

Journal
of Italian Translation



Editor Luigi Bonaffini

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**Journal
of Italian Translation**

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.

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Journal of Italian Translation

Editor
Luigi Bonaffini

Volume VIII

Number 1

Spring 2013

In each issue of *Journal of Italian Translation* we will feature a noteworthy Italian or Italian American artist. In this issue we present the work of Lisa Venditelli

Artist's Statement

My recent body of work incorporates Feminism, themes of domesticity, body image, and female experience. Added to them is the quirky twist of my Italian American background. In my work liquid soap bottles become angels, clothespins become musical notes, lasagna becomes wallpaper and a bikini, and fusilli pasta becomes a dress form.

Traditional Italian roles for women, involving the art of meal preparation and care of family, clash with the American way of life in which women are asked to focus on independence, career, and body image. Torn between old world values and modern aspirations, women from Italian American backgrounds find themselves in a stressful conundrum. They want to care for their families, as well as pursue their aspirations as freely as men.

The Italian American culture is rich in its zest for life, as well as its eccentricities. My family life is full of both. It is also full of humor, strong familial bonds, cultural pride, nurturing and overnurturing, compulsion, artful preparation, romantic notions, excess and abundance, ceremony, religion, domesticity, living the American Dream and experiencing conflicting female role models. Family is the priority for Italians, and women, as the caregivers, are central to it. Role models for women range from The Madonna on one hand and Sophia Loren on the other. As a woman you are expected to encompass both.

Consequently in my work, domestic objects such as ironing boards, clothespins, dishes, and pasta are juxtaposed with divine images including the Madonna, St. Zita (patron saint of the household), Gregorian Chants and Communion wafers. Repetition of the domestic objects is used to emphasize the mundane as in everyday chores. The repetition on a large scale shows the compulsiveness that can develop from the overwhelming quality of domestic maintenance chores. The repetition also comments on individuality. By altering common objects or applying divine imagery to them, those objects are transformed into a more individual, sacred object. These unlikely combinations naturally create humor, transform

the objects into shrines, and define the absurdity of the expectations, stereotypes and roles against which women in my Italian American culture are measured.

In a culture where food and family life are predominant, it is appropriate that domestic maintenance, food and family nurturing would be the subjects of my art. I realized I was putting the same kind of painstaking preparation into my artwork as into a meal. An integral part of my labor intensive work is the step by step preparation needed to create it.

The use of pasta mimics the ephemerality of domestic maintenance, such as cooking and cleaning, which take hours of preparation only to be immediately dirtied or eaten. The ephemeral pasta also critiques the myth of beauty. The pasta objects are laboriously created, but will eventually break down.

My humorous outlook sees something more in the repetitive task than a futile repetition of endless housework or lost hope. But there is also the threat of suffocation in these excessive, familiar, domestic objects. One can easily find oneself trapped. Maybe keeping a sense of humor is the way to avoid suffocation.

For me anger is not a productive emotion. It is healthier to keep one's sense of humor. Often people are willing to examine tougher issues when they are approached with humor, just as beauty can seduce the viewer to examine more closely a repulsive subject. If one can get people to look and consider, then maybe can society's attitude toward women be altered.

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Essays

Stefano U. Baldassarri (Academic Director, ISI Florence, Palazzo Rucellai - Firenze) è autore di diverse edizioni critiche di testi rinascimentali e studioso di letteratura italiana. Si è occupato in particolare di teoria e prassi della traduzione in epoca umanistica, tema cui ha dedicato volumi e saggi, alcuni dei quali apparsi sul «Journal of Italian Translation».

Riflessioni preliminari sulla traduzione manettiana del *Nuovo Testamento*

Stefano U. Baldassarri

Da tempo sto lavorando a un'edizione dell'*Adversus Iudaeos et gentes* con versione inglese a fronte insieme ai colleghi David Marsh e Daniela Pagliara per la collana «I Tatti Renaissance Library» della Harvard University Press. Conservata in un solo testimone,¹ quest'opera appartiene essenzialmente alla fase 'romana' della vita del celebre umanista fiorentino Giannozzo Manetti (1396-1459), ossia agli anni da lui trascorsi presso la curia di Niccolò V (1453-1455), per venire poi completata nel suo successivo soggiorno napoletano alla corte di Alfonso d'Aragona.² Non starò ora a riproporre considerazioni mie e altrui sui servigi prestati da Manetti al 'papa umanista'; spero basti in questa sede rinviare a una serie ormai cospicua di studi, i cui risultati sono perlopiù accettati, almeno per quanto concerne la cronologia degli scritti manettiani.³ Ciò che invece resta in massima parte da fare è un'analisi delle traduzioni di testi biblici (in particolare i Salmi e il Nuovo Testamento) che Manetti approntò su richiesta del pontefice.⁴ Lo studio dell'*Adversus Iudaeos et gentes* mi ha indotto a un confronto fra la versione manettiana del Nuovo Testamento e la Vulgata. Nel trattato in difesa della religione cristiana, infatti, l'umanista cita ampi brani dai Vangeli. Preparando l'edizione dell'*Adversus Iudaeos et gentes* ho riscontrato numerose discrepanze fra tali citazioni e il testo geronimiano. Si tratta in genere di una sintassi caratterizzata da un impianto più classico (col verbo, ad esempio, quasi sempre collocato alla fine

del periodo), l'uso di stilemi (in particolare le dittologie) assenti nel corrispondente brano della Vulgata, un diverso *ordo verborum* (anch'esso più classico rispetto al testo geronimiano, così come i sinonimi che il traduttore fiorentino talvolta adotta) oppure il ricorso al modo congiuntivo anche quando non necessario, alla figura retorica del poliptoto con scopi enfatici o a diverse forme sinonimiche dettate da esigenze di *variatio rhetorica* per evitare la ripetizione dello stesso termine. Sono insomma tutte caratteristiche della prosa di Manetti ben note agli studiosi di questo umanista.⁵

Quanto appena esposto mi ha fatto sorgere il sospetto che nell'*Adversus Iudaeos et gentes* – il cui unico testimone, merita sottolinearlo, fu redatto dalla bottega di Vespasiano da Bisticci per Federico da Montefeltro Duca di Urbino, vari anni dopo la morte di Manetti –⁶ vengano fedelmente trascritte le lezioni del Nuovo Testamento così come lo andava traducendo in quello stesso periodo l'umanista fiorentino. Per verificare tale ipotesi mi sono quindi accinto a una collazione tra il ms. Urb. lat. 154 e il Pal. lat. 45. Quest'ultimo esemplare, appartenuto alla biblioteca di Manetti,⁷ conserva la sua *Nova totius testamenti novi translatio*, come recita la rubrica a c. IIv.⁸ Sono appunto i risultati emersi da tale esame che intendo brevemente riferire e commentare in questo contributo, mettendo a confronto le citazioni evangeliche nel ms. Urb. lat. 154 (*Adversus Iudaeos et gentes*) e nel ms. Pal. lat. 45 (appunto la versione manettiana del Nuovo Testamento). Indicherò con le sigle U e P rispettivamente il primo e il secondo dei testimoni sopra citati. In questa collazione (che per ovvi motivi occuperà poche pagine rispetto all'intera estensione del testo sacro latinizzato da Manetti, prima di lasciar spazio ad alcune riflessioni generali e, al tempo stesso, preliminari a un ulteriore, più approfondito studio) mi dovrò ovviamente servire della Vulgata geronimiana, come del resto fece lo stesso umanista nell'approntare la sua versione latina. Indicherò con la sigla V la traduzione dell'illustre Padre della Chiesa Occidentale e 'santo patrono dei traduttori'.⁹

Ecco alcuni esempi di come il Vangelo di Matteo viene reso in V, U e P. Per chiarezza, inserirò i dittonghi nella mia trascrizione dei passi, benché essi non siano presenti nel testo di P e U.

V 13

nisi ut mittatur foras et conculcetur ab hominibus (V)

nisi ut proiciatur foras et conculcetur ab hominibus (P)
nisi ut foras proiciatur et ab hominibus conculcetur (U)

V 14

non potest civitas abscondi supra montem posita (V e P)
non potest civitas urbsve abscondi supra montem posita (U)

V 15-16

neque accendunt lucernam et ponunt eam sub modio sed
super candelabrum,
ut luceat omnibus qui in domo sunt. Sic luceat lux vestra
coram hominibus,
ut videant vestra bona opera et glorificent Patrem vestrum qui
in caelis est (V e P)

neque lucernam accendunt et sub modio ponunt sed super
candelabrum constituunt, ut omnibus domesticis luceat.
Sic lux vestra coram hominibus luceat, ut vestra bona opera
videant et Patrem vestrum glorificent, qui in caelis est (U)

V 17

non veni solvere sed adimplere (V e P)
non enim veni legem solvere sed adimplere (U)¹⁰

V 19

Qui ergo solverit unum de mandatis istis minimis (V e P)
Qui ergo solverit unum de mandatis minimis (U)

V 20

Dico enim vobis quia nisi abundaverit iustitia vestra plus quam
scribarum et Pharisaeorum non intrabitis in regnum
caelorum (V e P)

Dico autem vobis: nisi iustitia vestra plus quam scribarum et
Pharisaeorum abundaverit non intrabitis in regnum
caelorum (U)

V 23

Si ergo offeres munus tuum ad altare (V e P)
Si ergo offeres munus ad altare tuum (U)¹¹

V 25

et iudex tradat te ministro (V e P)
 et iudex tradat te ministris (U)

V 26
 reddas novissimum quadrantem (V e P)
 novissimum quadrantem reddideris (U)

V 29
 Quod si oculus tuus dexter scandalizat te (V)
 Si autem oculus tuus dexter scandalizat te (P)
 Quod si forte oculus tuus dexter scandalizat te (U)

V 29
 mittatur in Gehennam (V)
 proiciatur in Gehennam (P)
 in Gehennam mittatur (U)¹²

V 32
 Ego autem dico vobis quia omnis qui dimiserit uxorem suam –
 excepta fornicationis causa – facit eam moechari (V)
 Ego autem dico vobis quod quicumque dimiserit uxorem suam
 sine causa fornicationis facit eam moechari (P)
 Ego autem dico vobis quia omnis qui uxorem suam – excepta
 causa fornicationis – dimiserit eam moechari facit (U)

V 33
 dictum est antiquis: “Non peierabis” (V e P)
 dictum est antiquis: “Non periurabis” (U)

V 36
 quia non potes unum capillum album facere aut nigrum (V)
 quia non potes unum capillum album vel nigrum facere (P)
 quia ne unum quidem capillum album aut nigrum facere
 potestis (U)

V 38
 Audistis quia dictum est: “Oculum pro oculo et dentem pro
 dente” (V e P)
 Audistis quia dictum est antiquis: “Oculum pro oculo et

dentem pro dente" (U)

V 39

Ego autem dico vobis non resistere malo (V)

Ego autem dico vobis ne resistatis malo (P)

Ego autem dico vobis ne resisteat malo (U)¹³

V 39

Sed si quis te percusserit in dextera maxilla tua praebe illi et alteram (V)

Sed si quis te percusserit in dexteram maxillam converte ei et alteram (P)¹⁴

Sed si quis in dexteram maxillam percusserit tu quoque alteram praebeas (U)

V 40

et ei qui vult tecum iudicio contendere et tunicam tuam tollere remitte ei et pallium (V)

et volenti tecum iudicio contendere et tunicam tuam tollere dimitte ei et pallium (P)¹⁵

et ei qui vult tecum in iudicio contendere et tunicam tuam tollere tu etiam et pallium ei dimittas (U)

V 47

Et si salutaveritis fratres vestros tantum, quid amplius facitis? (V)

Et si amicos vestros solum salutaveritis, quid amplius facitis? (P)

Et si vestros fratres tantummodo salutaveritis, quid amplius facietis? (U)¹⁶

V 48

Estote ergo vos perfecti (V e P)

Esto ergo perfecti (U)¹⁷

VI 1

ne iustitiam vestram faciatis coram hominibus (V e P)

ne iustitiam vestram coram hominibus faciatis (U)

VI 1

alioquin mercedem non habebitis apud Patrem vestrum qui in
caelis est (V)
alioquin mercedem vestram non habetis apud Patrem vestrum
qui in caelis est (P)¹⁸
alioquin mercedem vestram apud Patrem vestrum qui in caelis
est non habebitis (U)

VI 2

Cum ergo facies elemosynam, noli tuba canere ante te, sicut
hypocritae faciunt
in synagogis et in vicis ut honorificentur ab hominibus (V)
Cum igitur facis elemosynam, ne tubicineris ante te sicut
hypocritae faciunt
in synagogis et in vicis ut glorificentur ab hominibus (P)¹⁹
Cum ergo facis elemosynam, noli ante te tubicinari, sicut
publicani faciunt
in synagogis et vicis ut honorificentur ab hominibus (U)

VI 4

ut sit elemosyna tua in abscondito (V e P)
ut elemosyna sit in abscondito (U)

VI 4

et Pater tuus qui videt in abscondito reddet tibi (V e P)
et Pater tuus qui videt in occultis reddet tibi (U)

VI 7

sicut ethnici. Putant enim quia in multiloquio suo exaudiantur
(V)
sicut gentiles. Putant enim quod in multiloquio suo exaudiantur
(P)
sicut ethnici faciunt. In multiloquio enim suo sese exaudiendos
putant (U)

VI 8

Scit enim Pater vester quibus opus sit vobis antequam petatis
eum (V)
Novit enim Pater vester quorum necessitatem habetis antequam
petatis eum (P)²⁰

Scit enim Pater vester quid opus sit vobis antequam petieritis
(U)²¹

VI 10

Veniat regnum tuum (V e P)
Adveniat regnum tuum (U)²²

VI 11

Panem nostrum supersubstantialem (V e P)
Panem nostrum cotidianum (U)²³

VI 12

sicut et nos dimisimus debitoribus nostris (V e P)
sicut et nos dimittimus debitoribus nostris (U)²⁴

VI 13

et ne inducas nos in temptationem (V)
et ne nos inducas in temptationem (P e U)²⁵

VI 13

sed libera nos a malo (V)
sed libera nos a malo, amen (P e U)²⁶

VI 15

nec Pater vester dimittet peccata vestra (V e P)
nec Pater vester vobis peccata vestra dimittet (U)

VI 16

Amen dico vobis quia receperunt mercedem suam (V e P)
Amen dico vobis quia iam receperunt mercedem suam (U)

VI 18

et Pater tuus qui videt in abscondito reddet tibi (V e P)
et Pater tuus qui videt ab occultis reddet tibi (U)²⁷

VI 23

Si ergo lumen quod in te est tenebrae sunt, tenebrae quantae
erunt! (V)
Si igitur lumen quod in te est tenebrae sunt, tenebrae quantae!

(P)

Si ergo lumen quod in te est tenebrae sunt, ipsae tenebrae
quantae sunt! (U)²⁸

VI 26

quoniam non serunt neque metunt (V e P)
quoniam non serunt neque nent (U)²⁹

VII 1

In quo enim iudicio iudicaveritis iudicabimini (V e P)
In quo enim iudicio iudicabitis iudicabimini (U)

VII 3

Quid autem vides festucam in oculo fratris tui (V e P)
Quid autem festucam in oculo fratris tui intueris (U)³⁰

VII 4

Aut quomodo dicis fratri tuo: "Sine eiciam festucam de oculo
tuo" (V e P)
Aut quomodo dicis fratri tuo: "Frater, sine eiciam festucam de
oculo fratris tui" (U)³¹

VII 5

Eice primum trabem de oculo tuo et tunc videbis eicere
festucam de oculo fratris tui (V)
Eice primum trabem de oculo tuo et tunc videbis ut eicias
festucam de oculo fratris tui (P)
Eice primum trabem de oculo tuo et tunc ad eiciendum
festucam de oculo fratris tui speculareris (U)³²

VII 7

Petite et dabitur vobis (V e P)
Vos petite et dabitur vobis (U)

VII 11

Pater vester qui in caelis est (V e P)
Pater vester caelestis (U)

VII 24

Omnis ergo qui audit verba mea haec et facit ea assimilabitur viro sapienti (V)

Omnem ergo quicumque audit verba mea haec et non facit ea assimilabo eum viro prudenti (P)³³

Omnis ergo qui audierit verba mea et fecerit ea assimilabitur viro sapienti (U)³⁴

VII 25

Fundata enim erat super petram (V e P)

Super petram enim fundata erat (U)

VII 26

Et omnis qui audit verba mea haec et non facit ea (V e P)

Et omnis qui audierit verba mea haec et non fecerit ea (U)

VII 27

et cecidit et fuit ruina eius magna (V)

et cecidit fuitque ruina eius magna (P)

et ita cecidit ut magna eius ruina foret (U)

X 12

Intrantes autem in domum salutate eam dicentes "Pax huic domui" (V e P)

Intrantes autem in domum salutate eam et dicite "Pax huic domui" (U)³⁵

X 14

Et quicumque non receperit vos neque audierit sermones vestros, exeuntes

foras de domo vel de civitate excutite pulverem de pedibus vestris (V)

Et quicumque non receperit vos et non audierit sermones vestros, exeuntes

foras de domo vel de civitate illa excutite pulverem de pedibus vestris (P)

Et quodcumque neque vos recipiemini neque sermones vestri recepti fuerint,

exite foras de domo vel de civitate et excutite pulverem de pedibus vestris in testimonium illis (U)³⁶

X 19

nolite cogitare quomodo aut quid loquamini (V e P)
 nolite cogitare quia aut quid loquamini (U)³⁷

X 19

quid loquamini (V e P)
 quid loquendum sit (U)

X 25

Sufficit (V e P)
 Sufficit enim (U)

X 26

Nihil enim opertum quod non revelabitur et occultum quod
 non scietur (V)
 Nihil est enim opertum quod non reveletur et occultum quod
 non sciatur (P)³⁸
 Nihil enim opertum est quod non reveletur neque occultum
 quod ignoretur (U)

XI 18

Venit enim Iohannes (V e P)
 Venit Iohannes (U)

XI 19

Venit Filius (V e P)
 Venit et Filius (U)

La tavola dei raffronti potrebbe continuare per molte pagine ancora, ma penso sia sufficiente fermarsi qui per svolgere alcune considerazioni. Innanzitutto, i casi di concordanza fra la Vulgata e la traduzione manettiana del Vangelo di Matteo contro la lezione dell'*Adversus Iudaeos e gentes* (indicato, lo ricordo ancora una volta, dalla sigla U) sono numerosi. L'impressione prevalente è che nella sua opera in difesa del cristianesimo contro le pretese dell'ebraismo Manetti abbia voluto fornire una versione esplicativa che meglio ponesse in risalto alcuni aspetti del dettato neotestamentario e risultasse particolarmente chiara, onde fugare eventuali dubbi in-

terpretativi. A tale scopo egli inserisce talvolta lezioni che meglio illustrino la funzione dei vari personaggi e la sequenza degli avvenimenti. Esempiare ritengo il caso di Mt. V 33, dove – come si è visto – la Vulgata e il Pal. lat. 45 leggono «Audistis quia dictum est: “Oculum pro oculo et dentem pro dente”» mentre l’*Adversus Iudaeos et gentes* sottolinea la differenza fra la vecchia e la nuova legge inserendo la forma «antiquis»: «Audistis quia dictum est antiquis: “Oculum pro oculo et dentem pro dente”». Si possono ricondurre a una finalità esplicativa anche soluzioni quali l’aggiunta (o, meglio, la ripetizione) del complemento oggetto «legem» a V 17, l’uso del discorso diretto a V 20, il plurale («ministris») in luogo del singolare («ministro») a V 25, la trivializzazione della forma verbale a V 33 («periurabis» al posto della *lectio difficilior* «peierabis»), l’aggiunta del verbo reggente «potestis» a V 36 e «putant» a VI 7, quelle di «quoque» nel secondo esempio a V 39 così come di «etiam» a V 40 e «iam» a VI 16. Numerosi, poi, i casi di un diverso *ordo verborum* nel testo di U, spesso con spostamento del predicato verbale in fondo al periodo (cfr. V 13, V 15-16, V 26, V 32, V 39, entrambi i casi riscontrati in corrispondenza di VI 1 e altri ancora). Né, infine, sembra alieno alla prassi di U un certo gusto retorico per la *variatio*, come suggeriscono le forme «in occultis» (VI 4) e «ab occultis» (VI 18) per evitare la ripetizione di «in abscondito».

Dato che tutti gli esempi sin qui forniti sono tratti dal Vangelo di Matteo, potrebbe sorgere il dubbio che le cose non stiano così nelle altre parti del Nuovo Testamento latinizzate da Manetti. Si dovrà quindi confrontare ulteriormente la lezione del ms. Pal. lat. 45 (P) con la Vulgata (V) e l’*Adversus Iudaeos et gentes* (U). Per non tediare i lettori, mi limiterò a fornire un numero limitato di casi desunti dalla sua versione del Vangelo di Giovanni, ossia il testo che nell’*Adversus Iudaeos et gentes* l’umanista fiorentino passa a citare e commentare subito dopo quello di Matteo. Si noterà facilmente che la situazione è la stessa appena illustrata:

XII 47

Non enim veni ut iudicem mundum sed ut salvificem
mundum (V)³⁹

Non enim veni ut iudicem mundum sed ut salvem mundum
(P)

Non enim veni ut mundum iudicarem sed ut salvarem (U)

XII 50

Et scio quia mandatum eius vita aeterna est (V)

Et scio quia mandatum suum vita aeterna est (P)

Et scio quod mandata eius vitam aeternam continent (U)

XIV 4

et viam scitis (V e P)

et viam cognoscitis (U)

XIV 6

Nemo venit ad Patrem nisi per me (V e P)

Nemo nisi per me ad Patrem venit (U)

XIV 7

Si cognovissetis me et patrem meum cognovissetis (V e P)

Si cognovissetis me utique et Patrem meum cognovissetis (U)

XIV 17

Vos autem cognoscitis eum quia apud vos manebit (V)

Vos autem cognoscitis ipsum quia apud vos manebit (P)

Vos autem cognoscetis quia apud vos manebit (U)⁴⁰

XIV 24

Et sermonem quem audistis non est meus sed eius qui misit
me, Patris (V e P)Et sermonem quem audistis non est meus sed Patris qui me
misit (U)

Lo studio sinora condotto e qui sintetizzato dalla breve disamina delle pagine precedenti mi induce ad affermare che l'*Adversus Iudaeos et gentes*, in sintonia col suo carattere di opera esegetica in difesa del cristianesimo, tende a riferire i passi scritturali presi in esame con alcune libertà, ossia ricorrendo a lievi discrepanze dettate dal desiderio di far comprendere con la maggiore chiarezza possibile il messaggio del testo biblico. Si tratta cioè spesso di una parafrasi, seppure assai rispettosa dell'originale, tanto da configurarsi come una serie di citazioni quasi letterali intervallate da brevi commenti dell'autore. Ciò risulta vero soprattutto nel terzo

libro dell'*Adversus Iudaeos et gentes*, quello qui considerato, dal titolo *De doctrina Christi*.

Quanto alla traduzione manettiana del Nuovo Testamento, non ho sinora raccolto abbastanza dati per poter esprimere un giudizio fondato. La prima impressione, tuttavia, è che l'umanista fiorentino abbia approntato una versione vicina al modello della Vulgata, con poche varianti rispetto ad essa. Non che questo sorprenda, viste la personalità e la cultura di Manetti. Non v'è dubbio, del resto, che Niccolò V decise di affidare a lui la nuova traduzione latina delle Scritture proprio in virtù della specchiata integrità morale e dell'ortodossia religiosa di Manetti, oltre che per la sua non comune conoscenza dell'ebraico. Si aggiunga inoltre che una particolare cautela nel latinizzare il Nuovo Testamento sarà stata suggerita a Manetti anche dalle critiche che la sua versione dei Salmi, di poco precedente, aveva sollevato, costringendolo alla stesura dell'*Apologeticus*.⁴¹ Eppure risultano interessanti, e senza dubbio meritevoli di ulteriore esame, varie coincidenze fra le soluzioni adottate da Manetti nel Pal. Lat. 45 (P) quando questo si discosta dalla Vulgata e il modo di tradurre quegli stessi passi suggerito da Valla. Si tratta di casi che ho segnalato nelle note a questo saggio ma che, per il loro esiguo numero e la loro natura, ancora non bastano ad affermare che Manetti e Valla avessero discusso approfonditamente questi temi durante i loro incontri a Napoli o a Roma e che si trovassero d'accordo su come rendere tali passi in latino.⁴² È, questo, un argomento che reputo degno di grande attenzione e di uno studio specifico, nel quale andranno considerate non solo le forme che Valla propone nella *Collatio* ma anche nelle *Adnotationes*.⁴³

Tale studio, tuttavia, è ancora lungi dall'esser completato, ma mi auguro che una volta giunto al termine possa venire anch'esso accolto nelle pagine del «Journal of Italian Translation».

Note

1 Vale a dire il ms. Urb. lat. 154, su cui si veda la scheda a cura di M. Marchiaro e la relativa bibliografia in *Coluccio Salutati e l'invenzione dell'umanesimo. Catalogo della mostra tenutasi a Firenze, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, 2 novembre 2008-30 gennaio 2009*, a cura di T. De Robertis, G. Tantarli, S. Zamponi, Firenze, Mandragora, 2008, pp. 61-62 (nr. 5). Su quest'opera dell'umanista fiorentino rinvio al mio saggio *Scolastica e umanesimo nell'Adversus Iudaeos et gentes di Giannozzo Manetti: edizione del VI libro «Letteratura Italiana Antica»*, 7 (2006), pp. 25-75 e alla bibliografia ivi segnalata, cui si aggiunga G. Gardenal, *Il "De scriptoribus prophanis" di Giannozzo Manetti*, Verona, QuiEdit, 2008.

2 Per una più precisa disamina degli spostamenti dell'umanista tra Firenze, Roma e infine Napoli durante gli anni '50 del Quattrocento cfr. S.U. Baldassarri-B. Figliuolo, *'Manettiana'. Documenti inediti e poco noti su Giannozzo Manetti*, Roma, Roma nel Rinascimento, 2010, pp. 122-152 (corrispondenti ai capitoli VII-XI dell'anonima biografia in terzine) e relative note, con bibliografia importante soprattutto alla n. 128 di p. 131, cui si aggiunga ora il mio saggio *Giannozzo Manetti e Alfonso il Magnanimo*, «Interpres», 29 (2010), pp. 43-95.

3 Resta fondamentale in proposito l'edizione critica del *De vita ac gestis Nicolai Quinti summi pontificis* di Manetti curata da Anna Modigliani, Roma, Istituto Storico Italiano per il Medio Evo, 2005. Si vedano anche i saggi di M. Miglio, R. Fubini e della stessa Modigliani in *"Dignitas et excellentia hominis"*. Atti del Convegno Internazionale di Studi su Giannozzo Manetti (Fiesole-Firenze, 18-20 giugno 2008), a cura di S.U. Baldassarri, Firenze, Le Lettere, 2008.

4 Per un aggiornamento bibliografico su Manetti traduttore della Bibbia e alcune considerazioni significative cfr. P. Botley, *Latin Translation in the Renaissance. The Theory and Practice of Leonardo Bruni, Giannozzo Manetti, Erasmus*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004. Segnalo che la Dott.ssa Annette den Haan sta attualmente curando un'edizione critica della versione manettiana dei Salmi.

5 Doveroso è il rinvio all'ormai classico saggio di M. Martelli, *Profilo ideologico di Giannozzo Manetti*, «Studi Italiani», 1 (1989), pp. 5-41, dove particolare enfasi viene posta sullo stile ciceroniano dell'umanista (e il suo fitto ricorso a dittologie, perlopiù sinonimiche). Quanto al frequente uso (o abuso) del congiuntivo, ho sottolineato questo aspetto della sua prosa in *Un testimone dei "Dialogi" appartenuto a Giannozzo Manetti: il ms. Pal. lat. 1598*, «Interpres», 14 (1994), pp. 173-182. Mi permetto inoltre di rinviare ad altri miei due contributi sulla prosa e il metodo di composizione di questo autore: *Clichés and Myth-Making in Giannozzo Manetti's Biographies*, «Italian History and Culture», 8 (2002), pp. 15-33 e il saggio introduttivo

a G. Manetti, *Historia Pistoriensis*, a cura di S.U. Baldassarri, W.J. Connell e B. Aldi, Firenze, SISMEL, 2011, pp. 3-46.

6 Per la datazione si veda ancora una volta la scheda approntata da Marchiaro in *Coluccio Salutati*, cit., p. 61, dove si attribuisce la confezione del codice agli anni 1475-1482, quando Federico da Montefeltro era Gonfaloniere di Santa Romana Chiesa.

7 Ancora imprescindibile a riguardo rimane il lungo saggio di G.M. Cagni, *I codici Vaticani Palatino-latini appartenuti alla biblioteca di Giannozzo Manetti*, «La Bibliofilia», 62 (1960), fasc. 1, pp. 1-43. Sul ms. Pal. lat. 45 cfr. ibidem, p. 35 (nr. 115); E. Stevenson Jr., *Codices Palatini Latini Bibliothecae Vaticanae*, Roma, Tipografia Vaticana, 1886, p. 8 e Botley, *Latin Translation*, cit., p. 85, ove l'esemplare è descritto come «the copy which Agnolo brought back from Naples after his father's death, which remained in the private library of the Manettis until 1529». Il codice presenta integrazioni a mio avviso di mano di Giannozzo alle cc. 66v, 132v e 160v.

8 Rubrica e indice che attribuirei ad Agnolo (1432-1479), figlio dell'umanista, sul quale inevitabile è il rinvio all'importante studio di G.M. Cagni, *Agnolo Manetti e Vespasiano da Bisticci*, «Italia Medioevale e Umanistica», 14 (1971), pp. 293-312. Ulteriori ragguagli su di lui in Botley, *Latin Translation*, cit., ad indicem, e in varie pagine di Baldassarri-Figliuolo, «Manettiana», cit.

9 L'edizione da me impiegata per questo confronto è la seguente: *Biblia Sacra iuxta vulgata versionem*, ed. R. Weber, R. Gryson et alii, Stuttgart, Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1994. A questa edizione rinverrà talvolta il lettore anche per le varianti ivi segnalate in apparato.

10 A differenza della Vulgata (V) e del Pal. lat. 45 (P) il ms. Urb. lat. (U) ripete quindi il complemento oggetto «legem» indicato nel passo precedente («Nolite putare quoniam veni solvere legem aut prophetas»). Da notare che nelle *Elegantiae* (I.25) Valla indica questo passo della Vulgata come una traduzione con sintassi 'alla greca', laddove più corretto sarebbe l'uso della forma «non veni ad solvendam legem sed adimplendam»; cfr. L. Valla, *Opera omnia*, Basileae, Apud Henricum Petrum, 1540, p. 32. Alcuni anni dopo, nell'*Antidotum primum* contro Poggio Bracciolini, egli ribadisce questa sua osservazione come segue: «Ego me fateor, ut in *Elegantiiis* dixi, potius translaturum fuisse 'Putatis quod venerim' sive 'Putatis me venisse ad legem solvendam' sive 'ut solvam legem'; non veni ad solvendam, sed ad adimplendam', sive 'non veni ut solvam, sed ut impleam'. Et hoc opinor fuisse latinus et perinde apertius nec minus verum». Riprendo il brano da L. Cesarini Martinelli, *Note sulla polemica Poggio-Valla e sulla fortuna delle "Elegantiae"*, «Interpres», 3 (1980), pp. 29-79, precisamente p. 63.

11 L. Valla, *Collatio Novi Testamenti*, a cura di A. Perosa, Firenze, Sansoni, 1970, p. 29 concorda sull'uso del tempo futuro («offeres») in questo passo.

12 Vale la pena notare che mentre in un primo tempo, all'interno della *Collatio*, Valla sembra considerare equivalenti i verbi «mitto » e «iacio» proprio trattando questo brano, più avanti si esprime a favore del secondo, discutendo la traduzione della Vulgata di Mt. VII.5; cfr. *Collatio*, cit., pp. 30 e 36.

13 La lezione di U si configura quindi come errore del copista in luogo del corretto congiuntivo «resistatis», attestato in P.

14 La forma con l'accusativo («in dexteram maxillam»), talvolta accompagnata dal possessivo «tuam», risulta ampiamente attestata in vari codici della Vulgata, come si evince dall'apparato critico (cfr. *ibidem*, p. 1532). Più interessante risulta a mio avviso l'impiego del verbo «convertere» alla luce di quanto asserito da Valla, *Collatio*, cit., p. 31, là dove l'umanista tratta questo stesso passo del Vangelo di Matteo: «*Prebe ei et alteram*. Grece, hoc est in fonte veritatis, est 'verte ei et alteram'».

15 Anche Valla, *Collatio*, cit., p. 31 riporta la forma «dimitte ei et pallium» ma la sua discussione di questo precetto verte sul come interpretare il sostantivo in questione, non il verbo: «*Dimitte ei et pallium*. Non utique pro pallio, quod est genus quoddam vestimenti, intelligendum est, cum pro eodem vocabulo alibi dicatur: 'Diviserunt sibi vestimenta mea ...'».

16 La forma col verbo al futuro è attestata fra le varianti nell'apparato critico della Vulgata: cfr. *ibidem*, p. 1533. Merita tuttavia notare che Valla predilige la forma al presente e il sostantivo «amicos» invece di «fratres», concordando così con la lezione di P, come si evince dalla *Collatio*, cit., p. 32: «*Et si salutaveritis fratres vestros, quid amplius facietis?* Grece est: 'Et si salutaveritis amicos vestros solum, quid amplius facitis?'».

17 U coordina quindi erroneamente (per facile sbaglio poligenetico) il modo imperativo al singolare.

18 Probabile che la forma «habetis» in P al posto del futuro «habebitis» derivi da un errore di trascrizione o di dettatura.

19 Il verbo al presente «facis» in luogo del futuro «facies» risulta ampiamente attestato fra le varianti trasmesse dai codici della Vulgata per questo passo; cfr. *ibidem*, p. 1533. Tale variante, come vedremo subito, si riscontra anche in U. Interessante quanto nota Valla, *Collatio*, cit., p. 33 circa le forme verbali «honorificentur» e «glorificentur» discutendo questo passo, in cui critica il valore sinonimico attribuito loro dall'*interpres*: «*Ut honorificentur ab hominibus*. Sciamus idem verbum esse hic quod superius, cum dicitur: ut glorificent patrem vestrum; ibi tamen est magis proprium: a 'gloria' ductum est hoc verbum, non ab 'honore', licet interpres ad suum arbitrium gloriam nunc per hoc nunc per illud vocabulum transferat, cum hoc faciendi non habeat potestatem, eo precipue quod cogit varias sententias esse, ubi diverse dictiones sunt, putare lectorem. In quod vitium, quantum in me erit, ne incidant studiosi, quotiens opus erit, admonebo». E' noto come la necessaria coerenza nel modo di tradurre un termine sia

fra gli aspetti con più forza sottolineati da Valla; ciò viene posto in risalto da tutti gli studiosi che si sono occupati della *Collatio* e delle *Adnotationes*. Si veda, ad esempio, C. Celenza, *Renaissance Humanism and the New Testament: Lorenzo Valla's Annotations to the Vulgate*, «Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies», 24 (1994), pp. 33-52.

20 Ancora un'identità di vedute fra Valla e Manetti (per come la sua versione latina risulta trasmessa in P) sul modo migliore di rendere il dettato evangelico. In *Collatio*, cit., pp. 33-34 si legge infatti: «*Quid opus sit vobis. Eadem quidem grece sententia, sed diversa verba, que hec sunt: 'Quorum necessitatem habetis' sive 'quibus necesse habetis'*».

21 La variante «quid» in luogo di «quibus» è ampiamente attestata nell'apparato della Vulgata; cfr. *ibidem*, p. 1533.

22 La lezione «Adveniat» (U) in luogo di «Veniat» (V e P) risulta ampiamente trasmessa e confluirà (come molte delle forme riscontrabili in U) nell'*Editio Clementina* alla fine del Cinquecento; cfr. l'apparato della Vulgata, *ibidem*, p. 1533.

23 Anche «cotidianum» (o «quotidianum») è variante diffusa nella tradizione della Vulgata al posto di «supersubstantialem»; cfr. *ibidem* l'apparato a p. 1533. Valla, *Collatio*, cit., p. 34 predilige la forma «super-substantialem».

24 Caso identico al precedente; per la frequente attestazione della forma «dimittimus» in alternativa al maggioritario «dimisimus» cfr. l'apparato della Vulgata a p. 1533.

25 La variante registrata in P, U e molti altri manoscritti verrà poi accolta nell'*Editio Clementina*, come indica l'apparato della Vulgata a p. 1533.

26 L'aggiunta di «amen» verrà poi accolta nel testo dell'*Editio Clementina*, come segnala l'apparato della Vulgata (p. 1533). Merita però riportare quanto Manetti aggiunge subito dopo nell'unico testimone dell'*Adversus Iudaeos et gentes*, appunto il manoscritto qui indicato con la sigla U (precisamente a c. 53r): «Sic enim in evangeliiis latinis habetur, at in exemplaribus graecis cum certa quadam horum paucorum verborum adiectione fideliter reperitur. Ante namque ultimum verbum "amen" ita subiungitur: "quoniam tuum est imperium et potestas et gloria in saecula"». La formula greca è accolta da P, ossia la traduzione latina dello stesso umanista fiorentino, dove a c. 4r, subito dopo la lezione «sed libera nos a malo», si legge: «quia tuum est regnum et potestas et gloria in saecula, amen», con cui si chiude il *Pater noster*. Anche Valla, *Collatio*, cit., p. 34 è favorevole alla reintegrazione della formula greca: «Cur denique tantum de oratione hac sacratissima decurtatum est? Nam ita finitur: 'quia tuum est regnum et virtus et gloria in secula amen'; quam clausulam ab ea oratione, qua Dominus ipse orare nos docuit, detruncasse, ingens sane piaculum est, necessarioque quod prave sustulimus addendum».

27 Così facendo il ms. U evita la ripetizione della formula «in abscondi-

to», presente subito prima all'interno della frase «ne videaris hominibus ieiunans sed Patri tuo qui est in abscondito» (Mt. VI 18).

28 L'aggiunta di «ipsae » davanti a «tenebrae» è ampiamente attestata nella tradizione e verrà poi accolta a testo nell'*Editio Clementina*; cfr. Vulgata, apparato a p. 1534.

29 Da notare che la forma verbale «nent» compare nella Vulgata poco dopo, sempre all'interno del *Discorso della montagna*, ossia a Mt. VI 28: «Considerate lilia agri, quomodo crescunt: non laborant nec nent».

30 Valla, *Collatio*, cit., p. 36 esprime l'esigenza di integrare la forma «quae est», diversamente da quanto avviene nella Vulgata e nei mss. di opere manettiane qui prese in considerazione: «*Quid autem vides festucam in oculo fratris tui. Deest 'que est'; nam articulus ille grecus vim optinet relativi et verbi, ut sit: 'festucam, que est in oculo fratris tui'*».

31 Nell'edizione dell'*Adversus Iudaeos et gentes* i termini «fratris tui» andranno espunti per l'ovvia origine poligenetica dell'errore. Resta comunque significativa la differenza che si registra nella forma in cui questo celebre detto viene trasmesso dalla Vulgata e dalla traduzione manettiana del Vangelo di Matteo rispetto al trattato apologetico dello stesso umanista conservato nel solo ms. Urb. lat. 154.

32 Diversamente dai casi qui messi a confronto, Valla, *Collatio*, cit., p. 36 afferma: «*Et tunc videbis eiicere festucam de oculo fratris tui. Potius est: 'et tunc despicias' sive 'discernes eiicere' sive 'ad eiiciendam festucam de oculo fratris tui'*».

33 Pressoché identica la traduzione suggerita da Valla, *Collatio*, cit., p. 38 (eccetto l'errore polare «non facit» nel testimone manettiano): «*Omnis enim qui audit verba hec et facit ea assimilabitur viro sapienti. Grece est: 'Omnis igitur, quicumque audit mea verba hec et facit ea, assimilabo ipsum viro prudenti'*».

34 Per l'uso del futuro anteriore in U cfr. anche il caso registrato poco più avanti in corrispondenza di VII 26.

35 Come talvolta avviene nell'*Adversus Iudaeos et gentes* Manetti inserisce qui una breve digressione linguistica dettata dalla sua non comune conoscenza dell'ebraico (oltre che del greco e del latino). L'intero brano in U (cc. 54r-v) legge infatti: «*Intrantes autem in domum salutate eam et dicite "Pax huic domui", quod hebraice expressius dicitur. Sicut enim apud (54v) Graecos "Chere" [traslitterazione per "Chaire"], hoc est "Salve", et apud Latinos eodem quoque modo sed aliis verbis "Salve" dicitur, ita apud Hebraeos - <per> uniuscuiusque linguae proprietatem - "Scialom alach" "Pax tecum" interpretatur*» (mio il corsivo). Il passo è utile anche a indicare le comprensibili difficoltà incontrate dal copista nel riproporre considerazioni linguistiche manettiane per lui ardue da seguire. Ma proprio in questo consiste il principale contributo dell'umanista fiorentino sia alla traduzione dei testi scritturali sia all'esegesi biblica, come notato da

Botley, *Latin Translation*, cit., p. 98: « Where Manetti did make a distinct contribution was in his application of his knowledge of Hebrew to the Greek New Testament ». Lo studioso inglese fornisce quindi l'esempio del noto passo in Mc. V 41 (*Talitha cumi*) indicando la relativa bibliografia in nota, all'interno della quale spicca l'edizione dell'*Apologeticus* manettiano a cura di A. De Petris, Roma, Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 1981, p. 123.

36 L'aggiunta della formula «in testimonium illis» risulta trasmessa da vari manoscritti della Vulgata; cfr. *ibidem*, apparato a p. 1540.

37 La forma «quia» invece di «quomodo» in U è forse di origine poligenetica, ossia dovuta a un'errata interpretazione del compendio paleografico. Da segnalare che risulta diversa la traduzione proposta da Valla, *Collatio*, cit., p. 41: «*Cum autem tradent vos, nolite cogitare quomodo aut quid loquamini. Non inquit 'ne cogitetis' sed ne 'soliciti sitis'; cogitare enim permittimur, anxii de eventu orationis esse non permittimur. Grece tamen est: 'ne solliciti' sive 'anxii fueritis'.*».

38 Come segnala l'apparato in Vulgata, p. 1540, vari testimoni leggono «opertum est», variante accolta poi nell'*Editio Clementina* e, come si noterà subito, presente anche in U.

39 Da notare la variante «salvum faciam» in alcuni testimoni della Vulgata secondo quanto indica l'apparato (*ibidem*, p. 1683).

40 La forma verbale al futuro («cognoscetis») risulta ampiamente attestata nella tradizione e verrà poi accolta nell'*Editio Clementina* della Vulgata; cfr. *ibidem*, apparato a p. 1684. Non così, invece, l'assenza del pronome «eum» che si riscontra in U.

41 Oltre al saggio introduttivo di De Petris alla sua già citata edizione critica di quest'opera, si veda, dello stesso studioso, il contributo dal titolo *Manetti, teorico e apologeta dell'arte umanistica del tradurre in "Dignitas et excellentia hominis"*, cit., pp. 169-187. Mi permetto di rinviare anche al mio *Teoria e prassi della traduzione nell'Apologeticus di Giannozzo Manetti*, «*Journal of Italian Translation*», 3.2 (2008), pp. 7-30. Ho fornito una versione italiana del quinto libro dell'*Apologeticus* (un vero e proprio trattato di teoria versoria) nel mio volume *Umanesimo e traduzione da Petrarca a Manetti*, Cassino, Dipartimento di Linguistica e Letterature Comparete dell'Università di Cassino, 2003, pp. 219-236, con un saggio introduttivo alle pp. 105-127. Infine, per una più ampia prospettiva sul problema del tradurre da Petrarca a Valla si vedano gli studi da me segnalati in *Breve guida bibliografica su teoria e prassi della traduzione nel primo umanesimo italiano (1400-1450 ca.)*, «*Testo a Fronte*», 38 (2008), pp. 47-80.

42 Quanto alla 'figura' di Manetti all'interno della polemica Poggio-Valla, concordo con Lucia Cesarini Martinelli nell'attribuirgli un valore essenzialmente politico piuttosto che erudito. Cfr. Cesarini Martinelli, *Note*, cit., p. 38: «Ponendosi sotto la protezione del Manetti Valla voleva non tanto, come si è pensato, rimettersi a un uomo al di sopra delle parti ...

quanto al contrario schierarsi da quella parte che il Manetti rappresentava simbolicamente in virtù delle persecuzioni subite». La parte politica cui si fa riferimento come propria del Manetti era all'epoca quella contraria a Cosimo de' Medici.

43 In tale circostanza andrà anche discusso il problema, complesso soprattutto per Valla, di quali manoscritti greci del Nuovo Testamento abbiano impiegato i due umanisti.

Il torto e il diritto delle traduzioni Giovanni Gentile

Translated by Maurizio Godorecci

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Giovanni Gentile (1875-1944) is a major figure in Italian idealist philosophy. He collaborated with Benedetto Croce, with whom he coedited *La Critica* between 1903-1922. He was the general editor of the *Enciclopedia Italiana* (completed in 1936). A selection of his works includes *La Riforma della dialettica hegeliana* (*The Reform of the Hegelian Dialectic*, 1913), *La riforma dell’educazione* (*The Reform of Education*, 1920), *La filosofia dell’arte* (*The Philosophy of Art*, 1931), *Teoria generale dello spirito come atto puro* (*The Theory of Mind as Pure Act*, 1916), and the posthumously published *Genesi e struttura della società* (*Genesis and Structure of Society*, 1946). Gentile also wrote on numerous other subjects, most notably Dante, Giambattista Vico, the Renaissance, Leopardi and Manzoni, Italian philosophy, and Fascism.

Abstract and keywords for “Translations’ Right and Wrong.”

My translation of Giovanni Gentile’s “Il torto e il diritto delle traduzioni” (“Translations’ Right and Wrong”) is the first Eng-

lish translation ever attempted of Gentile's essay on translation. Originally published in *Rivista di cultura* (1920), Gentile's essay was immediately noticed by Benedetto Croce, who felt the need to address certain issues that struck him as "revolutionary" and, at times, unsettling regarding the concept of translation. Gentile's remarks in his essay possess a latent similarity to Walter Benjamin's "The Task of the Translator" (1923): a similarity that has not yet had the chance to be expressed. I argue this final point in my essay "Giovanni Gentile: Translation at a Crossroads."

Keywords: Gentile, Actualism, Translation, Critical Theory, Italian, Idealism.

Translator's Note

"Il torto e il diritto delle traduzioni" is drawn from *Frammenti di estetica e letteratura* (Lanciano, 1920). These opening lines are the same opening lines that Charles Alunni penned in his French translation of Gentile's essay on translation. My translation in English is the second translation ever of Gentile's work. Originally published in *Rivista di cultura* (also 1920), the essay was immediately noticed by Benedetto Croce, who felt the need to address certain issues that struck him as "revolutionary" and, at times, unsettling regarding the concept of translation. (I take up some of Croce's same points in my own essay "Giovanni Gentile: Translation at a Crossroads." My essay is also accompanied by my own translation of Gentile's text—another similarity with Alunni, who paired his translation published in *Le Cahier VI* with the essay "Giovanni Gentile, Martin Heidegger. Note sur un point de (non) 'traduction'" (1988).)

More importantly, Walter Benjamin's "The Task of the Translator" (1923) and Gentile's "Il torto e il diritto delle traduzioni" have, according to Alunni, a "secret complicity" that draws the two texts together as if they were inhabited by a common "specter": a specter that traverses the two texts in the same manner that the translations theorized by the texts traverse themselves. Alunni's note of this complicity prompts in turn an analysis of translation at a crossroads between texts, between languages, and ultimately, between Gentile and Benjamin—an analysis that I take up in my own work.



