reale.

C'era lì una bisaccia, e il Re la colmò. Or che sapeva il motto, vi sarebbe ritornato più volte. Uscito fuor della Grotta, colla bisaccia morning...and the golden oranges were gone. Imagine his anger! Now he was obliged to come to terms with the crusty old peasant.

"Bring me the goldfinch alive, and the princess is yours."

"Majesty, within three days."

And before three days had passed, he returned.

"Majesty, here he is. Now the princess is mine."

A dark look came over the king's face. "Must I give the princess to this lout?" he thought. "Do you want jewels? Do you want gold? You can have as much as you want. But as for the princess, say no more."

"But, Majesty, that was our agreement," said the peasant.

"Do you want jewels? Do you want gold?"

"Keep all you have," answered the peasant. "Whatever happens, happens!" And he went on his way.

The king turned to the goldfinch. "Now that I have you in my hands, I am going to torture you."

The goldfinch shrieked as he felt his feathers being pulled out one by one.

"Where are the golden oranges hidden?"

"I will tell you, Majesty, if you stop torturing me."

"I will stop," said the king.

"The golden oranges are hidden in the grotto of the seven doors. However, guarding them is a merchant wearing a red cap. You need to know the magic words, and only two people know them: the merchant and the peasant who captured me."

The king called for the peasant.

"Let's make another agreement. I want to enter the grotto of the seven doors, but I don't know the secret words. If you tell me them, the princess is yours.

"Your word as king?"

"My word as king!"

"Majesty, the magic words are these:

"Dry, dry, very dry!"Open up, open up, say I."

"Very well."

When the king uttered the magic words, the entrance to the grotto opened. The peasant waited outside and waited for him. Within the grotto on the ground was a pile of diamonds, shining brilliantly. Seeing that he was alone, the king stooped down and filled his pockets. But in the next room, the diamonds, also in a pile, were bigger and more beautiful. The king emptied his pockets, and

in collo, trovò il contadino che lo attendeva.

- Maestà, la Reginotta ora è mia.Il Re si fece scuro. Dovea dare la Reginotta a quello zoticone?-

Domanda qualunque grazia e ti verrà concessa. Ma per la Reginotta nettati la bocca.

- Maestà, e la vostra parola?-

Le parole se le porta il vento.-

Quando sarete al palazzo ve ne accorgerete.

Arrivato al palazzo, il Re mette giù la bisaccia e fa di vuotarla. Ma invece di arance d'oro, trova arance marce.

Si mette le mani nelle tasche, i diamanti son diventati tanti gusci di lumache!Ah! quel pezzo di contadinaccio gliel'avea fatta!-Ma il cardellino la pagava.

E tornò a martoriarlo.

- Dove sono le mie arance d'oro?-

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

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

Il Re lo mandò a chiamare:

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

Parola di Re!

- Maestà il motto è questo:

"Ti sto addosso: Dammi l'osso."

- Va bene.

Il Re andava e ritornava più volte colla bisaccia colma, e riportava a palazzo tutte le arance d'oro.

Allora si presentò il contadino:-

Maestà, la Reginotta ora è mia.

Il Re si fece scuro. Dovea dare la Reginotta a quello zoticone?

- Quello è il tesoro reale: prendi quello che ti piace. Quanto alla Reginotta, nettati la bocca.
  - Non se ne parli più.

E andò via.

he refilled them with these. Thus it was until he came to the last room, where he saw the golden oranges of the royal palace piled up in a corner. Nearby, there happened to be a knapsack, and the king filled it. Now that he knew the magic words, he would return over and over again. As he left the grotto with the knapsack on his back, he found the peasant waiting for him.

"Majesty, now the princess is mine."

A dark look came over the king's face.

"Must I give the princess to this lout?" he thought.

"Ask for whatever reward you want and I will grant it to you.," said the king. "But as for the princess, say no more."

"But you gave your word, Majesty."

"My word is gone with the wind."

"When you return to the palace, you will realize what you have done."

Back at the palace, the king put down the knapsack and emptied it. But instead of golden oranges, he found rotten oranges. He put his hands in his pockets, and he found that the diamonds had turned to snail shells. This is the work of that crusty old peasant! But the goldfinch would pay for it. And he decided to torture the bird.

"Where are my golden oranges?"

"I will tell you, Majesty, if you stop torturing me."

"I will stop," said the king.

"They are where you saw them; however, to get them back, you will need to know other magic words, and only two people know them: the merchant and the peasant who captured me.

"The king sent for the peasant."

Let's make another agreement. Tell me the magic words to get back the oranges and the princess will be yours."