1. Fotoricettore Aggrovigliato/Tangled Web; antique kitchen utensils and silk thread.

Il torto e il diritto delle traduzioni

Giovanni Gentile

Il torto è ormai chiaro. Ed è diventato un luogo comune (dopo la deduzione che ne ha fatto l'estetica spiritualistica) che la pretesa del traduttore, di trasportare una poesia dalla lingua in cui nacque in un'altra, è assurda: e che oggi ogni traduzione è una falsificazione, se intesa a questo concetto, che essa effettivamente presenti al lettore la stessa materia dell'originale, benchè in forma nuova. Impossibile tradurre una poesia; impossibile, per la stessa ragione, tradurre un'opera di scienza o di filosofia, quantunque il pensiero, in quanto tale, paia meno intimamente congiunto, e non essenzialmente connesso con la sua forma letteraria, ossia con l'espressione linguistica. In realtà, non c'è pensiero che sia pensiero senz'essere la poesia del pensatore, e cioè senza vivere quella vita affatto individuale che si manifesta nell'atteggiamento artistico, e però nella espressione, nello stile, nella forma: che non può essere se non quella certa forma letteraria, e quindi linguistica. E noi, trascurando questo elemento nell'intelligenza d'un filosofo, facciamo propriamente opera d'astrazione; la quale non può essere se non arbitraria rispetto all'oggetto della nostra interpretazione: ossia rispetto a quel tale oggetto che, quando si parla di traduzione, si presuppone come un antecedente del lavoro a cui noi lo sottoponiamo. Infatti la traduzione di un *termine* filosofico lascia sempre insoddisfatti: poichè ciascun termine, nella sua originalità, ossia nella concretezza determinata del pensiero che vi realizza la sua forma, è investito d'una sua caratteristica, che è la sua individualità e intraducibilità. Donde consegue, che non c'è filosofia nata in una lingua straniera, la quale possa accogliersi effettivamente spogliata di quella che si considera come sua veste originaria, e nuda, e da rivestire quindi interamente delle forme della nostra lingua. Malgrado tutte le proteste, che si levano in questi casi, in nome del genio nazionale e del gusto della propria lingua, insieme col pensiero s'introduce tutta una terminologia, che non è veste, ma corpo del pensiero. E il fatto, ossia la stessa logica della realtà spirituale, entra in flagrante contraddizione con l'astratta teorica della separabilità del pensiero dalla sua forma letteraria.

Tutt'è che ci si renda conto di quel che sia per l'appunto forma letteraria, e, in genere, forma estetica. La quale non è da intendere

Translations' Right and Wrong Giovanni Gentile

It is now clear what is wrong. And it has become a commonplace (after the deduction made by spiritualistic aesthetics) that the claim of the translator to transport a poem from the language in which it sprang into another is absurd, and that every translation that actually presents the reader with the same material as the original in a new form is a falsification. It is impossible to translate a poem; impossible, for the same reason, to translate a work of science or philosophy where the thought, as such, appears less intimately joined and not essentially connected to its literary form, or rather, to its linguistic expression. In reality, there is no thought that is thought without being the poetry of the thinker: that is, without living the uniquely individual life that manifests itself in the thinker's artistic attitude, and therefore in expression, in style, in form. That form cannot be anything other than a certain literary and linguistic form. And we, ignoring this element in the understanding of a philosopher, properly make work of abstraction, which cannot be but arbitrary with respect to the object of our interpretation: or rather, with respect to that object which, when one speaks of translation, is presupposed as an antecedent of the labor to which we submit it. In fact, the translation of a philosophical *term* always leaves one dissatisfied, since every term in its originality, or in the determined concreteness of the thought whose form is realized in the term, is endowed with one singular characteristic: namely, its own individuality and intranslatability. From which follows, that there is no philosophy born in a foreign language that can be taken in effectively stripped of that which is considered to be its original guise, and, naked, be therefore re-dressed entirely in the forms of our language. Despite all the protests that arise in these cases in the name of national genius and the taste for one's own language, an entire terminology is introduced along with thought that is not the guise, but the body of thought. And the fact, or rather the very logic of spiritual reality, enters in blatant contradiction to the abstract theory on separating thought from its literary form.

The point of all this is to precisely comprehend literary and, more generally, aesthetic form — aesthetic form which is not, however, to be understood as something added to content in order to grant it existence in the spirit, or in the world that is thinkable for

come ciò che s'aggiunge al contenuto, per dargli esistenza nello spirito, o nel mondo che allo spirito riesce pensabile. Ancora, nella stessa estetica, come in gnoseologia, ci si dibatte in questo dualismo, che risale, nientemeno, ad Aristotele; ed è sempre piantato profondamente nel cervello umano in conseguenza della millenaria educazione aristotelica, che esso ha ricevuto. La forma è lo stesso contenuto, sottratto alla staticità, in cui esso, esteriormente considerato, ci si rappresenta, e ricondotto alla sua vita reale e concreta, che è la sua interna generazione.

Il libro è una cosa che sta lì: leggetelo, e tutto quello che voi ne apprenderete non è niente che stia già lì, come l'antecedente del vostro pensiero, ma questo stesso pensiero vostro nell'atto del suo svolgimento. Il contenuto, come tale, è un libro non letto: è quello che noi pensiamo o ci raffiguriamo, ma astratto da noi in cui si pensa o raffigura. La forma è la vita, cioè la vera realtà del contenuto: la sua soggettività. L'arte come forma è questa soggettività in atto, la quale si ripiega su se stessa, e non esprime se non se stessa (cioè quella stessa situazione d'animo, in cui la soggettività consiste); ed è perciò lirica¹. Ma niente di universale, cioè di propriamente oggettivo (poichè anche il soggetto che si contempi, o meglio si realizzi come contemplatore di se stesso, nell'arte, non può essere e non è se non universale), si può pensare, che non sia sempre pensiero, attività, vita del soggetto nella sua individualità: che non sia perciò forma, arte. E l'arte è immortale per questa sua immanenza nello spirito: astro che non tramonta mai nel mondo spirituale.

E dove è questa forma, che è il suggello d'ogni prodotto spirituale, ivi è individualità insuperabile, e quindi intraducibilità. La quale, dunque, è un corollario non della inseparabilità, come d'ordinario si dice, anzi della indistinguibilità della forma dal contenuto, o della lingua dal pensiero, nell'atto concreto dello spirito. In astratto altro è il contenuto e altro la forma; altro il pensiero, altro la forma; e perfino, altro l'immagine o fantasma poetico, altro la parola. In concreto l'una cosa è l'altra.

Il concetto dell'impossibilità del tradurre si lega perciò col concetto della spiritualità della lingua, che non dev'essere intesa come un fatto, ma come atto; o, secondo la celebre frase dell'Humboldt, non come *ergon*, ma come *energeia*. La lingua come fatto è contenuto (della conoscenza del glottologo, o del grammatico); soltanto la lingua come atto è forma (del pensiero dello stesso glottologo e

the spirit. Moreover, in aesthetics just as in gnoseology, we still struggle with this dualism that dates back all the way to Aristotle: a dualism deeply rooted in the human mind as a consequence of the age-old Aristotelian education that mind has received. Form is content divested of the static nature by which content represents itself when considered from without, and restored to its authentic and concrete life, which is its internal generation.

The book is there: read it, and what you will learn is not something that is already there, like an antecedent to your thought, but rather your own thought in the act of its unfolding. Content as such is a book never read. It is what we think or imagine, but abstracted from us in whom it is thought or imagined. Form is life: that is, content's true reality, its subjectivity. Art as form is in actuality this subjectivity, which doubles back on itself and expresses nothing if not itself (that is, that same state of mind in which subjectivity consists); for this reason art is lyrical.¹ But nothing universal – nothing that is strictly objective (for even the subject that can be contemplated or that comes to be as it contemplates itself in art is not and cannot be anything other than universal) – can be thought of that is not already always thought, activity, the life of the subject in its individuality: in other words, without being form, art. And art is immortal because of this immanence within the spirit: a sun that never sets in the spiritual world.

And where this form (the seal of each work of the spirit) is, there lies unsurpassed individuality, and therefore intranslatability. Intranslatability is therefore not a corollary of inseparability – as is ordinarily stated – but rather of the indistinguishable nature of form with respect to content, or language with respect to thought, in the concrete act of the spirit. In the abstract, one thing is content and yet another is form; one thing is thought, another form; and, even more so, one thing is image or poetic specter, another is word. In the concrete, however, these are one and the same.

The concept of the impossibility of translation is tied to the concept of the spirituality of language, which is not to be understood as fact but rather as *act*; or, according to Humboldt's celebrated phrase, not as *ergon* but as *energeia*. Language as fact is content (of the knowledge of the glottologist, or of the grammarian). Only language as *act* is form (of the very glottologist's or grammarian's thought). It is not quotidian speech but speech as such. Language ceases to be a product or a natural phenomenon

del grammatico). Non è la parlata, ma il parlare. Soltanto a questo patto la lingua cessa di essere un prodotto e fenomeno naturale, e acquista valore spirituale, come l'attualità, la vita, la soggettività di qualsiasi contenuto dello spirito.

Ma chi guardi a quest'intrinseco carattere spirituale della lingua, s'accorgerà prima o poi che la lingua non è l'astratto di quel concreto che sono le lingue. Le lingue, l'una accanto all'altra, nello spazio e nel tempo, e però l'una diversa dall'altra, sono le parlate, non il parlare: sono contenuto, non forma. Il concreto è la lingua nella sua unità, come universalità: quell'unica lingua che l'uomo parla, come sempre una lingua determinata; e determinata per un processo di svolgimento, che è lo stesso svolgimento, o la storia dello spirito umano; e quindi sempre la stessa lingua, e sempre una diversa lingua, come accade a tutto che viva, e per vivere si sviluppi.

Il che, per tornare all'argomento di questo scritto, trae a due conclusioni, che paiono l'una opposta all'altra, e pure coincidono come due facce d'una medaglia. La prima è che noi, effettivamente, non traduciamo mai, perchè di lingue che siano, ciascuna, lingua non ce n'è più d'una, e tutte sono una sola. La seconda è che noi traduciamo sempre, perchè la lingua, non quella delle grammatiche e dei vocabolari, ma la lingua vera, sonante nell'animo umano, non è mai la stessa, nè anche in due istanti consecutivi; ed esiste a condizione di trasformarsi, continuamente inquieta, viva.

E qui spunta il diritto del traduttore. Giacchè tradurre, in verità, è la condizione d'ogni pensare e d'ogni apprendere; e non si traduce soltanto, come si dice empiricamente parlando e presupponendo così lingue diverse, da una lingua straniera nella nostra, ma si traduce altresì dalla nostra, sempre: e non soltanto dalla nostra dei secoli remoti e degli scrittori di cui noi siamo lettori, ma anche dalla nostra più recente, ed usata già da noi stessi che leggiamo e parliamo. Verità semplicissima, che può suonare un paradosso soltanto all'orecchio di chi rimanga intricato in rappresentazioni affatto materialistiche non dirò della lingua, ma dei sussidi o strumenti, di cui ci si serve ad imparare una lingua, ossia a conoscerla come tale, in guisa da potercene servire. Ma che cosa è il tradurre, non in astratto ma in concreto, quando c'è chi traduce e quando si bada a quel che egli fa, se non un'interpretazione, in cui da una lingua si passa ad un'altra perchè sono entrambe note al traduttore, e cioè il traduttore le ha messe in rapporto nel suo spirito, e può

only on this condition, and acquires spiritual value, as *actuality*, life, the subjectivity of any content of the spirit.

But whoever watches over this intrinsic spiritual character of language will realize sooner or later that language is not the abstract of that concrete which languages are. Languages, each one standing beside the next in space and time (and therefore each one distinct from the next), are ways of speaking, not speech: content, not form. The concrete is language in its own unity, as universality: that sole language that man speaks, as always a specific language; and a language determined by a process of unfolding which is itself the very unfolding, or history, of the human spirit, and therefore always the same language and always different, as is the case with everything that lives, and that develops in order to live.

This fact (to return to the topic of this essay) leads to two different conclusions, which may appear to be opposed but in fact coincide like the two faces of a coin. The first conclusion is that, in effect, we never translate, because even with all the languages that exist, and that we individually refer to as “a language,” there is not more than one language, and all languages are but one. The second conclusion is that we are always translating, because language – not the one found in grammar books and dictionaries, but true language resounding within the human spirit – is never the same, not even in two consecutive moments; and it exists only to transform itself, forever restless, alive.

The right of the translator arises here, since translation is truly the condition of every act of thinking and learning. We do not translate, as they say, merely from a foreign language to our own (empirically speaking and presupposing different languages): we also, even more so, translate from within our own language, always. And not just from our language as found in centuries past or in the works of writers we read, but also from our language as we currently use and read and speak it. A very simple truth, which can sound like a paradox only to the ears of those who remain entangled in totally materialistic representations not of language per se, but of the learning aids or instruments used to learn a language – or rather to know a language as such – in order to use it. But given that there are translators and given what it is that a translator does, what, then, is translating (not in abstract but in concrete terms) if not an interpretation, in which a passage is made from one language to another because both are known to the translator, and because

passare dall'una all'altra, come da una parte all'altra della stessa lingua: di quell'unica lingua, che per lui veramente ci sia: la quale non è nè l'una nè l'altra, ma l'insieme delle due nella loro relazione od unità? Chi traduce comincia a pensare in un modo, al quale non si arresta; ma lo trasforma, continuando a svolgere, a chiarificare, a rendere sempre più intimo a sè e soggettivo quello che ha cominciato a pensare: e in questo passaggio da un momento all'altro del suo proprio pensiero, nella sua unica lingua, ha luogo quello che, empiricamente considerando, si dice tradurre, come un passare da una lingua ad un'altra. E non avviene forse il medesimo quando noi leggiamo ciò che è scritto nella nostra stessa lingua, da altri o da noi medesimi? Possiamo noi arrestarci a quello che immediatamente ci si presenta? O il nostro leggere, se è intendere, dev'essere piuttosto un procedere, e quindi ricostruire, e creare qualche cosa di nuovo, che si possa dire quello stesso che fu scritto, ma non in quanto fu pensato nell'atto dello scriverlo, bensì in quanto è pensato nell'atto del leggerlo? E c'è nulla che si presenti allo spirito immediatamente, e non sia prodotto dello spirito a cui si presenta?

La traduzione c'è se pure inavvertita. Io leggo Dante. Non voglio metterci nulla di mio. Non lo commento, non sostituisco parola a parola, nè, essendo io italiano, per dire come si dice oggi quello stesso che nel Trecento si diceva altrimenti, nè, se fossi cinese, per dire come si dice in Cina quello che Dante esprime italianamente. Leggo semplicemente. Ma ripeterò dunque quelle parole che furono dal Poeta vergate perchè gli vibrarono nell'animo, e non furono se non appunto vibrazioni dell'animo suo? La ripetizione è impossibile, non perchè Dante mortale è morto, e io che lo leggo non sono lui: in verità, Dante che io leggo è Dante immortale; è quell'uomo stesso, quello stesso animo che sono io; ma la ripetizione è impossibile perchè quest'animo è sempre lo stesso variando continuamente. La sua è realtà storica, che cresce su se stessa, ed è perciò sempre quella, in quanto è sempre diversa. Il triplice *amore* che suona sulle labbra di Francesca, vive eterno, perchè vive d'una vita eternamente rinnovantesi: vive non di *morte immortale*, secondo la frase lucreziana, come cosa che, avendo cessato di vivere, resterà sempre quella, senza più perire; ma, appunto, di vita immortale. E io posso tornare a ripetere le parole stesse della preghiera che appresi bambino dalla bocca di mia madre. Ma come diversa vedo oggi innanzi a me quella donna santa! Come più veneranda

the translator has established a relationship between them within his own spirit? The translator passes from one language to the other as if from one part of the same language to another: that one language, that for him truly exists: a language that is neither the one nor the other but a combination of the two in their relation or unity. He who translates begins by thinking in a manner that does not restrain him, but he transforms his way of thinking by continuing to develop, to clarify, and to render evermore personal and subjective what he has begun to think. And in this passage from one moment of his own thought to another, in his one language, that which is empirically considered to be translating takes place, as a passing from one language to another. Does not the same thing happen, perhaps, when we read what others or even ourselves have written in our very own language? Can we come to a halt at what immediately appears before us? Or must our reading – if it is understanding – rather be a proceeding, and therefore reconstruct and create something new that could be regarded as that very thing that was written: not because it was thought in the act of writing, but rather because it is thought in the act of reading? Is there anything that immediately presents itself to the spirit that is not also produced by the spirit to which it presents itself?

Translation takes place even if it goes on unperceived. I read Dante. I want to add nothing of my own to it. I do not comment upon it. I do not, being Italian myself, substitute a word for another word for the purpose of rendering in current usage what was expressed differently in the 1300's; nor, were I Chinese, do I render in Chinese what Dante expresses in Italian. I simply read. But will I then repeat those words penned by the poet as they reverberated within his spirit, those words that were nothing other than reverberations within his own spirit? Repetition is impossible, not because mortal Dante is dead, and I who read him am not he. In truth, the Dante whom I read is the immortal Dante. He is that very man, the very spirit that I am; but repetition is impossible because this spirit is always the same while constantly changing. His reality is historical reality, which grows out of itself and is therefore always the same in that it is always different. The threefold *love* that resounds upon Francesca's lips lives eternally because it lives a life that is eternally self-renewing. It lives not by *immortal death*, to cite Lucretius – that is, as something that has ceased to live and will remain forever unchanged without perishing – but, more to

nell'animo mio diventato tanto più pensoso e tanto più profondamente religioso! Come più alta e solenne e insieme più commovente suona la sua voce dentro di me! Come più pregne di divino, e diverse, assolutamente diverse, risorgono dal fondo della memoria quelle stesse parole! Potrei non tradurle? Sì, posso io ritornare a quell'ingenua e quasi sonnolenta anima infantile, con cui prima le ascoltai: ma io resto col mio cuore ingrandito innanzi a quella mia anima antica, non più mia; e quell'anima così, semisveglia e ancora sognante, non posso rivederla se non con questi miei occhi aperti, non posso udirla a parlare il suo linguaggio senza tradurre da capo questo linguaggio nell'anima attuale, e colorirlo di questa mia nuova vita.

Ed ecco il diritto del traduttore. Il cui torto, in fondo, non proviene se non dal preconconcetto che la realtà spirituale, per esempio un'opera d'arte, abbia un'esistenza finita, compiuta, chiusa, e perciò materialmente sequestrata nel tempo e perfino nello spazio; quasi poesia scritta, e non letta e giacente magari in un papiro seppellito da millenni (di cui, viceversa, noi parliamo poichè già l'abbiamo riportato alla luce, e letto!). Ma Dante che è morto nel 1321, non è il Dante che noi leggiamo, e che ci attrae a sè a vivere la sua vita, che sarà la nostra. Nè Goethe che leggiamo noi italiani, è il Goethe tedesco, di una nazionalità che esclude la nostra: esso non può essere che il nostro Goethe, ossia un Goethe tradotto, ancorchè letto in tedesco.

Note

1 Non è esatto che io abbia mai aggregato l'arte insieme con la religione allo spirito oggettivo, come si esprime l'amico Croce in un suo fugace accenno alle mie idee estetiche nella *Critica* del 20 gennaio 1920, p. 53; avendo io sempre professato che l'arte è soggettività. E non è esatto nemmeno che, come accenna anche il De Ruggiero (*La filosofia contemporanea*, II, p. 268), io abbia ora aggregate all'arte e ora alla religione le scienze della natura. Lo svolgimento rettilineo del mio concetto dal *Modernismo* (1909, p. 240) al *Sommario di Pedagogia* (1913) è chiaramente indicato nella *Didattica*, pp. 219-24; e ancor più nella *Teoria generale dello spirito* (1916). Vedi ora anche il mio scritto *Arte e religione* nel *Gior. crit. d. filos. ital.*, (1920), pp. 391-76.

the point, by immortal life. I can repeat again the very words of the prayer that I learned from my mother's lips as a child, but how differently do I see that saintly woman before me today! How much more venerable is she in my spirit, which has become so much more pensive and so much more profoundly religious! How her voice resounds much higher, more solemn and moving within me! How much more do those same words seem full of the divine, and how differently – absolutely differently – do they rise again from the depths of memory! Could I not translate them? Yes, surely I can return to that innocent and almost sleeping soul of the child through which I first listened to them: but I stand before that ancient soul, no longer mine, with a heart that has grown, and I cannot see that soul, half-awake and still dreaming, if not with these open eyes of mine. I cannot hear it speak its language without translating everything it says anew in my present soul, and coloring it with my new life.

And here is the right of the translator. In the end, what is wrong originates solely from the preconception that spiritual reality – a work of art, for example – has a finite existence: completed, closed, and thus materially sequestered in time and even in space, like poetry that is written and not read, lying – perhaps – in a scroll that has been buried for millennia (but of which we speak, on the contrary, for we have since restored it to life and read it!). The Dante who died in 1321 is not the Dante we read and who lures us to live his life, which will be ours. Neither is the Goethe whom we Italians read the German Goethe, born of a nationality that is not ours: he can only be our Goethe, a translated Goethe, even if read in German.

Notes

1 It is not precise to say that I added art along with religion to the objective spirit, as my friend Croce expresses in a fleeting nod to my esthetic ideas in his *Critica* from 20 January 1920, p.53, as I have always professed that art is subjectivity. And it is not precise to say either, as mentioned also by De Ruggiero (*La filosofia contemporanea*, II, p. 268), that I added now to art, now again to religion the natural sciences. The linear unfolding of my concept from *Modernismo* (1909, p.240) to *Sommario di Pedagogia* (1913) is clearly indicated in my *Didattica* pp. 219-24; and even more so in *Teoria generale dello spirito* (1916). See also my work *Arte e religione* in the *Gior. crit. d. filos. ital.*, I (1920), pp. 391-76.

Giovanni Gentile: Translation at a Crossroads

by Maurizio Godorecci

Abstract and keywords for "Giovanni Gentile: Translation at a Crossroads."

My essay compares and analyzes Giovanni Gentile ("Translations' Write and Wrong," 1920) and Walter Benjamin ("The Task of the Translator," 1923), addressing a very perceptive remark by Benedetto Croce on Gentile's concept of translation. More particularly, the essay looks at how Gentile's reflections on translation are grafted onto Benjamin's essay, and onto Paul de Man's well known remarks on the same. Gentile's and Benjamin's different points of view are evident; nonetheless, their attention centers on the theory rather than on the practice of translation. They are aware that a work's originality is always destabilized by the work's very ability to be translated, and that translation takes place first and foremost in our very *act* of reading, especially it takes place within our own language.

Keywords: Gentile, Benjamin, Paul de Man, Critical Theory, Italian, Derrida, Actualism, Translation, Croce, Idealism.

Walter Benjamin defines a work of literature as untranslatable at the time of its origin. At the same time, Benjamin asserts that a work's afterlife is marked by its translation. In this manner Benjamin begins his essay "The Task of The Translator" (1923), and his argument is more than an unwitting gloss of Giovanni Gentile's last words from a very little known article on translation, "Il torto e il diritto delle traduzioni," which I have translated into English as "Translations' Right and Wrong".¹

In his essay, Gentile talks of the afterlife of a work of art as a life that does not imply eternity in the Lucretian sense of "immortal death," but rather the eternity of a true "immortal life." This is an afterlife renewed with each act of translation, where translation itself is less a mark of a work's original life than a mark of a work's

afterlife — of a work's "survival." The difference between this "immortal life" and the "original life" of a work — that is, the work as it first appeared — is the concept Benjamin glosses by saying that a great work, a work of art, is one that lacks a translator at its origin.

As a consequence of this, true translation is not simply any rendering of an original text in another language. Translation here has nothing to do with the empirical act that we practice every day. Translation is what takes place in every act of "reading." It happens first and foremost in our own language, and it deals, to use Gentile's words, with the life of a work as form (that is, with thought as thought takes place) rather than with a work as content (that is, a content equivalent to a book as of yet unread).

The point of all this is to precisely comprehend literary and, more generally, aesthetic form — aesthetic form which is not, however, to be understood as something added to content in order to grant it existence in the spirit, or in the world that is thinkable for the spirit. Moreover, in aesthetics just as in gnoseology, we still struggle with this dualism that dates back all the way to Aristotle: a dualism deeply rooted in the human mind as a consequence of the age-old Aristotelian education that mind has received. Form is content divested of the static nature by which content represents itself when considered from without, and restored to its authentic and concrete life, which is its internal generation. (Gentile, "Translations" 370)

In fact, one can read only what is already written. And translations are always derivative, secondary to an original that they do not resemble and do not imitate.² The point is to conceive of reading as something different: something that deals with what is happening rather than with what has happened, with what is alive rather than with what is dead. It is to deal with a writing that is able to speak with its "own" voice (like the sky for Vico's giants, which appropriated the inner yet unspoken voice of the giants themselves in order to speak to them from on high).

In order to discuss these points, Gentile finds that he needs to rethink not only the role of language, but language's own being. Reasoning on translation becomes a reflection on language and on languages, ultimately becoming a reflection on one's own culture, on the genesis of society, and on education and its philosophical implications. All of the above have been the constant center of

Gentile's philosophical inquiries.

What I am proposing in this essay is a reflection on translation, where translation must always be understood as a translation of a work whose originality is destabilized by the work's very ability to be translated. For Gentile, translation is a move that must first of all be made within one's own language, which, in the specific case of Gentile, is the Italian language: "Il torto e il diritto delle traduzioni" must be read first of all as "Translations' Right and Wrong." The matter at hand is a question of paths, "vie," of translation(s) (always to be understood as a plural term) – an infinite intersection of highways in which terms get transferred from point to point, always departing and always returning. And the transfer we are discussing here is metaphor. Metaphor, which is generally understood as that which allows us to access the unknown or the indeterminate by means of the familiar. In our common understanding of translations, this metaphorical transfer "crosses" at least two languages. Yet, in doing so, it crosses to the other language as it crosses off itself. Croce³ himself, in a revealing note on Gentile's brief essay, took the time to write:

Certain lovely pages of Gentile's on "Translations' Right and Wrong" [...] give me occasion to pick up once again the earlier discussion. On the particular question of translation there is no room for dispute, because Gentile recognizes and restates the impossibility of reproducing in another form that which has already had its form; nor is there room for dispute regarding the right, which he vindicates, to carry out what are commonly called translations. My negation of the possibility of translation was directed against the inexact theory of that operation, understood as an adjustment of an original (which is then often the cause of fallacious judgments made in the examinations of translations, from which in turn one expects the impossible), and not against the fact of translation: for translation is carried out everywhere, and we all always translate that which we need to translate, and we do very well to carry out this useful task. (Croce 256)

For Croce the theory of translation has nothing to do with what is useful – "l'utile" – in translations. Gentile himself points to Aristotle for the dualism that places form and content in opposition ("Translations" 370). Furthermore, in keeping with the Platonic dualism rooted in the system of opposition governing

our philosophical tradition, one cannot reproduce in another form that which has already had its own form. Thus, the metaphorical transfer which apparently leads us from station to station – from term(inal) to term(inal) – according to Croce might be useful but not really possible. This attempt is what Derrida, in “The ‘retreat’ of Metaphor”⁴ with Heidegger in mind, calls the metaphysical project, the project of the father:

And the father? That which is called the father? He attempts to occupy the place of form, of formal language [as different from “mother tongue”]. This place is untenable, and therefore he can *attempt* to occupy it, speaking only to this extent the language of the father, merely for form’s sake. (Derrida 62)

To paraphrase, the name for this impossible and monstrous project of the father is “metalanguage” or “metaphysics.” Translation is a violent act executed by virtue of a catachresis which captures and violates the integrity of the mother tongue. In fact, the sense of translation has its roots in the mother tongue of a text, translation’s aim being that of turning the “content” of a text into an impossible “form.” This rapture from the mother tongue would allow for a language that can “freely be given its own particular convention” (Derrida, *Husserl* 100).⁵ This in turn is an operation supported and embodied in what we usually refer to as “grammar(s)”: a word also always to be understood as plural, since, as Gentile in “The Concept of Grammar”⁶ points out, “the traditional forms of expression are the object of art history (which includes historical grammar)” (Gentile, “Grammar” 189). Grammar’s univocity would like to render translatable, thus transparent, every element of a text. In this way it would avoid at least equivocation. Derrida sees this resulting in an impoverished empirical language, in contrast with what he sees as resembling Joyce’s linguistic attitude toward repeat[ing] and tak[ing] responsibility for all equivocation itself, utilizing a language that could equalize the greatest potential for buried, accumulated, and interwoven intentions within each linguistic atom, each vocable, each word, each simple proposition, in on wordly cultures and their most ingenious forms, (mythology, religion, science, arts, literature, politics, philosophy, and so forth). And, like Joyce, this endeavor would try to make the structural unity of all empirical culture appear in the generalized equivocation of a writing that, no longer translating one language into another

on the basis of a common cores of sense, circulates throughout all languages at once, accumulates their energies, actualizes their most secret consonances, discloses their furthestmost common horizons, cultivates their associative syntheses instead of avoiding them, and rediscovers the poetic value of passivity. In short, rather than put it out of play with quotation marks, rather than “reduce” it, this writing resolutely settles itself *within* the *labyrinthian* field of culture “bound” by its own equivocations, in order to travel through and explore the vastest possible historical distance that is now at all possible. (Derrida, *Husserl* 102)

The idea of grammar as the chosen technique of expression is absurd, and as a result grammar has never existed (Gentile, “Grammar” 192): “grammar is not, and cannot be, [...] that which it would like to be” (193). Moreover, “in this world it is never possible for arbitrariness to triumph” (193). Any normative grammar is the epiphany of such arbitrariness, since the precepts that such a grammar prescribes are in fact the true expressions of the spirit of the one who writes them. The arbitrariness of these precepts makes the grammar “wrong,” but (to keep Gentile’s legal terminology) there is no tort to be found as far as this grammar being normative because “every ideal determination, every definition of value, of spiritual activity, would be illegitimate; and it is instead the very assumption of philosophy” (188).

Grammar cannot – let it be noted – be historical, purely historical, free from every value-judgment; because the history of grammatical form does not focus on this form if not to determine its concrete meaning, and therefore its expressive value: which is not a statement of fact, but an aesthetic judgment and an equation of that which grammatical *fact* is and that which it should be. (*There is no literary history that is not critical*). And on the other hand, grammar cannot be purely preceptive, because that which *must be said* cannot be anything other than that which *is said* – or rather, that which is said by he who writes grammar: that which he says, and on which he reflects, feeling its value. [...] for which its norm is *its fact*; *the fact* with the value that *a fact* possesses when that fact is of the spirit: and with the consciousness of this value, in which is invested every spiritual act: consciousness that is judgment, in the very act in which it is proffered, universal and necessary. [my emphasis] (190-191)

Truth is what is made. The ideal Gentile speaks of is rooted in Vico's syntagma of the disarticulating (metonymic) unity (metaphor) of the *verum factum*. Yet the "made" is not a simple reckoning of an event, but rather a speculation *sub specie aeterni* on the intrinsic nature of the spiritual act.

Therefore, if grammar were only that law which, when I say "would be," forbids me from saying "were" or anything otherwise, grammar and aesthetics would coincide [since what I say is what I am prescribed to say]. But from this point, which is the concrete act [the *fact* – not the pure act], and in which we feel the force of grammar and of aesthetics, it appears that moving to bifurcate itself is a dual configuration of systems of ideas: on the one hand, the establishment of a network of abstract forms without real consistency which are the parts of discourse divided from their expressive value and considered in their respective relationships (morphological and syntactical, etc.; grammar); and on the other, the definition of the activity of the spirit – always the same – which comes realizing in their infinite variety all the concrete forms of its expression (aesthetics). The one creates fictitious entities (verb, mood of the verb, tense, etc.); the other knows nothing if not the reality of the spirit in its concrete universality: in the law of the immediate "would be," which is not the verb, nor the mood, nor the tense, etc., but *that* "would be" unique, different from every other "would be." Thus the most important consequence: that the "would be" which I learn in grammar is not the same as the one I say while speaking. The first is material: a reflex of a language, and therefore not language. It is the antecedent of that immanent, eternal, spiritual creation that is a speech; but it is not speech.

And here is the duality [...]. But I observe that in this conception of grammar the *false concept* is reproduced of grammar's prescriptiveness, as though this were a norm imposed anticipatorily upon speech: a concept that cannot in any way be thought of, whosoever may believe to think it. (my emphasis 191-192)

Thus the prescription of grammar may seem an arbitrary limitation imposed upon the freedom of representation of the spirit. And indeed,

Now, the normativity, the value of this form – which must be that which it is – constitutes the spirituality of the *fact*, designates its freedom [freedom of being "as" "fatto"]; but it represents *itself*

through (“si rappresenta”) an illusion [the “si” as “it-self” representing in the illusionary passive process of making concrete the “re” of its iteration]. (my emphasis 189)

This is a point similarly sustained by Croce, for whom—as Gentile himself acknowledges in a footnote—what has been spoken can never be spoken again, nor imitated, regardless of the circumstance. The illusion thus consists in foreseeing that what is now being analyzed as language is actually yet to be spoken, like an event that is already occurring but has yet to take place. For Gentile this foresight is not reducible to a technique—such a reduction would be equivalent to falling for a “false concept,” a concept that one would feign to think before it can actually be thought (Cf. 192). One should not speak of this foresight as a technique that can be learned, therefore, but as an “art” of “judgment” for which what is the “norm” is the *factum* that is worthy (inasmuch as it can be worthy) of the spirit. It is an art “in the immediacy of the act” (192) (an art that dwells in the proximity, to use Heidegger’s terminology, of the spirit as pure act) that recognizes such worth, and thus it is an art that is aesthetics: “the consciousness of art” (193), “consciousness that is judgement” (191), “aesthetic judgement” (190) and therefore “critica” of art in the perception of art’s own worth (192). This critical art would lead us through a study of language that is in turn a grammar that is not what it pretends to be, but is rather that which is governed by a higher mind, often contrary and superior to the mind(s) of the grammarians (Cf. 193-194). In this sense, the critical art discussed here partakes of metaphysics: a complex metaphysics, in which a thought erases itself in its closeness (“al suo essere attuale”) to its being thought (“atto concreto”). And once thought, far from achieving its form (the expression of the spirit) becomes a specter that cannot exist, that cannot be. The duality between the normative and the aesthetic (or historical) grammar, as well as the duality between form and content, must at least allow for this third element: this specter. One can only say what one must say: “I had to speak in the way that I spoke” (189). And regarding this “must,”

This duty which is— which is the norm of grammar— is rightly a law that here at this point shackles my hands and feet, basing itself on the singularity of a certain spiritual attitude that cannot be determined for that which it is— if separated from all, or from

part, of my spiritual history – ingrained as it is and organized in the history of the Italian spirit – or better yet, in the spirit of everything. (189)

This “must” is based on the singularity of a specific act of the spirit that cannot do without the whole historical dimension of the spirit of the one who obeys, and who in obeying resides in the proximity of his being. Gentile speaks of a new conception of truth, and Charles Alunni, in the introductory essay on Gentile and Heidegger to his French translation – the first translation ever attempted – of “Il torto e il diritto delle traduzioni,” (*Le Cahier*, VI) says that this requires a certain relationship between concealment and unveiling, between the concealed and that which dominates in the unveiling. We say that for the “actualist” philosopher, to think means to deny the immediacy of being, to deny its estrangement from thought – with the precaution that *that which is denied is not something that will be able to constitute itself “before” its being-denied*, but is rather a question of something that does not constitute itself, that does not live *except* in this denial. For Gentile, concealment is this *specter* that does not live but in the *act* of its negation, accomplished by thinking: “In fact, all acts of thought are the *denial* of an act of thought: a present where the past dies, and consequently the unity of these two moments. Eliminate [*togliete*, from the verb *togliere*, which translates into Italian the Hegelian *aufheben*, the “relève”] the present, and you will have *the blind past* (abstract nature); eliminate the past, and you will have the empty present (abstract nature or, even more so, another nature). Truth is *not* of the being that *is*, but of *the being that cancels itself out and that, in canceling itself, truly IS*: an unthinkable proposition for the fact that by thought one intends *abstract thought* where the being, once fixed, cannot but be; but inversely, a proposition that one cannot not think about, when for thought one means *concrete thought*, thought which is *absolutely actual* (where one cannot understand the truth of the concept of becoming except in relation to that true becoming that is thought, dialectic”).⁷ (10-11)

The “form” for Gentile is the content becoming content. And the content rigidly turns (and here is the “torto,” the “tort” or “wrong”) into form when it is made the object of our knowledge. There is no other form than the one that overflows, that supplements the form of life. And this overflowing, in the case of grammar,

“turns” the arbitrarily prescriptive into the “rightly” prescriptive. Concrete thought is not, therefore, the thought that is already thought and ready to be repeated, but the thought that cannot be thought until it act(ualizes) itself in the present by acting out its own destruction. And thanks to this, the thought lives beyond life in its afterlife (or over-life, “sopravvivenza”).

Gentile is aware of the difficulty inherent in this view. He begins his essay on the “tort” and on the “right” of translations, departing from where others have left off. The question at hand is no longer one of agreement on that which is the issue of the “wrong” as much as it is a question of looking at the wrong, at the “tort,” beyond the duality of right or wrong: tort and right overflow each other. There is no point in denying the “tort.” The logic of this *causa*, this trial, and all of its procedural implications – including the concreteness of the “cosa” (the res) – is based on an assertion, which must also be confirmed, rather than a denial. The “tort” must be defended, and if defended successfully, the “right” will overflow the tort: that is, the “right” will overflow its very *rigor mortis*.

And here is the right of the translator whose wrong in the end originates solely from the preconception that spiritual reality – a work of art, for example – has a finite existence: completed, closed, and thus materially sequestered in time and even in space, like poetry that is written and not read, lying – perhaps – in a scroll that has been buried for millennia (...). (Gentile, “Translations” 375)

It is not the subject matter (the meaning) of the original which will be reproduced in translation, therefore. And at the same time there will be no thought which will not already be the poetry of a thinker (“poesia del pensatore”) (369) rendered in a specific literary form:

And we, ignoring this element in the understanding of a philosopher, truly make work of abstraction, which cannot be but arbitrary with respect to the object of our interpretation. That is, with respect to that object which, is presupposed, when one speaks of translation, as an antecedent of the labor to which we then submit it. [...] From which follows, that there is no philosophy born in a foreign language that can be received effectively stripped of that which is considered to be its original guise, and-naked-be then re-dressed entirely in the forms of our language. [...] an entire terminology is introduced along with thought that is not the guise

but rather the body of thought. (369-370)

Thus, we are to understand the original in terms of translation and not vice versa. For Gentile this is an historical problem: that is, we have to read natural changes from the point of view of history. And, as expressed by Croce in *Filosofia della pratica*, in the pursuit of our volitions, only once our volitions are fulfilled are we presented with what we call the means used to achieve them as separate from their ends. In actuality the means and the ends are not distinguishable one from the other, and one is the other as they both change in order to become that which is ultimately achieved (29-32).

All this becomes understandable if we clarify what is meant by "literary form" and "aesthetic form." Gentile said that "form is content divested of the static nature by which content represents itself when considered from without [...]" (370). In its exteriority, this form is like a book never read. In its interiority, it is form: "it is life" (370).

Art as form is in actuality this subjectivity, which doubles back on itself and expresses nothing if not itself (that is, that same state of mind in which subjectivity consists. [...]) There lies unsurpassed individuality, and therefore *intranslatability*. Intranslatability is therefore not a corollary of *inseparability* — as is ordinarily stated — but rather of the *indistinguishable* nature of form with respect to content, or language with respect to thought, in the concrete act of the spirit. (my emphasis, 370-371)

Thought and form, content and form, and even image or poetic specter are other than words: they are different in the abstract, yet in the "concrete" one is the other. For Gentile, just as for the rhetorical tradition leading back at least to Poliziano, translation is interpretation (373) each and every time that the one who translates is aware of what he is doing. The "indistinguishable nature" mentioned above does not speak of "inseparability," which would suggest a complex structure made up of parts. The "indistinguibilità" introduces a simple concept. It stresses the singularly plural aspect of language.

The concept of the impossibility of translation is tied to the concept of the spirituality of language, which is not to be understood as *fact* but rather as act; [...] Language as fact is content (of the knowledge of the glottologist, or of the grammarian). Only

language as *act* is form (of the very glottologist's or grammarian's thought). It is not quotidian speech but speech as such. Language ceases to be a product or a natural phenomenon only on this condition, and acquires spiritual value, as *actuality*, life, the subjectivity of any content of the spirit.

[Beyond the "name" or "natural" image, and beyond the "word" as "thing" of convention and arbitrariness].[...] language is not the abstract of that concrete which languages are. Languages, each one standing beside the next in space and time (and therefore each one distinct from the next), are ways of speaking, not speech: content, not form. The concrete is language in its own unity, as universality: that sole language that man speaks, as always a specific language. (372)

The specific language we always speak is determined by the history and unfolding of the human spirit. All languages in their singularity are no more than one language, and all languages are but one language. On the other hand, the language that sounds in the human spirit is never the same, since it is forever changing. The first case, Gentile says, is why we never translate, while in the second case it is as if we always translate, with no two moments occurring in which we have the same language (372-373). This paradox stems from the fact that the apparent distinction noted above seemingly presents us with two sides of the same argument, strictly linked: indistinguishable rather than inseparable. The "tort" is now (translated) "right," since "translating, [...], is the condition of every act of thinking" (373). Thinking takes place in translation – and not simply in the translation that takes place between two languages, but first and foremost in what is always happening within our very own language. This very simple truth is widely misunderstood, says Gentile, due to the attention we give to the materialistic aspect of language: to the instruments that are used "to learn a language – to know a language as such – in order to use it" (373). Here lies a further distinction between the instruments of language that we require to learn language, and language as an instrument that we can use. All of the above are echoes of the Vichian distinction – already itself an echo of Dante's *De vulgari eloquentia*'s "form of speech" – between the "mental language"

and the languages we all speak and use in our day to day lives: the languages we use to live, to communicate, to build, even if in building we risk building the tower of Babel. In the concreteness of the singularly plural language, we are like the one who “passes from one language to the other as if from one part of the same language to another: that one language, that for him truly exists: a language that is neither the one nor the other but a combination of the two in their relation or unity” (373).