"Your word as king?"

"My word as king!"

"Majesty, here are the magic words:"

"I am coming after you; Give me your bones."

"Very well."

The king came and went many times with a full knapsack, and returned all of the golden oranges to the royal palace.

Therefore, the peasant returned:

"Majesty, now the princess is mine."

A dark look came over the king's face.

Da che il cardellino era in gabbia, le arance d'oro restavano attaccate all'albero da un anno all'altro.

Un giorno la Reginotta disse al Re:

- Maestà, quel cardellino vorrei tenerlo nella mia camera.
- Figliuola mia, prendilo pure; ma bada che non ti scappi.

Il cardellino nella camera della Reginotta non cantava più.

- Cardellino, perché non canti più?
- Ho il mio padrone che piange.
- E perché piange?
- Perché non ha quel che vorrebbe.
- Che cosa vorrebbe?
- Vorrebbe la Reginotta. Dice:
- "Ho lavorato tanto, e le fatiche mie son sparse al vento."
- Chi è il tuo padrone? Quello zotico?
- Quello zotico, Reginotta, è più Re di Sua Maestà.
- Se fosse vero, lo sposerei. Va' a dirglielo, e torna subito.
- Lo giurate?
- Lo giuro.

E gli aperse la gabbia. Ma il cardellino non tornò.

Una volta il Re domandò alla Reginotta:

- O il cardellino non canta più? È un bel pezzo che non lo sento.
- Maestà, è un po' malato.

E il Re s'acchetò.

Intanto la povera Reginotta viveva in ambascia:

- Cardellino traditore, te e il tuo padrone!

E come s'avvicinava la stagione delle arance, pel timore del babbo, il cuore le diventava piccino piccino.

Intanto venne un ambasciatore del Re di Francia che la chiedeva per moglie. Il padre ne fu lieto oltremodo, e rispose subito di sì. Ma la Reginotta:

- Maestà, non voglio: vo' rimanere ragazza.

Quello montò sulle furie:

- -Come? Diceva di no, ora che avea impegnato la sua parola e non potea più ritirarla?
- Maestà, le parole se le porta il vento.

Il Re non lo potevan trattenere: schizzava fuoco dagli occhi. Ma quella, ostinata:

- Non lo voglio! Non lo voglio! Vo' rimanere ragazza.

Il peggio fu quando il Re di Francia mandò a dire che fra otto giorni arrivava.

"Must I give the princess to this lout?" he thought.

"Here is the royal treasure: take what you like. But as for the princess, say on more."

"There is nothing more to say," responded the peasant, and he went away.

Because the goldfinch was in a cage, the golden oranges stayed on the tree from one year to the next.

One day, the princess said to the king:

"Majesty, I want to keep the goldfinch in my room."

"My child, please take him; but be careful not to let him escape."

Once in the princess's room, the goldfinch no longer sang.

"Goldfinch, why don't you sing anymore," asked the princess.

"Because my master is crying."

"And why is he crying?"

"Because he lacks what he desires."

"What does he want?"

"He wants the princess. He says:

"I have worked so hard, but all of my efforts have been scattered by the wind."

"Who your master? That lout?"

"Yes, that lout, princess, but he is more of a king than his Majesty."

"If this is true, I will marry him. Go tell him that and return right away."

"Do you swear it?"

"I swear it."

And, so, she opened the cage. But the goldfinch did not return.

One day, the king asked the princess:

"Why doesn't the goldfinch sing anymore? I have not heard him for quite a while."

"Majesty, he is a little ill."

And the king accepted this excuse.

Meanwhile, the poor princess lived in anguish.

"Traitorous goldfinch, you and your master!"

And as the season of the oranges got near, the princess got more and more depressed in fear of what her father might say.

Meanwhile, there arrived an ambassador from the king of France, who wanted to marry the princess. Her father was extremely happy, and he quickly gave his consent. However, the princess refused:

"Majesty, I don't want to marry. I want to remain a maid."

The king became furious.

Come rimediare con quella figliolaccia caparbia?

Dallo sdegno, le legò le mani e i piedi e la calò in un pozzo:

- Di' di sì, o ti faccio affogare!

E la Reginotta zitta. Il Re la calò fino a metà.

- Di' di sì, o ti faccio affogare!

E la Reginotta zitta. Il Re la calava più giù, dentro l'acqua; le restava fuori soltanto la testa:

- Di' di sì, o ti faccio affogare!

E la Reginotta zitta.

- Dovea affogarla davvero?

E la tirò su; ma la rinchiuse in una stanza, a pane ed acqua. La Reginotta piangeva:

- Cardellino traditore, te e il tuo padrone! Per mantenere la parola ora patisco tanti guai!

Il Re di Francia arrivò con un gran seguito, e prese alloggio nel palazzo reale.

- E la Reginotta? Non vuol farsi vedere?
- Maestà, è un po' indisposta.

Il Re non sapeva che rispondere, imbarazzato.

- Portatele questo regalo.

Era uno scatolino tutto d'oro e di brillanti. Ma la Reginotta lo posò lì, senza neppur curarsi d'aprirlo. E piangeva.

- Cardellino traditore, te e il tuo padrone!
- Non siamo traditori, né io, né il mio padrone.

Sentendosi rispondere dallo scatolino, la Reginotta lo aperse.

- Ah, cardellino mio! Quante lagrime ho sparse.
- La tua sorte volea così. Ora il destino è compito.

Sua Maestà, conosciuto chi era quel contadino, le diè in dote l'albero che produceva le arance d'oro, e il giorno appresso la Reginotta sposò il Re di Francia.

E noi restiamo a grattarci la pancia.

"What? Are you saying 'no' now that I have given my word and can no longer take it back?"

"Majesty, words are blown away by the wind."

The king was beside himself; fire was coming out of his eyes. But she was obstinate:

"I don't want him. I don't want him. I want to remain a maid."

It got even worse when the King of France sent word that he would arrive within eight days. How was the king to deal with his stubborn daughter? He became so angry that he tied her hands and feet, and he lowered her into a well:

"Say, yes, or I will let you drown!"

But the princess remained silent. The king then lowered her half way down.

"Say yes, or I will let you drown!"

But the princess remained silent. The king then lowered her even further into the water with only her head above it.

"Say yes, or I will let you drown!"

But the princess remained silent.

"Must I truly drown her?" asked the king.

And he pulled her up, but he locked her up in a room, giving her only bread and water. The princess cried:

"Traitorous goldfinch, you and your master! I must suffer so much just so I can keep my word."

The king of France arrived with a great retinue, and he took lodgings in the royal palace.

"And the princess? Won't you let me see her?"

"Majesty, she is a little ill."

The king did not know what to respond, for he was embarrassed.

"Take this gift to her," said the king of France. It was a small box made of gold and diamonds. However, the princess put it aside without desiring to open it. And she cried.

"Traitorous goldfinch, you and your master!"

"We are not traitors, neither I nor my master."

Hearing this response from within the box, the princess opened it.

"Oh, my goldfinch! I have shed so many tears."

"That was your fate, princess. But now your destiny is fulfilled."

His majesty, realizing who the peasant was, gave him as a dowry the tree that produced the golden oranges. The next day, the King of France and the princess were wed.

And about these two, that's all that can be said.



Justice, china ink, 70x50 cm.

# Three Poems by Alfredo De Palchi

## Translated by Barbara Carle

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

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

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

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

(26 aprile 2004)

I clasp you

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

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

(27 aprile 2004)

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

(27 April 2004)

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

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

(28 aprile 2004)

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

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

(28 April, 2004)

#### Once There Was Beirut

#### by Fernanda Pivano

### translated by Blossom S. Kirschenbaum

Blossom S. Kirschenbaum received her doctorate from Brown University, where she worked until a few years ago in the Department of Comparative Literature, after teaching literature and composition courses at MIT, RISD, U.Mass-Boston and Dartmouth, URI-Providence, and Clark. A member of PEN's New York Center, she translated Giuliana Morandini's prize-winning novel *I cristalli di Vienna* (as Bloodstains, New Rivers Press, 1987) and Paola Drigo's Maria Zef (same title, Nebraska UP, 1989); stories by Marina Mizzau for the Italica Press anthology *New Italian Women* and for *Wise Women's Web* edited by poet Daniela Gioseffi; a story by Stefano Benni in *Chelsea* 66; and *Fables from Trastevere*, a volume of verse translations from the romanesco of Trilussa. Her essay on Ginevra Bompiani appeared as Afterword to Sergio Parussa's translation of *L'orso maggiore* (The Great Bear, Italica, 2000).

Now approaching age ninety, a celebrity in Italy, her autobiography already in print, **Fernanda Pivano** known in the U.S. not for her two novels but as journalist, critic, and translator of American literature; biographer of Ernest Hemingway; and friend of Beat Generation stars and, recently, of younger writers like Jay McInerney. She writes for *Corriere della Sera*, where she published a tribute to Arthur Miller in February 2005. Benetton has given a palazzo for repository of her papers, and a petition is circulating to have her named Senator for Life.