Translation takes place in one language. In particular, this occurs when we read: and not when we read what was thought by the author at the time of his writing, but when we read what is being thought now by we who read. Translation takes place in the very *act* of reading. “[R]epetition is impossible” (374), as when I read Dante; not because, Gentile says, Dante is dead, but because Dante is that same immortal spirit that now is the reader. “This spirit is always the same while constantly changing” (374). The spirit spoken of has a historical reality, grown on and out of itself, forever changing. The Dante that we read is not, cannot be, the Dante of the 1200’s – yet he is not simply “our” Dante, as Croce believed to be the necessary consequence of Gentile’s thought:

But I am given food for thought by the identification, towards which Gentile seems to incline, of reading with translation: an identification that, in its ultimate consequences, *would shake the foundations* of literary and artistic criticism, replacing the critical investigation of the truth of a given poetic work with a series of retoolings and poetic variations of said work, resulting in the sudden crash between “my” and “your” Dante, “my” and “your” Goethe – which unfortunately exists in the capricious aestheticism of our current time, but which cannot be in the intentions as it is certainly not in the practice of Gentile. In truth, he who reading translates has not yet learned to read well (as can be seen in the subsequent phases of learning a language, the perfection of which is “to think in the language learned”); and only he who immerses himself in the original word, and reawakens and remakes in himself the original vibration, reads well. That then this original vibration resonates in a new man, and brings forth feelings and thoughts that are always new, is something that I have never doubted and in which I am in complete agreement with Gentile. But the poetical reading of poetry lies entirely in that poetical return – of which he

speaks, and of which he admits the possibility – “to that innocent and almost sleeping soul of the child.” The “heart that has grown,” and the “new eyes,” of which he then speaks, where that child’s soul is gathered and studied, are no longer “readings” of poetry, but rather creations of new poetry, and therefore a second moment, which presupposes the first and has in the first its point of reference. (Croce 256)

Croce chooses to distinguish here between two moments that are complementary to each other: the moment of reading and the moment of new creation. Gentile had stated instead, as we have already mentioned, that repetition is impossible. And indeed, the two moments that Croce puts in a sequential order are equivalent to the first moment in which one learns the “norms” of language – as when learning a new language – and the second moment in which one uses the results of the first moment in order to build on those same norms. For Gentile, these two moments are at the same time not simply different, but inseparable. One must think of them as supplementary to each other. Just as the historical, immortal Dante supplies and supplants us as readers, so do we supply and supplant the Dante of the Middle Ages. In a way, in reading Dante, we are read by Dante in what is a double move of the life of the spirit, which is itself the afterlife marked by both our “reading” and our “being read”. It is as if the “immortal” Dante was freed from the constriction of his own language and released to new life in our translation, in our reading. And in so doing, this Dante displaces us, expands us, make us grow out of ourselves. And so does our language expand by becoming Dante’s language, but a language that Dante, the man of the middle ages never spoke. And here we return to Benjamin who, a few years after Gentile, turned his attention to this afterlife of the “original” work:

Translatability is an essential quality of certain works, which is not to say that it is essential that they be translated; it means rather that a specific significance inherent in the original manifests itself in its translatability. It is plausible that no translation, however good it may be, can have any significance as regards the original. Yet, by virtue of its translatability the original is closely connected with the translation; in fact this connection is all the closer since it is no longer of importance to the original. We may call this connection a natural one, or, more specifically, a vital connection. Just as the

manifestations of life are intimately connected with the phenomenon of life without being of importance to it, a translation issues from the original – not so much from its life as from its afterlife. For a translation comes later than the original, and since the important works of world literature never find their translator at the time of their origin, their translation marks their stage of continued life. The idea of life and afterlife in works of art should be regarded with an entirely unmetaphorical objectivity. (Benjamin 71)

The withdrawal of the original Dante will correspond to the “actualization” of Dante in the act of reading.⁸ This process is translation, and its embodiment or specter is metaphor: metaphor as specter, as what retreats (“si toglie”). Yet actualism is not reducible to a simple presence: the substitution in place of the original. Actualism corresponds to the very life or afterlife of what is always forever becoming actualized: not the “made” – *factum*, content – but rather form as the content be-coming content. In this way the direction we take is not from Dante to the reader of Dante, such that the reader becomes a metaphor for and of Dante who now makes himself present (which is the danger that Croce saw). In the same way, it is also true that we the readers are not making ourselves present before Dante the writer. This raises more questions about the direction of metaphors.⁹

And ultimately metaphor is the issue here. Paul de Man in his take on Benjamin’s work notices that in “The Task of the Translator,” translations are derivative and secondary with respect to the original being translated. In translation, we are no longer moving between language and its extralinguistic referent, but we are moving sideways, so to speak, from one linguistic entity to another linguistic entity. The concern is no longer with meaning but with an interlinguistic movement. Meaning is entirely imbedded in the original work, and we can leave it there. We can here recall Benjamin’s awareness of the complications inherent even in a literal, word by word translation. The movement Benjamin is concerned about, in order for this movement to be possible at all, requires the postulation of a “pure language,” a *reine Sprache*, a language whose concern is not with meaning: a pure language that is essential in understanding the afterlife of a work of art that, as cited above, “should be regarded with an entirely unmetaphorical objectivity.” For Benjamin, the fact that translation (like many other activities

such as philosophy, history, and criticism) is derived and therefore secondary, is what makes de Man assert that all these activities are therefore "singularly inconclusive." And since they are not imitations, "one would be tempted to say they are not metaphors. The translation is not a metaphor of the original" (de Man 83). Consequently, in carrying on the concept of life in the theorization of the "afterlife" in a work of art,

the concept of life is given its due only if everything that has an history of its own, and is not merely the setting of history, is credited with life. In the final analysis, the range of life must be determined by history rather than by nature, least of all by such tenuous factors as sensation and the soul. The philosopher's task consists in comprehending all of natural life through the more encompassing life of history. (Benjamin 71)

Also any linguistic creation should be translatable even if no one is capable of translating it at any given time (70). In translation "the mother tongue of the translator is transformed as well. While a poet's words endure in his own language, even the greatest translation is destined to become part of the growth of its own language and eventually be absorbed by its renewal" (73). There is implied in this a maturing process where the growth of the original language corresponds to the development of the language of translation. Ultimately, translation "ironically transplants the original into a more definitive linguistic realm since it can no longer be displaced by a secondary reading. The original can only be raised there anew and at other points of time." (75) Recalling what we discussed above, the afterlife of a work of art should be determined by history rather than by nature, unaffected by factors such as sensation and the soul. True language is "concealed in concentrated fashion in translation" (77): a consequence, Benjamin says, of the basic differentiation between the work of a poet and that of a translator. The work of the poet looks at the totality of language, whereas the work of the translator narrowly focuses solely and immediately at the specific linguistic contextual aspects. Unlike a work of literature, translation does not find itself in the center of the language forest but on the outside facing the wooded ridge; it calls into it without entering, aiming at the sole spot where the echo is able to give, in its own language, the reverberation of the work in the alien one. (76)

And here comes the basic distinction: the intention of the poet is “graphic;” that of the translator is “derivative, ultimate, ideational.” This intention of the latter underscores the integration of “many tongues into one true language. [...] This language is one in which the independent sentences, works of literature, critical judgements, will never communicate – for they remain dependent on translation [...]” (77)

Translation is in the outside of language “facing the wooded ridge.” It recreates an inside in which space is made for the unknown other concealed in its language. Translation turns language inside out. It breaks the walls of safety in which the subject finds itself protected, cared for, yet incarcerated. In this way, translation destabilizes. It reveals the instability of the original. It disarticulates the original, says de Man, for whom

“critical philosophy, literary theory,, history – resemble each other in the fact that they do not resemble that from which they derive. But they are all intralinguistic: they relate to what in the original belongs to language, and not to meaning as an extralinguistic correlate susceptible of paraphrase and imitation. They disarticulate, they undo the original, they reveal that the original was always already disarticulated. They reveal that their failure, which seems to be due to the the fact that they are secondary in relation to the original, reveals an essential failure, an essential disarticulation which was already there in the original. They kill the original, by discovering that the original was already dead.” (84)

This language that Benjamin calls *reine Sprache* is free from the illusion of meaning: it is pure signifier, pure form. Let us recall once more that in translation sensation and the soul should not play a role. As Benjamin says, translation brings up the suffering of the original language as it grows, and the sufferings of the translator’s language as it also grows. Translation being on the outside of language and “facing the wooded ridge” turns our home-language into the place of our alienation: there where we we feel the most secure, we are all the more alienated. But this pain that generates is not human. Paul de Man precisely draws our attention to Benjamin’s German: this pain is not human because it

pertains to language. "They would certainly not be the suffering of an individual, or of a subject" (85). Indeed, we are not talking of subjective experience, even though a messianic tone permeates all of Benjamin's work. When we speak, there is a difference between what we want to say and what we say, between what is meant and the way language "means." In our formal way of using language no intent is implied: in such cases we are simply applying the rule of the mode of meaning of language. Gentile agrees with this. Yet this formal use of language brings the messianic with it. Gentile leaves the subject's awareness intact, and in this way can overcome, in an Hegelian move, the limitations of the subject: if not by bringing in his own suffering, then by granting the subject an elevated sense of linguistic awareness. Every possible shortcoming perceived in a work of translation can now be overcome by this achieved higher knowledge of the workings of language. The reader does not simply translate Dante, as if he already knew what Dante was/is. And Gentile tells us, as well, that Dante the man who died in the 1300s is not "simply" introduced into the question at hand. The Dante who spoke and wrote and lived in the 1300s ceases to be a natural phenomenon (as is the case for the words that "he" spoke) and acquires spiritual value by speaking – by actualizing – those same words, already different words than those acted by the reader. In fact, these words are reiterations of words out of "our" control. The words we now read are, in a sense, not human. Vico stated that in language, man begins to think humanly (*New Science* # 338), but this does not imply that there is meaning before and outside language before meaning is materialized linguistically. On the contrary, the intentionality of meaning underscores the human in man as man's humanity is put aside by said humanity's linguistic formulation. Language is historical, and it is used by the men who have it as their dwelling place without their being in control of, nor their being identified, with it. Translation, therefore, underscores all that is problematic at the core of language, which sees in the repetition of words the specter of the same: the specter already a vestige of the intention of he who is now proffering the words in question. The Dante Gentile speaks of gets grafted in the now-language of the reader, and such a translation occurs first of all within the Italian language in which Dante wrote. It has to do with the language's soul: the soul of the Italian language as it is perceived by the sen-

sations of the reader who lets himself go, who accepts all of the language's precepts. In this process the reader who captures Dante becomes captured by Dante, and thus by the Italian language (already many languages), in the uniqueness of the only Language humans speak. Gentile, contrary to Benjamin, seems apparently to need to preserve the intentionality not only in the meaning but also in the mode of signification of a language in the hands of an all-encompassing subject. However, the language Gentile speaks of has all the characteristics of pure language under the control of a "pure subject": a subject open to all possible significations in his identity with a language that is pure signifier. The Dante that I, as the reader, become has nothing to do with the empirical "me" speaking an empirical language. Out of the blind spot in Gentile's writing on language, a fear of our-being-in-relation to language appears; but the fear of this disruptive power of language is removed and overcome by accepting that very blindness as such. This subject is still blind to its condition by unconsciously accepting its blindness. This allows the subject to think it has built its own fortress-house. The "inside" of this fortress-house is the forever changing "I" whose instability, whose forever becoming other, we want to overcome by defining its outside. This translation of the inside is possible in the first place because of its instability, says Benjamin

[A]ll translation is only a somewhat provisional way of coming to terms with the foreignness of languages. An instant and final rather than a temporary and provisional solution of this foreignness remains out of the reach of mankind; at any rate, it eludes any direct attempt. [...] Indirectly, however, the growth of religion ripens the hidden seed into a higher development of language. Although translation, unlike art, cannot claim permanence for its products, its goal is undeniably a final, conclusive, decisive stage of all linguistic creation. In translation the original rises into a higher and purer linguistic air, as it were. It cannot live there permanently, to be sure, and it certainly does not reach it in its entirety. Yet, in a singular impressive manner, at least it points the way to this region: the predestined, hitherto inaccessible realm of reconciliation and fulfillment of languages. The transfer can never be total, but what reaches this region is that element in a translation which goes beyond transmittal of subject matter. This nucleus is best defined as the element that does not lend itself to translation. Even

when all the surface content has been extracted and transmitted, the primary concern of the genuine translator remains elusive. [...] Thus translation, ironically, transplants the original into a more definitive linguistic realm since it can no longer be displaced by a secondary reading. The original can only be raised there anew and at other points in time. (75)

Gentile's strategy is also that of provisionally appropriating the original work of art in order to move on to produce a new work of art – making his poetry out of someone else's poetry. For Gentile, the original as well as every provisional appropriation work like relays: they are like switches through which each meaning triggers a new meaning, leading ever and ever closer to a new level of signification. It seems that for Gentile that predestined region of fulfillment and reconciliation of languages is reachable, and its unstable terrain is left unaccounted for. Gentile sees no disjunction between any of these multiplying steps toward that region, but rather an implied continuity that imitates life: a life where a living body grows in time and space. Yet in this process, that body (the original poem) never gets old but is forever rejuvenating. Gentile stresses a sort of messianic aspect of language that is nonetheless manmade, and not a God-given gift – like a messianism without a religion. With each translation there is a movement forward that constructs an "originating" vessel, which with each "act" of reading/translating will be defined, formed, actualized under our very eyes. There is no broken vessel to reconstitute. There is a chain of metaphors that, by actualizing themselves in a new meaning, relay to an higher region their growth in the form of a new metaphor. The problem of the unstable original is bypassed by this provisional appropriation of an original work of art. Yet this is presented simply just as a tactical move in order to position the reader at a strategic point in which the old text (like any precepts of its grammar) is re-ironed and re-presented in a new guise. The move is presented as the most natural operation of reading. In reality, Gentile overlooks what is instead central to Benjamin's remarks.

In this process of endless redressing, Gentile necessarily suspends the original work of art, holding it outside the intra-linguistic relation and protecting its wholeness from revealing its metonymic status. It is as if for Gentile, the original work of art is in a forever

constant state of bliss—like the blessed souls of Dante’s *Comedy* who are perfectly in harmony with God’s given grace, no matter how tentative their status may appear to the living pilgrim who confronts them. Ultimately, the subject is defined by the fortress-house, which it might have built, but of which it was never the king. This subject can only find itself already made into the Kafkaesque animal that it does not know.

To conclude, Benjamin’s analysis of translation focuses on the translator’s task, which is dependent on both the “saying” and the “way of saying” in language: the way language “means” when we pass from one language to another. The translator must be receptive to the disruptions already at work in the original language of the work of art that translation reveals; and the translator must ultimately make room for this disruption in the language of translation, which painfully grows and expands in a non-human manner. The concern is non-human because language’s growth is a linguistic growth, indifferent to the pathos of the reader. The hermeneutic concern, instead, is Gentile’s concern. Gentile conceives of the art of translation as an hermeneutics. And translation is indeed an act of reading: in reading Dante, I become the new Dante, Gentile says—a Dante infinitely more complex than the original writer who wrote in the 1300s. I the reader am fundamental in activating, through my reading, that specific language of the work that is already a “speaking,” now and again, of that very spirituality that actualizes itself in a new form in my reading—that spirituality that is now me. Thus I get in touch with what was repressed, covered up, hidden in the specific material language of the original work. There is no text without a reader who brings the text to life in its afterlife: an afterlife that is a new and continued life with a higher and enhanced level of understanding and fulfillment of the subjectivity of the one who reads. The sacred in history is not lost as it occurs in the historical dimension of language, because language is concurrently the preserver of history. Translation is itself a translation first and foremost of our own words as we proffer them. Now, in my actual speaking of my language I am actually translating within my very language (already many languages), in the uniqueness of the only Language humans speak. Translation acts itself out as translation: a *mise en abyme* that is noted in Benjamin as well (de Man 86). Paul de Man suggests that we stay a bit closer to Benjamin’s text before

we run away from it in our hermeneutic mode, even though de Man indicates that the sacred in the messianic element in Benjamin's essay has often been the preeminent focus of many of his readers.

The ultimate task of the translator is to read the unreadable. It is to deal with a writing that writes what is never meant to read, what is unreadable—like graphemes for speech. Graphemes in writing are taken for granted, yet they are the keepers of a promise of meaning. Here, the blind spot of Gentile's essay appears, as Gentile seems to have assimilated speech to writing. For Gentile, to speak is to write since speech has all the prerogatives of writing. Translation's domain is writing even if it is performed through reading. Gentile expands this realm of writing/reading far beyond our customary practice. He repeatedly says: "when I say...", and he always implies "I am in my saying as I say it." He is present to his saying, and this saying is already a repetition of itself in the very moment it is proffered. What Gentile says is, all at once, what is being said and the confirmation of what is being said. In repetition lies the novelty. In order to do this, the saying must be recognizable and repeatable—even if this may mean that the saying is recognizable by itself as a language that in turn recognizes itself as it speaks. The historical continuity between the then and the now postulated by Gentile is marked by the univocity that indicates the historical ether, according to Husserl (Derrida, *Husserl* 102). The language of translation in a single act of memory wants to capture the whole of language's possibilities in a saying that wants to say it all, even if in a forever reaching process. The platonic mimetic relationship between image and speech will end up with writing occupying the last and humblest place within the chain of signification. Yet in order for speech to be present before its own image (in the manner of Plato's writing in the soul), one must possess a "competence" in the language that he—the one who speaks—must be able to recall. Saussure speaks of a "langue" that requires the same competence, allowing Jacques Derrida the opportunity to assert in turn that Saussure grants writing a space within speech (writing inhabits speech). Gentile's argument on translation may very well find support in the platonic concept of mimesis, but his argument also blurs the divide between writing in the soul (as in a silent monologue or even a silent reading) and writing as the imitation of true speech when Gentile specifically

starts discussing translation in relation to grammar.

Grammars always follow language in an attempt to stabilize what is already in itself destabilized. In this sense, grammar shares the same project of translation: the materialization of language. This is beyond the metaphysical project where the final metaphorized knowledge reproduces an originating awareness of an impulse of the heart in the literal meaning of “a sign signifying a signifier itself signifying an eternal verity” (Derrida, *Of Grammatology* 15). Translation in Gentile’s argument always occurs in the presence of a grammar. In fact, the arbitrariness of each and every grammar is what Gentile has to reconcile with the spirituality of language. There is no “grammar of grammar,” just as there is no translation of translation. The metaphorical sequence of replacement gets interrupted. When we translate, we open up all options of signification out of an original restricted referentiality. From here on, there is no way to orient ourselves any longer. Benjamin clearly says so. Otherwise grammar coincides with language and language with translation. Indeed, Gentile—and here is a paradox—says this much. The consequence is the killing of the originality of any origin. No thing, at least in language, “is” in itself, but is only in its inevitably becoming other. And this lack is already at work in speech as it is in writing: no longer the weaker link in the chain of representation, but also no longer the repository of a “literalness” that signifies a signifier which in turn signifies. Since Plato, writing has been the sign of a sign removed from truth, and this process is also at work always already in speech as we speak.

I read, I say, I translate, therefore I reproduce all at once in an immediate iterability which is directly possible thanks to the mechanical reproduction of any original sound bite, of any grapheme playing within language. Benjamin himself addresses the mechanical reproduction of the work of art and the issue of the aura in *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*. The mechanical reproduction threatens the stability of the original because it acts as the original’s own mechanical ghost, Derrida would say. It haunts the original. In this way a chain of mechanical reproduction gets generated in order to save, to keep safe, the original one, whose originality is thus forever being reinvented. Again, Gentile speaks of Dante—a Dante read, spoken, translated, therefore forever reproduced anew in his afterlife.

This essay began its discussion with this concept of the afterlife, acknowledged in both Gentile's and Benjamin's works. When we read – as when we read Dante – we have to reinvent what we read. Our reading must affirm the original; and our reading, in order to be affirmative, must confirm its originary reading. This way, in its reading of Dante, the "I" invents itself as it says "yes" to (puts its signature on) the original memory of itself. Like the terror-stricken traveler of the *Divine Comedy* who re-lives now and again his very "I", now in this moment of extreme fear. The I-then-there and the I-now-here underscore my singular signature: I-now-here reaffirm the I-then-there. The fear that now conceals my signature is the iteration of that fear that concealed the original signature in the middle of our afterlife's journey. My new, renewed fear, renewed promise of "I", will resolve itself in a parody if it be only a simple mechanical reproduction. In fact, Dante himself must reinvent himself from the beginning in order to assert and confirm himself as the "I" of the journey, even if in the negative: "I am not Aeneas, I am not Paul" (*Inferno* 2.32). Ultimately, I am not Ulysses either, I have respect for the past, I submit to what is in front of me: to what I am reading, to what I am repeating. The first event must already be iterable, it must immediately confirm itself in differentiating itself by its now spoken iteration. Indeed, Dante's name is spoken and repeated all at once in a single act of memory for the first time in *Purgatory*. Dante's name is the reiterated promise, the signature, Dante's singular signature, the name, the affirmation of the original "I": "I" is now a character enveloped in the play – the play whose chains of iteration relay now and again the author Dante himself as the reader of himself. In deciphering Dante's singular signature (he, Dante himself, as well as us, the readers of Dante) face the totalizing world of the *Comedy*: its absolute knowledge in a single act of memory, actually a dream (Cf. *Paradise* 33). This is achieved by charging every word, every sentence, with meanings, possibilities, associations. Dante's language is then at once "transparent" and "obscure." Dante's reader has no choice but to pay attention and recall everything at every moment. One (including Dante himself) must see the transparency of tradition, as advocated by Husserl, and the equivocality of writing, as practiced by Joyce, in order to clarify history, one's history, one's signature. (At another time, with leisure, we might want to turn our mind to the tension

between science and the mythos-logos in Vico's *New Science*). We, the reader, are the confirmation of Dante "before" Dante and after Dante's own confirmation of himself. We must affirm our own "yes", and repeat "yes" again. In reading Dante, we partake of the chains of confirmation.¹⁰ Every iteration ought to substitute itself for the original by claiming itself as a model of that original. Croce feared that Gentile's concept of reading would have produced an infinite number of Dantes, since each reader would have made his own Dante. Instead, Gentile was paying attention to and reasserting the relationship between mimesis and memory through his attentive reading of Plato's concept of the mimetic.

Like Dante, like that first "I" that is spoken and repeated at once by our own words, we must reproduce now and again that very memory which recorded in advance the memory of its own beginning. Our singular "I" now partakes of that first "I". It is in this context that we must read Gentile's assertion that we first and foremost translate when we speak. However, Gentile sees this translation as an affirmation of the original. He fails to see that this translation, in actuality, undermines the original's originality. The fact that the original cannot be present to itself remains a blind spot in Gentile's essay "Translations' Right and Wrong."

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Notes

1 Previously published in *Rivista di cultura*, a. 1 fasc. 1 (15 aprile 1920). The English translation from the Italian is mine throughout.

2 Cf. de Man 83.

3 See also, Charles Alunni 's bibliography, in "Du Tort et du droit des traduction. 13.

4 Derrida, Jacques. "The 'retreat' of Metaphor" was first published in *Poesie* 7 (1978).

5 Derrida, Husserl note 108.

6 Previously published in *La cultura* (1 dicembre) 1910. Also reprinted in K. Vosseler et al. Intro. Benedetto Croce. Città di Castello, Lapi, 1911. The English translation from the Italian is mine throughout.

7 The quote within Alunni's passage is from *Riforma della dialettica Hegeliana*. Sansoni: Firenze, 1975. 188). The translation from the French is mine throughout.

8 Life and afterlife should be regarded "unmetaphorically."

In fact, these two terms are not figures of speech for something else whose proper meaning is now spoken metaphorically. The afterlife or life of a work of art is what is taking place as it "actualizes" itself in its forever becoming life.

9 In "White Mythology" and in the "Retreat of the Metaphor,"

Derrida says that metaphor retreats as Being (of which it would be a metaphor) has retreated. Therefore, Being does not have a "proper" of which one could speak metaphorically. In this sense to be in the closeness of Being means to be there where the metaphor retreats.

10 Cf. Jacques Derrida's argument about the "yes" in "Ulysses Gramophone: Hear Say in Joyce." Acts of I. Derek Atridge, Ed. New York and London: Routledge, 1992. 253-309.

Translations

From Petrarch to Gaspara Stampa: On the Wings of Arabian Phoenix

New Translations by Barbara Carle

Barbara Carle has completed two new books of translation from Italian into English and French: *Patmos* by Rodolfo Di Biasio (revised translation into English, new translation into French) and *Bambina mattina, Little Morning Child, Fillette du matin*, by Domenico Adriano, Ghenomena, 2013. Her article *Dalle zolle perdute alla finestra: l'identità letteraria dei confini* in *Lina Galli e Graziana Pentich* will appear in 2014. She is author of three bilingual books of poetry (*Don't Waste My Beauty Non guastare la mia bellezza*, Caramanica, 2006, *New Life Nuova Vita*, Gradiva, 2006, *Tangible Remains Toccare quello che resta*, Ghenomena, 2009) and three books of translation.

Francesco Petrarca 1304-1374

Petrarch requires little introduction. Incomparable poet, innovative Humanist, and brilliant scholar, his major works consist of the *Rime sparse (Rerum vulgarium fragmenta)*, *I trionfi*, the *Secretum*, and numerous collections of letters. Petrarch's sonnets, *canzoni*, *sestinas*, and *madrigals* are the source of inspiration and model for many subsequent poets including Shakespeare, Gongora, the Pléiade poets, the poets of the Italian Renaissance and Gaspara Stampa's *Rime*, to name but a few.

Petrarch's sonnets have been widely translated into English, more recently by David Young, Robert Durling, Mark Musa, and others.¹ We do not wish to ignore previous translations by offering these new versions, simply to suggest a more poetic rendering.

We have chosen three sonnets whose themes and images reappear in the poetry of Gaspara Stampa: XC, *Erano i capei d'oro a l'aura sparsi* (memory), CLXXXV, *Questa fenice de l'aurata piuma* (the Arabian phoenix), and CCXXXV, *Lasso, Amor mi trasporta ov'io non voglio* (the ship or vessel). In the first poem the theme of memory blends with that of love for Laura (*l'aura*) and the passage of time. In the second, the mythological Arabian phoenix is compared to Laura (and of course poetry itself – *il lauro*). In the third sonnet,

the ship tossed on a raging sea is the driving metaphor. It is not original, but Petrarch's treatment of it is distinct and unforgettable.

Gaspara Stampa 1523-1554

Gaspara Stampa's complete poems were recently translated into English by Jane Tylus.¹ For scholars of Stampa's opus this edition is most welcome. It includes a critical introduction, commentary, and a rich array of biographical and bibliographical information. It is based on the 1554 edition. A selection of Gaspara's poems was also included in LauraAnna Stortoni and Mary Prentice Lillie's *Women Poets of the Italian Renaissance*² These works are invaluable for in depth understanding and appreciation of Stampa's poetry. Here we offer new versions, more focused on poetic harmony than literal meaning. The Venetian poetess takes up the themes of love and memory while renewing the emblem of the Arabian phoenix and the ship struggling at sea. Along with many of the women poets of the Renaissance, Gaspara was busy imitating Petrarch's sonnets while revising their content, tone, mood, and even their form to fit her own experiences. As the Arabian Phoenix who dies and is reborn from its own ashes, Petrarch's poems die and are reborn in Gaspara Stampa's conscious hands. The polished perfection of Petrarch's love poetry, its concentrated remoteness disappears and is replaced by a more direct, perhaps more raw experience of love, passion, suffering, introspection, hope, and joy. Previous adaptations of Gaspara Stampa's poetry, specifically her sonnet CCVIII, *Amor m'ha fatto tal ch'io vivo in foco* appeared in *Don't Waste My Beauty Non guastare la mia bellezza* (Caramanica, 2006). These imitations were rendered in English and in Italian. The Italian version was co-translated with Antonella Anedda. The present version is more of a translation than an imitation. Nevertheless attempts have been made to recreate corresponding meters, rhymes, and tones as well. Even though she imitates Petrarch's sonnets, Gaspara Stampa's approach is more realistic, more Dantesque, we could say, if we are mindful of Mario Luzi's well known essay titled *L'inferno e il limbo*. Hopefully this microselection from Petrarch's *limbo* and Gaspara Stampa's *Inferno* will open new perspectives.

Francesco Petrarca, *Canzoniere*⁴

XC

Erano i capei d'oro a l'aura sparsi
che 'n mille dolci nodi gli avolgea,
e 'l vago lume oltra misura ardea
di quei begli occhi, ch'or ne son sí scarsi;

e 'l viso di pietosi color' farsi,
non so se vero o falso, mi pareo:
i' che l'ésca amorosa al petto avea,
qual meraviglia se di súbito arsi?

Non era l'andar suo cosa mortale,
ma d'angelica forma; et le parole
sonavan altro, che pur voce humana.

Uno spirto celeste, un vivo sole
fu quel ch'i' vidi: et se non fosse or tale,
piagha per allentar d'arco non sana.

CLXXXV

Questa fenice de l'aurata piuma
al suo bel collo, candido, gentile,
forma senz'arte un sí caro monile,
ch'ogni cor addolcisce, e 'l mio consuma:
forma un diadema natural ch'alluma
l'aere d'intorno; et 'l tacito focile
d'Amor tragge indi un liquido sottile
foco che m'arde a la piú algente bruma.

Purpurea vesta d'un ceruleo lembo
sparso di rose i belli homeri vela:
novo habito, et bellezza unica et sola.

Fama ne l'odorato et ricco grembo
d'arabi monti lei ripone et cела,
che per lo nostra ciel sí altera vola.

Francesco Petrarca, *Canzoniere*

XC

Her aura was scattered in strands of gold
which she had wound in countless knotted crowns,
her lovely light-filled eyes, which have turned old,
once burned beyond their source of greenish brown.

It seemed compassion set her face aglow,
I do not know if it was dreamt or real
the fuse of love that lit me long ago
though I should not wonder since I still feel.

She did not move as any mortal thing
but like angelic dawn, nor were her words
dull sounding like a human, they seemed to sing

like one celestial spirit, sun struck wings
had touched her soul and voice which I first heard
and had they not, my wound would lose its sting.

CLXXXV

This phoenix whose bright plumes of gold adorn
the alabaster glow of her lovely neck
reveals a bright gem effortlessly born
that charms each heart, and my own, to sweet wreck,

she constitutes nature's diadem, vivid
igniter of air so the tacit flint
of Love can then release delicate liquid
inflaming me to burn with frosty glints.

Cerulean edges of her violet dress,
conceal her fair shoulders scattered with roses
uniquely beautiful aura, novel guise.

Fame still proclaims that her sweet scented breast
in Arabian mountains hides and poses
yet she flies so haughtily through our skies.

CCXXXV

Lasso, Amor mi trasporta ov'io non voglio,
et ben m'accorgo che 'l dever si varcha,
onde, a chi nel mio cor siede monarcha,
sono importuno assai più ch'i non soglio;

né mai saggio nocchier guardò da scoglio
nave di merci precïose carcha,
quant'io sempre la debile mia barcha
da le percosse del suo duro orgoglio.

Ma lagrimosa pioggia et fieri vènti
d'infiniti sospiri or l'anno spinta,
ch'è nel mio mare horribil notte et verno,

ov'altrui noie, a sé doglie et tormenti
porta, et non altro, già da l'onde vinta,
disarmata di vele et di governo.

Gaspara Stampa, *Rime*⁵ "sol una nocte, et mai non fosse l'alba"
Petrarch, *Rime sparse*, XXII

CIV

O notte, a me più chiara e più beata
che i più beati giorni ed i più chiari,
notte degna da' primi e da' più rari
ingegni esser, non pur da me, lodata;

tu de le gioie mie sola sei stata
fida ministra; tu tutti gli amari
de la mia vita hai fatto dolci e cari,
resomi in braccio lui che m'ha legata.

Sol mi mancò che non divenni allora
la fortunata Alcmena, a cui stè tanto
più de l'usato a ritornar l'aurora.

Pur così bene io non potrò mai tanto
dir di te, notte candida, ch'ancora
da la materia non sia vinto il canto.

CCXXXV

Ah, Love transports me where I don't want to go
and well I know that all duty is transgressed
thus for the monarch who reigns in my chest
I have become importunate, out of tow.

What helmsman could steer his precious ship through tides
as I have done, never afraid to wrestle
the currents or cliffs, guiding my frail vessel
amidst the battering blows of her harsh pride?

And yet this rain of tears and fearsome winds
of infinite sighs now drive my vessel on
throughout my sea of winter and horrid night

bestowing tedium to her, aches and chagrin
to itself, nothing else, vanquished by strong
sea surfs disarming sails to ungoverned might.

Gaspara Stampa, *Rime*

CIV

Oh night, more blessed and more bright to me
than the most blessed days and the brightest.
Oh night, worthy of praise by the highest
and keenest of minds, not by my ecstasy.

You brought him back to me with tenderness
the one who each joy of mine has governed
disarmed my doubts, dissolving all stubborn
remains of bitterness with sheer sweetness.

It seemed that I became the Alcmene
of dreams for whom a cosmic moan
delayed Aurora's timely return so long

I was the willing subject of Selene.
Oh night, I can't write your glory; you alone
shall shadow the dazzling of my song.

CCVIII

Amor m'ha fatto tal ch'io vivo in foco,
 qual nova salamandra al mondo, e quale
 l'altro di lei non men stranio animale,
 che vive e spira nel medesimo loco.

Le mie delizie son tutte e 'l mio gioco
 viver ardendo e non sentire il male,
 e non curar ch'ei che m'induce a tale
 abbia di me pietà molto né poco.

A pena era anche estinto il primo ardore,
 che accese l'altro Amore, a quel ch'io sento
 fin qui per prova, più vivo e maggiore.

Ed io d'arder amando non mi pento,
 pur che chi m'ha di novo tolto il core
 resti de l'arder mio pago e contento.

CCXXI

A mezzo il mare, ch'io varcai tre anni
 fra dubbi venti, ed era quasi in porto,
 m'ha ricondotta Amor, che a sì gran torto
 è ne' travagli miei pronto e ne' danni;

e per doppiare a' miei disiri i vanni
 un sì chiaro oriente agli occhi ha pòrto,
 che, rimirando lui, prendo conforto,
 e par che manco il travagliar m'affanni.

Un foco eguale al primo foco io sento,
 e, se in sì poco spazio questo è tale,
 che de l'altro non sia maggior, pavento.

Ma che poss'io, se m'è l'arder fatale,
 se volontariamente andar consento
 d'un foco in altro, e d'un in altro male?

CCVIII

Love generated me to live in fire,
 like salamanders newly born to earth,
 or the just as strange creature who expires
 in the same place that brings it back to birth.

My game and my every delight consist
 of living fire and never feeling pain,
 of never caring if he who causes this
 relents the vehemence of his domain.

Soon after the first flame had burned away,
 then Love lit up another, which I feel
 with more intensity and greater sway.

I don't regret defying fate through love
 as long as he who dares again to steal
 my heart remains content with the above.

CCXXI

Love has transported me back to open sea;
 from there for three years I could never flee
 although I was near port as winds claimed my sails
 now he prepares to increase my travails

by doubling the wings of my former desires
 attracting me with bright oriental spires
 immersing me with comfort as I learn
 new depth so that I'm not afraid to yearn

again. A fire just like the first I feel;
 if this, in such tight space, is now the case
 I fear it will be greater than the other.

What can I do, if burning is my appeal,
 if voluntarily I consent to taste
 ill after ill, one fire after another?

Notes

1 *Petrarch's Lyric Poems: The Rime Sparse and Other Lyrics*, Francesco Petrarca and Robert M. Durling, Harvard University Press, 1979. *Petrarch: The Canzoniere, or Rerum vulgarium fragmenta*, Mark Musa and Barbara Manfredi, Indiana University Press, 1999. *The Poetry of Petrarch*, David Young, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005.

2 Gaspara Stampa *The Complete Poems* The 1554 Edition of the "Rime," a Bilingual Edition, Edited by Troy Tower and Jane Tylus. Translated and with an Introduction by Jane Tylus, University of Chicago Press, 2010.

3 *Women Poets of the Italian Renaissance: Courtly Ladies and Courtesans*, Laura Anna Stortoni (Editor), Mary Prentice Lillie (Translator), Italica Press, 2008.

4 Poems quoted in Italian from Francesco Petrarca, *Canzoniere*, Testo critico e introduzione di Gianfranco Contini. Annotazioni di Daniele Ponchiroli. Torino, Einaudi, 1964, pp. 123, 241, 297.

5 Gaspara Stampa's poems in Italian are quoted as they appear in: Gaspara Stampa, *Rime*, Introduzione di Maria Bellonci, Milano, Rizzoli, 1976, pp. 147, 213, 221.



2. Vedi la luce/See the Light; dyed lasagna, glue, gold paint and window frame.

From *Il Florio* by Francesca Turini Bufalini

Translated by Joan E. Borrelli

Joan E. Borrelli received the MA in English Literature/Creative Writing and a second MA in Italian Language and Literature from San Francisco State University. She is cotranslator of *Autobiographical Poems* by Francesca Turini Bufalini (Bordighera Press, 2009). Her subsequent translations from Turini Bufalini's work (a sonnet and madrigal selection) appear in *Journal of Italian Translation* VI, nos. 1&2 (Spring-Fall 2011). Her translations of the poetry and prose of other Italian authors (Vittoria Colonna, Vittoria Aganoor Pompilj, Luisa Giaconi, Matilde Serao, Anna Banti) are included in a number of anthologies and journals as well as in past issues of *Journal of Italian Translation*: "Poems by Virginia Bazzani Cavazzoni," II, no. 2 (Fall 2007); "Sonnets by Ciro di Pers," III, no. 2 (Fall 2008). She has published essays of literary criticism in *Critical Companion to J.D. Salinger* (Facts on File, 2011) and a short fiction, "Terra Ferma: A Fragment," in *Voices in Italian Americana* 22, no. 1 (Spring 2011).

Francesca Turini Bufalini (1553-1641), whose work continues to attract current scholarly attention,¹ is unique among writers of the late Renaissance/early Baroque. With a series of autobiographical poems that are the first of their kind in the Italian tradition to offer precise details of the poet's life, Turini Bufalini likewise reveals themes not seen before in the Western poetic canon: intimate expressions of past youthful sentiments, of miscarriage, of the raising of children and of maternal joy and love. Her work displays a full range of emotion as she reacts to challenges she faced as an orphan, wife, mother and widow. Her immediacy of voice and personal subject matter create not only an unprecedented feel for the struggles of women of her historical period, but also reflect a sensibility almost modern in its confessional tone. Her poems moreover express a woman's struggle to write.²

Turini Bufalini published two books during her lifetime: *Rime spirituali sopra i Misteri del Santissimo Rosario* (Roma: Gigliotti, 1595) and *Rime* (Città di Castello: Molinelli, 1627; enlarged 1628). With

the 1628 edition, the publisher advertised a narrative poem, *Il Florio*, as the poet's major work nearly completed. During the next twelve years, Turini Bufalini continued to write and revise this work, which she describes in two sonnets³ as providing her with an outlet for her creativity as well as with much-needed consolation throughout her difficult life.⁴ In 1640, she sent the manuscript to her relative, Cardinal Ulderico di Carpegna, for his opinion. At the time of her death in 1641, however, the poem remained unpublished. Over the centuries, the text of *Il Florio* was believed lost until, in the 1990s, a manuscript was located among the family archives at the Bufalini castle in San Giustino (Umbria).

Due to the indefatigable efforts of Paolo Bà, the extant text (40 cantos) of *Il Florio* (edited and annotated by Bà) will be published for the first time within the pages of the prestigious Italian journal, *Letteratura Italiana Antica (LIA)*, volume XIV, 2013 (pp. 31600).⁵ I wish to convey my sincere gratitude to Professor Bà (San Giustino), who selected and shared the following excerpt prior to the publication of *Il Florio* and who provided me with the original text for my translation. I am greatly indebted to Professor Antonio Lanza, Director of *Letteratura Italiana Antica*, for permission to reproduce the original, as well as for translation permissions. I extend my heartfelt thanks to Professor Natalia Costa-Zalessow (San Francisco State University), for her unflagging generosity in sharing her knowledge of Italian literary history with me.

Comment on the translation

In *Il Florio*, Turini Bufalini utilizes *ottava rima*,⁶ the traditional stanza form of Italian narrative poetry, to recreate the story of two young *innamorati*, Florio and Biancofiore, as they labor to overcome obstacles to their love. Plot inspiration can be found in Boccaccio's prose work, *Il Filocolo* (c. 1336),⁷ which in turn derives from a twelfth-century troubadour romance. The metrics of *ottava rima* require lines of eleven syllables (*endecasillabi*), arranged in eight-line stanzas with end-rhyme of ABABABCC. The Italian *ottava* realized its perfection in Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* (1516) and in Tasso's narrative poems.⁸

Because of Turini Bufalini's innovative trend in her *Rime* (where she introduces new themes and also experiments with sonnet structure),⁹ I would not have been surprised to see some aspect

of experimentation in *Il Florio*. I was, however, flabbergasted at her extensive use of text-within-text technique in the selection that follows. The two letters between the lovers, inserted verbatim into the narrative frame, heighten the realism and the emotional charge of the exchange and allow for close reader involvement. Since text-within-text technique is, to my mind, a more modern literary convention, I queried Professor Costa-Zalesow about its use in Italian poetry in Turini Bufalini's era. She pointed me to Ariosto's *Furioso* (Canto XXV, stanzas 90-91, lines 713-728) – Ruggiero's letter to Bradamante – where the quoted text comprises two stanzas for a total of sixteen lines. Ariosto does not show a response letter from Bradamante. In Canto XVI of Turini Bufalini's *Il Florio*, the quoted text of the letter from Florio to Biancofiore comprises fourteen stanzas (nos. 62-75). Turini Bufalini, moreover, shows a response letter from Biancofiore comprising an additional fourteen stanzas (nos. 83-96). The two letters in *Il Florio* thus total an astonishing 224 lines of text-within-text. Although Turini Bufalini may not have been the first to employ the technique, we are nonetheless seeing in her Canto XVI an early and significant use of meta-narration. With Biancofiore's letter, moreover, we may also be witnessing the first time that the text of a letter written by a female character is embedded verbatim within the poetic stanza.¹⁰

In translating from *Il Florio*, I was challenged by various competing forces. On the one hand, I wanted my target language to capture the emotional spontaneity expressed in the letters of the young lovers. On the other hand, I vowed to keep faith with the formal metrics of the *ottava* and its elegant tone. The exciting atmosphere of a medieval tale – replete with chivalric knights, distressed damsels, court intrigues and feats of derring-do – demanded a broad action vocabulary. Conversely, Turini Bufalini's enhanced use of alliteration and internal rhyme (Baroque influences on her poetry), called for careful attention to the prosodic features of the original, thus limiting available word choice. The contrasting emotional elements inherent within the text of the letters, moreover, show Turini Bufalini's skill in keeping a nice balance between the unbridled histrionics of the jealous Florio (treated with light humor by the poet) and the measured and thoughtful responses of Biancofiore.

My overriding concern, therefore, in this, my first 'joust' with

ottava rima, was to keep my balance astride my translator's horse. To parallel the hendecasyllabic lines of the original with stanzas that gallop forward, I charged ahead with iambic pentameter, the preferred meter of narrative verse in English. To run the end-rhyme gauntlet, I relied on my anglophone steed, well equipped with slant rhyme, to echo the musical ring of the original when I did not have a full rhyme sound at the ready. To capture spontaneity, I reached for idiomatic expressions. Conversely, by inverting word order and pinning down a few archaisms here and there, I hoped to render some historical atmosphere and to move the translation closer to the source text. To pay homage to the prosodic features of the original, I matched consonance and internal rhyme wherever I could.

We come upon the scene with Florio in the distant city of Montorio, where he has been sent by his parents, the king and queen, in an effort to separate the lovers. Florio believes that Biancofiore has jilted him for Fileno, an errant knight just arrived from Marmorina (seat of the court where Biancofiore remains). Fileno is in possession of Biancofiore's veil, which he has shown to Florio while boasting that she placed her veil on his lance as a gesture of her love. The truth is that Biancofiore, against her will, was commanded by the queen to do so after Fileno won a tournament at court. Now alone, Florio denounces Biancofiore as unfaithful (seeing the veil as proof of her betrayal), and threatens to turn his sword against himself.¹¹

Notes

1 For readers of Italian, Paolo Bà, Professor Emeritus, has worked assiduously to edit the first complete modern editions of Turini Bufalini's books: "*Rime spirituali sopra i Misteri del Santissimo Rosario*," *Letteratura Italiana Antica* VI, (2005): 147-223 and "*Rime*," *Letteratura Italiana Antica* XI, (2010): 141-276. He has authored numerous articles on the poet for the journal *Pagine altotiberine* and is coauthor with Giuseppe Milani of a 1998 monograph on Turini Bufalini's family matters, in which he also contributes a chapter on her versification. To raise awareness of the poet and her work, he has arranged live readings for the public and the schools around San Giustino and in Turini Bufalini's birthplace of Borgo Sansepolcro (Tuscany). As President of the *Amici dei Musei e dei Monumenti Porta dell'Umbria*, he organized a conference at the Bufalini castle in May 2012,

at which he and other scholars from Italy and the USA, including Natalia Costa-Zalessow, Professor Emerita, presented their research-in-progress and participated in panel discussions. In a recent article, "Francesca Turini [sic] Bufalini: una poetessa tra Cinquecento e Seicento," *Amici dei Musei* (Florence) XXXVI-XXXVII, nos. 124-127 (October 2010-September 2011): 211-217, he comments on the poet's epistolary sonnet exchanges with her contemporaries including Margherita Sarrocchi (1556-1617), author of the narrative poem, *La Scanderbeide*. Bà is engaged in active research at the Bufalini and other archives where he has discovered manuscripts of Turini Bufalini's unpublished madrigals.

For readers of English as well as Italian, Natalia Costa-Zalessow has published the poet's autobiographical work with the anthology: Francesca Turini Bufalini, *Autobiographical Poems: A Bilingual Edition*, edited by Natalia Costa-Zalessow. Translations by Joan E. Borrelli, with the participation of Natalia Costa-Zalessow (New York: Bordighera Press, 2009). In her extensively-researched "Introduction" (*ibid.*, 7-36), Costa-Zalessow offers comprehensive biographical and bibliographical information on the poet and places the work in critical context, as influenced by the emerging Baroque style and diverging from the earlier Petrarchan model. She moreover argues successfully for the originality of Turini Bufalini's content within the Western tradition. Costa-Zalessow authored the critical essay, "Francesca Turini Bufalini," in *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, vol. 339: *Seventeenth-Century Italian Poets and Dramatists*, edited by Albert N. Mancini and Glenn Palen Pierce (Detroit: Gale, 2008): 271-276. For her review of Bà's editions and publications, see *Italica* 89, no. 3 (2012): 412-14. Her forthcoming article for *Italica* will concentrate on Turini Bufalini's autobiographical/encomiastic sonnets to Lucrezia Tomacelli Colonna.

2 Turini Bufalini, *Autobiographical Poems*, 187. In sonnet number 128, for example, the poet clearly laments her son Giulio's opposition to her writing.

3 *Ibid.*, 199. In sonnets numbered 140 and 141, Turini Bufalini directly addresses the title character, Florio, of her eponymous narrative work, declaring to him that writing has remained her only consolation (*refugio*) through years of grief. These two sonnets were not published until 1901, when Vittorio Corbucci included them in a printed text of a lecture he had presented at Città di Castello (Umbria). For a detailed chronology of Turini Bufalini's literary fortunes, see Costa-Zalessow, "Introduction," *Autobiographical Poems*, 31-36.

4 Orphaned at a very early age, Turini Bufalini was raised by a maternal uncle (Count Pietro Carpegna) at his castle, Gattara, in the wilderness of the Apennines (near Montefeltro). Not quite twenty-one years old, she married Count Giulio Bufalini (then seventy years of age). With professional military duties in Rome, Giulio was absent for long periods.

During their first years together, she suffered a miscarriage and a serious fever which nearly took her life. She subsequently gave birth to two sons and a daughter but was widowed at age thirty. Left with three small children and the burden of managing the Bufalini estate – the castle and the nearby *palazzo* in Città di Castello, along with lands, servants and finances – she was also forced to fight numerous legal battles to secure contested properties and to provide for her children's care. Her maternal love and devotion, evident throughout her poems, is later coupled with the lament of not enjoying a reciprocal affection. Her sons, upon reaching manhood, quarreled with her over money and litigated formally against her and against one another, as Giulio, the eldest, would retain future right of inheritance to the castle, whereas Ottavio, his younger brother, only the right to reside there. At age sixty-one, because of family discord, she left Umbria for Rome to take a post in the Colonna household as lady-in-waiting to the duchess, Lucrezia Tomacelli Colonna. She returned to Umbria only upon the death of Tomacelli in 1622. In 1623, Ottavio was killed by gunshot, with suspicion arising around Giulio's involvement.

5 *Letteratura Italiana Antica: rivista annuale di testi e studi*. Directed by Antonio Lanza. Rome: Moxedano Editrice. ISSN: 1724-0492 (electronic); 1129-4981 (paper). This international journal is dedicated to texts and studies on Italian literature and is available for purchase on the internet.

6 Although some use of the *ottava* can be found in Italian poetry before the Trecento, Giovanni Boccaccio (1313-1375) elevated and defined the form for Italian narrative verse. His *Filostrato* (c. 1337-39) is considered the first work in *ottava rima*. For a discussion of the form, see: Francesco Bausi and Mario Martelli, *La metrica italiana; teoria e storia* (Firenze: Casa Editrice Le Lettere, 1993): 102-104. See also: J.A. Cuddon, *Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991): 667-68.

7 *Il Filocolo* (c. 1336), Boccaccio's romance in prose, is considered the first adventure novel in Italian literature. The author chose the name of his title character to signify 'One Who Loves Labor.' The work derives from the French troubadour epic, *Floire et Blanchefleur*. Boccaccio would have heard the story as retold and/or sung at the Neapolitan court of Robert of Anjou (1278-1343). In reshaping the tale, Boccaccio hoped to fan the flames of his own courtship of Maria d'Aquino, natural daughter to the king (and who appears within his tale as "Fiammetta"). For a short synopsis of the *Filocolo*, see: Giovanni Boccaccio, *Antologia delle opere minori volgari, a cura di Giuseppe Gigli. Nuova presentazione di Vittore Branca* (Firenze: Sansoni, 1961): 133-171. Boccaccio's fame as one of Italy's finest writers rests securely on his prose work, the *Decameron* (composed 1349-53).

8 Ludovico Ariosto (1474-1533): His romantic 'epic' (or 'poesia cavalleresca'), *Orlando Furioso*, focuses on Orlando, driven to insane frenzy over his love for Angelica, who flees as he pursues her. The intricate plot

weaves together the fates of various pairs of lover-protagonists. Torquato Tasso (1544-95): Revered for his narrative poems, principally *Gerusalemme Liberata* (pub. 1581). Turini Bufalini may have known Tasso personally during her residency in Rome at the Colonna household.

9 For more complete information on Turini Bufalini's experimentation with sonnet structure, see my "Note on the Translation," *Autobiographical Poems*, 51-53.

10 In the *Furioso*, Canto XXV, stanzas 85-89, Ariosto himself relates to the reader the better part of Ruggiero's letter and utilizes text-within-text technique only in its final sixteen lines (stanzas 90-91). Turini Bufalini likely found poetic inspiration for her Canto XVI in the *Furioso*, particularly in Canto XXXII, stanzas 10-46 – Bradamante's jealousy. (My thanks go again to Professor Costa-Zalessow for indicating these passages to me.) In these stanzas, however, Bradamante expresses her feelings through direct speech and/or direct interior monologue. Turini Bufalini's use of text-within-text thus greatly surpasses its use by Ariosto.

11 This information is provided in Professor Bà's annotation to Canto XVI of *Il Florio*.

12 Lethe (Greek for 'forgetfulness'): In Greek myth, the souls of the newly dead were required to drink from the waters of Lethe (a river of Hades), which aided them to achieve complete forgetfulness of their mortal past before entering the underworld.

13 Morpheus: In Greek myth, the god of dreams who, as a son of Hypnos (Sleep), assumes the form of humans when visiting mortals during sleep. He is often accompanied by his brothers Icelus (who personifies beasts, birds, serpents) and Phantasus (who transforms himself into rocks, water, woods and inanimate objects) along with 1,000 other male siblings in order to enact the dream.

14 Florio and Biancofiore were born on the same day and raised together at the court of Marmorina.

Mal d'amore: gelosia
Canto XVI

25. O mio dolore intenso, smisurato!
 O me infelice sopra gli altri amanti!
 O senza alcuna colpa abbandonato!
 O cosa non mai più veduta inanti!
 O mia dura sventura! O tuo peccato,
 cagion de' miei non essicabil' pianti,
 cagion ch'io non potrò quietar già mai
 pensando al guiderdon che me ne dà!

[...]

42. Poi in tanta rabbia in tal furor disceso
 che, poiché al suo chiamar sord'è la Morte,
 infuriato in man la spada prese,
 già di lei dono in più felice sorte:
 «E tu sarai de le mie fiamme accese
 termine e del dolor pungente e forte
 — dice —, o vindice acciaio, al petto chiuso,
 forse da lei donato a simil uso.

43. E n'abbia ella il cor pago e sodisfatto
 quando a morte saprà ch'io son finito!».
 E, nel furor d'Amor crucioso e ratto,
 prende a passarsi il core empio partito.
 E lo faceva: se non che al miser atto,
 forse poi ch'ebbe il lungo pianto udito,
 mosso a pietade il ciel mandò repente
 a dar soccorso al giovane dolente.

44. Invisibil a lui per l'ombre quiete
 in aita dal ciel dolce scendea,
 chè soffuse a' suoi sensi non di Lete,
 ma soave liquor d'onda sabea.
 Entr' al sonno per vie bacciate e quete,
 per troncar l'ali a la sua morte rea
 e con dolce sopor fra varie larve
 Morfeo co' frati suoi lieve comparve.

[...]

Love Malaise: Jealousy
Canto XVI

25. "Oh pain of mine, intense, beyond all bounds!
Oh wretched me, more so than other lovers!
Oh guiltless, thrust aside upon no grounds!
Oh thing yet unseen in this universe!
Oh my hard luck! How your offense astounds –
the reason for my ever-spilling tears,
the reason I'll never again calm down,
considering this recompense you've shown!"

[...]

42. Then by such wrath, by such a frenzy grasped,
(since to his clamor Death turned a deaf ear),
furious now, in hand his sword he clasped,
her gift to him in times far happier:
"And of my ardent flames, you'll be," he rasped,
"the finish, and of pain caustically sore,
locked deep within my breast, avenging steel,
bestowed perhaps for just this use to fill.

43. "A gratified and pleased heart will be hers
when once she learns I've gone to meet my end!"
Then, in Love's folly, fierce, impetuous,
to pierce straight through his heart did he intend
and would have done – but at that act of his,
at that long plaint, the Heavens intervened
(by pity moved) to send all of a sudden
some respite to the suffering young man.

44. Invisible to him through quiet shades,
there drifted downward from above sweet salve
to soothe his senses (not quite Lethe's¹² aids,
but gentle liquor in a subtile wave).
Into this sleep of tranquil-kissed cascades,
to wrest the wings of flight towards a mean grave,
with dulcet drowsiness, 'mid specters varied,
Morpheus¹³ with his brotherhood appeared.

[...]

61. In questo dir ripose il ferro ignudo,
che tratto avea per trapassarsi il petto,
tant'era di ragion svogliato e crudo
contro di sè che al mal porgere effetto.
Ma, poiché fégli la speranza scudo,
temprato il duro suo gelato affetto,
perché 'l suo duol distintamente udisse,
prese la penna e in queste note scrisse:

62. «Donna, bella e crudele, ond'io beato
incominciai l'età fresca e novella,
mentre vollen gli dei, mentre il mio fato
non ti fece in amore empia e rubella,
lèggi di me fedele e sfortunato,
tanto quanto sei tu crudele e bella,
quest'infelici e dolorosi versi
d'inchiostro men che del mio pianto aspersi.

63. E se ben, di salute tutto privo,
reggo la penna debole e tremante,
quella salute pur ti mando e scrivo
che venir può da doloroso amante.
Amante mentr'io spiro e mentre io vivo,
d'amore essempro immobile e costante,
e che per troppo amar, per troppa fede,
indegno son di sì crudel mercede.

64. Dunque, crudel, dunque è pur vero (ahi, mille
e più volte crudel!) che del mio amore
spente sian nel tuo cor quelle faville
che l'arser già di sì possente ardore?
e che con nuovo incendio arda e sfaville
di desir nuovo il tuo mutabil core?
ond'or succeda nel tuo ingrato seno
di Florio invece il peregrin Fileno?

65. Dunque, il dominio, o Biancofiore, hai dato
de' miei promessi e mal graditi amori
a un cavalier incognito e privato,
di cui non sai la patria e i genitori?
d'un ch'a pena tre giorni è dimorato
in quella corte, ohimè, tu ti innamorì!
e d'un figlio d'un re, che t'amò sempre,

61. Throughout his dream rested the unsheathed sword
that he had drawn to run through his own breast,
such was the reasoning so twisted, crude,
against himself, its harm to manifest.
But like a shield, hope lent him fortitude.
No longer by an icy mood oppressed,
(and so she'd clearly comprehend his hurt)
he took a pen and in these words he wrote:

62. 'Woman beautiful, cruel – with whom so blest
I woke to life in childhood fresh and novel,
while the gods willed, while my destiny promised
your love not yet untrue, beyond betrayal –
read here of me, as faithful, fortune-cursed,
as you are cruel, as you are beautiful;
read words of dolor, infelicitous,
inscribed less so with ink than with my tears.

63. 'And though I, now of all my health deprived,
can barely ply a pen, wobbling and shaking,
I nonetheless send you what health survived
that issues from a lover who is aching –
lover while I still breathe, while I'm alive,
a model of love firm and not forsaking,
who, with love and faith having too much served,
such cruel mercy from you has not deserved.

64. 'So then, cruel one, so then can it be true
that in your heart the sparks of love are spent,
sparks of my love (countlessly cruel, ah, you!)
that once burned there with an ardor so potent?
and that it sparkles, burns, afire anew
with new desire, your fickle temperament?
that in your thankless breast he takes my place –
lover Fileno in Florio's space?

65. 'So then, you have relinquished, Biancofiore,
(over my promises, my love) the reign
to an unknown and private cavalier
who has no claim of country or of kin?
who only just three days ago arrived there
in court? Poor me, head over heels you've fallen?
And though I loved you – I, the king's own son –

sprezzi l'amore in disusate tempre?

66. D'aver dato a Fileno in man la chiave
de tuo pensier' con amoroso zelo
negar non puoi quando a me detto ei l'have:
né detto sol, ma dimostrato il velo
di reciproco amor, fra voi soave
pegno, e dell'alma mia pungente telo.
Ahi, ch'è pur ver ch'un'amorosa fiamma
un cor di donna picciol tempo infiamma!

67. Quale ha di me, questo amator novello,
più senno? più valor? più gentilezza?
Forse più è di me grazioso e bello
se la grazia contempli e la bellezza.
Ma, quando ancor m'avanzi in tutto quello,
ahi, ché d'amor, di fede e di fermezza
qualunque altro, crudel, vinco io, qual suole
vincer di luce ogn'altra luce il sole!

68. Ma se non hai d'alpestre tigre il petto
o di cote che il mare irato fiede,
ritornami nel grado onde soggetto
già ti lasciasti d'ogni mio arbitrio erede.
Fa' che non resti, ohimè, priva d'effetto
la tua promessa inviolabil fede
quando giurammo il nostro casto amore
in salda fé dando per pegno il core.

69. Ricòrdati, crudel, ch'un giorno un loco
ci diè al mondo, una sorte ed un desiro,
e prima io bebbi l'amoroso foco
degli occhi tuoi dell'aria ond'io respiro;
senza te non potei molto né poco,
viver né volli: ond'or l'incendio diro
sì mi consuma, ahi lasso, a dramma a dramma,
ch'io sento tutto convertirmi in fiamma!

70. Se da te mi partii, fu 'l partir forza:
partissi il corpo e restò teco il core.
Per questo non si cangia e non si smorza
d'una favilla il mio cocente ardore;
anzi, s'invigorisce e si rinforza

my love's tossed out, with such reckless abandon?

66. 'That you have handed Fileno the key
to all your thoughts, and with amorous zeal,
you can't deny. He's told me the whole story:
not only told, but he showed me the veil
of love exchanged (silken keepsake maybe
for you — for me, the fabric pricks my soul).
Alas, it's so, that an amorous flame
enflames a woman's heart so quick a time!

67. 'What's he got over me, this man of yours —
more wisdom? valor? more gentility?
Maybe he's better-looking and more gracious,
if grace is what you're looking for, and beauty.
But on my side, I'd say it's obvious
that as for love, faith and fidelity,
everyone fails where I'll have rightly won,
as any light pales in light of the sun!

68. 'Unless your breast's like that of a wild tigress
or of rock honed to rift sea's angry swell,
restore me to where I stood in your grace
when I left you heiress of my free will.
Do not forsake, alas, do not efface
your promised faith inviolable
when our chaste love to each other we swore
in firmest faith, each heart the other's keeper.

69. 'Recall, cruel girl, we met the world together,
one place and time, with one fate and desire,¹⁴
and I first drank the fire of amour
within your eyes wherefrom I breathe my air.
Without you I am good for naught, and neither
would I live on: further, this blazing pyre,
alas, now so consumes me, dram by dram,
I feel myself transformed into pure flame!

70. 'Though I did leave you, know my leave was forced:
my body left, my heart clung to you there.
But parting won't have changed and won't have doused
not by one tiny spark my scorching ardor.
Instead, what's sprung to life and reinforced,

con la mia lontananza il mio dolore,
né mi può far mutar desire o sorte
luogo, tempo, Fortuna, Amore o Morte!

71. Ahi, quante volte, ond'io di fé mi glorio,
ver' te costante, le più vaghe e belle
di molte che ne sono entro a Montorio,
m'han tentato d'amor donne e donzelle,
e sempre indarno! Ahi, miserabil Florio,
come l'alma dal cor non ti si svelle
se in ricompensa del tuo amor reale
il cavalier Fileno hai per rivale?

72. Ahi, quante volte a mezzanotte oscura
per disfogar l'acerbo mio martoro,
son io venuto ad abbracciar le mura
che m'ascondono, avare, il mio tesoro?
Ditel voi, stelle, voi che la mia dura
pena vedeste ond'io languisco e moro,
ed a questa crudel fede de' miei
notturni fati e dolorosi omèi!

73. Non t'ama già Fileno! Io son quel ch'amo
d'indelebil amor, tenace e forte!
Finge egli teco! Io solo odio e disamo,
per te, me stesso: e ne ricevo morte!
Né può né vuole amarti! Io voglio e bramo
che m'accetti per servo e per consorte:
purché tuo sia, non recus'io partito
o di servo o d'amante o di marito!

74. Dunque io ti prego, per gli eterni dei,
che del mio duro scempio ormai ti caglia;
e se mai cosa volli o dissi o fei
onde la tua virtute in pregio saglia,
se da quel foco illesa ti rendei
quando, per salvar te, l'aspra battaglia
sostenni e vinsi, del mio afflitto core
abbi pietà, che arde in più fiero ardore!

75. E se pur nieghi al mio soccorso aita
e per altri risolvi abbandonarmi,
se 'l dolor non potrà tôrmi la vita,

as distance lies between us, is my dolor.
Nothing can alter my desire — not fate,
place, time, Fortune; neither can Love nor Death!

71. 'How many times do I, if I may say so,
count myself constant to you, to my glory,
when choicest beauties, plenty in Montorio,
damsels and dames, all set about to lure me,
ever in vain! Ah, wretched Florio,
your soul's plucked from your core — how can it not be —
if now, in recompense for your love royal,
you've cavalier Fileno as a rival?

72. 'How many times, alas, in deep of midnight,
with my martyring torment to outpour,
I crept up to the walls to hug the site,
those greedy walls, hiding from me my treasure?
Oh stars, you witnesses of my hard plight,
reveal how I so fail and furthermore
may die of keeping faith to cruel degrees
with those nocturnal trysts and mournful cries!

73. 'Fileno loves you not! It's I who do,
with strong, tenacious, indelible love!
He's faking! I alone hate and eschew
myself for you, though death I would receive!
He can't, won't love you! where I yearn for you
to take me as your consort and your slave:
in order to be yours, I wouldn't grouse
over the part of slave, lover or spouse!

74. 'By the eternal gods, I beg you then,
let your blood curdle at my sacrifice;
if ever I've desired or said or done
a thing to have your virtue's merit rise;
if from the stake I freed you unscathed when
harsh battle to save you from that demise
I fought and won, have mercy on me thus,
on my heart flaming with fire more ferocious!

75. 'If you would yet deny me some relief
and for him you're set to abandon me;
if sorrow can't remove me from this life,

vo' che la tolga il paragon dell' armi.
 Ecco la destra a la mia morte ardita
 che stringe il ferro e ne' funebri carmi
 fia scritto: "Un giace qui cui morte diede
 suo vero amore ed altrui finta fede"! ».

76. Florio qui fine a le dolenti note
 pose e versò dagli occhi amaro pianto,
 e di fosco pallor ambo le gote
 sparse, non di viola o d' amaranto.
 Sì 'l duol c'ha dentro il cor l' ange e percote
 che stima che 'l morir non giunga tanto.
 Con la carta piegò le sue querele
 e chiamò un servo suo, scaltro e fedele,

77. che sapea del suo amor la causa intera
 e portò di sua fé più d' una prova;
 a sé chiamollo e disse in tal maniera:
 «Immantinente fa' che 'l passo mova
 e vanne a Marmorina inanzi sera
 secretamente, e Biancofior ritrova
 e dàlle questa carta e attendi; e poi
 con la risposta affretta i passi tuoi!».

78. Il servo, obediente a quanto imposto
 li fu, dal suo signor prende comiato,
 e sì il passo affrettò che giunse tosto,
 da molta fede e lealtà spronato;
 e diligente fa quanto gli ha imposto:
 ché non è da nessun visto e notato,
 e scaltro così bene il tempo apposta
 che sollecita lei per la risposta.

79. Tosto che vede il nunzio la donzella,
 che l' intero sapea del loro amore,
 s' allegra e con dolcissima favella
 dice: «Che fa l' amato mio signore?».
 Ed ei risponde al domandar di quella:
 «Spend' egli in sospirare i giorni e l' ore;
 ma la cagion del suo dolor m' è ascosa
 e perché meni vita aspra e dogliosa.

80. Sospira del suo amor la lontananza».

the paragon of arms will set me free.
My right hand, poised for death to end my grief,
clutches the sword. Write as my obsequy:
*"Here does he lie, delivered a deathblow
by his real love and her make-believe vow"!*

76. Thus ceased Florio's notes of discontent,
his eyes spilling forth tear on bitter tear
to bathe his cheeks (no hint of amaranth
or violet there, his pallor grown austere).
The hurt he felt so struck his heart, so rent,
he thought his certain death drew very near.
Within the paper, his complaints he folded
and called a servant, one faithful and shrewd,

77. who of their love was entirely apprised,
proving trustworthy many a time prior.
In confidence to him, the prince reprised:
*"Take to your heels within the very hour
and make for Marmorina well-disguised.
Be there by dark, and seek out Biancofiore.
Hand her this envelope and wait, and then
with her response hurry back here again!"*

78. Bending to the importance of the charge,
the servant swiftly takes leave of his lord
and gets there on the double, for his passage
and pace with loyalty and trust he spurred.
Diligent, every command to discharge,
he's careful to be neither seen nor heard;
he's shrewd to calculate the time and chance
most opportune to garner her response.

79. Soon as the damsel spies the messenger,
(who of their love was entirely aware),
she brightens, summons sweet words to inquire:
"With my beloved lord, how does it fare?"
And at the query, he replies to her:
*"From sigh to sigh he goes, from hour to hour.
From me, the reason for his pain is hidden,
and why he leads a life so sorrow-laden.*

80. *"He sighs as his love lies at such a distance."*

«Qual cagion esser può de le sue pene?»
 replica, e se ne va ne la sua stanza
 per veder quanto il foglio in sé contiene;
 e con la nova dolce rimembranza
 de l'amato signor ciò che le viene
 bacia e ribacia l'amoroso foglio;
 poi legge la cagion del suo cordoglio.

81. Non così tosto udì quel ch'inferire
 volut'ha il suo signor dentro a quel scritto
 e che di Florio son gli sdegni e l'ire,
 che gli have il cor la Gelosia trafitto,
 che si senti d'angoscia e di martire
 una frezza ch'al cor le andò dritto.
 E se quei fogli con sospir' non arse,
 le lacrime 'l vietâr che sù vi sparse!

82. Poi che più volte con singulti e pianti
 ebbe lo scritto suo letto e riletto,
 e, visto (error di semplicetti amanti!)
 la fallace cagion del suo sospetto
 — sospetto mai non concepito inanti —
 per medicar l'ingelosito petto
 prese la penna e a la risposta fisse
 gli occhi e la mente, e sospirando scrisse:

83. «Non senza molte lacrime e sospiri
 ho fra tante mie doglie, unica speme,
 veduto la cagion de' tuo martiri
 e perché il cor così s'affligge e geme:
 liev'è cagion, se non quanto i desiri
 lievi non son di chi pur ama e teme.
 Ma, s'ami, io t'amo; e non può lingua o carte
 raccontar del mio duol la minor parte.

84. A paragon del mio continuo pianto
 nulla la carta tu, ma ben molt'io
 di pianto aspersi, e via non men di quanto
 stat'è il mio duolo, impetüoso e rio!
 E ché tu d'infedel mi doni il vanto,
 ch'altro che te non voglio, idolo mio?
 Né mentre spirerà questa mia vita
 fia che m'impiaghi Amor d'altra ferita!

“What reason can there be to cause him pain?”
she says, and to her room withdraws her presence
to gather what the letter might contain;
and with that sweet and renewing remembrance
of her beloved lord, she can’t refrain –
with kisses she covers her lover’s folio,
then reads therein the reason for his woe.

81. Soon as she learned of all he would infer
in what he wrote (and what he left untold),
and of his indignation and his anger –
that his heart was by Jealousy controlled –
cold fear, martyring anguish to endure,
gripped her at heart and instantly took hold.
Those pages would have burned from sighs so searing,
had not her tears kept them from disappearing!

82. Repeatedly between choked sobs and tears,
having read what he wrote, and read again,
seeing (fault of lovers ingenuous!)
the flimsy and false cause for his suspicion
– suspicion never dreamed of previous –
to dress his jealous breast with medication,
she took a pen, focused on her retort
her eyes and mind and, with a sigh, she wrote:

83. ‘Not without copious tears and sighs sustaining,
have I, my only hope, through my travails
discerned the reason why you’re agonizing
and why your heart afflicts itself and wails:
a trifling cause, though ever far from trifling
the needs of one who loves, whom fear assails.
But, if you love, I love you; there’s no chance
that speech or page can tell my sufferance.

84. ‘Comparing tears, my own continual,
(none on the page from you – from me a rain
of tears shed there) and when far more I feel
such dolor from this quick and evil pain!
when you unfairly tout me as unfaithful,
while I want no one but you, idol mine?
As long as breath and life in me be found,
let not Love pierce me with another wound!

85. E se potere avrà la debil mano
 di sostener la penna onde dir possa
 il mio dolor, se ben sospiro invano,
 ond'ho per te già 'ncenerite l'ossa,
 mi sforzarò di farti noto e piano
 che non ho la mia fé spenta o rimossa
 e che sol te scolpito ho dentro al seno,
 non, qual credesti, il cavalier Fileno.

86. Florio, a te sol del cor dominio ho dato
 e solo a te rivolti i pensier' miei,
 né pensar che mai t'abbia abbandonato:
 ché, volendolo far, non lo potrei,
 nonché per un incognito e privato
 che Fortuna guidò, per casi rei
 e per far me dolente, in questa corte,
 come il ciel volle e la mia trista sorte!

87. Morta fuss'io, pria che patir sì grave
 pena che a torto sì m'affligge e duole!
 A torto sì: poiché tu sol la chiave
 hai del mio cor, che te sol brama e còle.
 E se Filen, con sue menzogne, grave
 riferito t'ha tanti suo vanti e fole
 e d'amor pegno ha dimostrato il velo,
 testimonio ne sian gli uomini e 'l cielo

88. come ciò fu contrario a la mia voglia,
 ché a la reina non potei disdire
 che si forzommi: onde da te si toglia
 sì vana occasiòn del tuo languire.
 Sì che lo spirto in questa frale spoglia
 fia d'altro stral: non mi potrà ferire
 Amore il sen (ché te sol ama e prezza)
 che degli strali de la tua bellezza.

89. Non ho perduto il senso e la ragione
 che la grandezza tua non veggia e 'l merto;
 e la bellezza senza paragone
 e 'l gran valor paragonato e certo.
 Né m'inganna d'amor la passione
 ch'io non l'apprezzi e nol conosca aperto;
 e falla in me ch'un amorosa cura

85. 'If strength support my hand, now grown so weak,
to hold a pen whereby I might convey
my deep-felt hurt (though in vain I may seek),
and since, for you, my bones yet burn away —
to set you straight, I'll force myself to speak:
not once did I let my faith wane or stray.
Just you alone I've chiseled in my breast,
and not Fileno, as you would suggest.

86. 'Over my heart, I ceded you sole reign,
Florio: my thoughts turned solely to you.
That I've abandoned you, never imagine —
I couldn't do so, if I wanted to:
not for a private cavalier unknown
whom Fortune led, with wicked ways to sow
and make me suffer, right here at this court,
as Heaven wills, and Fate, to my sad lot!

87. 'Would that I had first died, before so grave
a blow you dealt, wrongfully striking me!
Yes, wrongfully: as to my heart you have
(you, my heart's sole desire) the single key.
If false report to you Fileno gave
with lies, with his overblown, silly story —
if, as token of love, that veil he's shown —
may every man and woman and may Heaven

88. 'testify how, contrary to my will,
the queen, whose rule I could not disobey,
forced me to favor him: so take as nil
so trivial an act for your dismay.
As this, my soul, within my flesh so frail,
is spoil to dart diverse. Love cannot slay
my breast (that loves and prizes you alone),
lest with your beauty his darts he would hone.

89. 'I haven't lost my senses or my reason
that I don't recognize your princely merit,
your good looks that defy comparison,
your valor uncomparred, beyond dispute.
And neither am I hoodwinked by love's passion
that I don't prize your qualities outright.
Not so for me, that the pangs of amour

in cor di donna picciol tempo dura.

90. Benché Filen con amorosi sguardi
m'abbia scoperto il suo ferito core,
e con rotti sospir', con fiochi e tardi
pianti, quant'arda di cortese amore,
non però nel mio petto o faci o dardi
m'infiamaro e ferir di nuovo ardore,
ché quel conservo in me che nei primi anni
per te mi pose in amorosi affanni.

91. E quantunque egli il velo abbia ottenuto,
com'ei si vanta, e ti par torto espresso,
tutto da la tua madre è proceduto,
che così volle e comandommi espresso,
che di sciôr l'amor nostro ha provveduto
con tal sua arte, e le sarà sucâcnesso;
cruda ell'è, ché tradimmi, e seco poi
tu, che pur credi a' tradimenti suoi!

92. È questo dunque il premio e la mercede
de l'amor mio leal, sincero e puro?
che tu stia in dubbio, ohimè, de la mia fede,
che macchiar possa di pensiero impuro?
Ben sallo il ciel, dacché movesti il piede
da me: ché 'l viver mio fu lasso e duro,
e senza cor restai! Tu te l' portasti
quando al patir, crudel, mi abbandonasti!

93. Sallo il ciel che da me non è restato:
ché t'avrei con la vita ancor seguito,
come col core afflitto e addolorato,
che teco venne e non se ne è partito!
Ma tu non hai, che io venga, procurato;
anzi, in ogni promessa a me mentito,
poiché al partir, su la real tua fede,
dicesti a me voltar sùbito il piede!

94. Tu forse, ohimè, tu forse abbandonata
per altra m'hai, di me più vaga e bella!
E me cerchi imputar qual donna ingrata,
perch'io non biasmi in te fiamma novella!
Ma voglio esser di te più dolce e grata,

in woman's heart but paltry time endure.

90. 'Although Fileno with amorous glances
his wounded heart to me he did disclose,
and with cleft sighs, with tears and hoarse preponderance,
declaimed how he, with courtly love, so glows —
no torch or dart in my breast made advances
its flame to fan, new ardor to impose —
for I conserve within the one borne first
for you, whence in Love's labors I was thrust.

91. 'Though of the veil Fileno has possession
and sews for you a tale with crooked thread,
your mother put the whole affair in motion,
commanding me to do just as she said.
To unravel our love she made provision
and wove with craft, and perhaps profited.
So cruel is she! By her I was betrayed,
and by you, too, falling for traps she laid!

92. 'Is this the thanks and mercy I receive —
that of my faith you are, alas, in doubt?
and that my pure, sincere and loyal love
you stain with a purely salacious thought?
Heaven well sees that when you sought your leave
from me, my life turned hard, for I without
a heart remained! You plucked it from my person
when you abandoned me to pain, cruel one!

93. 'My heart stayed not with me, as Heaven knows.
My life in tow, I'd have gone straightaway,
one with my heart, surrendered unto sorrows
yet there with you, from where it did not stray!
But no plan for my fare did you propose,
instead forsaking each oath from the day
you disappeared, though in true faith you'd sworn,
promising me to make a swift return!

94. 'Maybe, poor me, maybe I'm left behind
for fairer damsel or comelier dame!
By calling me ungrateful you then find
(afire anew) a means to skirt my blame!
But I'll be sweeter to you and more kind —

né presumer in te nova facella:
per costante t'acchetto, e tu l'amore
credi costante ancor di Biancofiore!

95. Io sarò sempre tua fino a la morte:
tu sarai la mia speme e 'l mio desire;
per signor, per amante e per consorte
ti voglio e teco vivere e morire!
Però lascia il dolor tenace e forte
e sgombra dal tuo petto ogni martire;
né faccia il ferro in te sì cruda opra
che d'eterna ignominia ti ricopra!

96. E se pure avverrà che con la spada
tu ti dia morte, io per uscir d'impaccio,
acciò che teco viva e teco cada,
appenderommi al cinto onde m'allaccio!
Prendi pur qual tu vuoi dubbiosa strada:
se spegne 'l ferro te, me spegne il laccio;
e fia scritto nel marmo: "Ancor mi glorio
morta ch'amai sol fedelmente Florio"!».

97. Seguia, ma da le lacrime impedita,
ch'in molta copia da' begli occhi versa,
languida si rimase e sbigottita
da quel ch'esser solea tutta dimessa.
Mancar si sente in tal dolor la vita
e la faccia ha tutta di pianto aspersa.
Chiusa la carta a con sagace modo
insieme colligò la cera e 'l nodo.

98. Poiché sì asciutte ha le purpuree labbia,
con le lacrime sue la damigella
bagnò la gemma acciò ch'a prender abbia
l'imgo del sigillo altera e bella.
Indi, turbata d'amorosa rabbia,
a riportar la sua risposta appella
il nunzio, che devoto a lei s'inchina,
e qual da corda stral ratto camina.

I won't presume you're lit by a new flame.
Constant I know you; know, too, that a love
constant for you does Biancofiore have!

95. 'T'll be yours always, till death do us part:
you'll ever be my hope and my desire
as lord, as lover, as my only consort.
To live and die with you do I aspire!
So set your strong, tenacious hurt apart
and from your heart stamp out the martyr's pyre.
Let not that crude steel blade to you lay claim
and cover you with an eternal shame!

96. 'But if you end your life with sword of steel,
(to exit the entanglement I'm seeing,
and so with you I live and with you fall),
I'll string myself up by my belt and hang!
Go follow any dubious path you will:
if you choose steel, the noose is my undoing,
my marble writ: *"Gone, yet ever my glory
that I in faith loved none but Florio!"*

97. She'd have said more, but by weeping impeded,
in copious droplets shed from her bright eyes,
so downcast and discouraged and so languid
was she, unlike herself, her normal ways.
So pained, she felt that life itself receded,
her face wholly awash in tearful sprays.
Her pages folded, she expertly brought
together and entwined the wax and knot.

98. Those crimson lips now parched from such distress,
with her plentiful tears did she, the damsel,
moisten the gem in order to impress
her image, lovely, proud, upon the seal.
Then, perturbed by an anger amorous,
to carry back her answer does she call
the messenger. Devoted, bowing low,
off like an arrow shot straight does he go.

Jaufré Rudel's *Amor de lonh* in dialetto molisano

Traduzione di Giose Rimanelli

Giose Rimanelli è Professore Emerito d'Italiano e Letteratura Comparata all'Università di Stato di New York (SUNY), ad Albany. Ha pubblicato diversi romanzi, narrative di viaggi e racconti sia in italiano che in inglese, tra i quali *Tiro al piccione* (1953, ristampa 1991), *Peccato originale* (1954), *Biglietto di terza* (1958, ristampa 1999), *Una posizione sociale* (1959, ristampa col titolo *La stanza grande*, 1996), *Graffiti* (1977), *Molise Molise* (1979), *Il tempo nascosto tra le righe* (1986), *Detroit Blues* (1996), e i romanzi in inglese *Benedetta in Guysterland* (1993, premio American Book Award, 1994), *Accademia* (1997), *Il paese di Nonsisadove* (2001 - romanzo telematico, websites.com/requiesmaster.html).

All'attività narrativa ha unito quella della poesia, teatro, giornalismo e critica letteraria, in italiano e in inglese. Di particolare interesse sono le cronache letterarie *Il mestiere del furbo* (1959), *Tè in Casa Picasso* (1961), *Il corno francese* (1962), *Lares* (1962), *Modern Canadian Stories* (1996), *Tragica America* (1968), *Italian Literature: Roots & Branches* (1976), *Dirige me Domine, Deus meus* (1996), *Discorso con l'altro* (2000, con Enrico Cestari), *Familia. Memoria dell'Emigrazione* (2000).

I suoi libri di poesia includono *Carmina blabla* (1967), *Monaci d'amore medievali* (1967), *Poems Make Pictures Pictures Make Poems* (1971), *Arcano* (1990), *Moliseide* (1990, 1992), *Alien Cantica* (1995), *I Rascènije* (1996), *Da G. a G.: 101 sonnetti* (1996, con Luigi Fontanella), *Moliseide and Other Poems* (1998), *Sonetti per Joseph* (1998), *Viamerica/Gli occhi* (1999, con Achille Serrao), *Jazzymood* (2000).

Prefazione

Spesso una scelta di vita verso determinate discipline di studio è capricciosa o anche casuale: ma nutrita da simpatia e dedizione potrebbe diventare essenza di vita.

I monaci latini del medioevo mi attrassero fin da bambino, e i poeti d'amore provenzali ancor prima di loro, sui banchi delle elementari a Casacalenda, Molise. Frequentavo il terzo anno con la maestra D'Attilio, cercando di memorizzare la mini-lirica di Carducci *Pianto antico*, ma corsi a una nota dell'antologia e lessi un giudizio sul concetto di "sentimento" interpretato come "amore", e a questo ne era legato uno dello stesso poeta, Giosué Carducci. Non ne capii molto, ma tre parole strane, belle, incomprensibili mi affascinarono: "*amor de lonh*", amor lontano, del poeta provenzale Jaufré Rudel, vissuto nel secondo terzo del XII secolo.

Alcuni anni più tardi, nel seminario dove studiavo, misi le mani su alcuni libri ¹ francesi e su uno dal titolo *Les Poésies de Jaufré Rudel* di A. Jeanroy (Paris, 1924), attraverso il quale credetti di capire che "*amor de lonh*" era il tema centrale delle canzoni del trovatore Jaufré Rudel, principe di Blaia in riva alla Gironda e crociato (in quella del 1148) il quale, innamorato della contessa di Tripoli secondo la *Vita*, per averne udito in giro nome e bellezza, pur senza averla mai vista si mise in barca per raggiungerla, ma durante il viaggio si ammalò, per infine morire nelle braccia di quella gran dama la quale, per onorarne la virtù, lo fece seppellire nel Tempio mentre lei, quello stesso giorno, decise di prendere il velo di monaca.²

Lessi anche, più tardi, che "*amor de lonh*" non propriamente riguarda amore per una donna di carne ed ossa ma per la Vergine Maria, mentre il tema del "viaggio" sarebbe allegoria della Terra Santa. Mario Casella, con un suo libro del 1948 pubblicato a Firenze sulle liriche di Jaufré è del parere che il poeta, deluso dell'amore umano è in cerca dell'amore divino. Tramite documenti del 1160 e 1164, Casella ritiene anche che Jaufré sia stato fratello di Gerardo II di Blaia, figlio di Jaufré Rudel I.

Più tardi ancora lessi altri maestri: Leo Spitzer, Martin de Riquer, T.G. Bergin, Salvatore Battaglia e, ultimamente, Robert Lafont. T.G. Bergin, del quale fui collega alla Yale University durante gli anni accademici 1961-63 restandone per amicizia sempre

associato, quanto Spitzer crede che i versi di Jaufré esemplificano un “paradosso amoroso”: il desiderio di possedere e allo stesso tempo venerare.

Robert Lafont, che ribalta varie interpretazioni, non a torto assume che questa bella storia d’amore e morte narrata con semplicità dall’anonimo biografo della *Vita* (scritta un secolo dopo, 1243) abbia nutrito la fantasticheria per via anche della sua grande semplicità, “densa di risonanze animistiche, archetipica dei ‘viaggi’ della psiche,”³

Le poesie d’amore (cantate) di Jaufré dunque, assai belle anche dal punto di vista formale, per noi e il Lafont “propongono il mistero dell’amore dell’assente e la fabula della passione che attraversa lo spazio.” Ma non esclude l’allucinato realismo del desiderio carnale, suggerito con una certa precisione nella seconda stanza del *Canso I*, quando il poeta si lamenta di esser privato “*d’amor doussana / dins vergier o part cortina,*” di dolce amore nel giardino (verziere) o dietro la tenda (cortina) con la donna amata.

L’occitanico è lingua adulta, raffinata dal canto e oltretutto dall’esperienza di corte, tornei e guerre. Al confronto, il mio dialetto è rimasto ruvido, precario, primitivo ed essenziale, con parole contate e sempre ripetute come la vita sudata di terra e fatica che lo ha prodotto. Non è adeguato a tradurre o farsi tradurre a meno che non si ricorra a trasparenze di linguaggio: un filtro direi di influenze linguistiche provenienti dall’altrove del linguaggio stesso che, intanto, smussa in qualche modo la coatta esistenza del suo essere secco, nudo di lessicale gioia e di quella stessa parola, *gioia*. Che fatica usarlo, dunque, specie con questa poesia al cui centro c’è proprio il “famoso *jòi*, in cui si definisce l’esaltazione animistica dell’amore felice, ma anche semplicemente dell’amore, l’esaltazione universale della vita nel suo ciclo stagionale e la qualità, morale e psichica, di chi ama o ispira l’amore.”⁴

E tuttavia usarlo, anche in traduzione, è come creare di nuovo, che è la vera gioia!

L’opera sopravvissuta di Jaufré Rudel si riduce a sei canzoni, forse sette, e a quattro melodie. Il Lafont, che basa il suo studio sul testo manoscritto C della Biblioteca Nazionale di Parigi, che io seguo, ne fa una panoramica: le liriche I, V, e VII formerebbero un insieme, che è quello della “dama lontana,” mentre i componimenti II, III, IV e VI modellano l’arte del *trobar*; la canzone VI, anzi, sarebbe

addirittura una specie di codice di "arte poetica."

Io ho preferito dedicare la mia attenzione alle liriche I, V, e VII, e attenermi (se non proprio alla rima che ricorre nelle strofe di sette o otto versi delle canzoni per meglio dar risalto alla musica,) a una forma sintattica che potesse dare compattezza al verso: ogni verso infatti - sia in questa mia versione in dialetto che in quella combaciante in lingua - è nonosillabica in I, e decasillabica in V e VII.

G.R.

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NOTE

1 Sul soggetto, il primo libro che apersi fu un *Manuale per l'avviamento agli studi provenzali* di Vincenzo Crescini (Milano, 1926), che mi invogliò a curiosare per altri sullo stesso soggetto.

2 Vida: "...et enaissi el moric entre sos bratz. Et ella lo fetz a gran honor sepeillir en la maison del Temple; e poi en aqel dia ella se rendet monga, per la dolor qe ella ac de la soa mort."

3 Jaufré Rudel, *Liriche*. A cura di Robert Lafont. Casa Editrice Le Lettere, Firenze 1992, p. 10.

4 Ibid., p. 24.

*Quan lo rius de la fontana
s'esclarzís, si cum far sòl,
e par la flors aigentina
e'l rossinholet el ram
vòlf e refranh ez aplana
son dous chantar e l'afina
be'ys dregz q'ieu lo mieu refranha.*

Quan lo rius de la fontana si compone di cinque stanze di sette versi di sette sillabe, con cadenze rimarie in I-II *abcdace*, e III-VI *cdabcae* (la V è apocrafa, ma il Prof. Lafont l'ha integrata nel suo ottimo studio, e per buone ragioni - tematiche - la mia lettura avalla la sua scelta.)

Cuànn' ù ríje da fónde è chiàre,
cóm'è sèmbe, e à róse di ròcchie
spónde e dà ràmbelélle ù ciéll
cànde chi llì mènere sije
- mó pàzzèjànne e mó fisc_chènne,
mó cu chiànde e mó carezzànne -
jusc_t'è che me revéle i mije.

Quando il ruscello della fonte è chiaro,
com'è sempre, e la rosa dei cespugli
spunta e dal rametto l'uccello
canta con le maniere sue
- ora giocando e ora fischiando,
ora col pianto e la carezza -
è giusto che mi riveda le mie.

Amor de terra lonhdana
per vos tot lo còr mi dòl,
e no'n puesc trobar mezina
si non al vòstre reclam
ab maltrait d'amor doussana
dins vergier o part cortina
ab dezirada compahna.

Èmóre de tèrre lendàne
 pe vùje sc_tù córe me dóle,
 e nèn pòzze trèvà cuènzuoéle
 se nèn córre à ù rèchiàme tije
 cà uèlje d'èmóre sc_trèfíne
 ngòpp' à jèreve o èrrét' à ténde
è uèníte cà chèmbàgne mìje.

Amore di terra lontana
 per voi tutto il cuore mi duole,
 e non posso trovar consolo
 se non corro al vostro richiamo
 con voglia di amore strafino
 sull'erba o dietro la tendina
 insieme alla compagna amata.

Alcune voci dialettali presentano varianti orali, applicabili a discrezione, e questo è il caso del sostantivo maschile “desiderio” nelle sue due forme: “uèlje” e “(g)uélíje”. Io mi avvalgo per convalida e guida del *Vocabolario ragionato del dialetto di Casacalenda*, di Antonio Vincelli, Edizioni Enne, Campobasso, 1991.

3.

*Pus tot jorn me'n falh aizina,
no'm meravilh si n'ai fam,
quar anc génsen crestiana
no fo, ni Dieus non o vòl,
juzia ni sarrazina.
Ben es selh paguatz de mana,
qui de s'amor ren guazanha*

E seccóme ne sènd' à mèngànze,
n' è mèrèviglie se m' èmbóche:
ngè sc_ tâte màje crisc_ tijàne
cchiù bbèlle, né Ddije ù velésse,
né ggedée e né sarrécíne.
Chi màne chiéne è chèmbènzàte
chi ze guèdàgne cuíll' èmóre.

Siccome ne sento la mancanza,
non è stranezza che la brami:
non c' è mai stata una cristiana
più bella, né Dio lo vorrebbe,
né giudea e né saracena.
A mani piene è compensato
chi si guadagna quell' amore.

Poems by Daniela Gioseffi

Translated into Italian by Ned Conдини

Daniela Gioseffi is an American Book Award winning author of 16 books of poetry and prose. She has presented her poetry from Columbia and Princeton to Oxford, Venice and Barcelona, and for NPR, NYC and BBC Radio. She's been interviewed on the Poet & The Poem radio show of The Library of Congress, sponsored by the N.E.A. Among the first Italian names to be widely published in the mainstream, her *Women on War; International Writings*, (Feminist Press, CUNY) is a women's studies classic in-print for over 25 years. Her compendium, *On Prejudice: A Global Perspective* (Anchor/Doubleday) won a World Peace Award at the U.N., 1993. Her verse was etched in marble on a wall of PENN Station, 2002, with that of Walt Whitman and William Carlos Williams. She's won the John Ciardi Award for Lifetime Achievement in Poetry, and the OSIA NY State Literary Award. Her 6th volume of poetry, *Blood Autumn, Autunno di sangue*, contains poems that appeared in *The Paris Review*, *The Nation*, *Chelsea*, *Poetry East*, *YIP Review*, and *Prairie Schooner*. Her fiction appears in *Stories of the American Experience*, Oxford U. Press. Also a novelist and literary critic, she founded and directs the only poetry prize for bilingual book publication for Italian American poets with Italian poet, Alfredo dePalchi. She edits <http://www.PoetsUSA.com> which included the website <http://www.ItalianAmericanWriters.com/>. Her newest book is titled *Pioneering Italian American Culture; Escaping la Vita della Cucina, Essays, Reviews, Interviews by and about Daniela Gioseffi* with an Introduction and Notes by Angelina Oberdan, VIA Folios, 2013.

Ned Conдини is a native-born Italian who has lived in the United States for many years, a fact that makes him thoroughly bi-lingual. He's a writer, translator, and literary critic, who won the prestigious PEN/Poggioli Award for his versions of poet Mario Luzi (New York, 1986), and the Bordighera Translation Prize for his rendering of Jane Tassi's *Andsongsonglessness* (Bordighera Press, 2002). Short stories and poems of his have appeared in

Translation, New York, *The Mississippi Review*, *Prairie Schooner*, *The Partisan Review*, *Mid-American Review*, *Negative Capability*, *Chelsea Review*, *YIP Review* (Yale), *The Village Voice* (New York) and *The Litchfield Review* (Connecticut). He has translated Ben Jonson's plays and adapted *The Malcontent*, by John Marston. Other publications include *Malcolm X*, a play; *Witches' Sabbath*, a short play; and the poetry chapbooks *Rimbaud in Umbria*, Multigraf, Venice, 1994, and *quartettsatz*, VIA Folios, Purdue University, W. Lafayette, Indiana, 1996. In November 2002 he placed first in the Winning Writers War Poetry Contest, New York. In October 2004 Chelsea Editions published his selection of Giorgio Caproni's poetic works, *The Earth's Wall*. For the MLA, New York, 2008, Conдини published an anthology of Modern and Contemporary Italian Poetry, *Yet Fire Is All*, in bilingual edition.

My Venus Flytrap Is Dying

because it frightens me.
 I've tried to remember to water it.
 I keep saying I'll buy it a new pot,
 furnish it with fresh earth.
 After all, it is a plant and I do love
 greenery. But it's carnivorous,
 ingesting raw meat, living
 insects, engulfing them in heart-
 shaped leaves. Other plants wait
 for death to give flesh to roots.
 I resolve to become a vegetarian.
 I've loved and envied plants
 for their peacefulness,
 their quiet conversion of the sun,
 that first all contingent link
 between solar energy and animal.
 But this Venus Fly Trap
 is too much for me.
 It will have to die
 tossed into the waste can
 with the bright red lipstick,
 the blood red nail polish.
 I no longer wear.

This Venus Fly Trap doesn't
 photosynthesize peacefully.
 It's trying to become an animal
 and I
 trying so hard to be a tree
 can't bear it.

Returning from Paradise We Stop at a Carnival

and view the "freaks"
 watching us, and offer a smile
 to the snake charmer. She nods at us
 knowing we are lovers returning from paradise.

At night, just before dawn of the last day

La mia dionea sta morendo

perché mi fa paura.
Ho cercato di ricordare di darle acqua.
Continuo a dire che le comprerò un vaso nuovo,
lo colmerò di terra fresca.
Dopo tutto è una pianta e a me piace il verde.
Ma è carnivora, ingoia
carne cruda, insetti vivi, intombandoli
in foglie a forma di cuore. Altre piante aspettano
che la morte dia polpa alle radici.
Propendo a farmi vegetariana.
Ho amato e invidiato le piante
per la loro tranquillità,
la loro quieta metamorfosi del sole,
quel primo tutto insospettato aggancio
di energia solare e animale.
Ma questa dionea
è troppo per me.
Dovrà morire gettata
nel contenitore d'immondizie
col rossetto rosso fiammante,
lo smalto rosso sangue per le unghie
che non uso più.

Questa dionea non fotosintetizza
in pace.
Sta cercando di diventare un animale
e io
che cerco tanto di essere un albero
non lo sopporto.

Tornando dal paradiso ci fermiamo al carnevale

per vedere i "grotteschi"
che guardano noi, e offrire un sorriso
all'incantatrice di serpenti. Ci accenna sapendo
che siamo amanti che tornano dal paradiso.

Di notte, poco prima dell'alba dell'ultimo giorno

of an old year, we have a common nightmare.
Each falls asleep and wakes alone
in a dream on a cold shore
far from home, without shelter from wind, sun
dark, cold, heat.

I feel as a tiny breathing thing alone in a vast night
no hand anywhere to hold mine. I call to you, friend,
brother, lover, husband, but you can't answer
out of your body, alone in your dream crying for friend,
sister, lover wife!

We wake into life
sure of dying under the frozen sky
and mute stars, glistening with winter light.

We have returned from paradise and visited a carnival
many times again, to view the "freaks" watching us
and smile at the knowing snake charmer.

Sometimes, as we look at the pain in the other's eyes
each recalls the nightmare had separately,
but we do not speak of it. We hold hands into new
[years,
knowing all new years turn old, and listen to the night,
snow creaking in mounds, and the air iced from the
[Northwind

For the sake of the other,
we do not say
how each together
is alone
returning from paradise.

The Ruby Throated Hummingbirds Are Gone

They've flown south,
and one great egret fishes the pond
as broad-winged hawks begin their migrations –
kenneling on thermal currents of wind
off above yellowing mountains.

di un anno passato, abbiamo un incubo.
Ciascuno si addormenta e si sveglia solo
in sogno su una spiaggia fredda
lontano da casa, senza riparo da vento, sole,
buio, freddo, calore.

Mi sento un minuscolo oggetto che respira solo in una notte
[immensa
da nessuna parte una mano a tenere la mia. Ti chiamo,
[amico,
fratello, amante, marito, ma tu non puoi uscire in risposta
dal tuo corpo, solo nel tuo sogno in pianto per l'amica,
sorella, amante, moglie!

Ci destiamo alla vita
sicuri di morire sotto il gelido cielo
e stelle mute, che brillano di luce invernale.

Siamo tornati dal paradiso e abbiamo visitato un carnevale
molte volte ancora, per vedere i "grotteschi" guardarci
e sorridere alla saputa incantatrice di serpenti.

Talvolta, mentre scorgiamo la pena negli occhi dell'altro
riandiamo all'incubo che avemmo entrambi,
ma non ne parliamo. Ci teniamo le mani verso anni nuovi,
sapendo che tutti i nuovi anni invecchiano, e ascoltiamo la
[notte,
la neve che cricchia in cumuli, e l'aria ghiacciata dalla
[tramontana.

Per amore dell'altro non diciamo
come ciascuno insieme
è solo
quando ritorna dal paradiso.

I colibrì dalla gola rubino se ne sono andati

Sono volati a sud,
e una magnifica egretta pesca nello stagno
mentre falchi dalle grandi ali iniziano le migrazioni –
portati da correnti termali
su per monti che si stanno indorando.

Ora, la serpentina malerba fiorisce lungo il sentiero e soffoca
astri porpora e bianchi. Alcune foglie sanguinanti
cadono sul verde che langue. L'edera velenosa
si fa rossa in ammonimento.

Mia madre novantenne litiga ancora
con mio padre, morto da vent'anni.
Il loro odio rimbomba in una retrostanza
della mia testa, sonagliando ricordi
di un'infanzia solitaria.

Il loro reciproco disgusto
colora tutti i miei giorni. Io amavo lui
perché lui amava me più di tutti, ma io
sembro tutta lei. Il mio volto e il mio spirito
fanno a pugni.
Sono la figlia dell'odio.

Una malerba spunta
da acquatiche profondità,
non coltivata,
fiori, bianchi
e porpora, fioriscono
persino in questi giorni
di foglie morenti.

Al di là dell'inverno,
nessuno si
tormenta.

Sonetti americani per mio padre

— per Donato Gioseffi: 1906-1981 scritti nello studio di
Edna St. Vincent Millay Steepletop, N.Y., Nov.1981

1.

Moristi di primavera, padre, e adesso l'autunno muore.
Vivido di compiuta giovinezza, opacato dal tempo,
prugne di affetto gocciavano dai tuoi occhi rosse essenze,
sangue emorragiato in polle a calmare la tua trepida mente.
A quarant'anni oggi salgo Point Pinnacle

pensando a te che mi hai lasciata per sempre.
In questi boschi di Millay, novembrini, rugginosi,
sfoggio il tuo vecchio cappello, caro patriarca Italiano,
per vedere se posso pensarti fuori della tua tomba americana
a cantare con me la tua mai scritta canzone.
Col tuo spirito reco la tua poesia fatta muta.
Mi tolgo il tuo vecchio cappello e lo annuso
per odorare il sudore che esala, ancora vivo.

2.

Lavoravi come un mulo, il maggiore di troppi figli, un
[magrolino
in zuava frusta che negli Anni Ruggenti zoppicava
su per i gradini della city, di porta in porta con carichi
di giornali del mattino e serali, ciascuno contato
un misero soldo sudato per mantenere la famiglia.
Ti logorasti il cuore e le soles. A quarant'anni, non salendo
colli d'autunno come me, fosti colpito da malattia ai
[polmoni,
immobilizzato dalla morfina, sentendo il tuo respiro
striderti in gola come chiavi alle porte dell'inferno.
Il tuo corpo fu sempre un briccone impastoante il tuo
[volere di maschio.
Mi riempisti di orgoglio e tenacia di immigrante. Schiavo
di piet  filiale, tessitore dei nostri sogni, non potevi aver
[agio
di cantare. E va bene. Hai concluso, adempiuto nel canto
[solo in me.
Se i tuoi sogni sono miei, vivi di nuovo, respira e esisti in
[me.