"Once There Was Beirut" is set in that capital at a time when it was splendid, "its shoreline studded with fabulous hotels, those that the criminal madness of munitions makers would have destroyed some twenty years later." This city, dating back to the ancient Phoenicians, is rightly cherished in the story; astonishing innovations were attributed to its ancient civilization, including invention of an alphabet using symbols for sounds; the cedars of Lebanon have been famous for centuries. The modern Levantine state crafted by the French had always been precarious, however; civil war starting in 1975 bled Lebanon so severely that the 22-nation Arab League called a summit meeting in Casablanca to mediate reform. American marines were deployed in Lebanon between 1982 and 1984. In July 1989 newspaper headlines trumpeted "Lebanon: Artillery pounds Beirut, kills 6," "Thousands Escaping From Beirut After Two Days of Fierce Fighting," and so forth. That fury too subsided, and the Lebanese capital rebuilt. Now, alas, as The New York Times reports ("Ruined Towns Look to Beirut, Mostly in Vain" by Michael Slackman, 1 October 2006), the south of Lebanon is once again rutted and bombed-out, "a landscape of twisted metal and crumbled concrete"—a battleground for external conflicts. Ruined villages await adoption by foreign donors.; "when it comes to homes, the government is slow to respond." And further: "The animosity has only grown between Hezbollah and the coalition that controls the government—named for March 14, the day in 2005 that huge numbers of people demonstrated to call for an end to Syria's military presence." While suffering spreads and wrangling ensues, the story shows Beirut as "the Paris of the Middle East" that it has been and may yet become again. The story expresses grief without relinquishing hope.

# C'era una volta Beirut di Fernanda Pivano (da Cos'è più la virtù, il capitolo quattro, le pagine 29-32)

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

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

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

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

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

Non ricordo come si chiamava l'uomo orribile che ingaggiammo faute di mieux. Era basso, grasso, puzzolente, sporco: le aveva tutte ed era così sgradevole che invece di fissarlo per l'indomani gli demmo appuntamento dopo tre giorni, nella speranza di trovare qualcun altro.

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

L'indomani Lino disse:

"Perché non andiamo a Damasco?"

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

#### Once There Was Beirut

## by Fernanda Pivano

# Translated by Blossom S. Kirschenbaum

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Così partimmo in macchina da soli per Damasco. La strada presto cominciò a snodarsi nel deserto e sui due lati vedevamo ogni tanto beduini a gruppetti di quattro o cinque per volta: avremmo voluto fermarci e parlare con loro, ma senza interprete non c'era neanche da pensarci. Non ricordo quanto durò quel viaggio felice: ci fermammo solo quando ci bloccò la polizia di frontiera.

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

"Vedrai che non ce la faremo a tornare a Beirut in serata" dissi. Pensai:

"Chissà dove mi toccherà dormire."

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

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

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

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

The next day Lino said:

"Why don't we go to Damascus?"

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

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

Thus we left by car on our own for Damascus. The road soon began to stretch out through the desert and on both sides we saw every so often Bedouins in little groups of four or five at a time. We'd have liked to stop and speak with them, but without an interpreter there was no use thinking further about it. I don't recall how long this happy journey lasted: we stopped only when the police barred the way at the frontier.

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

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

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

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

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

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

We left again convinced that the one in Damascus, along with the one in Beirut, was one of the better arranged museums in the Pensai:

"Va proprio tutto in merda." Dissi:

"Speriamo che non le comperi."

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

"Niente" dissi. "Niente."

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

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

"Bisogna andare al Castello" disse perentorio.

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

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

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

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

"Lino! Lino!"

Senza voltarsi a guardarmi gridò:

"Stai ferma!"

Finì quello che stava facendo, poi chiese:

"Cosa c'è?"

Ormai mi ero calmata.

"Niente" dissi per evitare una cazzottatura. Forse.

world and we headed out toward the highway. Passing in front of a westernized shoe shop we recognized or thought we recognized from his strange attire one of the Bedouins seen the day before along the street. He was squatting on the ground and in a pensive and diffident way he kept turning between his hands a pair of women's shoes, the kind from the Third World, ten years out of date.

I thought:

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

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

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

"Nothing," I said. "Nothing."

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

We arrived at the hotel in the late evening and found that horrible guide waiting for us. He pretended that we had forgotten which day it was, that he had waited for us since morning; he made out that he expected to be paid. What a nuisance. But there were no other guides available, and we came to an agreement with him for the next day.

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

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

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

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



Death, China ink, 70x50 cm.