3.

Tu non capisti mai la trama americana.
Il tuo sogno ferito, padre, non guarir  mai
in me, il tuo spirito per sempre si lamenta
dal mio respiro, geme di memorie d'infanzia,
sospira in te per la mia mortalit 
che infine accetto pi  completamente che mai
di quando si rideva insieme
e pareva che non avremmo mai smesso –
anche se sapevamo tutto il tempo

you would die much sooner than I
 who am your spirit come from you.
 Remember, "a father lost, lost his!" you told us,
 preparing us with Shakespearean quotation
 and operatic feeling for your inevitable death.

4.

Good night, go gently, tired immigrant father
 full of pride and propriety. We, your
 three daughters, all grew
 to be healthier, stronger, more American than you.
 Sensitive father, I offer you this toast,
 "I've never known a braver man!" No empty boast.
 The wound that will not heal in me
 is the ache of dead sensibility.
 Once full of history, philosophy, poetry,
 physics, astronomy, your bright, high-flying psyche
 is now dispersed, set free from your tormented body,
 but the theme you offered, often forlorn,
 sheer luminescent soul, glistened with enough light
 to carry us all full-grown.

Unfinished Autobiography for My Daughter (written 1994, during the first Gulf War)

I was born in 1941. The sky was falling.
 The chairs of state were arranging themselves
 in military "isms" of mass murder. I learned
 to speak by holding an "apple," rolling its crimson
 shine in baby fingers, because my mother's smile
 offered a red toy to the table of my highchair
 in that Newark kitchen of new mornings, bright
 leaves at frosty windows just met for the first
 time: autumn sun light, warm hands.

"God bless Mommy! God bless Daddy!
 God bless spaghetti!" I chortled up
 to big people around my crib. When
 they laughed, I learned I had a pen
 for a tongue that could please.

che tu saresti morto molto prima di me
che sono il tuo spirito proveniente da te.
Ricorda, "un padre perso, perse il suo!" ci dicevi,
preparandoci, con citazioni da Shakespeare
e magia operatica, alla tua inevitabile morte.

4.

Buona notte, viaggia remissivo, stanco padre immigrante
pieno di correttezza e orgoglio. Noi, le tue
tre figlie, crescemmo tutte
più sane, più forti, più americane di te.
Padre vulnerabile, ti offro questo brindisi, "Non ho mai
conosciuto un uomo più coraggioso!" Non futile vanto.
La ferita che in me non si chiude
è la pena di una sensibilità svanita.
Ricca una volta di storia, filosofia, poesia, fisica,
astronomia, la tua psiche-chiarore in volo spiegato
è ora scomparsa, liberata dai tormenti del corpo,
ma il tema che tu porgesti, spesso disperato,
anima puro raggio, baluginava con luce sufficiente
per sospingerci a piena maturità.

Autobiografia incompiuta per mia figlia (scritta nel 1994, durante la prima Guerra del Golfo)

Nacqui nel 1941. Il cielo stava precipitando.
I capi di stato si schieravano nei militari
'ismi' dell'omicidio in massa. Imparai
a parlare tenendo una 'mela,' rigirando il suo luore cremisi
nelle mie dita di neonata, perché il sorriso di mia madre
era un giocattolo rosso alla mensa del mio seggiolone
in quella cucina a Newark di freschi mattini, di foglie
vivaci a finestre brinate viste per la prima volta:
luce solare d'autunno, mani calde.

"Dio benedica Mamma! Dio benedica Papà!
Dio benedica la pasta!" mugugnavo a grosse
persone attorno alla culla. Quando risero
seppi che per lingua avevo
una penna che dava piacere.

Meantime, bombs were blitzing:
 Jewish, Polish, Romany, homosexual... human
 flesh sizzled in Hitler's ovens; lampshades of skin,
 gold teeth manufactured into wedding rings.

Are you wearing one? Has your gold
 ring come from a mother's mouth
 filled with poisoned gas in the chamber
 where menstrual blood stained her thighs
 bereft of clothes as she held her child
 to her breasts. "Empathy"

is my favorite word. Your peasant grandmother –
 war orphaned – your lame Italian grandfather,
 "greenhorn guinea" they called him. "Guinea gimp!"
 they shouted as he sold newspapers
 for the state "Education of the Poet"
 he gave to me, raising

me in the ghetto of Newark to speak good English
 where the worse horror then was when
 a boy named Herby chased me down the alley,
 cornering me – sticking his tongue in my mouth,
 choking me with belligerent sex, as others laughed:

"Herby *French*-kissed Daniela!" A grand joke
 of our ghetto's kids. Nothing more frightening

happened until in 1961, I helped
 to integrate WSLA-TV – a white journalist
 on an all Black gospel show, announcing "Freedom
 Rides" and "Sit-ins" – not out of bravery,
 but idealistic naivete. Twenty and virginal when
 raped one midnight in a jail cell by an angry
 Klansman, Deputy Sheriff of Montgomery County,
 Alabama – only law for miles around Selma.

Somewhere, in between then and then,
 I met a book full of rotting corpses,
 of mutilated bodies on battlefields
 or in prison camps, agonized faces distorted
 by screams, breasts impaled on bayonets,
 and all my orgasms, ever since, have been cries

Nel contempo, improvvisi grappoli di bombe:
Ebreo, Polacco, Romania, omosessuale... carne umana
sfrigolava nei forni hitleriani; paralumi di pelle,
denti d'oro fusi in anelli matrimoniali.

Ne porti uno? Il tuo anello d'oro
è venuto dalla bocca di una madre
riempita di gas nello stanzone
dove sangue menstruale le macchiava le cosce
nude mentre stringeva un bambino
al seno? "Empatía" è la mia

parola favorita. Tua nonna contadina —
orfana di guerra — tuo nonno italiano zoppo,
"grinone ghinni" lo chiamavano. "Ghinni gambadilegno!"
gridavano mentre vendeva giornali
per lo stato. A me diede
"L'Istruzione del Poeta,"
allevandomi, per parlare giusto inglese, nel ghetto di
[Newark
dove l'esperienza più orribile fu quando un ragazzo
chiamato Herbie mi rincorse per un vicolo,
e mi bloccò — infilandomi la lingua in bocca,
soffocandomi di sesso brutale, mentre altri sghignazzavano:
"Herby ha baciato Daniela alla francese!" Roba da spanciarsi
per i boys del ghetto. Niente di più drammatico

accadde fino al 1961, quando fui strumento
nell'integrazione della WSLA-TV — una giornalista bianca
in uno spettacolo tutto di Battisti negri, promulgando
"Freedom Rides" e "Sit-ins" non per coraggio
ma idealistica ingenuità. Ventenne e vergine fui stuprata
una mezzanotte in una cella di prigionia da un rabido
Klansman, il vice sceriffo della Contea Montgomery,
Alabama — unica legge per miglia nei dintorni di Selma.

Da qualche parte, tra un trascorso e l'altro,
m'imbattei in un libro pieno di salme in putrefazione,
di corpi mutilati su campi di battaglia
o in campi di prigionia, volti suppliziati distorti
dalle urla, mammelle impalate su baionette,
e tutti i miei orgasmi, da allora, sono stati grida
di lasciarmi libera da bocche spalancate in teschi

of letting go of gaping mouths in skulls robbed
of gold-filled teeth.

I'm a "Jersey girl" whose mother was part Polish
war orphan, part Jew, whose father was a Greek
Albanian Italian immigrant — daughter of a lame
"guinea gimp," who was a poet dying
of the word "empathy." He carried it on his back
and taught me Shakespeare's English.
He said I was too pretty for my own good
and read me Yeats's prayer for his daughter,
but now, menopausal insomniac, I don't care
about looks. My greatest moment of joy came
in a near death — not when jailed by the Klans-
man, but when giving birth to you
who came by emergency Cesarean, bright

with hope, lovely daughter;
do you hear the ambulance of guilt,
grieving in your near death birth, the re-
birth of your mother, your moment of almost not
being new life greeting me in your eyes, my eyes
peering back at me, questioning, after the fever
[subsided.

Here's your crimson apple of being, Daughter,
amidst new wars and books always repeating
[themselves
like autumn where death turns to beauty in windy sighs
of dying leaves singing hypocritical histories —
hand by reborn hand murdered and bleached to bones
or held warm or cold. Old, I can't sleep
well anymore. I grow fat eating love, I remember thrills
of my childhood autumns when the maples sang with
[sparrows
outside windows and the kitchen was warm as apples
turned crimson in pale hands — sanguine color, simply
being before I found the book of corpses
from slave ships, battlefields, ovens,

Now, I take you, Daughter,
to the woods to meet the scarlet maples,
feed the wild deer, crush the leaves

derubati di denti foderati d'oro.

Sono una ragazza del Jersey la cui madre era in parte orfana di guerra polacca, parte ebrea, il cui padre era immigrante greco albanese italiano — figlia di uno zoppo “grinone gambadilegno,” che era un poeta che moriva della parola “identificazione.” La portava sulla schiena e mi insegnò l'inglese di Shakespeare.

Disse che ero troppo graziosa per essere felice e mi lesse la preghiera di Yeats per sua figlia, ma ora, insonne per menopausa, non m'importa del mio aspetto. Il più bel momento di gioia arrivò quando rischiavi la vita — non sbattuta in cella dall'uomo del KKK, ma partorendo te, che venisti tramite taglio cesareo d'emergenza, luminosa di speranza, dolcissima figlia; senti l'ambulanza della colpa che si duole della tua nascita presso la morte, la rinascita di tua madre, il tuo momento di quasi non essere nuova vita salutante me nei tuoi occhi, occhi miei che mi riguardavano sorpresi, passata la febbre.

Eccoti la mela cremisi dell'essere, Figlia, nel mezzo di nuove guerre e libri che sempre si ripetono come l'autunno dove la morte si muta in bellezza nei sospiri

[ventosi

di foglie morenti che cantano storie ipocrite —
mano da mano rinata uccisa e sbiancata in ossa
o tenuta calda o fredda. Anziana, non dormo più bene.
Ingrasso mangiando amore, ricordo gioie di autunni
della mia infanzia quando gli aceri risuonavano di passeri
fuori dalle finestre e la cucina era calda come mele
mutate cremisi in mani pallide — colore sanguigno,

[null'altro, vita

prima che trovassi il libro di salme
di schiavi in velieri, campi di battaglia, forni,

Adesso, ti porto, Figlia, nei boschi
a incontrare gli aceri scarlatti, a dar da mangiare
ai daini selvatici, a schiacciare foglie
e ghiande coi piedi, a danzare

al chiaro di luna: tua madre non è un'orfana,
com'era la sua, tuo padre non è zoppo come il mio —
ma la Terra, Nostra Madre, e tutte le Sue creature vor-
ticano in nuvole di gas, immondizia, cupidigia la lingua
dell'oppressione: "scimmia, mangiapatate, dego, briacone, giu-
da, faccia gialla, crucco, protestante bianco del menga, codino,
Kore-ano, lesbia, checca, spanici...!"

Washington fece i conti con la sua creazione, "Il Macellaio
[di Bagdad",
mentre "i fottuti di Allah" furono vilipesi a Wall Street
dove le banche annegarono in intralazzi. Un sottile filo
di vita goccia sulla pagina mentre i miei occhi

diventano gli occhi di un altro: Sono i tuoi, Figlia?

Metto insieme un libro, Sul Pregiudizio: Una Prospettiva
[Globale,
di xenofobia, etnocentrismo, sexismo, razzismo,
e odio i baroni nucleari e del petrolio
che sono i tuoi nemici.

Non possiamo amare senza nemici che ci legano
insieme in amore — disse Freud —

se non vediamo come l'avarizia riscalda
la nostra putredine e rovina tutta su di noi —
Soffocandoci col nemico comune. I nostri sensali
di petrolio, armi nucleari, chimiche, biologiche ci tengono
tutti in ostaggio, tu, me, e loro, alle grida dei teschi
con i loro eterni denti d'oro, i paralumi di pelle,
le loro orecchie sono le nostre rintronate da una sirena di
[colpa
dal libro di storia delle salme.

Parla all'autunno, Figlia. Dice: "Identificati con tutti!"
Perché noi tutti moriamo per vivere, mangiare, vedere, e
[tenere
la nostra mela cremisi. Il suo splendore ci fa cantare.

Lost Buds

Bach cello suites grate on old bones,
stir memories that tickle my teats
with sensational sorrow,
lost buds, fields gone fallow.

I think of how there are no tomorrows
in which I'll give birth.
Now, it's not pregnancy or the hope of it,
no new bouncing baby to come.

Only middle age girth makes me look
maternal. Menopause has left not one
kernel of hope in my old ovaries.
I'm out to pasture, a sagging nag
who's never tasted fruition,
that cornucopia of sharing
the labor with him, the supreme
moment, that most fertile union
together, hand in hand, eye to eye,
smile upon smile, kiss of joy,

lips and minds met
in the shared ecstasy of birth,
seeing our bodies fused in new creation
at an occasion of our rebirth together
in one
being
made from both,
blended in a new person!

Those who live that moment together
can't know how desolate not to.

Boccioli perduti

Le suites per violoncello di Bach grattano su vecchie ossa,
suscitano memorie che mi accarezzano il seno
di dolore accecante, boccioli
perduti, incoltivati campi.

Penso a come non ci sono domani
in cui darò alla luce. Oggi, non vengo o spero
di divenire incinta,
nessun bimbetto scalpicciante in arrivo.

Solo l'ampiezza della mezz'età mi fa sembrare
materna. La menopausa non ha lasciato
un briciolo di speranza nelle mie vecchie ovaie.
Son fuori al pascolo, cavallona cascante
che non ha mai goduto trionfi,
quella cornucopia di spartire
con lui le doglie, il momento
supremo, la più fertile unione
insieme, mano in mano, occhio ad occhio,
sorriso verso sorriso, bacio di gioia,

labbra e menti che s'incontrano
nella condivisa estasi della nascita,
vedendo i nostri corpi fusi in nuova creazione
nell'occasione della nostra rinascita insieme
in un
essere
formato da ambedue,
conflato in una nuova persona!

Quelli che vivono quel momento insieme
non possono sapere quant'è triste non viverlo.

The Peach Throughout the Eye of the Needle**1.**

The peach
 is a belly dancer's fruit.
 It, too,
 possesses a navel
 for seeing the world through the skin,
 has rounded buttocks, good
 to place against the hand
 the way earth
 reminds flesh
 of its being.

2.

Through the eye of the needle,
 death is a country where people wonder
 and worry what it is like
 to live. The sullen
 wish to live and live soon,
 to be done with death
 and the happy
 want to stay dead forever

wondering:
 will it hurt
 to live

and is there death
 after death?

Ortanova, provincia di Puglia

- for my father, Donato Gioseffi [Italy 1905 - America 1980]

"Land of bright sun and colors,"
 you're called in *Italia*.
 Near Bari and Brindisi where the ferry
 has travelled the *Adriatico*,
 to and from Greece for centuries.

La pesca attraverso la cruna dell'ago

1.

La pesca è il frutto
della danzatrice del ventre.
Anch'essa
possiede un ombelico
per vedere il mondo attraverso la pelle,
ha natiche rotonde, belle
da premere contro la mano
come la terra
ricorda alla carne
la sua essenza.

2.

Attraverso la cruna dell'ago
la morte è un paese dove la gente si chiede
e si preoccupa di cosa voglia dire
vivere. Il cupo
desiderio di vivere e vivere presto,
di farla finita con la morte
e la voglia appagata
di stare morti per sempre

chiedendoci:

 farà male
 vivere

 e c'è, dopo la morte,
 morte?

Ortanova, provincia di Puglia

-per mio padre, Donato Gioseffi [Italia 1905 - America 1980]

"Terra di sole lucente e di colori,"
ti chiamano in Italia.
Vicino a Bari e Brindisi dove il traghetto
ha scorrazzato l'Adriatico diretto
in Grecia e ritorno per secoli.

Orta Nova, città dove mio padre morto nacque.
Com'è strano vederti, piccolo villaggio,
con coccinelle, mio talismano, atterrate sulla blusa.

Mi mostrano il tuo certificato di nascita –
Donato Gioseffi, nato nel 1905 –
scarabocchiato a penna, su carta che ingiallisce.
Quando gli dico che sono una scrittrice, prima della
[famiglia americana
a ritornare alla casa paterna, di colpo sono nobile!
Chiudono il Municipio per portarmi nella loro limo più bella
a uno scavo archeologico ai bordi della città.
Ed ecco il Regno di Herdonia, riscoperto con la sua strada
[di mattoni
che portava a Roma, come tutte le strade allora ed ora,
alla gloria dell'antico! Coccinelle riposano su di me allo scavo
di sculture in pietra che il professore belga mi mostra.
[Compro il suo libro,
"Il Regno di Herdonia: Più antico di Tebe."

Ah, padre mio, i dileggi che sopportasti
– magra, piccola cavia che non parlava inglese
nella classe di quinta elementare – da parte
di americani arroganti di una terra neonata!
Non ritornasti mai alla tua terra vetusta dove i nativi,
simpatici paesani, mi dan da mangiare e bere nel loro
ristorante migliore. Insisto a pagare il conto. Mi regalano
barattoli di funghi e pimento in olio d'oliva – il loro prodotto
pregiato perché lo porti a casa. Ammiccano consci,
quando parlano di te, devo lasciare la tavola per piangere –
sola in bagno, guardando nello specchio
gli occhi che mi desti, le mani così uguali alle tue
che aprono il rubinetto di ottone
e mi spruzzano acqua fredda sul viso.
Per un attimo, in questo luogo forestiero, ti ho incontrato
di nuovo, Padre, e ho capito meglio le tue fatiche,
la tua lotta, il tuo orgoglio, la tua umiltà,
la gleba da cui venisti per attraversare
il vasto mare e far di me una poetessa di New York.

Qual è la mia casa vera? Questo piccolo villaggio,
vicino a Bari, con la sua vecchia università,
la provincia dove le ossa turche di San Nicola

sono sepolte, in un ossario smaltato, stacciato in oro,
la provincia di cave d'arenaria prodighe di affreschi
più antichi di quelli di Lescaux,
questa bianca città del Gargano, non sciupata da turisti,
[questa terra
di colore bellezza e solarità. Questa casa dove tu saresti
[stato più felice,
e compreso meglio che nei torturanti casoni di Newark
della tua giovinezza. Questa terra di sole, cieli azzurri,
[fiori bianchi e rosa, case di stucco bianche,
e povertà, il mezzogiorno, questo calore che mi lasciasti
per far di me una poetessa di New York, sito indifferente,
miscuglio di tutte le razze, così che io
sono più cosmopolitana dei tuoi
compaesani o di quanto
tu potesti mai sognare di essere.

Questo viaggio
paradossale all'indietro
verso una generazione smarrita
per sempre sparita forgiando una strada
dal Vecchio verso il Nuovo Mondo.

Interview with Grace Cavalieri

by Maria Lisella

Translated into Italian by Awdie Coppola

Born in Lecce of an Anglo-Italian family, **Awdie Coppola** speaks five languages and is a freelance translator, interpreter, lecturer as well as teacher of English and Spanish. After graduating in translation (English, Spanish and Italian) at the university of Trieste (Faculty of Scuola Superiore di Lingue Moderne per Interpreti e Traduttori), he has specialized in the languages of Economics, History and Tourism. He has been an interpreter and translator at international events such as the “1st Mediterranean Peace Forum” held in Lecce in November 2008 and the G8 of Finance Ministers, which took place in June 2009 in Lecce.

Maria Lisella has been an editor and journalist for most of her life and has covered the travel industry, a profession that has taken her to dozens of countries. Her work appears online at FOXNews.com, AFAR, *Sherman’s Travel*, *Travel and Leisure*, *German Life Magazine*, *the New York Daily News*, *Spa Review Magazine* and others.

Her Pushcart Poetry Prize-nominated work appears in *Amore on Hope St.* [Finishing Line Press] and *Two Naked Feet* [Poets Wear Prada] as well as *The New York Quarterly*, *Paterson Literary Review*, *Skidrow Penthouse*, *Feile Festa*, *FoxHill Review*, *Gradiiva*, *New Verse News*, *Philadelphia Poets*. She co-curates the Italian American Writers Association literary readings at Cornelia St. Cafe and Sidewalk Cafe in NYC.



5. Bound; Bible and silk thread.

From: "Bridge Puglia USA" (www.bridgepugliausa.it)
Grace Cavalieri, Poetry Queen on FM-Radio
by *Maria Lisella*

A writer, poet, and journalist she considers herself first Italian and then American.

To bring poetry to people is her mission: for 36 years she has successfully hosted the radio program *The Poet and the Poem*.

In 1977, when the blood of the U.S. ran hot with black nationalism, gay rights, and the cultural revolution, an Italian-American named Grace Cavalieri, suburban housewife, mother of four, living on a naval base, was one of the founders of an "all jazz radio station" WPFW-FM, the first black-managed public radio station in America and the fifth of the Pacifica chain of progressive broadcast entities. She opened the microphone to the city inviting poets, non-poets, ordinary citizens to share their voices on the airwaves.

Best known for *The Poet and the Poem*, which is celebrating its 36th year on the air as an hour-long radio program, Cavalieri continues to produce and host the show on public radio. Her programs include every Poet Laureate since 1989 and a significant collection of African-American poets.

Cavalieri has written 16 books of poems and 26 produced plays. Her newest publication is a chapbook of poems, *I Gotta Go Now* (Goss: 183, Casa Medendez 2012). Among many other accolades she holds the Allen Ginsberg Poetry Award, a Paterson Poetry Prize, a Pen Fiction Award, the Bordighera Award for Poetry, the CPB Silver Medal plus others. She lives in Annapolis, Maryland, and was married to metal sculptor, Kenneth C. Flynn who recently passed away. She has four children and four grandchildren.

Of Sicilian and Venetian descent, American-born Cavalieri talks to *Bridge Puglia USA* about her first forays as a suburban housewife interviewing major national poets, how her *italianità* impacts but never limits her work, and why poetry is as necessary as air.

Grace Cavalieri, la regina della poesia in FM di Maria Lisella

Scrittrice, poetessa, giornalista, si considera italiana prima ancora che americana. Portare tra la gente la poesia è la sua missione: da 36 anni conduce con successo il programma radio *The Poet and the Poem*.

Nel 1977, quando negli Stati Uniti infuriavano le lotte per il nazionalismo nero e per i diritti degli omosessuali e la rivoluzione culturale, un'Italo-Americana di nome Grace Cavalieri, casalinga di periferia, madre di quattro bambini, che viveva in una base navale, fu una delle fondatrici della "all jazz radio station" WPFW-FM, la prima radio pubblica americana ad essere gestita da neri, la quinta della catena Pacifica di trasmissioni radiofoniche progressiste. La Cavalieri aprì il microfono alla città in maniera radicale, invitando poeti e non poeti, gente comune, a condividere le loro voci sulle onde radio.

Molto popolare grazie al programma radiofonico di un'ora *The Poet and the Poem* (il Poeta e la Poesia), che quest'anno festeggia il suo 36° anno di vita, la Cavalieri è ancora un'attiva produttrice e conduttrice radiofonica. I suoi programmi hanno proposto tutti i Poeti Laureati a partire dal 1989 e una notevole raccolta di poeti Afro-Americani.

La Cavalieri ha scritto 16 libri di poesie e ha prodotto 26 opere teatrali. La sua ultima pubblicazione è un libro tascabile di poesie, *I Gotta Go Now* (Goss: 183, Casa Medendez 2012). Tra i vari riconoscimenti vanta un Premio Allen Ginsberg per la Poesia, un Paterson Poetry Prize, un Pen Fiction Award, un Premio Bordighera per la Poesia, il CPB Silver Medal e molti altri riconoscimenti. Vive ad Annapolis, nel Maryland, ed era sposata con lo scultore Kenneth C. Flynn, scomparso recentemente. Ha quattro figli e quattro nipoti.

Americana di origini siciliane e venete, Grace Cavalieri racconta a *Bridge Puglia USA* delle sue prime iniziative come casalinga di periferia intervistando i più grandi poeti nazionali americani, in che misura la sua italianità incida ma senza limitare il suo lavoro e spiega, inoltre, perché la poesia sia necessaria come l'aria.

How is it you became so closely aligned with African-American literature?

Ironically, I was more attracted to Jewish culture and years later after my father's death I learned that my father's family was Jewish. But the African-American link came through poetry rather than cultural or political affiliations. I was helping to set up and teach writing at Antioch College's east coast campuses, (in Washington, D.C., Baltimore, and Columbia, Maryland) in 1970-75 and the population was mostly inner city blacks.

You've said, "I taught black literature and I found my freedom as a writer."

The poetry and plays written by black writers at that time, like women and gays, unleashed the truest sound in the world. When I heard a new radio station was being planned to go on-air in Washington, D.C., and they would need a drama and Literature Director... a black station... I had the love and history on my side... Because Washington D.C. has a significant black population, this radio station became the voice of the people - many of the poets had never been heard before but the radio program gave them a platform.

How did you come upon the interview/radio format?

I didn't care that poetry was not popular, I didn't care listeners were used to commercial products, I would not allow cornflakes and hygiene sprays to take over the airwaves when poetry was available. I worked three years fundraising and sweeping floors to get a radio station on the air, to establish a platform for poetry. By February 1977, WPFW-FM went on the air with Sterling Brown reading poetry with Duke Ellington's "A Train" as our theme song.

Any notable moments from "The Poet and the Poem"?

Although I was making poetry available in a way that had not been done before, I still had to prove myself. Gwendolyn Brooks was wary of me, but became a friend; Allen Ginsberg insulted me but eventually respected my work. My most profound memories were of truck drivers, prize-fighters, drunks, grandmothers, who called in to read their own poems.

Come si è avvicinata alla letteratura Afro-Americana?

Ironicamente ero più attratta dalla cultura ebraica e anni dopo la morte di mio padre scoprii che la sua famiglia era di origini ebraiche. Ma il collegamento Afro-Americano si è realizzato tramite la poesia piuttosto che attraverso affiliazioni culturali o politiche. Nel periodo tra il 1970 e il 1975 aiutavo ad avviare ed insegnare la scrittura presso i campus universitari della costa orientale del College di Antioch, (a Washington D.C., Baltimora e Columbia nel Maryland) dove la popolazione era costituita perlopiù da neri provenienti da quartieri disagiati.

Lei ha detto, "Ho insegnato letteratura Afro-Americana e ho trovato la mia libertà come scrittrice."

In quell'epoca le poesie e le opere teatrali scritte da autori Afro-Americani, come donne e gay, liberarono il suono più autentico del mondo. Quando venni a sapere che una nuova stazione radio sarebbe stata fondata, con trasmissioni a Washington D.C., e che avevano bisogno di un Direttore per teatro e letteratura... una stazione radiofonica nera... avevo la passione e la storia dalla mia parte... e per tre anni me ne andai in giro a raccogliere denaro per far aprire la radio. Poiché Washington D.C. ha una notevole popolazione Nera, questa stazione radiofonica divenne la voce della gente - fino ad allora molti dei poeti non erano mai stati sentiti, ma questo programma radiofonico offrì loro una piattaforma.

Come ha avuto l'idea del format intervista radiofonica?

Non m'importava che la poesia non fosse popolare, e tantomeno che gli ascoltatori fossero abituati agli stacchetti pubblicitari, ma non avrei permesso che fiocchi di granturco e spray per l'igiene occupassero le onde radio quando c'era poesia da ascoltare. Lavorai tre anni raccogliendo fondi e pulendo pavimenti pur di far partire le trasmissioni radiofoniche, per fondare un programma per la poesia. Nel febbraio del 1977, WPFW-FM iniziò le trasmissioni con Sterling Brown che leggeva poesia e "A Train" di Duke Ellington come sigla del nostro programma.

Ricorda dei momenti significativi di *The Poet and the Poem*?

Sebbene stessi rendendo la poesia disponibile in un modo mai utilizzato prima d'allora, dovevo ancora affermarmi. Gwendolyn

You've said, "My heritage is my strength and my weakness; my wish to claim what is mine, my fear to do it."

I am Italian first and American second; my grandfather instructed me to say, "I am an Italian American." It has only been since I won the Bordighera Award for Poetry that I have been included among other Italian American Writers. My heritage is an ongoing theme I have only begun to explore, there is so much richness waiting, the past has so many stories, but I cannot be objective about its effect on me yet. I have yet to make enough use of it. This worries me. But the past is all still in my future.

What do you see as poetry's role in society?

Poetry is the way we rinse off language. If it were not for poetry, we would all talk in slogans and TV commercials. We would use the language of politicians – words with no meaning. Poetry is, as Allan Grossman once said, the way we preserve the beloved.

I see it as the great equalizer, the democratic ideal, the way every person can speak with an inimitable voice, the miracle that each one of us has our own breath and cadence that cannot be stolen. Poets document what it is to be alive at this moment in history.

What would you like readers to come away with from poetry?

I wish and hope they think: *I felt that same way but just didn't say it. ... I'm so glad someone said it for me. I feel less alone now.*

Brooks era diffidente nei miei confronti, ma divenne un'amica; Allen Ginsberg mi insultò ma alla fine rispettò il mio lavoro. I miei ricordi più profondi sono di camionisti, pugili professionisti, ubriachi, nonne, che telefonavano per leggere le proprie poesie.

Lei ha detto, "Il mio patrimonio culturale è la mia forza e la mia debolezza; il mio desiderio di reclamare ciò che mi appartiene, la mia paura di farlo."

Per prima cosa sono italiana e per seconda americana; mio nonno mi insegnò a dire "Sono un'Italo-Americana." Solo recentemente sono stata inclusa con altri Italo- Americani dopo aver vinto il Premio Bordighera per la Poesia. Il mio patrimonio culturale è un tema costante che ho solo iniziato ad esplorare: c'è così tanta ricchezza ad attendermi, il passato ha tantissime storie, ma ancora non posso essere obiettiva sugli effetti su di me. E devo ancora utilizzarlo appieno. Ciò mi preoccupa, ma il passato è tutto, persino nel mio futuro.

Cosa pensa del ruolo della poesia nella società?

La poesia è il modo in cui risciacquiamo la lingua. Se non fosse per la poesia, parleremmo tutti con slogan e col linguaggio della pubblicità televisiva. Useremmo il linguaggio dei politici - parole senza significato. La poesia, come disse una volta Allan Grossman, è il modo in cui salvaguardiamo i nostri cari.

La vedo come un grande livellatore, l'ideale della democrazia, il modo in cui ogni persona può parlare con voce inimitabile, il miracolo che ciascuno di noi abbia un suo respiro ed una sua propria cadenza che non possono essere rubate. I poeti documentano ciò che significa vivere in questo momento della storia.

Cosa vorrebbe che la poesia lasciasse ai suoi lettori?

Desidero e spero che pensino: *Ho provato ciò nella stessa maniera. Ma non l'ho detto. ... sono così felice che qualcuno l'abbia detto per me. Ora mi sento meno sola.*

Pier Paolo Pasolini's *Le ceneri di Gramsci*

Translated by N. S. Thompson

N. S. Thompson is a full time writer and translator and lives outside Oxford, UK. He has published work in *Able Muse*, *The American Scholar*, *The Birmingham Poetry Review*, *The Hudson Review*, *Measure*, *The New Criterion*, *The Southern Review* and elsewhere in the United States. He has given readings and translation workshops for the Sewanee Writers' Conference, panels for the AWP Conference and the West Chester Poetry Conference. In the UK his poetry, translations, essays and reviews have been widely published, including in *Agenda*, *Ambit*, *The Dark Horse*, *Envoi*, *Modern Poetry in Translation*, *PN Review*, *Poetry Review*, *The Reader*, *The Spectator*, *Times Literary Supplement* and several anthologies. His latest book of poetry is *Letter to Auden* (Smokestack, 2010) a verse epistle in rime royal. A collection of his translations of Pier Paolo Pasolini's poetry will be published next year.

Pier Paolo Pasolini 1922-1975. Although he achieved international fame as a film director, Pasolini was first and foremost a poet and played an important part in Italian literary life as editor, critic and novelist. While pursuing these many different paths, he continued to write and publish verse throughout his life, including poetry in the Friulan dialect. But it was his novels and screenplays of Roman low life that led to his success in the cinema as director: *Accatone* (1962), *Mamma Roma* (1962), *The Gospel according to Matthew* (1964) and his famous 70s trilogy *Decameron*, *Canterbury Tales* and *A Thousand and One Nights*. The range of his poetry is equally wide; it starts with evocations of pastoral in Friulan dialect, moves into standard Italian through his profound engagement with Roman life, and ends in polemical observations about the new consumerist life enjoyed after Italy's 'economic miracle'. His collected poetry came out as *Bestemmia: Tutte le poesie*, edited by Graziella Chiarocci and Walter Siti, Garzanti, 1993.



Le ceneri di Gramsci

I

Non è di maggio questa impura aria
che il buio giardino straniero
fa ancora più buio, o l'abbaglia

con cieche schiarite... questo cielo
di bave sopra gli attici giallini
che in semicerchi immensi fanno velo

alle curve del Tevere, ai turchini
monti del Lazio... Sponde una mortale
pace, disamorata come i nostri destini,

tra le vecchie muraglie l'autunnale
maggio. In esso c'è il grigiore del mondo,
la fine del decennio in cui ci appare

tra le macerie finito il profondo
e ingenuo sforzo di rifare la vita;
il silenzio, fradicio e infecondo...

Tu giovane, in quel maggio in cui l'errore
era ancora vita, in quel maggio italiano
che alla vita aggiungeva almeno ardore,

quanto meno sventato e impuramente sano
dei nostri padri - non padre, ma umile
fratello - già con la tua magra mano

delineavi l'ideale che illumina
(ma non per noi: tu morto, e noi
morti ugualmente, con te, nell'umido

giardino) questo silenzio. Non puoi,
lo vedi?, che riposare in questo sito
estraneo, ancora confinato. Noia

patrizia ti è intorno. E, sbiadito,
solo ti giunge qualche colpo d'incudine
dalle officine di Testaccio, sopito

Gramsci's Ashes

I

It's not at all like May, this gloomy air
Made so much darker by the shadows of
The foreign garden, where it's not caught in glare

By sudden blinding shafts of light above
The yellow rooftops set in the watery sky
That mask the Tiber River's winding curves

And block out Lazio's turquoise hilltops by
Their vast semicircles. Here deathly peace
Descends out of this dark autumnal May

As alien as all our destinies
And in it lies the shadow of a world,
The ending of a decade and the cease

Of that huge naïve effort to rebuild¹...
So it appears to us out of the ruins
This putrefying infecund silence fills.

You were young then in that May when error
Was still alive²... in that Italian May
That gave at least the benefit of ardour,

That careless, less immorally healthy
Time of our fathers, when you – humble brother,
Not a father – were ready with a stealthy

Hand, ready to sketch out an ideal other
(But not for us now, as dead here as you
In this dank garden) bringing light to bear

On silence. And there's nothing you can do
But lie in this alien site, an exile,
While round you hangs nobility's ennui.

The only sound comes from an anvil
Struck in Testaccio's workshops in this drowse
Of evening, nothing else. And with an evil

nel vespro: tra misere tettoie, nudi
mucchi di latta, ferrivecchi, dove
cantando vizioso un garzone già chiude

la sua giornata, mentre intorno spiove.

II

Tra i due mondi, la tregua, in cui non siamo.
Scelte, dedizioni... altro suono non hanno
ormai che questo del giardino gramo

e nobile, in cui caparbio l'inganno
che attutiva la vita resta nella morte.
Nei cerchi dei sarcofaghi non fanno

che mostrare la superstite sorte
di gente laica le laiche iscrizioni
in queste grigie pietre, corte

e imponenti. Ancora di passioni
sfrenate senza scandalo son arse
le ossa dei miliardari di nazioni

più grandi; ronzano, quasi mai scomparse,
le ironie dei principi, dei pederasti,
i cui corpi sono nell'urne sparse

inceneriti e non ancora casti.
Qui il silenzio della morte è fede
di un civile silenzio di uomini rimasti

uomini, di un tedio che nel tedio
del Parco, discreto muta: e la città
che, indifferente, lo confina in mezzo

a tuguri e a chiese, empia nella pietà,
vi perde il suo splendore. La sua terra
grassa di ortiche e di legumi dà

questi magri cipressi, questa nera
umidità che chiazza i muri intorno
a smotti ghirigori di bosso, che la sera

Song an apprentice brings day to a close
Among those humble rooftops and piles of tin
Beside scrap metal yards. Now the wind blows

bringing in intermittent drops of rain.

II

Between two worlds, this is the respite where
We have no life. Choices and sacrifices...
Make no sound in this garden now so bare,

If noble. But all the obstinate lies
That deaden life are here for death to know.
And in these circles of sarcophagi,

Banal inscriptions of these banal folk
Show nothing but a lasting transition
Set in the graveness of this greyish stone,

Brief and imposing. With unbridled passion
But no longer any scandal, the burnt
Remains of millionaires who came from nations

Much grander; as if they were here, the hum
Of irony from prince and pederast
Whose ashes lie in scattered burial urns

And, although turned to cinders, still not chaste.
The silence of the dead here is witness
To cultivated silence of these last

Remains of men still men, of weariness
The weary garden tactfully disguises,
The city that surrounds it making less

Its splendour in between the pieties
Of makeshift shacks and churches. This rich earth
Here bearing only meagre cypresses,

Giving nettles and other weeds wide berth,
This dark humidity staining the walls
With lifeless squiggles of ground box that the dearth

rasserenando spegne in disadorni
sentori d'alga... quest'erbetta stenta
e inodora, dove violetta si sprofonda

l'atmosfera, con un brivido di menta,
o fieno marcio, e quieta vi prelude
con diurna malinconia, la spenta

trepidazione della notte. Rude
di clima, dolcissimo di storia, è
tra questi muri il suolo in cui trasuda

altro suolo; questo umido che
ricorda altro umido; e risuonano
- familiari da latitudini e

orizzonti dove inglesi selve coronano
laghi spersi nel cielo, tra praterie
verdi come fosforici biliardi o come

smeraldi: "And O ye Fountains..." - le pie
invocazioni...

III

Uno straccetto rosso, come quello
arrotolato al collo ai partigiani
e, presso l'urna, sul terreno cereo,

diversamente rossi, due gerani.
Lì tu stai, bandito e con dura eleganza
non cattolica, elencato tra estranei

morti: Le ceneri di Gramsci... Tra speranza
e vecchia sfiducia, ti accosto, capitato
per caso in questa magra serra, innanzi

alla tua tomba, al tuo spirito restato
quaggiù tra questi liberi. (O è qualcosa
di diverso, forse, di più estasiato

e anche di più umile, ebra simbiosi

Of light at this hour turns to simple smells
 Of algae... In this atmosphere of calm,
 Of stunted grass, the violet evening falls

And brings a whiff of rotten hay or balm
 Of mint, diurnal sadness acting as
 A quiet prelude to the coming storm

Of busy nights. Although it has to face
 Harsh weather, the history of this soil is sweet
 Between these walls and oozes with a trace

Of different soil and in its dampness meets
 Another dampness; these echoes bring back
 – Familiar from the latitudes replete

With English woods that coronet the lakes
 Misted by sky beside the meadows green
 As phosphorescent billiard tables

Or emeralds: "And O ye fountains..." – paeans
 Of pious invocations...

III

A red bandana like those rolled around
 The necks of partisans and, beside the urn,
 A different shade of red on waxy ground,

Stand two geraniums: so we discern
Le ceneri di Gramsci here among
 These foreign graves and are the words we learn:

Severe, non-Catholic, elegant as song.
 And so I come across you quite by chance
 With hope and old mistrust still on my tongue

And find you in this makeshift lean-to placed
 Around your grave, your spirit resting here
 Along with these free spirits. (Or a glance,

Perhaps, of something more ecstatic or

d'adolescente di sesso con morte...)
E, da questo paese in cui non ebbe posa

la tua tensione, sento quale torto
- qui nella quiete delle tombe - e insieme
quale ragione - nell'inquieta sorte

nostra - tu avessi stilando le supreme
pagine nei giorni del tuo assassinio.
Ecco qui ad attestare il seme

non ancora disperso dell'antico dominio,
questi morti attaccati a un possesso
che affonda nei secoli il suo abominio

e la sua grandezza: e insieme, ossesso,
quel vibrare d'incudini, in sordina,
soffocato e accorante - dal dimesso

rione - ad attestarne la fine.
Ed ecco qui me stesso... povero, vestito
dei panni che i poveri adocchiano in vetrine

dal rozzo splendore, e che ha smarrito
la sporcizia delle più sperdute strade,
delle panche dei tram, da cui stranito

è il mio giorno: mentre sempre più rade
ho di queste vacanze, nel tormento
del mantenermi in vita; e se mi accade

di amare il mondo non è che per violento
e ingenuo amore sensuale
così come, confuso adolescente, un tempo

l'odiai, se in esso mi feriva il male
borghese di me borghese: e ora, scisso
- con te - il mondo, oggetto non appare

di rancore e quasi di mistico
disprezzo, la parte che ne ha il potere?
Eppure senza il tuo rigore, sussisto

More humble, the elated symbiosis
Of sex with death felt by a teenager.)

I feel here – in this quietness where your tomb is
Laid, in this country where your tension had
No place in this unstable fate of ours, –

How right and wrong you were, before the sad
Day of your murder, writing the supreme notes³
You did. And bearing witness to the seed

Of power with its old traditions not
Displaced, these dead attached to ownership
That founders in the centuries with its pot

Of evil and its grandeur. But the taps
Heard from that hammered anvil, heartrending,
Obsessive, if faint, coming from the traps

Of poverty, bear witness to its ending.
And here I find myself, poor, in the kind
Of clothes the poor admire in window dressing

Of garish splendour, but have lost the grime
Picked up in long forgotten streets and seats
Of trams that give my day a dizzying time.

But all the same, my life has little rest,
Few holidays, because the struggle to
Exist is such a torment, if it's zest

I feel in loving this world as I do,
It is because that love is violent
And sensual, if naïve, as long ago

I hated it, confused and adolescent,
My bourgeois self hurt by its bourgeois soul.
And cut off now – with you – it seems that it's

Become the object if my mystical
Contempt, at least that part that makes the rules,
Is that not so? And yet without your total

perché non scelgo. Vivo nel non volere
del tramontato dopoguerra: amando
il mondo che odio - nella sua miseria

sprezzante e perso - per un oscuro scandalo
della coscienza...

IV

Lo scandalo del contraddirmi, dell'essere
con te e contro te; con te nel core,
in luce, contro te nelle buie viscere;

del mio paterno stato traditore
- nel pensiero, in un'ombra di azione -
mi so ad esso attaccato nel calore

degli istinti, dell'estetica passione;
attratto da una vita proletaria
a te anteriore, è per me religione

la sua allegria, non la millenaria
sua lotta: la sua natura, non la sua
coscienza: è la forza originaria

dell'uomo, che nell'atto s'è perduta,
a darle l'ebbrezza della nostalgia,
una luce poetica: ed altro più

io non so dirne, che non sia
giusto ma non sincero, astratto
amore, non accorante simpatia...

Come i poveri povero, mi attacco
come loro a umilianti speranze,
come loro per vivere mi batto

ogni giorno. Ma nella desolante
mia condizione di diseredato,
io possiedo: ed è il più esaltante

dei possessi borghesi, lo stato

Rigour, I live because I do not choose
And in this postwar twilight love the world
I hate, feel lost and scornful in its poverty

Because of some obscure controversy
Of conscience...

IV

This scandal of my contradictions: for
You and against you; for you in my heart,
In light; against you in my dark inner core;

A traitor to my own paternal state
– in thought, and in the shadow of an act –
I know I'm still attracted by the heat

Of instinct and aesthetic passion,
By proletarian life that came before
You; and for me its joy is sacrosanct,

Not its millennial struggles; the nature
Of it and not its conscience; it's the force
There that's ordinary to man, but surely

Lost now in every action, yet the source
That gives nostalgia its intoxication
And a poetic light: and anything more

I cannot say with more justification
Or appear as more heartfelt sympathy
And love sincere enough to be abstraction.

Poor as the poor, like them I pit myself
Against humiliating hopes, like them
I struggle every day to keep one step

Ahead in my life. But here's the problem:
In my forsaken disinherited state
I still possess the most exalted gem

Of bourgeois ownership, its absolute

più assoluto. Ma come io possiedo la storia,
essa mi possiede; ne sono illuminato:

ma a che serve la luce?

V

Non dico l'individuo, il fenomeno
dell'ardore sensuale e sentimentale...
altri vizi esso ha, altro è il nome

e la fatalità del suo peccare...
Ma in esso impastati quali comuni,
prenatali vizi, e quale

oggettivo peccato! Non sono immuni
gli interni e esterni atti, che lo fanno
incarnato alla vita, da nessuna

delle religioni che nella vita stanno,
ipoteca di morte, istituite
a ingannare la luce, a dar luce all'inganno.

Destinate a esser seppellite
le sue spoglie al Verano, è cattolica
la sua lotta con esse: gesuitiche

le manie con cui dispone il cuore;
e ancor più dentro: ha bibliche astuzie
la sua coscienza... e ironico ardore

liberale... e rozza luce, tra i disgusti
di dandy provinciale, di provinciale
salute... Fino alle infime minuzie

in cui sfumano, nel fondo animale,
Autorità e Anarchia... Ben protetto
dall'impura virtù e dall'ebbro peccare,

difendendo una ingenuità di ossesso,
e con quale coscienza!, vive l'io: io,
vivo, eludendo la vita, con nel petto

Possessive state. But how can I own history
When it owns me, has me illuminated:

And what use is its light?

V

Of individual sensuality
And sentimentality, there's not much
To say, man's vices in reality

Have other names and sins at which they clutch
All have to end, but what prenatal seeds
Of common sins are planted there with such

Objective sinfulness! And so his deeds,
Internal and external - all that go
To give some body to his life - must needs

Be subject to religions, there is no
Escape, they take a mortgage out on death
To trick the light and light this trick they do.

His last remains destined for burial at
Verano, his real struggle with them is
A Catholic one, the way in which his heart

Is settled, Jesuitical, and yes,
Deeper inside, his conscience biblical
In all its cunning...his desires

Ironically liberal...provincial
His dandyish affectations of dislikes
And his glowing health... up to his animal

Self where Authority and Anarchy
Are compound in the lowest details... Well
Protected from impure virtue and drunken

Sinning, defending a naïve obsession,
And with what conscience the self can live, I live,
I am alive, eluding life, my breast

il senso di una vita che sia oblio
 accorante, violento... Ah come
 capisco, muto nel fradicio brusio

del vento, qui dov'è muta Roma,
 tra i cipressi stancamente sconvolti,
 presso te, l'anima il cui graffito suona

Shelley... Come capisco il vortice
 dei sentimenti, il capriccio (greco
 nel cuore del patrizio, nordico

villeggiante) che lo inghiottì nel cieco
 celeste del Tirreno; la carnale
 gioia dell'avventura, estetica

e puerile: mentre prostrata l'Italia
 come dentro il ventre di un'enorme
 cicala, spalanca bianchi litorali,

sparsi nel Lazio di velate torme
 di pini, barocchi, di giallognole
 radure di ruchetta, dove dorme

col membro gonfio tra gli stracci un sogno
 goethiano, il giovincello ciociaro...
 Nella Maremma, scuri, di stupende fogne

d'erbaschetta in cui si stampa chiaro
 il nocciolo, pei viottoli che il buttero
 della sua gioventù ricolma ignaro.

Ciecamente fragranti nelle asciutte
 curve della Versilia, che sul mare
 aggrovigliato, cieco, i tersi stucchi,

le tarsie lievi della sua pasquale
 campagna interamente umana,
 espone, incupita sul Cinquale,

dipanata sotto le torride Apuane,
 i blu vitrei sul rosa... Di scogli,
 frane, sconvolti, come per un panico

Has sensed that life is oblivion,
Heartrending, violent... Here where Rome lies mute,
Near you, only too well I sympathize

Among windblown tired cypresses, intuit
The feelings of the human soul whose name
Is carved out here *Shelley*... following suit,

Mute, in the damp gusts of wind... I came
To know the whirlwind feelings and the twist
Of fate (the heart so Greek inside the Grand

Tour traveller) that swallowed him in the misty
Blue of the Tyrrhenian Sea, the carnal joy
Of his adventures and their aesthetic

Puerile side; while, prostrate, Italy
Lies as if inside the belly of one huge
Cicada and with the length of its sandy

Beaches in Lazio comes the shady fugue
Of Baroque pines, the yellowish masses
Of growing rocket leaves that form a rug

On which the sweet lad from the Ciociara's
Hills sleeps his Goethian dream dressed in rags
But with his member proudly erect... as

On Maremma's darker coast the *buttero*⁴ drags
His careless youth along stupendous ditches
Lined with hazel where he gathers grasses.

On Versilia's parched coast, the beaches
Give off an unseen fragrance to the air
And from the tumbling waves it reaches

The sharp stucco and bright inlays that share
Its wholly human Paschal countryside...
Below the baking Apuan Alps, the shade

Of Cinquale's vitreous blue on rose... Landslides
Of jumbled fallen rocks looking upset
As if in panic by the scented tide

di fragranza, nella Riviera, molle,
erta, dove il sole lotta con la brezza
a dar suprema soavità agli olii

del mare... E intorno ronza di lietezza
lo sterminato strumento a percussione
del sesso e della luce: così avvezza

ne è l'Italia che non ne trema, come
morta nella sua vita: gridano caldi
da centinaia di porti il nome

del compagno i giovinetti madidi
nel bruno della faccia, tra la gente
rivierasca, presso orti di cardi,

in luride spiaggette...

Mi chiederai tu, morto disadorno,
d'abbandonare questa disperata
passione di essere nel mondo?

VI

Me ne vado, ti lascio nella sera
che, benché triste, così dolce scende
per noi viventi, con la luce cerea

che al quartiere in penombra si rapprende.
E lo sommuove. Lo fa più grande, vuoto,
intorno, e, più lontano, lo riaccende

di una vita smaniosa che del roco
rotolio dei tram, dei gridi umani,
dialettali, fa un concerto fioco

e assoluto. E senti come in quei lontani
esseri che, in vita, gridano, ridono,
in quei loro veicoli, in quei grami
caseggiati dove si consuma l'infido
ed espansivo dono dell'esistenza -
quella vita non è che un brivido;

Of fragrance from the Riviera's wet
Slopes where the sun's in combat with the breeze
And gives supreme smoothness to the jut

Of the sea... And all around it is seized
By sex and sunlight's never ending hammer
Blows like a drum and Italy so pleased

And used to it, it's never shocked or stammers
But plays dead in the life it has: in ports
Built in hundreds of places, dark youths yammer

Out friends' names, sweating youths of every sort
Among the coastal people tending plots
Of cultivated cardoons among the orts

left on lurid beaches...

And would you ask me, lying plainly furled
In that bandana there, to give up on
My desperate passion to be in this world?

VI

I have to go... and leave you in the sad
Time evening brings as it falls softly on
The living in the sunlight that turns pallid

As it thickens above this part of Rome
Turning dark and stirring it, making it
Look large and empty. And the eager longing

For life lights up in the distance, split
With the harsh rasp of the trams, the raucous
And distant shouts in dialect that knit

To form a concerto. In those far-off souls
That laugh and shout as they drive off, you feel
The life in those impoverished houses
Where they fritter away the fruitless, real
But expansive gift of life: real life hence
Is but a passing tremulous thing as it deals

corporea, collettiva presenza;
senti il mancare di ogni religione
vera; non vita, ma sopravvivenza

- forse più lieta della vita - come
d'un popolo di animali, nel cui arcano
orgasmo non ci sia altra passione

che per l'operare quotidiano:
umile fervore cui dà un senso di festa
l'umile corruzione. Quanto più è vano

- in questo vuoto della storia, in questa
ronzante pausa in cui la vita tace -
ogni ideale, meglio è manifesta

la stupenda, adusta sensualità
quasi alessandrina, che tutto minia
e impuramente accende, quando qua

nel mondo, qualcosa crolla, e si trascina
il mondo, nella penombra, rientrando
in vuote piazze, in scorate officine...

Già si accendono i lumi, costellando
Via Zabaglia, Via Franklin, l'intero
Testaccio, disadorno tra il suo grande

lurido monte, i lungoteveri, il nero
fondale, oltre il fiume, che Monteverde
ammassa o sfuma invisibile sul cielo.

Diademi di lumi che si perdono,
smaglianti, e freddi di tristezza
quasi marina... Manca poco alla cena;

brillano i rari autobus del quartiere,
con grappoli d'operai agli sportelli,
e gruppi di militari vanno, senza fretta,
verso il monte che cela in mezzo a sterri
fradici e mucchi secchi d'immondizia
nell'ombra, rintanate zoccolette

Them its bodily collective presence.
You feel that any true faith is missing,
Life is not life, only survival makes sense

– which is happier than life perhaps – in being
Akin to the animal world, they mumble
Arcane orgasms, the only passion

Is for daily existence, whose humble
Fervour gives a sense of festival
To humble corruption. In the rumble

Of this empty space in history, all
Pulsating pause in which life is silent –
You feel the pointlessness of all ideals.

Better the stupendous, sun scorched bent
Of almost Alexandrian sensuality
That impurely illuminates it, sent

when something in this world's fragility
Breaks up and drags it in the shadows found
In empty piazzas, workshops out on the city

Limits. Already streetlights are sparkling down
Via Zabaglia, Via Franklin and all
Over Testaccio, naked round its mound

Of shards, and Tiber's banks, against the pall
Beyond the river that Monteverde's blocks
Make, clear or smudged. As night begins to fall

Diadems of lights now lose themselves in flocks
Of glittering cold and gleam with almost marine
Sadness... Soon it will be supper, say the clocks...

Here in the district, a few buses shine,
Clusters of workmen crowding the windowpanes
And National Servicemen in straggling lines
Make for the mound of shards and its insane
Dirty excavations in the muddle
Where half seen prostitutes – light on the wane –

che aspettano irose sopra la sporczia
afrodisiaca: e, non lontano, tra casette
abusive ai margini del monte, o in mezzo

a palazzi, quasi a mondi, dei ragazzi
leggeri come stracci giocano alla brezza
non più fredda, primaverile; ardenti

di sventatezza giovanile la romanesca
loro sera di maggio scuri adolescenti
fischiano pei marciapiedi, nella festa

vespertina; e scrosciano le saracinesche
dei garages di schianto, gioiosamente,
se il buio ha resa serena la sera,

e in mezzo ai platani di Piazza Testaccio
il vento che cade in tremiti di bufera,
è ben dolce, benché radendo i capellacci

e i tufi del Macello, vi si imbeva
di sangue marcio, e per ogni dove
agiti rifiuti e odore di miseria.

È un brusio la vita, e questi persi
in essa, la perdono serenamente,
se il cuore ne hanno pieno: a godersi

eccoli, miseri, la sera: e potente
in essi, inermi, per essi, il mito
rinasce... Ma io, con il cuore cosciente

di chi soltanto nella storia ha vita,
potrò mai più con pura passione operare,
se so che la nostra storia è finita?

1954

Pasolini's note:

Gramsci è sepolto in una piccola tomba del Cimitero degli Inglesi, tra Porta San Paolo e Testaccio, non lontano dalla tomba di Shelley. Sul cippo si leggono solo le parole: "Cinera Gramsci" con le date.

Wait ready in the shadows in a huddle
Above this aphrodisia's piles of muck.
Nearby, about the mound and piles of rubble,

Illegal shanty housing and the blocks
Of flats that almost look clean, young kids play out
And in the tepid breeze dance light as socks

Pinned out. Elsewhere, dark adolescents pout
As well: with devil-may-care attitudes
They whistle down the pavements, twist and shout

Tearing down roller blinds, full of a rude
And festive joy making a fearsome din
That breaks the evening calm with interludes

Of rasping sound. Among the plane trees in
Piazza Testaccio, the wind's strong gusts
Seem actually soft, despite grazing the vines

And Macello's tufa where it sucks
Up abattoirs' stale blood and everywhere
Whips up the rubbish and the smell of musty

Poverty. But life is bustling here,
Its folk lost in it like a bright kermes,
A fair that leaves hearts full; and here they are

Poor, but out for fun this evening; defenceless
But empowered, the myth for them reborn...
But having in my heart the consciousness

Of those who know how history is the mover
Will pure passion ever move me again
When I know that our history is over?

Pasolini's note: Gramsci is buried in a small tomb in the English Cemetery between Porta San Paolo and Testaccio, and not far from Shelley's tomb. The headstone bears the simple words "Cinera Gramsci" and his dates.

Translator's Note

'Gramsci's Ashes' is the title poem of *Le ceneri di Gramsci*, Garzanti, 1957, written in 1954. Monte Testaccio is a vast mound of shard refuse that accumulated during Rome's ancient past when imported amphorae were abandoned there and the mound gives its name to the surrounding working class district. It is now a protected archaeological site. Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937) was Italy's first leading Marxist writer, founder of the Italian Communist Party in 1921 and imprisoned by Mussolini from 1926 until his death in prison hospital. His ashes are buried in the Protestant Cemetery near the Porta San Paolo in Rome, where the graves of Keats and Shelley are also found.

Notes

¹ Postwar reconstruction after WWII.

² May 24, 1915, Italy's entry into World War I.

³ Gramsci's famous *Quaderni di carcere* (Prison Notebooks), published posthumously.

⁴ Horseback cattle herder of the Maremma.

Poems by Nelo Risi

Translated by Lynne Lawner

Lynne Lawner graduated from Wellesley College and holds a PhD from Columbia University. She lived many years in Rome and now resides in Manhattan. Among her books are two collections of her own poetry, three illustrated books on art, and translations of Gramsci's letters and Spaziani's poetry. She often lectures and is also a fine art photographer

Nelo Risi, a much-published poet and noted film-maker, brother of the even more celebrated cinematographer Dino Risi, was born in Milan in 1920 but at a certain point of his life became a fixed feature of Rome, where he still dwells at the ripe age of 92 in the same house on via Capo le Case where I first visited him back in the 1960's and 1970's. Risi's wife Edith Bruck, a Holocaust survivor, is a well known writer of fiction and film-maker in Italy.

Risi holds a degree in medicine, but he never exercised this profession, preferring to make documentaries and to produce one volume after another of stringent and caustic/tender verse almost always relevant to the problems of the day and with an eye to the cosmos, which human beings then and now seem so eager to explore. As one critic, Luigi Picchi, succinctly put it, describing his poetry: "First the abyss of the human soul, then galaxies."

There were two major stops on Risi's way to Rome – one when he was in the army where he fought on the Russian front (he was also interned in a work camp in Switzerland), the other a sojourn in Paris, where Risi was greatly influenced by the surrounding culture, especially Surrealism. Montale observed, in a wry phrase, that "Risi must have learned a lot from a certain kind of French painting."

The first volume Risi produced was entitled *Le opere e i giorni* (Works and Days) 1941. It was his second collection, *Il polso teso* (The Tense Pulse) 1956, that earned him the attention of the literary and general public, although by then he had already been presented in Luciano Anceschi's key anthology *Linea lombarda* (The Lombard Line) 1952 which included so many poets who have quietly become classics of Italian twentieth-century literature (Erba, Orelli, Sereni).

It was also during these years that Risi made his first feature film, *Andremo in Città* (Let's Go to the City) in addition to many short films for television.

Today, there are two main anthologies of his work, as well as many individual volumes to peruse, most of them issued by the Milanese publishing house Mondadori. The principal anthologies are: *Poesie scelte 1943-1975* (with introduction by Giovanni Raboni) and *Di certe cose: Poems 1953 – 2005* which contains an Afterword by the author.

Risi is also well known for his extensive translation work, especially the many volumes of Pierre Jean Jouve, also selections from Supervielle, Jules Laforgue, Kavafy, and Radnoti. Poems by Guillaume Apollinaire, Gérard de Nerval, Robert Desnos, Max Jacob, André Frénaud, Raymond Queneau, Henri Michaux appear in his anthology *Compito di francese e altre lingue 1943-1993*.

Diario di una schizofrenica and *La colonna infame*, inspired by Alessandro Manzoni's chronicle, are two of Nelo Risi's most famous films. Other notable ones are *Andremo in città* (1966) and, *Una stagione all'inferno* (1971). Among his best-known documentaries are *Il delitto Matteotti* (1956), *Lettere dal Sud* (1957), *La memoria del futuro* (1958), *I fratelli Rosselli* (1959), and *La Firenze di Pratolini* (1961). The titles alone indicate his engagement with social themes.

Both as a poet and a film-maker, Risi is clearly heir to the traditions of Parini and Leopardi, predecessors whom he often evokes within the poems, along with other quite different influences such as Rimbaud. A progressive, neorealistic film-maker and author, his is a constant critique of hypocrisy, corruption, injustice, indeed every abuse of power in contemporary life. Often he mimics the speech of the enemy – governmental meta-language, publicity slogans, etc. A unique, original civic stance is veined with sardonic bursts. If he reduces phenomena to the bones, however, he also expands our sense of a higher destiny for humankind with his noble reminders.

Starting out as "a stylist of the usual" (in his own words), Risi evolves into someone speaking for the collectivity, always in a recognizable personal voice. I include one of the best of his early poems about the atomic threat that became our nuclear threat: "Maneuvers". Risi attacks pollution, the bureaucratic torments of modern life, the increasing dehumanization of industry, and tech-

nological risks, these concerns always augmented by the hovering memory of horrors recently perpetrated in a Europe still needing to come to terms with its changed identity. In 1957 in an article in *Corriere della Sera* Risi declared that his aim was “to speak out about what offends people, to write about what makes us angry.”

In poems at once epigrammatic and elegiac – an interesting fusion, Risi’s harshness and despair are tempered by an authentic grief for what in his world has been irreparably damaged. Never tiring of telling us the harm we all have done, Risi seems to me right in step with the ecological-minded poets of today in America and in the world. I include one poem, a fantasy about freeing birds, that, simple as it is structurally, relates to this theme.

There are also Risi’s many miniature hymns to sensual love, capturing the spirit of his age.

Risi is interesting geographically and historically, bringing back from his voyages the kind of collections of odd facts and impressions that constellate Alberto Arbasino’s high-level cultural journalism, although of course each author has his own style. Both keep an eye out for the absurd, often domesticating the exotic. I give you a sampling of some poems about North Africa.

Some of the best poems by Risi are portraits of personages of the past, such as Beethoven, Clara Schumann, Nijinsky, Gaudí. A Flaubert piece is precious, a long poem about Leopardi a challenge. Lewis Carroll is in there. Often these poems are monologues faintly in the Browning tradition. I like them for their concreteness and the slight tilting of our perception of persons we thought we knew. I include a brief excerpt from “Clara”, offering a taste of what these are like. There are also poems dedicated to friends in the literary world – Erba, Sereni, Porta, Paul Celan. Alas, some of these are epitaphs as these persons gradually faded from view.

Some of Risi’s verse is straightforward, yet some has an attractive experimental quality. One needs to read widely in his work to perceive the full range of his powers and the variety of subjects treated. Risi’s love poems can be piquant, harsh, and touching by turn. I include in this selection some of my favorites from his early Counter-Memorial series, in itself a significant title. In preparing a volume of Selected Poems, I would certainly look to some of his later work. Translating Risi into English, one must deal with the many run-on sentences that tumble down the page or spread out

typographically. There is consequently the question of how often where, and when to use punctuation at the end of lines. I have taken a moderate approach, adding punctuation when absolutely necessary.

POETRY COLLECTIONS (NELO RISI)

- Le opere e i giorni* (Milano, Scheiwiller, 1941)
L'esperienza (Milano, Edizioni della Meridiana, 1948)
Polso teso (Milano, Mondadori, 1956)
Il contromemorale (Milano, All'insegna del pesce d'oro, 1957)
Civilissimo (Milano, All'insegna del pesce d'oro, 1958)
Pensieri elementari (Milano, Mondadori, 1961)
Minime Massime (Milano, All'insegna del pesce d'oro, 1962)
Dentro la sostanza (Milano, Mondadori, 1966)
Di certe cose che dette in versi suonano meglio che in prosa (Milano, Mondadori, 1970)
Amica mia nemica (Milano, Mondadori, 1975)
Poesie scelte 1943-1975 a cura di Giovanni Raboni (Milano, Mondadori, 1977)
I fabbricanti del "bello" (Milano, Mondadori, 1982)
Le risonanze (Milano, Mondadori, 1987)
Mutazioni (Milano, Mondadori, 1991)
Il mondo in una mano (auto-antologia per temi) (Milano, Mondadori, 1994)
Altro da dire (Milano, Mondadori, 2000)
Ruggine (Milano, Mondadori, 2004)
Di certe cose (poesie 1953-2005) (Milano, Mondadori, 2006)
Né il giorno né l'ora (Milano, Mondadori, 2008)



7. *Medusa, Self-Portrait; pasta, wig head and dish*

Da *Polso Teso*
"Le vacche magre"

I meli I meli I meli

Quell'albero che mi sorprese
con I suoi rami gonfi
quanti corvi sul ramo più alto

Quel toro che si accese
per una macchia scura al mercato
quanto sangue versato alle frontiere

Quella ragazza in tuta che s'intese
prima con francesi e polacchi
quanti viaggi il suo corpo tra le braccia

Quel soldato che mi chiese
la via breve oltre Sempione
quanta ansia in uno sguardo.

I lupi

La mia città deserta
un nero vento invade,
la mia città dolora
all'alba delle case

Il muro non misura
più di tre metri, il sonno
di quel ragazzo steso
a lato è un peso eterno

I lupi sono scesi
visitano le strade,
autunno o primavera
non mutano paese

La mia città deserta
ha occhi di rovina,
le rose del suo sangue
c'è già chi le coltiva.

From *Polso Teso*

From the section "The Lean Cows" (1943-1947)

Apples Apples Apples

That tree with swollen limbs
surprised me—
how many crows on the highest branch!

That furious bull
who'd spotted a dark patch in the marketplace—
how much blood shed at the frontier!

That girl in her outfit who got chummy
with French and Polish soldiers—
how many trips through arms her body's made!

That soldier who asked me
the shortcut past Sempione—
how much anxiety in those eyes!

The Wolves

A black wind invades
my deserted city,
city that suffers
in the dawn of houses.

The wall's only
three meters high, the sleep
of that fellow stretched out
beside it an eternal weight.

Wolves have come down,
roam the streets;
whether it's autumn or spring
they never go elsewhere.

My deserted city
has eyes of ruins,
already someone is gathering
the roses in its blood.

Estate Quarantaquattro

Un popolo lontano
 non è che una notizia:
 legata nella polvere dei marmi
 come il suo nome
 al sangue dei miei denti.
 L'americano a Cecina e Volterra
 gli indiani al Trasimeno,
 le tombe degli etruschi sono buche
 per gli ospiti prudenti
 sotto il cielo d'Italia fatto a scacchi.

Da "Dediche"

La Ville

Mecca, falotica meta da tutti segnata a dito
 viola di sera viola del pensiero oh quanto violata
 non hai più niente d'inedito.
 Ogni giorno l'ultimo venuto
 armeno cafro o solo cisalpino
 come me scava nel tenero
 si taglia una parte di livido e di Senna
 numera i ponti si fa un po' alla lingua
 va sull'antenna della più alta torre di ferro
 spazia e decide: qui staremo ottimamente.
 Pubblicamente io ti ringrazio.

Da "Cronaca"

Ricetta per esprimere il volo degli uccelli

Fate a pezzi le gabbie
 disfate i roccoli
 date fuoco alle panie
 miracolate i fringuelli
 abolite i richiami e il vischio
 seminate il cielo di miglio
 forzate i sonni dei musei
 con le finestre, e aria

Summer of '44

A distant nation
is nothing but a bit of news
tethered to marble dust,
its very name
glued to the blood of my teeth.
An American in Cecina or Volterra,
Indians at Trasimeno;
Etruscan tombs are holes
for cautious guests
beneath Italy's checkered sky.

From the section "Dediche" (Dedications)

La Ville

Phantasmatic Mecca, destination that all desire,
violet at evening, violet in the mind,
how violated you are! Nothing's left to discover.
Each day someone newly arrived –
Armenian, Kaf, or only from across the Alps
(myself) – digs into the tenderness,
cuts out a livid portion, counts the Seine's
bridges, learns a bit of the language,
climbs an antenna of the highest iron tower,
looks out, decides, "How great it would be to stay here."
Let me publicly congratulate you!

From "Cronaca"

Recipe For Expressing the Flight of Birds

Tear apart cages
take down fixed nets
set snares on fire
make bullfinches holy
abolish fake calls and bird-lime
seed the skies with millet
throw open windows of somnolent

al nibbio impagliato sottovetro
finché s'impenni...
Li guardo volare
ma la parola è rimasta indietro.

Tribù

III
Così nel regolato
disordine d'un circo
tra esotico sterco
e gesti color d'ambra
nel timbro delle mazze sugli anelli
le tende vanno già di schianto
coi pali in un mattino neutro.

Da PENSIERI ELEMENTARI
Dalla sezione "Civilissimo 1"

Sotto i colpi

C'è gente che ci passa la vita
che smania di ferire:
dov'è il tallone gridano dov'è il tallone,
quasi con metodo
sordi applicati caparbi.

Sapessero
che disarmato è il cuore
dove più la corazza è alta
tutta borchie e lastre, e come sotto
è tenero l'istrice.

museums, letting the stuffed kite
breathe until it takes wing...
I watch them fly up from glass cases
while it is only words that lag behind.

Tribes

III

And so in the regimented
chaos of a circus
exotic excrement
and amber acts,
mallets on metal rings resounding,
tents come crashing down
with their poles
in a colorless morning.

From PENSIERI ELEMENTARI ("Basic Thoughts")
From the section *Civilissimo 1* (Very Civilized)

Beneath the Blows

Some people live their lives
crazy about wounding.
Where's the heel, they cry, where's the heel?
Methodical, stubborn,
deaf to others, they hold their ground.
If only they knew
how disarmed the heart can be
where breastplates are highest,
all bolts and screws,
and how tender
the hedgehog is underneath.

[Note: a mini-Self-Portrait is in those last lines.]

From CIVILISSIMO 2

Manovre

nel Nevada osservate da un bambino di 5 anni
 Al quasi dolce autunno velato di malva
 in un alito d'aria oscillano
 le prime salve. Il cielo
 ha una ghirlanda di fiocchetti buffi
 tanti palloni scappati di mano
 a un gigante buono, e tutti
 chi più su chi meno
 crepano con un tonfo lungo
 n un fungo da non toccare!

I bravi boys
 fanno la nanna
 in caverna
 o scrivono a mamma
 schiacciando sotto l'unghia gli isotopi attivi
 pronti all'urto
 come un sol morto.

Una luce natalizia
 dentro un pino di calore
 che mio padre generale
 aveva già visto prima
 alla sagra di Hiroshima
 sbianca la città cavia
 e il paese in malora
 frigge e sbrodola
 come un getto di coca-cola.

God! un centro così urbano
 con tanto di edifici federali
 e un poco di ideale Americano
 un vero centro con bella vista
 Anabattista, asettico
 dotato di orizzonte
 ma che lo spostamento ha decentrato.

L'effetto è massiccio
 una primizia

From section "Civilissimo 2" (Very Civilized)

Maneuvers

In the nearly sweet autumn, in a mauve mist,
 the first discharges waver in a breath of air,
 the sky garlanded with funny flakes —
 tons of blossoms let loose from the hand
 of a good-hearted giant, and all of them
 high up or low
 burst with a long splashing sound
 into the mushroom *that mustn't be touched!*
 The good guys
 take a nap
 in a cavern
 or write to mamma,
 crushing active isotopes under their nails
 ready for the assault:
 a dead sun.

A Christmas light
 within a pine-tree of heat
 that my father, the general,
 already viewed
 at the celebration of Hiroshima
 bleaches the guinea pig city,
 and the ruined town
 fries and melts
 as a spurt of coca-cola.

God! A center so urban
 with so many federal buildings
 and a little of the American ideal —
 a real center with a good view,
 Anabaptist, aseptic,
 endowed with a horizon
 but one that the shifting has decentralized.

The effect massive
 a predictable
 novelty,
 an excavation work

del resto prevista,

un'opera di scavo *continues on next page*
 un colpo d'occhio sul mondo nuovo
 un superdeserto
 senza miraggio
 un po' malconcio al mezzo
 simile a un marrone sgranato dal riccio.

Ma dall'alto
 dall'alto e d'un sol balzo va visto il paese
 nero palato velato di malva
 fino alle case
 e al fu pezzato scozzese
 con vene dure di strade che si torcono silenziose
 in un vesuvio di ceneri anche

dove una merla sola rimasta
 liscia le poche penne tutte bianche
 al quasi dolce autunno velenoso.

Le magre baccanti

Avide
 dissipate
 solitarie
 pigre alla gioia
 per troppa noia
 emancipate

ma quel tanto
 che consente l'amore-scambio

Dopo gli inverni
 senza primavera
 dopo l'autunno del cuore
 dopo dopo doptutto
 rotto il ghiaccio che le tiene prigioniere
 bianche orse nel libero mare
 alla deriva tra le correnti
 e le maree

più insane della mente
 nuotano a frotte
 verso pascoli

a glance at the new world,
a superdesert
without mirages
a little knocked-about in the middle
like a chestnut shelled for its burr.

You ought to see the town
from high up, in one sweep of the eye –
black palate veiled in mallow –
all the way to the houses
and formerly plaid Tartan,
hard veins of streets twisting silently
in an ashy Vesuvius

where a lone remaining blackbird
smoothes out its feathers now white
in the nearly sweet, poisonous autumn.

The Lean Bacchantes

Avid
dissipated
solitary
bored
unaroused by joy
emancipated
 allowing just that small amount
 for love-exchange
after the spring-less
winters
and the autumn of the heart
after after afterall,
ice broken that held them prisoners
white bears out at sea
adrift among currents
and the most insane
 tides of the mind,
they swim in flocks
 towards flag-green
 pastures,

di un verde bandiera.
 Sono donne
 di un altro
 continente
 dai mariti bruciati
 con poche gioie
 in banca *continues on next page*
 e con labbra suggellate
 nel fermoposta
 di mezz'Europa
 vestali in fregola di vita
 a caccia di iloti
 tra cacciatore di dote sulla costa Latina
 ansiose
 di un naufragio sicuro
 tra Lerici e Taormina.

Da "Il Contromemoriale

Il faut savoir choisir; on n'a pas le droit de tout
 avoir c'est défendu,
 Un bonheur est tout le bonheur; deux, c'est comme
 s'ils n'existaient plus.
 (Ramuz: "Histoire du soldat")

Goccia a goccia

Si comincia con molti amici
 allacciati da braccia tenere
 anche il sonno viene presto
 in un coro così fuso.

Ecco la piena, non si contano gli anni
 urgono e rompono con tanta allegria
 musi di latte! che si anemizzano
 sulla via dei macelli.

women
 from another
 continent,
 with burned-out husbands
 and very few jewels
 in the bank
 their lips sealed
 in the poste-restantes
 of half of Europe
 vestals in the heat of life
 chasing helots
 among dowry-hunters of the Latin coast,
 eager for a sure shipwreck
 between Lericci and Taormina.

From section "Il Contromemoriale" (Counter-Memorial)

Il faut savoir choisir; on n'a pas le droit de tout
 avoir c'est défendu,
 Un bonheur est tout le bonheur; deux, c'est comme
 s'ils n'existaient plus.
 (Ramuz: "Histoire du soldat")

[Epigraph above is a quote from a Swiss writer's rendering of a Russian tale that was immortalized in Stravinsky's music. "One has to know how to choose; we're not allowed to have everything; that's forbidden. One happiness is all happiness; if there were two, it would be as if none actually existed."]

Drop by Drop

Start with a few friends
 tenderly embraced
 in a chorus packed so close
 you soon drift off to sleep.

Here's the climax: age doesn't count,
 years push forward, gaily break,
 milky faces grow anemic
 enroute to slaughter.

Le crepe le gramigne i primi allarmi
con la donna tutta per chi?
con gli amici in rassegna sulle dita:
presto o tardi se ne andranno anche quelli.

Parlare della morte è prematuro
Il più fedele vola in pezzi
e tutto il peso della fronte
è nel ricordo meno puro.

I

Sto imparando a disamare
macchina indietro
a tutto pudore.
Il cielo anche se basso
non ci cancella
eppure mai è stato tanto basso
tanto chiuso.
Come la seppia che a difesa
si sprema e si consuma
conosco l'arte della fuga
a mie spese
nel buio.

VII

Si svende
si liquida
si smobilita
la bella opera fallimentare
per piantare le tende
in un altro deserto
d'amore.

IX

Lasciati guardare
senza amore:
un certo slancio
nel portamento
due cosce un po' di sesso

Cracks, sprouting weeds, alarms—
a woman's all yours, but is she?
You count friends on your fingers,
they're going to go away soon.

It's premature to speak of death
the most faithful flies into pieces,
the whole weight of a forehead
rests on the least pure memory.

I

I'm learning how to unlove,
going into reverse gear
with all due caution.
The sky is low but it's still there
although never has it seemed
so oppressive.
Like the cuttlefish in defense,
squeezing, using itself up,
I know the costly art of the fugue
in darkness.

VII

A sale!
Liquidation!
We're moving on—
what a great job of failure
only to set up tents
in another
desert of love.

IX

Go on, get stared at
without love:
a special swing
to your walk,
two thighs, a dash of sex,

un fegato dolente
 due spalle da scolpire
 una bocca da parole...
 e chi ti riconosce?

XI

Sto sul fiume, guardo passare
 le belle frasi con vele nere
 l'oppio e il tossico
 nei mulinelli
 dei nostri anni.
 Che colla
 che gelatina
 che argilla friabile
 e quanta saliva
 per cementare l'incomunicabile.

da *DENTRO LA SOSTANZA*

Per memoria

Avreste dovuto lottare
 la storia ci rimprovera
 venivano avanti
 divorando compatti l'orizzonte;
 e fu uno sbattere d'imposte
 un barricarsi
 sotto lenzuola e tende,
 una paralisi
 rotta dalle preghiere.
 Ne vidi uno solo
 tutto mandibole e rostri
 una molla uno scatto
 nel mimetismo della corazza
 esatto come ogni macchina di guerra
 con un guanciale sotto la testa
 uscii all'aperto in un sole d'eclissi
 e come Plinio il Vecchio
 o uno storico del Ghetto
 la passione del fenomeno
 mi perdettero.

an aching liver,
shoulders fit to be sculpted,
mouth full of words,
but who would ever recognize you?

XI

Near the river, I watch
lovely black-veiled sentences glide by—
opium and poison
in the whirlpools
of our days.
How much glue
gelatine
friable clay
and saliva is needed
to cement the incommunicable!

From *DENTRO LA SOSTANZA* ("Inside the Substance")
From section La Colonna Infame (Infamous Column)

For the Sake of Memory

You should have fought it.
History scolds you.
Blanketing the horizon in one mass,
rattling tent-posts, they came forth;
everyone huddled
beneath linens and curtains,
only prayers broke
the paralysis. I spotted
one all jaws, all beak
ready to snap and spring,
its armored vest
the perfect war machine.
Coming out into an eclipsed sun
I held a pillow under my head
and, like Pliny the Elder
or a Ghetto chronicler,
lost myself completely
in the fascinating phenomenon.

Arte Poetica (alcuni versi di una lunga poesia)

Dopotutto sarà più facile capire
 che la poesia in sé non conta molto
 (ne posso fare tranquillamente a meno)
 conta ciò che sta dietro la poesia
 che in segreto l'alimenta, e fa leva
 o la contrasta; il resto è metodo
 di lavoro con la sua musica dentro.
 Ho imparato a disporre le parole
 Senza lasciarmi andare, soprattutto
 Senza fidarmi troppo.

From section "Minime Massime"

Telegiornale

Stando nel cerchio d'ombra
 come selvaggi intorno al fuoco
 bonariamente entra in famiglia
 qualche immagine di sterminio.
 Così ogni sera si teorizza
 la violenza della storia.

Una sola famiglia

L'operaio ingrassa la macchina
 la macchina ingrassa il padrone
 entrambi si affacciano a sera
 a un balcone che dà sulla fabbrica
 la nostra fabbrica dice il padrone
 l'operaio preferisce tacere.

excerpt from **The Art of Poetry**

When all is said and done, it's easy to understand
why poetry hardly matters,
what matters is what's behind poetry
secretly feeding it, exalting or resisting;
the rest's technique, with music thrown in.
I've learned how to lay words out
without letting myself go too far,
without letting myself trust too much.

From section "Minime Massime" ["Minimum(s)
Maximum(s)"]

TV News

While the family's arranged
like savages in a circle of shadow,
a few Holocaust images
serenely flutter across the screen.
Thus, each night, the violence of history
is a theoretical issue.

One Happy Family

The worker greases the machine,
the machine fattens up the owner.
Together in the evening they emerge
onto a balcony overlooking a factory.
"Our factory," says the owner,
the worker chooses to keep silent.

From *DENTRO LA SOSTANZA*
 "I geroglifici"

II

La vedova

Da un campionario di mummie a buonmercato
 e di sarcofaghi ho scelto quello
 che ti contiene meglio: svuotato dei visceri
 e del cervello, avrai più carità?

Il defunto

Stretto nelle odorose bende, sotto la tela
 che da maschera, all'infinito io gioisco.
 ma nel mio ventre c'è solo sabbia e orzo,
 zavorra per chi naviga nell'ombra.

III

Il contadino

Il Dio Nilo apre I solchi nel mio campo
 lo sarchia lo feconda e con maestosa
 flemma a passo di pantera si ritrae.
 fino all a semina io sto a guardare.

Neanche un Dio può tutto. Giù nel limo
 la mia fatica del mietere è tanta,
 non per l'agronomo che in tunica bianca
 disteso all'ombra pilucca provviste.

IV

I subumani

In vendita, alla gogna, siamo noi la preda
 di Libia e di Nubia. Non uno che non abbia
 assaggiato la canna del padrone — noi siamo
 sangue inferiore inquadrato a consumo.
 Chi scappa muore di freccia o è divorato

From section "Hieroglyphics"
Hieroglyphics

II

The Widow

I chose the best one from a manual of samples
of cheap mummies and coffins;
now emptied of viscera and brain,
will you finally show me some kindness?

The Deceased

Held tightly in perfumed linen bands,
beneath the fabric of my mask I experience
infinite joys; inside me are only sand and barley,
ballast for one who navigates through shadows.

III

The Farmer

The Nile God opens furrows in my field,
rakes and fertilizes,
then with majestic macho, stealthy as a panther,
withdraws. Until it's time to plant seeds
I stay there watching.

Not even a God can do everything.
Harvesting down in the mud exhausts me
while the agronomist in his white tunic
stretched out in shade noshes his picnic.

[Note: last line: A little Middle Eastern joke of my own. Instead of the Yiddish term I could just say "picks at his food"]

IV

Subhumans

In Lybia and Nubia, we're
prey, sold off, pilloried,
not a single one of us
spared the owner's whip;
our blood's inferior, we're meant to be used up.

dalle fiere. Basta un frego sul papiro
e la practica è archiviata dallo scriba
che ignora le sue vittime e ha le mani nette.

V

L'arte della guerra

Il Faraone avanza sotto un cielo di ventagli
l'esercito va sempre a piedi su dodici file
dal deserto di sabbia alle pietre nere di Siria,
un leone senza laccio segue il carro reale.

Dove l'erba è fitta una città d'oriente
manda barbagli. Gli ambasciatori si consultano
fissano il luogo e il giorno dello scontro,
se una delle parti non è pronta la si attende.

XII

Il profeta portato dalle acque

Sono un uomo dai vasti progetti che trova posto
dietro i padri morti. Mi richiamo a un Dio solo
impronunciabile. Queste divinità locali hanno muso
hanno becco d'animali. Ma io mi reputo egizio.

Mi dovete tutto: la sopportazione della vita e l'astio
del mondo per l'ebreo appartato. Sarò la vostra
immagine. Guiderò l'Esodo in modo pacifico.
con le Scritture terrò in pugno il popolo disperso.

XIII

Consanguinei

Mia sorella incarnata un'acqua cheta
ha le virtù dei laghi etiopi
è lenta è voluttuosa è opaca
di un bel blue chiaro di tinta

Ha una dolcezza ch'evapora. Fugge
il sole e ha sempre fame di sonno
ma la notte il suo corpo è una laguna
selvaggia che s'increspa e mi estenua.

Anyone who runs off is shot with arrows
or eaten by beasts. A single papyrus mark
entered into the scribe's notebook.
He never sees his victims, has clean hands.

V

Art of War

Under a sky of fans a pharaoh marches forth
twelve rows of foot soldiers move
from sandy deserts to Syria's black rocks,
an unleashed lion follows the royal chariot.

Where thick grass grows, an Eastern city flashes.
Ambassadors fix the place and time of conflict;
if one party's not ready, war's postponed.

XII

The Prophet Borne on the Waters

I'm a man of vast projects, following in footsteps of dead
fathers, reporting to a sole God of an unpronounceable
name. These local gods have animal faces and beaks,
yet I consider myself Egyptian.

You owe me everything – making life tolerable,
shouldering the world's fury at our apartness;
your very image, I'll lead a serene Exodus,
bind the diaspora together by means of Scripture.

XIII

Blood Relatives

My sister in the flesh is quiet waters,
she has the virtues of Ethiopian lakes
slow voluptuous opaque,
her skin's light-colored, a beautiful blue;

her suavity swiftly evaporates,
avoiding sun she always longs to sleep,
however at night her body's a wild lagoon
with waves stirred up that exhaust me.

Da AMICA MIA NEMICA

Suite a ritroso

3

Saprò annodarmi la cravatta a farfalla?
 bilanciare d'un sol colpo le bretelle
 dietro le spalle? questo non altro
 diceva il me stesso turbato quando
 il mattino saltavo piedi nudi sul loro letto
 e assistevo al rito
 accucciato nello stampo ancora caldo
 ignorando la mamma cui stavo accanto
 per il papà riflesso nello specchio
 col rasoio a mano libera su una guancia insaponata -
 stranamente quel gesto veloce
 mi ridava la stessa fiducia
 della volta che mi tenne ben saldo tra le gambe
 che mi tolse in due colpi le tonsille
 e un fiotto del mio sangue
 si rovesciò sullo specchio frontale
 per un attimo accecandolo.

Da I FABBRICANTI DEL "BELLO"

Che cosa farai questa estate?

Barriere coralline isole sommerse
 sabbie foreste metropolis galassie
 non basta il mondo, l'immaginario
 naviga nell'afa. Al tavolo si ride
 di una promessa, mai tenuta "cara,
 con me ti stacherai di viaggiare."

Sotto il piumone la blusa aperta
 All'ultimo bottone libera un seno
 Pieno, via gli anelli via le scarpe
 La gola chiede aria... che gli altri
 Programmino pure, io migrerei in
 Un corpo solare, all'ombra degli occhi.

From AMICA MIA NEMICA ("My Friend My Enemy")

Backwards-Motion Suite

Will I learn to make a bow-tie right?
straighten over my shoulders with one jerk
a pair of suspenders? This is what I wondered
those mornings when I jumped barefoot
on their bed or nestled into still-warm sheets,
neglecting mother nearby while watching the ritual
of Dad reflected in a mirror, his hand with its razor gliding
over a foamy cheek; it's curious how that gesture
helped me to be not afraid one time
when, holding me tightly between his legs,
with merely two sweeps he took out my tonsils
and a flow of blood spread
over the facing mirror, for a second blinding him.

From I FABBRICANTI DEL BELLO ("Fashioners of 'the Beautiful'")

What Are You Going to Do This Summer?

Coral barriers, submerged islands,
beaches, forests, metropolises, galaxies;
the world is not enough, fantasy
navigates through muggy air. At dinner we joke
about a promise unfulfilled:
"My dear, surely you'd tire of traveling with me."

Under a downy jacket,
after the last button is undone,
a full breast pops out. Off with rings, off with shoes!
We need to breathe deeply.
Let others make plans. My pilgrimage?
to a solar body beneath the shade of eyes.

Scenario

Malinconico incanto del declino
 Un tronco di colonna in tanta luce
 Sull'altura...dacché il tempo è a lavoro
 La natura rimodella la scena (entra in scena
 La storia) per frammenti i millenni
 Ci rendono dell'opera altre forme altri valori
 L'occhio s'attarda sul trascorso il già vissuto
 C'è fusione tra il gran tutto e il non finito
 (il paesaggio e la rovina) e c'è sempre una lucertola
 sul muro, nel silenzio in un profumo di timo
 s'ode il passo d'Agamennone che torna
 Egisto è nell'ombra e la pietra si tinge di rosso
 O di viola al tramonto ogniqualevolta lo sguardo
 Risveglia le vestigia di quel mondo.

Clara la luminosa

I
 Che secolo il nostro di padri severi!
 Al suo magistero
 Alla sua volontà fui sottomessa per anni
 Potevo opportmi? Gli appartenevo
 Ero il suo capolavoro, una bimba cullta
 Dal consenso a dagli applausi, la virtuosa
 A cui Chopin baciò la punta delle dita
 In giro per l'Europa...

Ero mutevole spontea; troppo a lungo, Robert
 Sono rimasta la tua creatura lontana:
 In luogo di una lettera
 Quella volta ricevetti una sonata
 (nostro diario è la tastiera) al tuo ritratto
 al mio (doni del cuore) palesavamo ogni sera alle nove
 — quando lottammo finalmente uniti
 la vita ci premiò così in eccesso
 che la felicità ci parve povera di eventi.

Stage Set

Melancholy enchantment of the decline
a tree-trunk, a column bathed in light
up on the hill. While time is at work,
Nature remodels scenery,
History takes the stage
fragment by fragment
across millenniums;
new forms, new values.
Eyes linger on the already lived —
fusion of a great whole and the not yet finished
(landscape and ruins); there's always a lizard
climbing a wall in the perfumed silence of thyme*
the sound of Agamemnon's returning footstep,
Aegisthus in the shadows, stones turning red or violet
at sunset whenever our gaze
reawakens vestiges of that world.

*time/thyme is a pun in English but not in Italian. I used it
once in an unpublished poem of my own, then years later found
it cleverly embedded in James Merrill's verse.

Luminous Clara (Excerpt)

I
What a century of harsh fathers this is!
for years I was subjected to his rule and will.
How could I fight back? I belonged to him,
his masterpiece, a baby cradled in praise,
virtuoso whose hands traveled the whole planet,
got kissed even by Chopin.
I was spontaneous and changeable,
for you always a distant entity.
Instead of a letter
once I received a sonata
(our diary's the keyboard). Each evening at nine
we'd perform for each other's portraits.
We battled, until finally united.
Happiness seemed truly uneventful
so luxuriously had life rewarded us.

Da MUTAZIONI (section IV)

L'impronta (1989)

Quando l'impresa
avrà il sapore della rimembranza
uno fra i tanti accadimenti
a opera dell'uomo rimarrà per sempre
nell'infinita maestà stellare
l'impronta di quel piede sulla luna.
(1989)

Madrigale (1993)

Ho fatto un pieno di versi
per la traversata dei deserti
dell'amore, là dove il viaggiare
più comporta dei rischi, dove
occorre tenere gli occhi bene aperti
perchè non sempre regge il cuore
A malapena si conserva un viso
se il tempo ingoia il resto;
con un ritratto appeso non si va
molto lontano, a meno che un sorriso
una figura non venga a divorarti
con dolcezza, un modo ancora
per stare con la vita.

From MUTAZIONI (section IV)

Imprint (1989)

When, among the other things humankind engenders,
this exploit takes on the flavor of remembrance,
in the infinite majesty of the heavens
that imprint on the moon
of a foot will be everlasting.

Madrigal (1993)

I filled up my tank with poetry
to traverse love's deserts,
the most dangerous parts
where you have to keep your eyes
wide open because the heart
can sometimes falter!
When time washes out the rest,
it's hard to remember a face:
a portrait hung on the wall won't do it.
You need a smile, a figure
consuming you with sweetness—
that's how to go on staying in life.

Poems by Antonio Spagnuolo

Translated by Paul D'Agostino and Andrea Monti

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

Andrea Monti is an Italian artist and curator living in Brooklyn, NY. In 2009, he curated a tribute event to Italian writer and translator Fernanda Pivano at the Italian Cultural Institute of New York, with special contributors John Giorno, Erica Jong, Jonas Mekas, and Mauro Pagani. His current projects include Microscope Gallery, an art space in Bushwick presenting monthly exhibitions combined with a regular event series (www.microscopegallery.com).

Antonio Spagnuolo (Napoli 1931), poeta e saggista, vive a Napoli. Ha pubblicato numerose opere poetiche: *Ore del tempo perduto* (1953), *Rintocchi del cielo* (1954), *Erba sul muro* (1965), *Poesie 74* (1974), *Affinità imperfette* (1978), *I diritti senza nome* (1978), *Angolo artificiale* (1979), *Graffito controluce* (1980), *Ingresso bianco* (1983), *Le stanze* (1983), *Fogli dal calendario* (1984), *Candida* (1985), *Dieci poesie d'amore e una prova d'autore* (1987), *Infibul/azione* (1988), *Il tempo scalzato* (1989), *L'intimo piacere di svestirsi* (1992), *Il gesto, le camelie* (1992), *Dietro il restauro* (1993), *Attese* (1994), *Io ti inseguirò* (1999), *Rapinando alfabeti* (2001), *Corruptions* (2004), *Per lembi* (2004), *Da Napoli* (2007, antologia di poeti contemporanei), *Fugacità del tempo* (2007), *Fratture da comporre* (2009), *Frammenti imprevisti* (2011) e *Misure del timore* (2011). Alcune sue opere di prosa sono *Monica*

ed altri (1980), *Pausa di sghembo* (1994), *Un sogno nel bagaglio* (2006), *La mia amica Morè e altri racconti* (2008). Ha scritto anche un pezzo per il teatro, *Il cofanetto* (1995). Spagnuolo ha ricevuto diversi primi premi in concorsi letterari: "Città di Adelfia," 1985; "M. Stefanile" e "Venezia," 1986; "Spallicci, 1991"; "Minturnae," 1993. Spagnuolo è presente nel *Dizionario della letteratura italiana del Novecento*, curato da A. Asor Rosa, e nel volume antologico *Disordinate convivenze: Poeti di fine secolo*, curato da G. Manacorda. Attualmente dirige la collana "le parole della Sibilla" per le edizioni Kairòs, e la rassegna "poetrydream" in internet (<http://poetrydream.splinder.com>).

Nota sulle traduzioni

In questi nuovi testi di Antonio Spagnuolo emerge un io poetico che spesso interviene come intermediario e osservatore intimo. Un io poetico, cioè, che comunica fra il fisico o il corporale e l'effimero o lo spirituale. Esiste come interlocutore, questo io; persiste di verso in verso. Parla il corpo, quasi; o il sangue, quasi; o il cuore, che è a volte la mente. La difficoltà nel tradurre tali versi, dunque, deriva dalla consapevolezza che il quotidiano qui, ossia il riconoscibile palese, coincide soltanto con le parole stesse che danno corpo al testo. Vi è un rapporto tripartito: versi che raffigurano un fisico; vocalizzazioni che incorporano uno spirito; testi che incidono e esprimono entrambi. Questi componimenti sono astratti e abbastanza fragili, per cui abbiamo deciso – io e il mio collaboratore, Andrea Monti – di lasciar regnare la sottigliezza e la delicatezza. Speriamo di esserci riusciti.

Inediti**Dal tempo degli altari**

Nessuna epifania conosce il gioco
inciso nella tua verginità.
Ti lascerò distribuire il sangue
rifiutando pensieri,
doglianze del tuo piccolo ventre
ormai più avvezzo allo scherno che ai riflessi.
Recupero occasioni rinverdite
confondendo le crepe del passato
e a doppia fonte, ora piena, o triste,
spacco le mie giornate senza agganci.
Dal tempo degli altari
denudavo le lampade
nel perimetro corto delle pene,
lentamente alle braccia ora scolora
la strada senza un fine, tra le congiunzioni
di una fragile bacheca.
Sguscio l'enigma, distacco rifugi, che la mia mente
tra ombre e agguati scintilla
per ritrovarti ancora dove le offerte
lanciano sottintesi,
non riesco a distinguere pallori,
rivedo l'orrida trasparenza della noia
dove lo sforzo è inutile, gesticolando
o s'incestra tra i cristalli della nonna
il filo della tua scommessa.

Illusione

Anche il trillo del vuoto è un'illusione
di altri tempi e guizzi, ultima frattura
a scaglie di ripetizioni,
belva semiaperta a mutamenti.
Il mio urlo ha l'intreccio
delle tinte roventi, delle attese,
ed ecco che le arterie inceppano
per la sclerosi - agguato,
filiere disperate

Previously Unpublished

From the Time of the Altars

The game incised in your
virginity knows no epiphany.
I will let you distribute the blood
rejecting the thoughts,
your tiny belly's aches
now more used to mocking than to reflexes.
I regain regreened occasions
by confusing cracks of the past,
and it's a double spring, now full, now glum,
that splits my days that have no getaways.
From the time of the altars
I denuded the lamps
in the short perimeter of grief,
now slowly the road without end
fades into the arms, among the junctures
of a brittle display case.
I shell the enigma, detach the shelters that my mind
makes sparkle amidst darkness and ambushes
to find you again where the offers
cast allusions,
I can't discern the pallors,
I see the dreadful transparency of boredom
where effort is useless, gesticulating,
or tangled in grandma's crystals is
the thread of your bet.

Illusion

Even the trill of the void is an illusion
of other times and flashes, of the last
scaly fracture of repetitions,
of a yet partially alterable beast.
My shout carries the intrigue
of waits, of blazing tints,
and now sclerosis blocks
up the arteries—a trap,
desperately sequenced
mixtures that keep track of forever,

secondo impasti che fan conto del sempre,
 nel crepitio dei fiotti d'ombra,
 insistono gli abbracci per fondere il cerchio,
 là dove ancora sembra intatta
 la punta del pensiero giovanile,
 dove era scritto che la carne in discesa
 maliziosamente rimetteva il verso giusto
 condividendo il medesimo guizzo
 delle incisioni.

Salva le immagini delle matrici
 per l'endotelio che aggruma lipemie
 secondo errori piccolo borghesi.
 Ad incastonare cristalli sogno di essere altrove
 avvolgendo la vampa come frusta di luna
 sotto gli stridii dei gabbiani
 cambiando senza fine le rese del miracolo.

Febbre

Ora strappi le frange della febbre
 tra corde irraggiungibili e l'arsura
 dei ricordi, malinconie
 condotte tra i miei giorni incompiuti.
 Così le inezie scalciate ove il divano
 ed il cerchio di noi stessi ondeggia
 deformando le dita.
 Ecco i bagliori continuano a momenti.
 Quel giro preferito, ben disposto a silenzi,
 mormora sottintesi alle nebbie.
 Piegato allo specchio
 come un ladro offro bicchieri
 per custodire tristezze,
 figure deformate mi travolgono
 e non comprendo cosa mai circonda la mia casa
 nel vortice dei giorni che costringono
 al pianto, uno scherzo sprecato.
 Mentre la rabbia ripercuote e riaffiora
 l'antica solitudine, sommessa,
 l'oscura implacabile favola
 che penetra ogni mattina nelle maglie
 di immagini passate, è l'irrazionale
 esperimento che attanaglia.

in the rustling gushes of darkness,
the embraces insist on melding the circle,
wherein the acuity of youthful thought
seems yet intact,
where it was written that falling flesh
puts the right verse back, maliciously,
with the same flash
of incisions.

To be saved are the images of the matrices
through the endothelium gathering tumors
according to petit-bourgeois errors.
While setting crystals I dream of being elsewhere
wrapping up the heat like the moon's whip
beneath the shrieking seagulls
altering endlessly the yields of the miracle.

Fever

Now you tear off the fringes of the fever
between unreachable strings and the heat-wave
of memories, melancholies
led through my unfulfilled days.
Thus the shabby trifles where the couch
is impressed with circles of ourselves
deforming fingers.
There continue the glares, at times.
That favorite path, to which silence is welcome,
murmurs unexpressed thoughts to the fog.
Bent before the mirror
like a thief I offer glasses
to guard sadnesses,
deformed figures overwhelm me,
and I just don't get what surrounds my house
in the vortex of days compelling me
to weep, a wasted joke.
As the anger reemerges and reverberates,
the ancient solitude, subdued,
the determined, obscure fairy tale
that every morning seeps through the tangle
of past images, it is the irrational
experiment that strangles.

Batticuore

Occultavo leggende tra gli umori:
quei gesti, quel tremore, quei furori,
quel teatro di ombre ripetute,
un prodigio che esprime la mano
fra il mare e le stradine,
ove incomincia codice che lacera.
Io, fervore delle pupille,
dal tocco già assegnato,
cerco ferite e agguati,
distratto dalle camere fragranti.
Quando chiama la fionda
nel profondo è certezza di brusii,
il batticuore che incalza
per confessare preghiere,
soltanto la memoria a rinnovare
la pigrizia della primavera.
Perfidi dubbi che svanivano
per azzardare ore, evanescenze,
un granello che divide le rovine delle stelle.
Inflessibile e cupa la monotonia
è leggero sussurro, descrive desideri
nel chiederti lo sguardo imbronciato,
ogni tuo mutamento raffigura le rughe
che rimarranno così per conservare distanze.

Heartbeat

I used to conceal legends in humors:
those gestures, that tremor, those furors,
that theater of repeated shadows,
a marvel expressed by the hand
between the sea and the little streets
commencing the lacerating codex.
I am the ardor in the pupils,
already assigned by the touch,
I seek coagulations and wounds and am
distracted by fragrant rooms.
When the sling calls up
in the deep, an unnerving is certain,
the heartbeat pressing on
to confess prayers,
only memory renews the
laziness of spring.
Tracherous doubts that once vanished to
hazard away hours and evanescences,
a grain separating the ruins of stars.
Monotony is dark and unbending,
a light whisper describing desires
by requesting your sulking gaze,
your every change deepening the wrinkles
that will remain, conserving distances.

Eclogue Written by Girolamo Muzio upon the Death of Tullia d'Aragona's Daughter Penelope

Translated by Elizabeth Pallitto

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*

Muse to *Maestra* and Pupil: Images of Tullia and Penelope d'Aragona in Muzio's Eclogues

Girolamo Muzio (1496-1576), also called Giustinopolitano, served various noble families as a courtier, including the d'Este. Muzio's *Egloghe*, first published in 1550, consist of classical pastoral

eclogues in diverse modes, divided into five sections, or “books”: “Le Amorse” (love poems), “Le Marchesane” and “Le illustri” (to noble or royal acquaintances), “Le Lugubri” (elegies in a funereal vein), and “Le Varie” (other occasional poems). The “elegy upon the death of Signora Penelope” appears in “Le Lugubri,” Book Four of Muzio’s *Egloghe . . . Divise In Cinque Libri* (Venice: Gabriel Giolito de Ferrari et Fratelli, 1550). The book is numbered by leaves rather than by pages; Eclogue VI, “Per La Morte Della Signora Penelope,” begins on 94v of the 1550 edition. “La Tirrhenia,” dedicated to Tullia d’Aragona, is found in Book I, “Le Amorse.” As we shall see, young Penelope was related to the poet and writer Tullia d’Aragona (c.1510-1556), allegedly the daughter of Cardinal Luigi d’Aragona.¹

Lacking legitimate birth, Tullia was nevertheless educated. Cardinal Luigi d’Aragona, Giulia Campana’s companion, provided young Tullia d’Aragona with an education in the *studia humanitatis*. Penelope was a benefactor of this learning; apparently, so was Muzio. Muzio was a prolific humanist, man of letters and diplomat who exchanged poetry with Tullia d’Aragona and dedicated several of his works to her. In a letter to Antonio Mezzabarba, he explains that he depicts Tullia as the nymph Tirrhenia, and – at her request – as Thalia, the comic muse. In Eclogue VI, then, Tirrhenia is Tullia, Iole is Giulia, and Argia is Penelope.

Giulia Campana (also “Ferrarese”) claimed that Penelope was her daughter; however, there are over twenty years between the “sisters.” Therefore, it is likely that the girl is Tullia’s daughter and that their move to Ferrara from Rome was motivated by the birth of a child. The face-saving fiction of sisters was to uphold Tullia’s honor as she built her reputation as a poet.

Whether Giulia’s daughter or Tullia’s, Penelope was the daughter of a courtesan. In Medici Florence, however, Tullia’s image was to undergo a metamorphosis from courtesan to courtier. Eleonora de Toledo, wife of Cosimo de’ Medici, encouraged him to grant clemency to Tullia who had violated the law that courtesans must wear a yellow veil. Twice fined, she had refused to wear the sign of the courtesan. In 1547, having published two books, she had been exonerated by Cosimo on the basis of “poetry and philosophy.” This history is explained in the introduction to *Sweet Fire: Tullia d’Aragona’s Poetry of Dialogue and Selected Prose*.

Muzio identifies the extremely wealthy and powerful Luigi

D'Aragona as Tullia's father. Luigi, the son of Enrico, Marquis of Gerace, was a natural grandson of Ferdinand I of Spain. The Cardinal and Giulia shared two residences: one in Rome and one in the suburbs. The Cardinal's travels – an extended trip to the major cities of Europe – are well documented in a book by his secretary Antonio de Beatis. Luigi d'Aragona met with princes and dignitaries, cementing powerful alliances for the house of Aragón. Speculating on the Cardinal's political ambitions, Andre Chastel infers that he was seeking ecclesiastical promotion, possibly election to the papacy.

Luigi did not live to enjoy the fruits of his labors; his death in 1519 left Giulia and Tullia in a precarious social and financial position. Had clergymen been allowed to marry, Tullia might have been spared the poverty and loss of innocence she laments in the preface to her epic. Her life was marked by the tension between the label *cortigiana* (courtesan) and her aspiration to become a *cortigiano* (courtier). She finally succeeded on the merits of her poetry and philosophy.

Our interest in this elegiac eclogue has to do with the indirect benefits of the humanistic education provided for Tullia by Cardinal d'Aragona. Proficient in Latin, it was said that she could argue in that language. Reading between the lines of Muzio's "Argia" eclogue, a portrait of the young maestro and her pupil, we see Penelope/Argia as a precocious student of the learned Tullia/Tirrhena. The latter's care and solicitude for the "formation of her likeness" is one of the most striking images in the poem.

Muzio manages to skirt the issue of the family fiction by emphasizing the maternal *nature* of the bond. Ever anxious to preserve Tullia's honor, he upholds the cover story of "sisters." Perhaps he goes overboard in assigning the language normally reserved for the Virgin Mary to Giulia – "blessed be the fruit of thy womb" – in his enthusiasm for the gifted "sisters." It is a striking portrait, however: the reader's attention is subtly drawn to the image of the two *sembianti*, young woman and young girl in a bond of affection and learning.

In her *Dialogo...della Infinité di amore*, Tullia recreates herself in the image of Diotima of Mantinea, the teacher of Socrates. She reiterates Diotima's point in Plato's *Symposium*: that creative bodies bring forth children and creative souls give birth to art and to ideas

in the minds of others. Muzio never says Tulliaq is the mother of Penelope; he cannot do so without damage to Tullia's carefully constructed image of virtue/*virtù*. He does, however, portray his beloved Tullia as someone whose guidance benefits those creative souls who learn from her, himself included. The selfless care and diligent dedication that recall the highest calling of an educator are embodied in the highly original portrait and in this uncommon, early use of the word *maestro* in the feminine — *maestra*.

In reinventing the classical idea of *paideia*, Muzio creates a subtle shift, from the Greek practice of the older male patron of a male pupil — to a familial, female, version of *paideia*. This home-schooled family education brings us back to the Greek root *paidi* (child). At puberty, Penelope is hardly a Signora (but the word "Signorina" is not yet in use). Penelope's early death is all the more devastating in light of her prodigious potential.

The pastoral eclogue is an archaic form that nevertheless resonates with emotional immediacy. As David Ferry writes in introduction to his *Eclogues of Virgil*, "the artifice of its forms makes us vividly, radiantly, conscious of our experience of its meanings." In pastoral, "figures of refuge and ease" remind us of "the precariousness of refuge and ease." (Ferry, xv). The same can be said of Muzio's *Egloghe*. The "vita brevis" theme comes through especially in the metaphor of a flower cut down by the cruel plow ("Come purpureo fior, cui duro aratro / Tagliato ha da radice"). Penelope d'Aragona died at thirteen years of age; we do not know the cause of her death. All we have is her epitaph and this poem.

D.O.M.

PENELOPE ARAGONE OMNEM EXPECTATIONEM FORMAM
CORPORIS VENUSTATE AC INGENII ACIE DE SE CONCITANTE
PRETER OMNIUM SPEM REPENTINA MORTE PROII DOLOR OP-
PRESSE IULIA CAMPANA MATER ET TULLIA ARAGONA SOROR
MESTISSIM. POSVERE OBIT ANNO A CHRISTI ORTUS 1549 CAL.
FEBBRU. DUM AGERET ANNOS AETATIS SUAE XIII. MENS.
X. DIES. XX.

Penelope d' Aragona,
having aroused all manner of expectation
with loveliness of your form and acuity of your intellect
By her unexpected death
overwhelmed by sorrow beyond all hope
is her mother, Giulia Campana;
her sister, Tullia d' Aragona, devastated.
Here she lies, until the resurrection of Christ.
In the year of our Lord, 1549, the 1st day of February.
This she did at the age of thirteen years, ten months, and
twenty days.



8. Oh, Sophia! ; rosary beads on canvas.

Delle lugubri
Del Mutio egloga vi

Argia.
Per la morte della
Signora Penelope

Il Tevere solo

Scendea dolente il glorioso Tebro
Per doppia vena giù da i poggi Thoschi:
Et lasciato l'antico suo costume,
Non pur dal mento, & dal ceruleo crine,
Ma da gli occhi stillava un largo humore.
Et giunto là, dov' anchor si riserba
La memoria del furto, & de la pena
Del fero Caco, à seder si ripose
Nel duro suolo in su la destra riva.
A lui facean le nimphe ampia corona
In terra, e in acqua; à lui stavan dintorno
Taciti, & riverenti i Dei silvestri.
Et l'onde, che correano à l'onde salse
Da gli alti gioghi giunte al suo cospetto
Raggirandosi intorno & gorgogliando
Rendeano honore al lor Signore, & padre.
Ei stato alquanto tra pensoso, & tristo
Mirando à terra, e infin dal cor profondo
Mandando d'hor in hor gravi sospiri,
Et raccogliendo con attente orecchie
Il confuso dolor de i tristi lai,
Che fean d'intorno risonar le valli,
Al fine alzata l'honorata fronte
Gli occhi volse guatando i sette colli,

Il Tevere

Poi ch' à l'ocaso è gito il nostro Sole,
Et è con lui caduta ogni speranza
Di vederlo tornare in oriente,
Ragion è ben che la gravosa nebbia

Delle Lugubri / the Funeral Elegies of Muzio¹
Del Mutio egloga vi / Eclogue vi of Muzio.

Argia.
Per la morte della Signora Penelope
On the Death of Lady Penelope

The Tiber, alone

Glorious in sorrow, the Tiber flowed, descending
the Tuscan hills in a forked stream:²
and, departing from his ancient custom,
not even from his chin, nor
from the waves of his cerulean mane,
but from his eyes, a large teardrop welled.
And having arrived at the hill, where the memory
of the theft by fierce Cacus³ – and of the pain – remains;
he rests there, sitting on the hard, harsh ground
of the river's right bank.
For him, the earth-nymphs weave a broad crown
on earth and in the water,
and the sylvan gods surround him,
silent and reverent.⁴
And the waves, that run from the high peaks
to the salty sea,
having reached his presence,
circle around him, gurgling,
and render honor to their Lord and Father.
Amidst them he stood, looking down at the ground,
between pensive and sorrowful,
emitting deep and rhythmic sighs from his heart's core;
and with attentive ear
taking in the mingled sorrow of their sad sounds,
songs that made the valleys resound –
at last he lifted his venerable face, and
turning his eyes, fixed his gaze on the seven hills:

The Tiber

“Because it has come to pass
that our Sun is gone,
and with him, every hope
of seeing him return to rise in the East,

Del nostro duol quest'aere tutto ingombri,
 Et ch'al furor de i tempestosi venti
 De i sospir nostri si risolve in pioggia
 D'amaro pianto. O morte; acerba morte,
 Come n'hai posti in tenebre, e in martire?

Il nostro Sole era la bella Argia,
 Che come nuovo Sol, che l'aurea luce
 Riporti al mondo, lucida, & serena
 Surgea: Et non sofferse ingiusto fato,
 Che pervenir potesse al mezo giorno;
 Anzi al primo apparir cadde dal cielo.
 Quanti amari desiri, & quanti amari
 Hai sospiri lasciati à le nostre alme
 Gentile Argia, che di dolci desiri
 Empier solevi ogni anima gentile,
 Et trar dolci sospir da i gentil cori.

Gia s'invaghia nel bel regno d'amore
 Qual ha piu raro, & pellegrino ingegno,
 D'affisar gli occhi in quel lucente specchio
 Del chiaro viso tuo: gia nuove fiamme
 Fiammeggiar si sentian ne i sacri petti
 De i piu nobil pastor. Gia al nuovo suono
 Di dolci cetre, à nuove, & dolce rime
 Era la tua vaghezza ampio soggetto.
 Et in un punto le nemiche stelle
 Posto han fine al piacere, al foco, al canto.

Amor spent'è l'honor de la tua face,
 Poi ch'estinto è l'ardor di que'begli occhi.
 Da i nostri cor letitia è posta in bando,
 Poi ch'oscurata è la serena fronte;
 Altro non s'ode che dogliosi accenti,
 Poi che silentio ha l'amorosa voce;
 Non piu risplende l'aurea primavera,
 Poi che cadute son le fresche rose
 De le guance vermiglie; ogni ricchezza
 N'han rapita l'avare invide parche
 Nel tor le schiette perle, e i bei rubini
 Di quella bella bocca, onde solea
 Spirar d'Arabia il piu soave odore.

this is why
the heavy fog of our grief
weighs down the air,
and this is why
the furor of our sighs' tempestuous winds
condenses into a rain
of bitter tears. O death,
bitter unyielding death,
how you have reduced us
to shadows and to suffering."

Lovely Argia,⁵ who arose, shining, was our sun
and, like a new Sun, rose, bringing golden light,
lucid and serene, to the world:
Would that she could reach midday,
and not suffer so unjust a fate,
that, at her first blazing-forth,
she should fall from the sky.
How many unfulfilled longings,
how many bitter sighs
you have bequeathed our souls,
gracious Argia, who would fill
every noble soul with sweet desire,
and draw sweet sighs from every worthy heart.

In Love's fair realm, one rare and pilgrim soul,
is already smitten, his eyes transfixed
in the shining mirror of your bright face:
already one hears rumors of new sparks bursting into flame,
ignited in the sacred hearts of the most noble shepherds.
already, for new sounds from sweet lyres,
for sweet poems in new styles,
your beauty is theme enough —
and yet in an instant the hostile stars
have put an end to pleasure, flame, and song.

Love, your face has lost all honor,
for extinguished is the flame of those lovely eyes.
Happiness is exiled from our hearts
for the serene face is obscured from view;
One hears only sounds of sorrow
for silence has taken away the lovely voice.
Fallen are the fresh roses of those blushing cheeks;

Ma che vo rimembrando d'uno in uno
I dolor nostri? O dura rimembranza
Del ben passato. Ahi quante volte, & quante
L'habbiamo o figlie dentro'l nostro fiume
Raccolta ignuda. Anchora il mio diletto
Veder mi sembra. Io scorgo vivo, & vero
Tra voi scherzare il morbido alabastro.
O belle, o care, o delicate membra;
Imaginar non puo chi non le vide,
Come gia fosser belle, & come care,
Et come delicate. In su quel sasso
Vista l'ho seder nuda, & vergognosa
Ristretta in se con le candide mani
Tutta coprirsi de' suoi bei capelli.
L'ho vista (ahi lasso) & riveder non spero.
Fra que' riposti, & fortunati liti
Su Nacque la bella, & diletta Argia;
Quivi i begli occhi aperse à l'auree stelle;
Quindi à l'aere mandò i primeri accenti;
Quivi nudrita fu di puro latte.
Là per quelle contrade humide, & salse
A la dolce, & vezzose fanciulletta
I lascivi delphin festosi giri
Tessean saltando intorno; à le sue culle
Le Nereide portavano, e i Tritoni
Conche da i marin liti, & fresche perle.

thus, golden spring no longer shines.
Envious, the greedy Fates have seized
all richness, taking away
the bright-white pearls and deep-red rubies
of that beautiful mouth,
where the softest Arabian perfumes
used to respire.
But how is it that I go remembering
Our sorrows, one by one?
O, harsh remembrance of past joys.
Ah, daughters, how often have we gathered,
nude, in our river. Yet I seem to see even now,
my delight, my dear — I discern her, alive and real,
her smooth alabaster, playing among you.
O lovely, beloved, and delicate members;
one who does not see cannot imagine
how beautiful they were, how dear
and how delicate. Sitting
on that rock,
I have seen her, nude and shy,
covering herself with her white hands
enveloped in herself,
Covered entirely by her beautiful hair.
I have seen her thus; alas, and do not hope to see again.
O vain desires, and hopes in vain.
I went away proud, and triumphant
to have despoiled the Adria
of a gem so rare — the dreadful Adria!
whose secret ponds, whose
proud and marshy reeds,
try to measure up to our laurels.
And now my every joy has turned to lament.
For on these secluded and fortunate shores
the beautiful, delightful Argia was born;
there, her lovely eyes opened to the golden stars;
just so, her first sounds were sent through the air.
There, she was nourished on pure milk.
There, in those well-watered and fertile waves,
as the cavorting dolphins wove joyful circles
leaping around the sweet and charming tiny girl,
Nereids and the Tritons brought to her cradle
conches from the seashores, and fresh pearls.

Indi pargoleggiar su per le rive
 Fu vista un tempo del gran Re di i fiumi,
 Dove premendo col tenero piede
 Il verde suolo, & raggirando gli occhi
 Rendea fiorite, & odorate l'herbe.
 Quivi dolce scherzando, & balbettando
 Di se diede à i pastori, & à le nimphe
 Dolce trastullo, & gloriosa spene.

Poi come la guidava il suo destino
 Varcata d'Apennino i duri gioghi
 Tenne lunga stagione adorni, & lieti
 I poggi d'Arbia, & le campagne d'Arno.

Ma ne la salse, & arenose piagge,
 Ne'l vago Po, ne i be'paesi thoschi,
 Ne dapoì questi fiumi, & questi poggi
 Lei vider mai senza la fida scorta
 De la dotta Tirrhenia, di colei,
 Il cui nome segnato è in mille tronchi
 Da i piu chiari pastor; De le cui rime
 Surgon superbe piu di mille piante.
 Et ch'è si chiara tra i famosi allori
 Di Parnaso, & si chiara ad Aganippe,
 Che'l ragionar de le sue eterne lode
 Saria proprio un voler dar luce al Sole.

L'alma Tirrhenia à la vezzose Argia
 Per natura sorella, per amore
 Et per studio le fu madre, & maestra.
 Care dolci sorelle, & cari frutti
 À noi¹ prodotti da felice pianta.
 Fortunata Iole, à cui dal ciel fu dato
 Dal tuo fecondo, & fortunato ventre
 Render al mondo cosi cari parti.
 O troppo fortunata se pur fermo
 Fosse quel ben, ch'à noi prestano i cieli.

There, upon the riverbanks, she spent her childhood,
 and was seen for a time by the great King of rivers,
 where, pressing the verdant soil with tender foot,
 and taking all within her circling glance,
 she made the grasses sweet-smelling and flowering.
 Here, sweetly playing and babbling to herself,
 she gave sweet delight and glorious hope
 to the shepherds and the nymphs.
 Then as her destiny guided her,
 crossing the harsh peaks of the Apennines,
 for a long season she kept the hills
 of the Arbia and the lands of the Arno
 full of beauty and joy.

But neither by the salty and sandy shores,
 nor by the wandering Po,
 nor by the fair Tuscan countryside,
 and later, by these rivers and these hills,
 was she ever seen apart from
 her faithful companion, the learned Tirrhena –
 whose name, engraved by the most famous shepherds;
 adorns a thousand trees;
 for whom proud poems arise
 in more than a thousand places.
 For shining so among the famous laurels
 of Parnassus, and so clear to Aganippe,⁶
 that to sing her everlasting praises
 would be to lend light to the Sun.

Bountiful Tirrhena, sister by nature to charming Argia
 by nature, but by love for her and for her studies,
 she was a mother to her, a *maestra*.
 Beloved sisters, dear shoots,
 born to us from the same felicitous plant.
 O fortunate Giulia, chosen by heaven
 to bestow upon the world such dear children,
 the fruit of your fertile and blessed womb.
 O too fortunate, if that blessing remained with us still –
 she who was lent to us – so briefly – by the heavens.

L'alma Tirrhenia con materno affetto
Del raro honor de'suoi gentil sembianti

Informò l'amorosa pargoletta.
Questa con la favella, & con l'esempio
Mostrava à lei com'anima mortale
Per l'interna belta diventa eterna.
Et questa del piacer de l'alme Muse
D'hor in hor l'accendeva, al sacro monte
Lei conducendo per destro sentiero.

Fioria con tal belta, con tali honori
La bella Argia, come novella rosa,
Cui porge il ciel benigno aure soavi,
Tepidi Soli, & rugiadoso humore.
Perche fanciulla anchor mille trophei
Lasciò di spirti chiaramente accesi
Intra'l monte, la Macra, e'l mar Tirrhenò.
Ma come quella, à cui nova virtute
Gia prometteva piu honorate spoglie,
A noi rivolse al fine il vago piede,
Per triumphar di me, ch'al primo tempo
Gia menai colà su tanti triumphi.
Et era caro à me l'esser soggetto
A quella gratiosa, & bella mano,
Che temprava ad amor l'auree saette.

Mortal diletto, come ti dilegui.
A pena giunta era à la terza etade
La bella giovinetta, & hora in herba
Perduta habbiamo & la vaghezza, e'l frutto.

Come purpureo fior, cui duro aratro
Tagliato ha da radice, afflitto langue,
Pallida langue l'amorosa Argia.

La bella Argia crudel morte n'ha tolta:
Argia la bella è morta; & di si rare
Bellezze, di si rare, & care doti
Altro non lascia à noi, che van desio,
Honorata memoria, & duolo eterno.

Gracious Tirrhena, with maternal affection
for the singular honor of her refined likeness,
formed and infused the lovely young girl,
showing her, by word and by exemplary deed,
how a mortal soul, through intellectual beauty,
becomes immortal. And Tirrhena,
to the delight of the gracious Muses,
illuminated her,⁷ leading the way,
step by step, on the straight path,
ascending the holy mountain.

With such beauty, such honors,
the lovely Argia flowered, like a new rose;
whom the heavens brought, with gentle pleasing breezes,
moderate Sun, and dewy humors.
For the young girl left a thousand trophies, spirits aflame
among the hills, the Macra,⁸ and the Tirrhenian Sea.⁹
But she, whose virtues already promised new spoils,
finally turned her wandering foot to us, to triumph over me,
who achieved so many triumphs from the beginning.
And how dear it was for me to be subject
to such a gracious, lovely hand,
of one who tempered the golden arrows with love.

Mortal delight, how quickly you disappear.
Hardly had she reached adolescence,
the lovely young girl, when now,
just now, in the first budding of youth,
we have lost not only her joy
but also its fruit.¹⁰⁰

Like a crimson flower the cruel plow has severed
at the root, pale and lifeless
lies the lovely Argia.

Cruel Death has taken the lovely Argia:
Argia, beautiful Argia, is dead;
she of such rare beauties, and gifts
so rare and dear, nothing is left to us but vain desire,
honored memories, and infinite sorrow.

Ite silvestri Dei, Nimphe, & pastori,
Coronate di rose, & di viole
Il pretioso corpo, e'l sacro loco.
Gite, che cosi piace à l'alme Muse,
Et cosi ne comanda il santo amore.

Voi ch'ad amore, & voi ch'al sacro choro
Sacrați havete i cori, à la bell'alma
Com'à cosa divina, d'anno in anno
Farete honor intorno al suo sepulchro
Di nove rime, & di caldi sospiri.

Cosi dicea l'addolorato Tebro;
Et cosi detto in men ch'io no'l ridico
Fu veduto tornare in liquide onde,
Et con l'altre à l'in giu pigliare il cors

¹ Muzio, Egloghe, A 'noi (should be "À noi")

Go, woodland gods, nymphs, and shepherds,
crown with roses and with violets
her precious corpse and the sacred place.
Go, as is pleasing to the holy Muses,
And as sacred Love commands.

You who have consecrated your hearts
to Love and to the sacred Choir,
to the beautiful soul as to a thing divine,
year after year - with new poems
and bitter fervent sighs -
render honor to her sepulchre."

Thus said the sorrowing Tiber;
and having said it so quickly I had no time to reply,
he turned back from there, descended into the liquid waves,
and with the others, from there down, went on his way.

Notes

¹ Muzio, Girolamo, 1496-1576.

² The Tiber River flows from the Apennine Mountains south-westwards to the Tyrrhenian Sea after passing Rome.

³ Cacus: In Roman myth, a fire breathing monster, son of Vulcan, who was supposed to have lived on a hill at Rome (Aventine – cf. Virgil, who may have invented this story) and terrorized the country. As Hercules was driving to Greece the cattle he had stolen from the monster Geryon, he rested at the future site of Rome, where he was entertained by Evander. Cacus stole some of the cattle and dragged them into his cave, tail first, so that it was impossible to follow their traces. When the remaining cattle passed the cave, those within began to bellow and were thus discovered; Hercules then killed Cacus (in Etruscan myth, Cacus was a seer on the Palatine). M. C. Howatson and Ian Chilvers, *The Concise Oxford Companion to Classical Literature* (Oxford/NY: Oxford UP, 1993).

⁴ Muzio's depiction, in pastoral terms, can be compared to the first poem of *Le Rime della Signora Tullia d'Aragona*, in which nymphs, shepherds, and the poet herself pay tribute to Cosimo de' Medici with flowers and incense. English translations of this poem can be found in Sweet Fire: Tullia d'Aragona's Poetry of Dialogue and Selected Prose, translated and edited by E. A. Pallitto (New York: Braziller, 2007), pages 34-35. In a (1550) letter, Muzio documents Tullia d'Aragona's influence upon his poetry. Girolamo Muzio, *Lettere* (Venice: Gabriele Giolito de' Ferrari, 1551). Muzio, Girolamo, 1496-1576. *Lettere* : ristampa anastatica dell'ed. Sermartelli, ed. Luciana Borsetto (Bologna : Arnaldo Forni, 1985). I first consulted this book, thanks to a grant, as Mascioli Fellow at the Folger Shakespeare Library, Washington, D.C. At the Folger, I found Muzio's *Rime* and *Rime Diverse*.

⁵ In Muzio's poetry, he assigns to mythical pastoral identities to historical persons: Tirrhenia is Tullia d'Aragona; Iole is her mother, Giulia Campana (a.k.a. Giulia Ferrarese); and Argia is Penelope d'Aragona.

⁶ A nymph of the well of the same name at the foot of Mount Helicon, in Boeotia, which was considered sacred to the Muses, and believed to have the power of inspiring those who drank of it[...a daughter of the river-god Permessus. (Paus. ix. 29. § 3; Virg. *Ecl.* x. 12.) The Muses are sometimes called Aganippides. From *Dictionary of Greek and Roman Biography and Mythology*. <<http://www.theoi.com/Nymphe/NympheAganippe.html>>.

⁷ Mount Helicon, sacred to the Muses. Penelope had the benefit of Tullia's classical education – as well as her knowledge of the world. The implication of this passage is that Penelope was on the path to becoming a poet, like Tullia; unlike Tullia, her virtue was protected (Tullia's mother

had compelled her to become a courtesan).

⁸ Macra is a *comune* (municipality) in the Province of Cuneo in the Italian region Piedmont, located about 80 km southwest of Turin and about 35 km northwest of Cuneo. Valle Macra is a valley in the province of Cuneo, Italy.

⁹ The sea between Italy and Sardinia.

¹⁰ Argia's death or "apotheosis" (departure for an eternal sojourn among the Muses) is effectively the end of the poem, which closes with a meditation of the brevity of mortal joy: "mortal diletto, come ti dilegui."



9. Adornments-St. Lucy; eyelashes on paper.

Classics Revisited

Torquato Tasso's
Le lagrime della beata Vergine
and
Le lagrime di Cristo

Translated by Joseph Tusiani

Torquato Tasso's *Le lagrime della beata Vergine* and *Le lagrime di Cristo*

Translated by Joseph Tusiani

The religious note, which fashionably concludes every Canzoniere of the Renaissance, should not be confused with the theme of "tears" prompted by the dogma of Original Sin as defined by the Council of Trent. It was Luigi Tansillo's *Lagrime di San Pietro* that almost officially started the new trend in poetry. The great fame of the poet whose *Vendemmiatore* had dazzled half a generation was responsible for the spreading of the new poetic mood, the sincerity of which is to be probed more through the personality of the poet affected than through the facility of the affecting theme. Some of Michelangelo's sonnets ("Carico d'anni e di peccati pieno," "Per croce e grazia e per diverse pene," "Non fur men lieti che turbati e tristi," "Di morte certo, ma non già dell'ora") and two of Robert Southwell's major poems, *Marie Magadlens Funerall Teares* (1591) and *Saint Peters Complaint* (1595) may suffice to determine the range of the effectiveness, or popularity, of what Paolo Sarpi, in the Proem to his *Storia del Concilio Tridentino*, called "a clear document of man's surrendering all his thoughts to God." What divides Tasso's *Lagrime della Beata Vergine* and *Lagrime di Cristo* from Pietro Aretino's *Lagrime di Angelica* is more a conflict of conscience than a half century of literary taste and tradition. Published in 1593, the year of the *Gerusalemme Conquistata*, these two religious poems by Torquato Tasso (*Stanze per le Lagrime di Maria Vergine Santissima e di Giesù Cristo nostro Signore*) were introduced to the reader by the following note, pertaining to their genesis, from their publisher Giorgio Ferrari of Rome: "Signor Torquato Tasso was inspired to write these first twenty-five *ottavas* by a painting of our Blessed Lady which the most illustrious and most reverend Signor Cinzio Aldobrandini, nephew of our Holy Father, keeps with great devotion in his room. This image is not only the exquisite work of an obviously learned and skillful master, but is also exceptionally miraculous inasmuch as, having been portrayed with hands and gaze in the act of devout contemplation, it seems to have those holy eyes so vividly impregnated with tears, and has those blessed cheeks streaked with tears so true, that, while it deceives the be-

holder, it invites every pious hand to dry them. The other twenty stanzas derive from the first, just as concepts (if there be fertility of intellect) bloom one from the other. Both poems are charming as well as religious."

This note, which makes no reference to Tasso's well-known devotion to the Blessed Mother, almost creates the impression that it was Ferrari's intention to please more Cardinal Aldobrandini by publicizing his rare painting than to remind the reader of the poet's gladly seized opportunity to pay homage to "Maria Vergine Santissima." A sonnet and a madrigal, already written in remembrance of his vow of pilgrimage to Loretto, were indeed too small a token of gratitude from one who, in the midst of terrors and horrors, had seen the image of the Glorious Virgin appear in the air with her son in her arms, and, later, on the seventh day of an alarming fever, had as of instantly been restored to health by her miraculous intervention. "Too weak to endure any medicine or even to sit up to take it," writes Serassi, "he recommended himself to the intercession of the most Blessed Virgin, our Lady, with such faith and ardent devotion that the compassionate Virgin, appearing to him, visibly healed him."

In 1593, Tasso was still working on his *Mondo Creato*, which he completed in the winter of the following year. While it is easy to see in Saint Ambrose's *Hexameron* and, possibly, in Du Bartas' *La Sepmaine Sacrée ou Creation du Monde* two models for Tasso's last ambitious work, it is inconceivable that, for *Le Lagrime della Vergine*, he had to resort to models other than the elementary creeds of the current Marian devotion. The theme of the seven swords that pierced Mary's heart was popular then as it is now. From Iacopone's "Stabat Mater" to Blessed Giovanni Dominici's "The Blessed Virgin and the Infant Jesus," more treatises and poems had been written on Mary's grief than on her joy. In the following *Stanze*, Tasso does not detach his description from the popular list of the most salient moments of sorrow in the Virgin's life.

I am not attempting to pass critical judgment on a work that, obviously, is not what we may expect of the poet of the *Gerusalemme Liberata*. But the reader will, I am sure, find in both poems lines that will remind him of the poet's unhappy life, if not of his poetic genius.

LE LAGRIME DELLA BEATA VERGINE

Piangete di Maria l' amaro pianto
che distillò da gli occhi alto dolore,
alme vestite ancor di fragil manto,
in lagrime lavando il vostro errore;
piangete meco in lacrimoso canto
l' aspro martir che le trafisse il core
tre volte e quattro; e ciò ch' alor sofferse
sentite or voi, de la sua grazia asperse.

Chiaro sol, che rotando esci del Gange,
d' alta corona di bei raggi adorno,
piangi dolente or con Maria che piange
e piovoso ne porta e oscuro il giorno.
Tu piangi il duol che la scolora ed ange,
o luna, cinta di procelle intorno;
e voi spargete ancor di pianto un nembo,
pallide stelle, a l' ampia terra in grembo.

Con la madre di Dio tu piangi, o madre
de' miseri mortali, egra natura;
e l'opre tue più belle e più leggiadre
piangan teco, gemendo in vista oscura;
piangan le notti tenebrose ed adre
oltre l' usato; e quei ch' il sasso indura
e 'l vento e 'l gelo inaspra, orridi monti,
spargano i lagrimosi e larghi fonti.

E corra al mesto suon de' nostri carmi
lagrime il mar da l' una a l' altra sponda;
e, perch' io possa a pieno al ciel lagnarmi,
sia lutto e duol quanto la terra inonda.
Piangan con le pitture a prova i marmi,
del cor men duri, ove 'l peccato abonda;
e l'opre d' arte muta, alte colonne,
sembrin le statue lagrimose donne.

Tu, Regina del ciel, ch' a noi ti mostri
umida i lumi e l' una e l' altra gota,
fa di lagrime dono a gli occhi nostri,
ed ambe l' urne in lor trasfondi e vota,
perché, piangendo, a gli stellanti chiostri

THE TEARS OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN

Weep all the bitter tears that Mary shed
When height of sorrow from her eyes outpoured.
O souls still clad in frail mortality,
weep, and in all your tears your error cleanse.
Weep with the weeping of my tearful song
the harshness of the pain that pricked her heart
three times and four, and, sprinkled with her grace,
- feel the same anguish that she had to face.

Bright sun who, wheeling, from the Ganges rise,
with rays that clearly crown your lofty brow,
oh, sadly weep with weeping Mary too,
and bring a dark and rainy day along.
And, girt with tempests all about, O moon,
weep for the grief that makes her wan and weary;
- and you, discolored stars, oh, weep and weep,
and flooded with your tears this wide earth keep.

- Weep with God's Mother, sickly nature, too,
O mother of us wretched, mortal men;
and let all of your fairest, fondest things
visibly weep and mourn along with you.
Let more than ever all your darkest nights
now also weep; let every mountain top,
- which wind and frost make hard and full of dread,
all of its tears in ample rivers shed.

Let at the mournful sound of this our dirge
the sea add all its tears from its two shores,
and, for my full lament to reach the sky,
let grief and mourning flood the universe.
Let statues, oh, less hard than sinful hearts,
compete with paintings in lament and tears,
and let high columns, works of silent art,
resemble weeping ladies in each part.

O queen of Heaven, who appear to us
with tears within your gaze and on your cheeks,
bestow the gift of weeping on our eyes,
emptying into them your own full urns,
so that the devout soul through tears may raise

teco inalzi il pensier l' alma devota;
parte del Tebro in su la verde riva
il tuo santo dolor formi e descriva.

Già 'l suo Figlio immortale avea riprese
le membra, che sentir di morte il gelo,
co' segni ancor de le mortali offese;
ma più del sol lucente in bianco velo,
e come vincitor d' eccelse imprese,
era tornato fiammeggiando al cielo,
ancisa morte e vinto il cieco inferno,
e l' alme pie rendute al regno eterno.

Ella medesma, che 'l crudele assalto
dar vide al dolce Figlio e 'n mente il serba,
e vide tinta di sanguigno smalto
la lancia onde senti la doglia acerba,
lucido il mirò poi levarsi in alto
e trionfar di morte empia e superba,
sopra le nubi ergendo e sopra i venti
il suo trofeo fra mille schiere ardenti.

Or tutta in sé raccolta, al fin rimembra
quanti per lui sofferse aspri martiri
dal dì ch' egli vestì l' umane membra,
e quante sparse lagrime e sospiri,
e 'n questo suo pensiero altrui rassembra
freddo smalto ch' umor distilli e spiri:
ben mostra a noi quel che contempli e pensi
chi la dipinse e colorilla a' sensi.

E prima le sovvien ch' il nobil pondo
senza fatiche espose e senza duolo
nel fosco de la notte orror profondo
fra duo pigri animali, in umil suolo,
quando il suo Re produsse al cieco mondo;
e vide ignota stella il nostro polo
a' peregrini regi in Oriente
segnar co' vaghi rai la via lucente.

Rimembra l' umil cuna e i rozzi panni
e 'l dolce lamentar del picciol Figlio
e 'l suo pargoleggiar ne' teneri anni,

all thinking to the starry firmaments,
and on the Tiber's verdant bank I may
describe your holy agonized dismay.

Her deathless Son already had resumed
his body, which had felt the frost of death,
and bore the signs of all its mortal wounds.
In his white mantle, brighter than the sun,
he had ascended, flaming, to the sky –
a victor of immense accomplishments:
death had been slain, blind hell defeated, and
the good souls brought to God's eternal land.

She, who had seen with her own eyes, and still
recalled, the cruel death of her sweet Son,
and, reddened with his blood, the pointed spear
that made him feel his last and bitter pain,
finally saw him crave the firmament,
bright and triumphant over wicked death,
raising on clouds and winds his trophy high
among his countless armies dazzling by.

Now in herself absorbed, she numbers all
the bitter griefs that for her Son she knew,
and all the tears and sighs she shed for him
from the first day he shared man's flesh and fate.
It is her meditation that now makes
this cold enamel melt as if in tears,
for well the one who painted it divined
all of the thoughts now thronging in her mind.

First, she recalls the day when with no pain
and with no grief she laid the noble weight
upon the ground between two lazy beasts
in the bleak horror of the deep dark night –
the day to this blind world she gave its King,
and some strange star above our pole was seen,
showing with wandering rays that never ceased
the lucent way to monarchs from the East.

Her little Baby's crying she recalls,
his humble cradle and coarse swaddling clothes,
and the sweet tender playing of his prime

quando angelo era pur d' alto consiglio;
 e 'l sospetto d' Erode e i primi affanni
 de la sua fuga e del suo gran periglio;
 e per notturne vie l' alte tenebre
 d' Egitto, ove trovò fide latebre.

Poscia il perduto suo Figliuol le riede
 a mente, e quel dolor ch' allora aprilla;
 e ne' begli occhi la pietà si vede
 che dolorose lagrime distilla:
 duolo a duol, lutto a lutto a lei succede,
 ferro e face è il martir ch' arde e sfavilla;
 e mostra ben ne' lagrimosi sguardi
 quante ella abbia nel core e fiamme e dardi.

A la colonna il pensa, e stille a prova
 ella versa di pianto, egli di sangue;
 e imaginando il suo martir rinova
 martir de l' alma che s' afflige e langue.
 Pensa poi come in croce estinto ei giova,
 anzi vita ne dà: mirabil angue,
 ch' unge del nostro error l' antica piaga;
 così pensando, in lagrimar s' appaga.

E fra sé di suo cambio ancor s' attrista,
 donna chiamata; e si lamenta e duole
 che perde un Dio figliuolo, un uomo acquista;
 e ripensando a l' oscurato sole,
 al ciel ch' apparve tenebroso in vista,
 al vacillar de la terrena mole,
 piange co 'l mondo il suo Fattore insieme,
 che disse in croce le parole estreme.

Par nel volto del sol minore eclissi
 ch' in quel de la sua Madre afflitta ed egra;
 o in quel del Figlio, in cui 'l divino unissi
 co 'l mortal, che si parte e no 'l rintegra.
 Ma sua divinitate alor coprissi
 con la nube di morte orrida e negra;
 e ricoperta la divina luce
 a lagrimar le donne e 'l cielo induce.

when, though so young, an angel wise was he;
and she remembers Herod, the first fear
and peril of their quick and anxious flight,
and their nocturnal journey and, at last,
Egypt that saved him in its darkness fast.

Now she recalls the day she lost her Son,
with that new pang that rent all of her heart.
There's anguish in the beauty of her eyes,
and, look!, her anguish drips in grieving tears:
sadness on sadness, grief on grief anew,
her martyrdom's a torch that burns and glows.
Oh, how her glances show, so full of tears,
the number of her inner flames and spears!

Of him she thinks now at the pillar scourged,
and wants to weep as much as then he bled.
This thought renews her ancient agony,
and once again her soul is sad and torn.
She knows now that, though dead upon the Cross,
he helped us live afresh—a wondrous snake
that licked the sore of our first error clear—,
and at this thought she blesses every tear.

But, called just woman, deep within she grieves,
and very sadly mourns that she must lose
a godly son for but an earthly one.
Now in remembering the shadowed sun,
which, dark, appeared in heaven all at once,
and the swift quake of the terrestrial weight,
she joins the world in mourning the great loss
of its Creator speaking from the Cross.

Smaller is the eclipse on the sun's face
than on so sad a mother's can be seen,
or on the Son's, from which the human part
left the divine no longer to be one.
When at that moment his divinity
was hidden by the dismal cloud of death,
the disappearance of the godly light
made firmament and women weep in fright.

Sembra poi ch' il pensiero al dì rivolga
 che l' ebbe essangue, anzi sanguigno in seno
 con mille piaghe; e 'n ricordar si dolga,
 impallidito il bel volto sereno;
 e 'n duo fiumi i begli occhi alor disciolga,
 a le querele sue lentando il freno;
 e i piè membrando, e questa mano e quella,
 che fece il sole ed ogni ardente stella.

Sparso nel dolce seno, ond' egli nacque,
 di lagrime e d' odori e 'n lino avvolto,
 Maria poscia il contempla, e come ei giacque
 nel grembo de la terra al fin sepolto.
 Questo pensier d' amare e tepide acque
 a la Vergine inonda i lumi e 'l volto:
 però questa del cielo alta Reina
 gli occhi nel suo dolore a terra inchina.

Là dove in tanto le tartaree porte
 rompe il Re vincitore e doma e spoglia
 i ciechi regni de l' oscura Morte,
 pria che gli antichi spirti il cielo accoglia;
 come apparisse il glorioso e forte
 con lucente, immortale e lieve spoglia,
 né stil, né penna mai, né lingua esprime,
 né l' intende pensier santo e sublime.

Qual interno pittor giamai dipinse
 nel cor, che di suo spirto è vivo tempio,
 la sua vittoria onde la Morte estinse,
 non pur le pene e 'l sanguinoso scempio?
 E chi di lei che nel Signor s' incinse
 poté ritrar, quasi da vero esempio,
 le lagrime, i pensieri, i santi affetti?
 e com' esser traslata al cielo aspetti?

Alziamo or con Maria, d' amore acceso,
 il pensier nostro, come fiamma o strale;
 seguendo alto Signor ch' in cielo ascenso
 siede a destra co 'l Padre, al Padre eguale;
 né di terreno affetto il grave peso
 tardi la mente, che s' inalza e sale.

She seems to turn her thoughts now to the day
she held him lifeless, bloodless in her arms –
oh, no, so full of blood from countless wounds:
the sad remembrance clouds her face again,
and her sweet eyes now seem to be two streams
as she no longer checks her lone laments,
recalling now his feet, and now the hand
that gave the sun and all bright stars command.

Now Mary watches him on her sweet breast,
whence he was born, wrapped in a fragrant shroud
and wet with all her tears, until at last
she sees him buried in the earth's dark womb.
Oh, how the Blessed Virgin's glance and face
are flooded with new warm and bitter tears!
That's why our Queen of Heaven, sorrow-bound,
keeps both her eyes so lowered to the ground.

But how the glorious King in the meantime
vanquished and tamed deep hell and broke its doors,
and how he plundered the dark realm of Death
before he raised all ancient spirits high;
how the invincible and mighty God
looked as he lifted his bright spoils aloft,
no human quill or tongue or style can guess,
nor can sublime or sacred thought express.

What painter ever could, or ever can,
paint in his heart – his spirit's living shrine –
Christ's Victory that vanquished Death forever
after such pain and bloody martyrdom?
And who could ever sketch, as though from life,
the thoughts and fears and feelings of the one
who bore him in her womb, and now is bent
only on leaving for the firmament?

So, like a flame or like a blazing dart,
let us with Mary launch our loving thought
behind our lofty Lord, who now in heaven
sits at his Father's right, as great as He.
Let no terrestrial passion's grievous weight
slacken the mind in its ascending flight.

Alziamo il pianto, e sovra 'l cielo ascenda
sol per sua grazia, ed ella in grado il prenda.

Ed in santa dolcezza amor converta
quel che d' amaro il nostro fallo asperge.
Piangea la Madre alor, quasi in deserta
valle di pianto, ove 'l dolor sommerge.
Piangea per gran desio, sicura e certa
già de la gloria, ov' ei ne chiama ed erge,
ove di stelle alta corona e veste
avrà di sole, in maestà celeste.

E piangea stanca pur nel corso umano
e co 'l peso mortal, ch' è grave salma,
mesta e solinga; e già nel ciel sovrano
bramosa di salir la nobil alma.
Ancisi intanto da furore insano,
aveano i fidi suoi corona e palma.
Piangea gli altrui martiri e 'l proprio scampo
ne la vita, ch' a morte è duro campo.

E piangendo diceva: "Oh com' è lunga
la mia dimora, anzi l' essiglio in terra!
Deh sarà mai ch' a te ritorni e giunga
pur come da tempesta o d' aspra guerra?
Bramo esser teco, o Figlio: a te mi giunga
quella santa pietà ch' il ciel disserra.
Se non son de la Madre i preghi indegni,
chiamami pur dove trionfi e regni.

Deh non soffrir che si consumi ed arda
tra speranze e desiri il cor penoso.
Odi la Madre che si lagna e tarda,
odi la Madre pia, Figlio pietoso;
e se già lieta io fui dove si guarda,
quasi per ombra, il tuo divino ascoso,
quante avrò gioie in ciel, s' io ti riveggio
coronato di gloria in alto seggio?

Mòstrati, o Re di gloria, o Figlio, omai,
tu che servo apparisti in tomba e 'n cuna;
e fa contenta a' chiari e dolci rai
la vista mia ch' amaro duolo imbruna.

Let us still weep, but raise our tears above,
and may she welcome them with grace and love.

May her love turn into sweet holiness
whate'er our sin besprinkles and makes sour.
As stranded in a desert vale of tears,
where grief abounds, our Blessed Mother wept.
From keen desire she wept, already sure
of the great glory where we, too, are called –
where, seated on a high, celestial throne,
she'd wear a crown of stars, a dress of sun.

But weary of the course of human years,
weary of her mortality was she,
and sad and lonesome and in tears: the sky
was now her noble spirit's only goal.
Slain by mad fury, all her trusted sons
in heaven now had won victorious crowns:
so, while bemoaning other's martyrdom,
she envied them their life and their new home.

In tears, she prayed: "How long upon this earth
my stay, oh, no, my exile seems to be!
When will it happen that I come to you
back from this stormy sea and horrid war?
With you I want to live, my Son, my Son:
let pitying heaven take me, then, at once.
Oh, if a Mother does not plead in vain,
call me this moment where you proudly reign.

"Let not my grieving heart be wholly spent
in flames of still more hope and more desire.
Hear a lamenting Mother still below;
to your good Mother listen, my good Son.
Oh, if I once was happy to behold,
as through a shadow, your divinity,
how greater will my bliss in heaven be
when you, my glorious King, again I see?

"Reveal yourself on your majestic throne,
my Son, so poor at birth, so poor in death,
and gladden with your sweet and limpid light
these eyes, so overcast with bitter grief.

Tra gli occhi cari e i miei, c' han pianto assai,
 non s' interponga o sole o stella o luna.
 Cedete al mio desir, pianeti e cieli,
 perch' a la Madre il Figlio al fin si sveli".

Così dicea nel lutto. E voi portaste,
 angeli, al Figlio il suon devoto e sacro,
 e le lagrime sue pietose e caste,
 bench' uopo a voi non sia pianto o lavacro.
 Or, se mai d' altrui duol pietà mostraste,
 portate queste mie ch' a lei consacro;
 e 'l lagrimoso dono, o spirti amici,
 offrite, o sempre lieti e 'n ciel felici.

LE LAGRIME DI CRISTO

V oi che sovente il Re d'eterno regno
 Alla colonna, e 'n su la croce esangue
 Qui contemplate, e 'l duro, iniquo sdegno
 Ond' aspramente egli è percosso e langue;
 D'alta corona di martiri indegno
 Chi si dimostra? e nega il sangue al sangue?
 Deh, chi le vene mai n'ebbe sì scarse,
 Che temesse versarlo ov' ei lo sparse?

Pietro non già, che fe' la piaga all' empio
 E le ferite e 'l feritor prevenne:
 E pur in sè medesimo il fero scempio
 In croce dopo 'l suo Signor sostenne.
 Non chi prima seguì pietoso esempio
 Che, perdonando, Cristo in morte dienne;
 Non Giacomo, non Paolo, o mille e mille,
 Che fiumi fean, non pur sanguigne stille.

Se vogliam dunque or simigliarci a Cristo,
 Versando il sangue dall' umane membra;
 Chi piange seco, e seco il pianto ha misto,
 Mentr'egli piange, il pio Signor rassembra,
 Non sei, tardo pensiero, ancora avvisto,
 Ch'ei nostra umanitate a noi rimembra?
 Deh, concediamo i pianti ai pianti amari:
 E l'uom pietà da Dio, piangendo, impari.

Between your eyes and mine, that wept so much,
let no more sun or star or moonlight fall.
Planets and heavens, to my longing yield,
and keep my Son from me no more concealed."

So in her grief she spoke. And all of you
carried her wish, sweet angels, to her Son,
together with her chaste and tender tears,
O spirits who need not such cleansing flood.
Oh, if you ever pitied others' woe,
take to Our Blessed Mother these my tears,
and lay this mournful gift upon her breast,
O friendly souls in heaven ever blest.

THE TEARS OF CHRIST

You, who see often the Eternal King
scourged at the pillar, bloodless on the Cross,
and meditate upon the wicked wrath
and harsh disdain that maims and makes him weep,
will you now show yourselves unworthy of
the crown of death, and deny blood to blood?
Is there amongst you anyone afraid
to shed one drop where all His blood was shed?

Surely not Peter, who prevented wounds
by wounding with his sword a ruthless foe,
and who, after his Lord, himself endured
the same ferocious death upon the Cross.
Surely not those who, following the first
example set by dying Christ, forgave:
not James, not Paul, not countless other men
whose blood in rivers, not in droplets, ran.

So, if we must compare ourselves to Christ
by shedding all our human blood for him,
we ought to mingle with his tears our own
for if we weep we most resemble him.
O my slow mind, do you still fail to know
that he reminds us of our human state?
Let us our tears to bitter tears now add;
let weeping man learn piety from God.

Udite il grido che nel ciel risuona,
 Pregando il Padre in dolorosi accenti;
 E' s'invitta virtù ch'altrui perdona,
 Secura nella morte e nei tormenti,
 Ci manca a gloriosa, alta corona,
 E non è chi morire ardisca o tenti,
 Non ci manchi pietate, e non sia priva
 Del largo umor ch'in lagrime deriva.

Il Re nella spietata e dura morte,
 Di cui si duol natura e 'l ciel si sdegna,
 Magnanima virtù costante e forte,
 Con la sua voce a' suoi fedeli insegna:
 Pietà mostra, piangendo: ahi, fide scorte
 Di seguir lui, che già trionfa e regna.
 Seguiam Cristo con ambe al ciel sereno;
 Chi non è forte, sia pietoso almeno.

Ma chi piange? e che piange? alme pietose,
 Pensate meco, è l'Uom che duolsi e piange.
 Ma l'Uomo è Dio, che 'l suo divino ascose
 Nel suo mortal che s'addolora ed ange.
 L'uom freme, e freme Dio ch'a sè n'impose
 Il peso; e non avvien ch'egli si cange:
 Ma fa il caduco eterno, ond'ei s'adora;
 Tal che al pianger dell'Uom Dio stesso or plora.

Quel che librò la Terra, e tanti intorno
 Cieli eterni e lucenti a lei sospese,
 E diede il Sol, ch'è suo gran lume al giorno,
 E nella Notte altri splendori accese;
 Quel, che nel far suo magistero adorno,
 Piacque a sè stesso, e sè medesimo intese;
 Di sua gloria contento e di sua luce,
 Or fatto umano a lagrimar s'induce.

Quel ch'è Bontà sovrana, e sommo Amore,
 Nè cerca fuor di sè gioia o diletto,
 Or piange, e stilla in lagrimoso umore
 Di nostra umanitale il puro affetto.
 Deh, qual alpestro sasso intorno al core
 S'accoglie? e com'è 'l gelo in lui ristretto?

You've heard his cry, resounding in the skies,
whereby he begged his Father mournfully.
Now if, to earn our glorious diadem,
we lack the virtue that forgives all men
and stays unvanquished in the midst of death,
and if we are today afraid to die,
let piety be ours, and let it show
through tears that amply from our bosom flow.

In his horrendous, agonizing death,
which makes both firmament and nature grieve,
our King to all his faithful with his word
still teaches virtue, constancy, and strength.
But he shows also pity with his tears:
pity and strength, that to his triumph lead!
Let's with such trusted escorts follow Christ:
where strength is not, let pity dwell at least.

But who is weeping, and for what? Be sure,
pitying souls: it is a man who weeps.
But, oh, that man is God, whose divine nature
hides in the human, that now grieves and moans.
The man in him is weeping, and the God
who wished to take our weight upon himself:
matter he'll make eternal in the sky,
but in the meantime Man and God must cry.

The One who balanced this our earth, and hung
around it bright, eternal firmaments,
gave to the day its mighty light – the sun,
and kindled other splendors in the night.
He who in making all his deeds so fair
both pleased and understood his very self,
sated with his own majesty and light,
now, being human, knows man's tearful plight.

He who is sovereign goodness, highest love,
and needs no outer happiness or joy,
is weeping now, and shedding with his tears
the purest feelings of our humankind.
What hardened rock is lodged within my heart?
What ice has come to freeze its deepest core?

Se diaspro non è ch'ivi s'impetra,
 Fonte di pianto abbia percossa pietra.

Ma che pianga primiero il Re de' regi?
 Piange l'umanità quand'egli nasce;
 Ed ornando umiltà d'eterni pregi,
 Pur com'uom piange e stride, in cuna 'n fasce.
 E s'altri gli aurei alberghi e gli aurei fregi,
 Per seguir lui, vien ch'abbandoni e lasce,
 Care lagrime sparga in dolci tempre,
 E col pianto di Cristo il suo contempre.

Che piange il pio Signor? piange uom sepolto;
 E più l'altrui che la sua morte acerba:
 Piange l'amico suo, da nodi avvolto,
 A cui libera vita il ciel riserba.
 Freme l'ardente spirto, e bagna il volto.
 Or non si piegherà mente superba,
 Che, sdegnando l'umana, umil natura,
 Sè stessa inaspra, e contra il duol s'indura?

Tu, che ti vanti pur d'alma tranquilla,
 E sei duro via più di quercia o d'elce,
 O di qualunque al ferro arda e sfaville,
 Con varj colpi ripercossa selce:
 Pietoso amore a noi dal cielo instilla
 Il Re dej cielo; e per suo dono ei dielce:
 Perchè altero ten vai col viso asciutto,
 S'al buon servo di Cristo è gloria il lutto?

Se fece al fido amico onor supremo
 Di lagrime pietose il Re celeste,
 Chi nega d'onorarlo al giorno estremo,
 Quand'ei si spoglia la corporea veste?
 Ahi, di vera pietà te, o privo o scemo,
 Or chi sarà ch' in te l'accenda e deste;
 Se non se il pianto, ond'il Signor c'invita
 A lagrimar la morte, e pria la vita?

Chi piange Quel che fece il cielo e 'l mondo?
 Piange altera città, che stanca al fine
 Vinta cadeo sotto 'l gravoso pondo
 Delle sue minacciose, alte ruine.

Oh, if my spirit is not made of mountain,
let there my tears now strike a living fountain.

Why is the King of kings the first to weep?
Becoming human, at his birth he cries,
and, though adorned with his eternal worth,
still like a babe in swaddling clothes he cries.
So let those, too, who, just to follow him,
leave golden homes and golden ornaments,
shed happy tears (oh, tears, so dear and gay!),
and mingle them with Christ's in a sweet way.

And why is the good Lord still weeping now?
He weeps for someone's death, not for his own.
He weeps for a dear friend bound in a shroud,
for whom more life is destined in the skies.
His ardent soul is grieved, tears wet his face:
and will man's daring mind therefore bend not,
if, calling human nature vile and low,
it makes itself so hard to sorrow's blow?

You, who still boast of a most tender soul,
and are, instead, much harder than an oak
or any flint-stone that, by iron struck,
after repeated blows gives sparks and burns:
the King of Heaven teaches from above
sweet love to us, and gives it as a gift.
Why, then, do you dry-eyed and proudly go,
if Christ's good servants through their weeping glow?

If our Celestial King paid his good friend
the highest homage of his pitying tears,
who will not honor Him on the last day
when He will shine without his human dress?
If no true piety in you abides,
what can arouse and kindle it in you
if not these tears through which our Lord invites
all men to weep on death and life's delights?

Oh, why is the Creator of both earth
and heaven weeping still? For a proud town
he's weeping, which, defeated, will one day
crumble beneath the weight of its high walls.

Ma l' uom pianto si leva; e d' atro fondo
 Di gran sepolcro innalza il viso e 'l crine:
 La Città lagrimata è sparsa a terra,
 Precipitando in ostinata guerra.

Ma l' uno e l' altra al fin in ciel risorge,
 Fatta sicura da contraria possa
 L' uno e l' altra s' eterna, e s' altri scorge,
 O se cerca qua giù ruine ed ossa,
 Erra col volgo errante, e non s' accorge
 Che torna l' alma al cielo, ond' ella è mossa,
 E ch' ivi splende ancor perpetua norma
 Di città non caduta, e vera forma.

O di quai pietre fa novo restauro
 E le cadute mura il Fabbro eterno,
 Gerusalem celeste! e l' Indo e 'l Mauro
 Elegge a prova, e non ha gente a scherno.
 O quali ornai d' alte colonne e d' auro,
 Opre maravigliose in te discerne,
 Perch' io disprezzi ancor teatri e terme,
 In parti quasi solitarie ed erme!

Ma s' è tanta virtù nel pianto amaro,
 Ond' egli il volto, lagrimando, asperse;
 Se, dall' oscura tomba al ciel più chiaro
 Il sepolto, per lui, già gli occhi aperse:
 E per lui, quanto atterra il Tempo avaro,
 O consuman le fiamme, e l' armi avverse,
 Risorge al cielo, e vie più adorno e grande,
 Felici quegli a cui si versa e spande.

Or tu, che fosti eletta al grande Impero
 Della terra e del ciel, Roma vetusta,
 Caduta spesso dal tuo seggio altero
 Sotto vil giogo d' empia gente ingiusta;
 Risorta poi, col Successor di Piero,
 In maggior gloria della gloria augusta,
 Ripensa onde cadesti, e ch' or t' estolli,
 Coronata di Tempj in Sette Colli.

But from the bottom of a mighty tomb
the Man they weep for shows his face and hair.
The wept-for town is scattered on the ground,
a battlefield of ruins all around.

Yet with the One who rose, that city too,
secure from hostile might, lived once again.
They now are both eternal; therefore, wrong
are those who see but stones and bones down here,
or foolishly still look for them. They should
know that the soul's in heaven, whence it came,
and that up there the lasting norm is found
of a true town forever safe and sound.

Oh, with what stones the deathless Architect
rebuilds the fallen walls, and makes anew
his heavenly Jerusalem! He calls
Hindu and Mauretanian alike,
excluding none. What columns and what wonder
of golden works already I behold!
For them, I baths and theaters despise
upon this earth — a desert to my eyes.

Then, if such might is in the bitter tears
that from His glances pour and wet His face;
if one who had been buried could once more
open his eyes and see the clearest sky;
and if all things that greedy time annuls
and flames consume and hostile armies fell
rise, far more lustrous, to the firmament:
oh, blessed he, for whom such tears are spent!

Now you, O ancient Rome, chosen to rule
over the vastness of both earth and sky,
fallen not once from your majestic throne
under the yoke of cruel, lawless foes,
and then with Peter risen once again
to make Augustus' glory far more bright:
think from what height you fell, who only now
raise, crowned with shrines, on seven hills your brow.

E ben chiaro vedrai che 'l sangue sparso
Di tre Decj, in lor fero, orribil voto,
E quel di Scipio e di Marcel fu scarso
Al tuo peccar ch' era a te stessa ignoto.
Ma poi che 'l vero Lume è in terra apparso,
Non dico il sangue, il lagrimar devoto
Di que' fedeli, a cui 'l tuo rischio increbbe,
Più ti difese, e più l'onor t'accrebbe.

Lagrimosa pietà di ben nate alme
Te difese non sol d'estranea gente,
Ma t'acquistò corone e sacre palme,
E ti fe' lieta trionfar sovente.
Deh, leva al ciel con gli occhi ambe le palme,
E 'l Pianto di Gesù ti reca a mente,
Sì che tu pianga, e dal suo duolo apprenda
Santa virtù, che fera colpa emenda.

Se beato è chi piange, in largo pianto
Si strugga il tuo più denso e duro gelo;
E l'amor tuo profan si volga in santo,
E l'odio interno in amorosa zelo
Già di fortezza avesti e gloria e vanto;
Abbito or di pietà, ch'innalza al cielo.
Sembra Roma celeste agli occhi nostri
Com'è l'idea negli stellanti chiostri.

You'll see how the blood, shed by the three Decii
in their horrendous suicidal pact,
and that of Scipio and of Marcellus
could not suffice to cleanse your unknown sin.
But after the true light shone on this earth,
oh, not the blood, but the religious tears
of those your sense of peril made most sorry
strengthened you most, and added to your glory.

The tearful piety of well-born souls
not only saved you from barbaric hordes,
but earned bright, holy diadems for you,
and made you often triumph in delight.
Oh, join your hands in prayer, look to the sky,
and treasure in your mind the tears of Christ,
so that you, too, may weep and learn from all his grief
the virtue that redeems your fall.

Blessèd are those who weep: so let the ice
that hardens you now melt in ample tears;
turn into holy all your earthly love,
and into loving zeal your inmost hate.
You boasted of your fortitude one day:
boast now of piety that leads to God.
Heavenly Rome is looming to our eyes –
shining idea in the starry skies.

Re-Creations:
American Poets in Translation

Edited by Michael Palma



10. Piena di Grazie/Full of Grace; communion wafers, fake money, rosary beads.

Re-Creations:
American Poets in Translation

Translated by Luigi Bonaffini

Edited by Michael Palma

H. D. (Hilda Doolittle, 1886-1961) was born in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania; her father was a professor of astronomy at Lehigh University. While a student at Bryn Mawr, she met fellow poets Marianne Moore, William Carlos Williams, and Ezra Pound, to whom she was briefly engaged. After both had moved to England, Pound printed her in *Poetry* magazine over the signature "H. D., Imagiste." Her early work is generally accounted the purest example of the Imagist movement, with its emphasis on precision of description and avoidance of abstraction. In 1913 she married the British poet and novelist Richard Aldington; they separated six years later but did not divorce until 1938. From 1919 to 1946, she lived with the British novelist Bryher (Annie Winifred Ellerman). Her several slender volumes of brief lyrics were succeeded, in the last twenty years of her life, by a stream of long poems, novels, and personal accounts, including *Tribute to Freud* (1956), a memoir of her analysis with Sigmund Freud in Vienna in 1933-34, and *End to Torment: A Memoir of Ezra Pound* (written 1958, published 1979). Our selections form a sort of sequence dispersed through her first book, *Sea Garden* (1916).

Larry Johnson was born in Natchez, Mississippi, in 1945 and raised in Jackson. He earned a B.A. from Mississippi College, and an M.A. and M.F.A. from the University of Arkansas. He has taught at Alma College (Michigan), the University of New Orleans, North Carolina State University, and Louisburg College (North Carolina). Although he has been publishing poetry in a wide range of journals since the 1960s, he did not publish his first collection, *Veins* (David Robert Books), until 2009. Praised by Donald Justice, George Garrett, and Fred Chappell, the volume received admiring reviews that focused on its precise and polished craft, the breadth of its poems' subjects, and the depth, seriousness, and maturity of the work. A second collection, *Alloy*, is due from the same publisher in February 2014. Larry Johnson lives in Raleigh, North Carolina.

H. D.**Sea Rose**

Rose, harsh rose,
marred and with stint of petals,
meagre flower, thin,
sparse of leaf,

more precious
than a wet rose
single on a stem—
you are caught in the drift.

Stunted, with small leaf,
you are flung on the sand,
you are lifted
in the crisp sand
that drives in the wind.

Can the spice-rose
drip such acrid fragrance
hardened in a leaf?

Sea Lily

Reed,
slashed and torn
but doubly rich—
such great heads as yours
drift upon temple-steps,
but you are shattered
in the wind.

Myrtle-bark
is flecked from you,
scales are dashed
from your stem,
sand cuts your petal,
furrows it with hard edge,
like flint

H. D.

Translated by Luigi Bonaffini

Rosa marina

Rosa, rosa aspra,
deturpata, scarsa di petali,
fiore scarno, sottile,
avaro di foglie,

più preziosa
di una rosa bagnata
sola su uno stelo -
sei presa nel flusso.

Sparuta, dalla foglia piccola,
sei scagliata sulla sabbia,
sei sollevata
nella sabbia friabile
che sospinge nel vento.

Può la rosa spice
stillare una fragranza così acre
indurita in foglia?

Giglio marino

Canna,
squarciata e lacera
ma due volte ricca -
grandi teste come la tua
vagano sui gradini del tempio,
ma tu ti frantumi nel vento.

La corteccia del mirto
si screzia di te,
le scaglie del tuo stelo
piombano a terra,
la sabbia ti taglia i petali,
li solca di un filo duro,
come selce
su pietra lucente.

on a bright stone.
 Yet though the whole wind
 slash at your bark,
 you are lifted up,
 aye – though it hiss
 to cover you with froth.

Sea Poppies

Amber husk
 fluted with gold,
 fruit on the sand
 marked with a rich grain,

treasure
 spilled near the shrub-pines
 to bleach on the boulders:

your stalk has caught root
 among wet pebbles
 and drift flung by the sea
 and grated shells
 and split conch-shells.

Beautiful, wide-spread,
 fire upon leaf,
 what meadow yields
 so fragrant a leaf
 as your bright leaf?

Sea Violet

The white violet
 is scented on its stalk,
 the sea-violet
 fragile as agate,
 lies fronting all the wind
 among the torn shells
 on the sand-bank.

Ma se anche tutto il vento
ti squarcia la corteccia
sei portato in alto,
sì - anche se sibila
per coprirti di schiuma.

Papaveri marini

Bacello d'ambra
scanalato in oro,
frutto sulla sabbia
segnato da ricche venature,

tesoro
versato accanto a pini cespuglio
a sbiadire sulle rocce;

il tuo stelo ha affondato le radici
tra i ciottoli bagnati
e i relitti gettati dal mare
e conchiglie raschiate
e gusci di strombo spaccati.

Bello, diffuso,
fuoco su foglia,
quale prato produce
una foglia profumata
come la tua foglia lucente?

Viola marina

La viola bianca
è odorosa sullo stelo,
la viola marina
fragile come l'agata
affronta tutto il vento
tra le conchiglie lacere
sul banco di sabbia.

The greater blue violets
 flutter on the hill,
 but who would change for these
 who would change for these
 one root of the white sort?

Violet
 your grasp is frail
 on the edge of the sand-hill,
 but you catch the light—
 frost, a star edges with its fire.

Sea Iris

I

Weed, moss-weed,
 root tangled in sand,
 sea-iris, brittle flower,
 one petal like a shell
 is broken,
 and you print a shadow
 like a thin twig.

Fortunate one,
 scented and stinging,
 rigid myrrh-bud,
 camphor-flower,
 sweet and salt— you are wind
 in our nostrils.

II

Do the murex-fishers
 drench you as they pass?
 Do your roots drag up colour
 from the sand?
 Have they slipped gold under you—
 rivets of gold?

Band of iris-flowers

Le viole blu più grandi
tremolano sulla collina,
ma chi scambierebbe con esse
chi scambierebbe con esse
una sola radice
del tipo bianco?

Viola
la tua presa è debole
sull'orlo della duna,
ma tu prendi la luce -
brina, che una stella orla col suo fuoco.

Iris marina

I

Malerba, malerba-muschio,
radice attorcigliata nella sabbia,
iride marina, fiore fragile,
un petalo come guscio
si rompe,
e tu marchi un'ombra
come un ramoscello esile.

Fortunata,
odorosa e pungente,
bocciolo rigido di mirra,
fiore di canfora,
dolce e sale - sei vento
alle narici.

II

T'inzuppano i pescatori di murici
quando passano?
Le tue radici tirano su
il colore dalla sabbia?
Hanno infilato oro sotto di te-
rivetti d'oro?

Banda di fiori di iris

above the waves,
 you are painted blue,
 painted like a fresh prow
 stained among the salt weeds.

Sea Gods

I

They say there is no hope —
 sand — drift — rocks — rubble of the sea —
 the broken hulk of a ship,
 hung with shreds of rope,
 pallid under the cracked pitch.

They say there is no hope
 to conjure you —
 no whip of the tongue to anger you —
 no hate of words
 you must rise to refute.

They say you are twisted by the sea,
 you are cut apart
 by wave-break upon wave-break,
 that you are misshapen by the sharp rocks,
 broken by the rasp and after-rasp.

That you are cut, torn, mangled,
 torn by the stress and beat,
 no stronger than the strips of sand
 along your ragged beach.

II

But we bring violets,
 great masses — single, sweet,
 wood-violets, stream-violets,
 violets from a wet marsh.

Violets in clumps from hills,
 tufts with earth at the roots,
 violets tugged from rocks,
 blue violets, moss, cliff, river-violets.

sulle onde,
siete dipinti di azzurro,
dipinti come una fresca prua
macchiata tra l'alga marina.

Dei marini

I

Dicono che non ci sia speranza -
sabbia - deriva - rocce - detriti del mare -
la mole spezzata di una nave,
appesa a brandelli di fune,
pallida sotto la pece spaccata.

Dicono che non ci sia speranza
di farvi apparire -
non c'è frusta di lingua che vi mandi in collera -
né odio di parole
che dobbiate confutare.

Dicono che siete stravolti dal mare,
che siete lacerati
da frangente dopo frangente,
che siete sfregiati dalle rocce taglienti,
spezzati dal raspere prima e dopo.

Che siete squarciati, dilaniati, straziati,
dilaniati dalla spinta e dal colpo,
non più forti delle strisce di sabbia
lungo la vostra logora spiaggia.

II

Ma noi portiamo viole,
in grande quantità - singole, dolci,
viole di bosco, viole di ruscello,
viole dell'umida palude.

Viole a mazzi dalla collina,
ciuffi con terra alle radici,
viole strappate alle rocce,
viole azzurre, muschio, rupe, viole di fiume.

Yellow violets' gold,
burnt with a rare tint –
violets like red ash
among tufts of grass.

We bring deep-purple
bird-foot violets.

We bring the hyacinth-violet,
sweet, bare, chill to the touch –
and violets whiter than the in-rush
of your own white surf.

III

For you will come,
you will yet haunt men in ships,
you will trail across the fringe of strait
and circle the jagged rocks.

You will trail across the rocks
and wash them with your salt,
you will curl between sand-hills –
you will thunder along the cliff –
break – retreat – get fresh strength –
gather and pour weight upon the beach.

You will draw back,
and the ripple on the sand-shelf
will be witness of your track.

O privet-white, you will paint
the lintel of wet sand with froth.

You will bring myrrh-bark
and drift laurel-wood from hot coasts!
when you hurl high – high –
we will answer with a shout.

For you will come,
you will come,
you will answer our taut hearts,
you will break the lie of men's thoughts,
and cherish and shelter us.

Oro di viole gialle,
acceso di una tinta rara -
viole come ceneri rosse,
tra ciuffi d'erba.

Noi portiamo porpora scura,
viole a zampa d'uccello.

Portiamo la viola-giacinto,
dolce, nuda, gelida al tatto -
e viole più bianche del fiotto
della tua spuma bianca.

III

Perché verrete,
tormenterete ancora gli uomini sulle navi,
seguirete al limite dello stretto
e girerete attorno a rocce frastagliate.

Seguirete attraverso le rocce
e le laverete con il vostro sale,
vi accartoccerete tra le dune -
tuonerete lungo la rupe -
vi romperete - ripiegherete - acquisterete nuova forza -
raccoglierete e verserete peso sulla spiaggia.

Arretrerete,
e l'incresparsi della piattaforma di sabbia
sarà testimone del vostro passaggio.

O bianchi come il ligustro, dipingerete
di spuma la mensola di sabbia bagnata.

Porterete corteccia di mirra
e legno di lauro alla deriva da coste calde!
quando vi lancerete in alto - in alto -
risponderemo con un grido.

Perché verrete,
verrete,
risponderete ai nostri cuori tesi,
spizzerete la menzogna dei pensieri umani,
ci avrete cari e ci proteggerete.

*Larry Johnson***Once**

Once, in 1949,
in Eastabuchie, Mississippi,
while my fingers were rooting
a gritty carrot from the earth,
there was a blast, a roar
louder than that first helicopter
I had seen a month before.
I wasn't there to see the flash
of red and black in the tall magnolia,
or hear the spang of feathers
on the tin roof of the garage.
All I did was run to the yard
and discover, nestled in my grandfather's hands,
an ivory-billed woodpecker, dead,
punched through with shotgun pellets,
a thick gout of blood on its beak,
blood bright as its head or a magnolia seed.
The rarest creature of earth,
and I saw one, fallen to earth,
but less precious to me than the helicopter
which had sliced and dipped so silverly.
"I wanted you to see it," he said.

Morte d'Oscar

Outside, the sun bloats downward,
thick, red — sick on the sick air.
Darkness coming again here in Paris,
weary, like me, of the world's cigarettes and absinthe:
thin trees begin to pencil the fog
as streetlamps weave their webs of graygreen light.
Parisian night, as usual, impossible —
conjured solely in English dreams.
This hotel seems conjured — incredibly enough,
No. 13 Rue des Beaux Arts. Within,
a second floor room — here under the white pile

Larry Johnson
Translated by Gianluca Rizzo

Una volta

Una volta, nel 1949,
a Eastbuchie, in Mississippi,
mentre con le dita strappavo
dalla terra una carota tenace,
ho sentito un botto, un ruggito
ancora più forte del primo elicottero
che avevo visto un mese addietro.
Non ero lì a guardare il lampo
rosso e nero fra gli alti alberi di magnolia,
o a sentire l'impatto delle piume
contro il tetto di metallo del garage.
Sono riuscito soltanto a correre verso il cortile
e ho trovato, accoccolato nelle mani di mio nonno,
un picchio dal muso di avorio, morto,
tutto sforacchiato da pallettoni di fucile,
una goccia densa di sangue sul becco,
un sangue vivido come la sua cresta o come un seme di
[magnolia.

La creatura più rara della terra,
e io ne ho vista una, caduta per terra,
ma per me meno preziosa dell'elicottero
che aveva tagliato l'aria e s'era fiondato giù, argentino.
"Volevo che lo vedessi", ha detto.

Morte d'Oscar

Fuori, il sole si gonfia verso il basso,
denso, rosso – malato nell'aria malata.
Scende nuovamente la notte qui a Parigi,
stanca, come me, delle sigarette e dell'assenzio del mondo:
alberi sottili cominciano a pennellare la nebbia
mentre i lampioni tessono le loro ragnatele di luce grigioverde.
Notte parigina, come al solito, impossibile –
immaginata soltanto in sogni inglesi.
Questo hotel sembra immaginario – incredibile a dirsi,
No. 13 Rue des Beaux Arts. Dentro,
una stanza al secondo piano – qui sotto la pila bianca

packed in choking dark with the mouldy brass
 stench and taste of terror I covered her,
 strained to soak that aura from her pores,
 tried to shield her with my scrawny flesh
 as the gases seethed our lungs to crackling husks
 and the boiling sludge enveloped us with the sound
 of vast black mothwings beating on the sun.

Clodia

Love's ecstasies were never enough for her
 And her black, drugged hair, body of supple chalk,
 Grackle-sheening eyes: she craved design
 More durable than flesh. Her Muse's mind
 Drew menlike souls whose bodies she could stir
 Almost into becoming men. Their talk
 Tendered all the ambitions she would find.

Then he appeared, a poet who could bind
 All plots and senses with the body's myrrh
 And taunt her with a love that was a birth
 Of elegies — so she twisted him and he died.
 Despite those mindless, perspiring hours, to her
 No passion was as fierce as when she lied.

His blood diffused like wine through the dark earth,
 The Pomptine marshes dreamt malarial sleep,
 She gazed on white columns with her great black eyes —
 But the words of poems, like starlights, flickered steep.

Cavafy Poem

Because of our telephone conversation
 you are coming at four o'clock
 to see my kitchen of tricolored glass.

I have not told you
 that my eyes are as green as that Cretan stone
 dredged up by a Greek fisherman in 1908,
 said to be from the stars . . .

and that I have no kitchen.

Sentry

I'm the one who always dies at night for you
 In all the movies, novels — even life:
 Somehow the night knows but it never tells —
 Knows I'm going to die yet doesn't smirk
 Or shudder in a warning jest before
 The cord seethes around my throat, before
 The hand crimps my scream and blackened steel
 Sleeks between ribs, before the rifle butt
 Stamps a spiderweb throughout my brain.
 I'm legion, and each time you see me die
 Failing in my duty, though I kept
 A decent watch, usually, but then
 Always, I nod or droop to sleep at last,
 Or jerk toward that skittering in the brush
 Where the hero's thrown a rock — and then it comes.
 Did you ever think what my nights are like —
 Knowing they're out there and no matter what
 I do they'll still skulk up behind my back,
 Strangling, stabbing, bashing. Hero-fodder,
 That's what I am, and also don't forget
 It's no fair fight — your brave warrior's only
 A sneaking coward — though his mission's just.
 How boring to be a necessary death!
 I pray for a quick and painless bludgeoning
 But anybody can swing a club; therefore,
 The blade's keen scorching or the hissing cord —
 Both showing off the hero's strength and skill —

Poesia Cavafy

Vista la nostra conversazione al telefono
hai deciso di venire a casa mia alle quattro
a vedere la cucina dai vetri tricolori.

Non ti ho detto
che ho gli occhi di un verde simile a quella pietra di Creta
rinvenuta da un pescatore greco nel 1908,
e che dicono venga dalle stelle...

e neppure che non ho una cucina.

Sentinella

Sono quello che muore sempre per voi la notte
In tutti i film, i romanzi — perfino nella vita reale:
Per qualche ragione la notte lo sa ma se lo tiene per sé —
Sa che mi tocca morire eppure non sogghigna
O non frema in un gesto di avvertimento prima che
La corda mi scivoli attorno alla gola, prima che
La mano accartocci le mie urla e l'acciaio brunito
Mi allisci le costole, prima che il calcio del fucile
Mi incida una ragnatela nel cervello.
Quelli come me sono legione, e ogni volta che mi vedi morire
È perché sono venuto meno al mio dovere, anche se
Faccio buona guardia, di solito, ma poi finisce
Sempre che chiudo gli occhi o mi appisolo o mi addormento,
Oppure mi volto verso quel rumore fra i cespugli
Là dove l'eroe ha lanciato un sasso — e alla fine arriva.
Ci pensate mai a come devono essere per me le notti —
Sapendo che loro sono là fuori e che a prescindere da quello
Che faccio riusciranno comunque a sorprendermi alle spalle,
A strangolarmi, pugnalarmi, ammazzarmi. Carne da eroe,
Ecco cosa sono, ma non dimenticate
Che non è una lotta equilibrata — il vostro audace guerriero
[non è niente
Di più di un codardo vigliacco — anche se la sua causa è giusta.
Che noia essere una vittima necessaria!
Io preferirei una bastonata veloce e indolore
Ma a maneggiare una clava son bravi tutti; e quindi,
L'acuto bruciore della lama o la corda sibilante —

Are used most often in my sacrifice
To the gods of convenience and cliché.
Perhaps I love this earth . . . I could whine
That I adore my mother and girlfriend too,
But that's no help—you won't ever stop
Heart-racing toward my death. Is it because
You almost never have to see my face?
No. I'm here because like all of us
No matter where I turn I turn my back.

Entrambe atte a dimostrare la forza e la destrezza dell'eroe –
Sono le armi più usate quando si tratta di sacrificarmi
Agli dei della comodità e dei cliché.
Forse è che amo questo mondo... Potrei piagnucolare
Dire che adoro mia madre e anche la mia fidanzata,
Ma non servirebbe a niente – non smetterete mai di correre
A perdifiato verso la mia morte. È forse perché
Non vi capita quasi mai di guardarmi in faccia?
No. Sono qui perché come per tutti quanti
A prescindere da dove mi giri do sempre le spalle.

Voices in English from Europe to New Zealand

Edited by Marco Sonzogni

The Poetry of Courtney Sina Meredith

Translated by Marco Sonzogni and Francesca Benocci

Marco Sonzogni (1971) is a widely published academic and an award-winning editor, poet and literary translator. He is a Senior Lecturer in Italian with the School of Languages and Cultures at Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand, where he is also the Director of the New Zealand Centre for Literary Translation (www.victoria.ac.nz/slc/about/staff/marco-sonzogni).

Francesca Benocci (1985) holds a BA in Foreign Languages and Literatures from the University of Siena, where she is currently completing a Master in Literary Translation (which includes the first excerpts in Italian of Keri Hulme's *The Bone People*). She is a poet, short story writer and blogger (www.francescabenocci.com).

Courtney Sina Meredith (1986) holds a degree in English and Political Studies from the University of Auckland (where she also studied Law and co-edited *Spectrum 5*). She has held international residencies, and her poetry and prose have been translated and published around the world. CSM launched her first book of poetry *Brown Girls in Bright Red Lipstick* at the Frankfurt Bookfair in October 2012, where she also performed with Samoan dance group Tatau and took part in readings around the city. Her collection 'Silvertip' was published in Landfall's Frankfurt edition 2012. Her play *Rushing Dolls* won three national awards and was published by *Playmarket* in November 2012 in an anthology of new plays. The title of the anthology was created by Courtney - *Urbanesia* a word that seeks to represent new Polynesian communities in urban areas. CSM was the first New Zealander, the first Pacific Islander and the youngest artist to be selected as writer in residence for the LiteraturRaum Bleibtreu Berlin in 2011. While in Germany, she featured in Mau Theatre's world premiere of *Le Savali*. She also toured Indonesia in April 2012 for their International Poetry Festival (Forum Penyair) across four cities and a selection of her poetry was translated into Bahasa Indonesia. She visited London in June 2012 as a delegate for the British Council for the Velela Festival,

which formed part of the Cultural Olympiad. She was invited to Oxford University and to the House of Lords. She was nominated and subsequently selected for the Aspiring Leaders Forum in July 2012, an annual event that brings together 100 of the brightest, most courageous and committed young leaders from all over New Zealand. She was also nominated for a Radcliffe Research Institute Fellowship by Lloyd Jones, Toa Fraser and Brian Boyd at Harvard University for 2013. CSM worked as a fulltime Arts Advisor for Auckland Council where she developed programmes for young artists, diverse communities and community artists. CSM is of Samoan, Manganian and Irish descent and is currently the featured poet for *Poetry NZ 46* (www.courtneymeredith.com).

Scars and Stars: the Pulsating Poetry of Courtney Sina Meredith



Three adjectives come to mind to define unequivocally Courtney Sina Meredith's poetry: Pacific, primordial, performative. The indigenous identity of this poet breathes in and out of her work: it is in the sweet and sour seasons of her heart – swelling and provoking; it is in the banana bread of her mind – nourishing and tempting; it is in the bright red lipstick of her smile – welcoming and challenging; it is in the brown sugar coated *vellum* of her Samoan skin – primordial and indomitable.

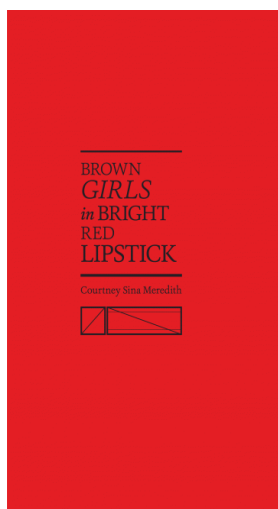
The rap-like flow of her lines; the three-dimensional fingerprints of her imagery make up her all-in response – for yesterday and tomorrow are here and now – to an ancestral call: to the ocean

of familial landscapes and lineages; to the waves of tribal histories and rhythms; to the tides of bone, tusks, turtle shell and wood. This is how CSM does poetry: translating the scars of lives lived into the stars of lives to live. So her words ink out into sentences and stories like a tattoo, like blood vessels in the placenta of imagination.

The poems presented here are taken from CSM's debut collection, *Brown Girls in Bright Red Lipstick* (Auckland: Beatnik, 2012, 68pp). It is only the beginning and yet she has already – and dangerously – got close to the end of the whole thing. The architecture of the world is following her bones; the voice of the universe is borrowing her words.

The translators have endeavoured to share the author's heartbeat and mindbeat, performing with her the challenging and liberating dance of writing the mysteries and truths of life.

(M.S. & F.B.)





11. Pages from the Book of Souls; sausage gut, soles, images and paint.

Basilica

I sit in a weatherboard city
 a basilica of wondrous beauty
 roads have grown from the chest of soldiers
 arching to southern lovers
 the seabed has no memory of the Calvary.

In the place of a skull by lemon trees
 coloured crescents darken
 I take the bones I used to be and wash them
 in the Waikato

my grandmother sewed denim
 my second father drove a truck.

From the mount of olives come promises
 they are like gold flakes in a stream

they are like electric fences of the mind
 keeping the cows brown

the land is full of boyish bones
 some Totara see higher than the Gods of Apia.

Mihi be careful with your misery
 stars hang above Jerusalem
 like coloured glass

on the high plain of Peru
 a woman looks like you
 Venancia with brothers in the dust
 your body is the light above the dusk.

Territory

The body knows no way to thank the heart
 I hold my chest and stare into apple halves
 where dark seeds are earth doomed.

Through rivers' time small love aligning
 the cardinal land stands electric

Basilica

Siedo in una citt^ fatta di tavole di legno
una basilica d'incantevole bellezza
le strade fiorite dal petto di soldati
inarcati verso amanti del sud
il fondo del mare non ha memoria del Golgota.

In luogo del cranio tra alberi di limoni
strade colorate s'adombrano
raccolgo le ossa che ero un tempo e le sciacquo
nel Waikato

mia nonna cuciva denim
il mio secondo padre guidava un camion.

Dal monte degli ulivi giungono promesse
sono come scaglie dorate in un torrente

sono come recinzioni elettriche della mente
che conservano brune le mucche

il suolo è carico di giovani ossa
certi Totara scrutano più in alto degli Dei di Apia.

Mihi attenta alla tua infelicità
le stelle sospese su Gerusalemme
come vetri colorati

sulle alte pianure del Però
una donna sembri tu
Venancia con i suoi fratelli impolverati
il tuo corpo al tramonto ci ha abbagliati.

Territorio

Il corpo non sa come ringraziare il cuore
mi tengo il petto e fisso mele a met^
dove scuri semi sono terra condannata.

Nel tempo di fiumi allineando amoretto
sta elettrica la terra cardinale

and you cawing odes to purple grass
want so much to fall and slant the heavens.

Cloth Saints

Dark boys high on the hill
are dead as the bright leaves falling

walking their bikes up the dusty road
stopping to smoke and look at the ants

like lost stars set above the city
they pretend no one they love is buried there.

Eight Star

Your brothers lie with kinas
the trees have grown quiet
I wait for your patu across my cheek

instead, we sit on the front porch and drink
the blood of young soldiers
like plum wine.

The waves come in
angry as sea stallions
trying to claim pearls in a shell
banana bread warm on a white towel
is one good thing.

Moss grows over the most willing rocks
sticks fall from the heavens and bloodhounds run
we knit the wool of mutton on the table
dyed redder than fish eyes in a bucket.

e tu gracchiando odi a erba purpurea
brami tanto cadere e inclinare i cieli.

Santi di stoffa

Ragazzi scuri su per la collina
morti come foglie accese che cadono

tirandosi dietro bici per la strada polverosa
fermandosi a fumare e a guardare formiche

come stelle smarrite fisse sulla la città
fingono che nessuno dei loro cari sia sepolto lì.

Ottava stella

I tuoi fratelli sdraiati con i kina
gli alberi si sono acquietati
aspetto il tuo patu lungo la mia guancia

invece, ce ne stiamo seduti in veranda a bere
il sangue di giovani soldati
come vino di susino.

Arrivano le onde
impetuose come stalloni marini
che cercano di appropriarsi di perle di conchiglia
il pane di banana tiepido s'uno strofinaccio bianco
è una cosa buona.

Cresce il muschio sulle rocce più accoglienti
cadono dal cielo ramoscelli e segugi corrono
lavoriamo lana di montone sul tavolo
tinta più rossa che occhi di pesce in un secchio.

Christmas Dove

A Christmas dove;
 you would like one,
are like one, a wet bird
 diving in cotton;
 under the breast plate
 sparrow graffiti.

The wall of my chest
 reads *love me love me*
 in fluro pink
 not organ-like at all.

Space Dance

It isn't my fault
 it's my design that enjoys clinging
 legs boomeranged around some fine torso

(really I'm just hung over and sick of
 bleeding every month
 like a shit for brains artist wasting money on ice
 cream bricks
 inventing morals in the wee hours
 trying to
 talk the devil out of me and stop blushing)

patting gingers and fisting the sun
 I keep on being
 the un-me

closing my eyes when I kiss
 same as the movies

in the morning I fucking regret it
 all I recall is black desert.

Don't Trust a Samoan Girl

she'll eat your heart while you sleep

Colomba natalizia

Colomba natalizia;
ne vorresti una,
una ne sei, uccello bagnato
che s'immerge nel cotone;
sotto la tavola del petto
graffiti di passero.

Sul muro del mio petto
c'è scritto *amami amami*
in un rosa fucsia
per niente da organo.

Danza spaziale

Non è colpa mia
è al mio disegno che piace aggrapparsi
gambe a boomerang intorno a un bel torso

(davvero sono solo sbronza e stanca di
sanguinare tutti i mesi
un'artista cervello in pappa che butta i soldi in
mattonelle di gelato
e inventare principi nelle ore piccole
per cercare di
liberarmi dal male e smettere di arrossire)

toccando passerine coi pugni contro il sole
continuo a essere
la non-me

chiudo gli occhi quando bacio
come nei film

la mattina cazzo me ne pento
ricordo solo un deserto nero.

Mai fidarsi di una samoana

ti mangerà il cuore mentre dormi
finché sarai polvere negli angoli delle case popolari rosa

until you are silt in the corners of pink state houses

the girls all lie they lie like me
 all of us ones like us
 in a group upright
 sometimes wearing the same thing
 we don't speak the language
 we laugh a lot

young guys in nightclubs in leathers go off at us
 drunk on mother tongue
 they give you the drink in their hand
 punch cars passing the road and always
 someone's brother

crying the Manu Sina
 fucked up on K Road
 doing the Manu Samoa
 on the street on the fly

slapping themselves
 until it hurts
 until the girls
 are red.

Midnight Limbs

Too late to scale concrete bricks
 that crossing will make us
 hard night kids crossed like Jesus
 star-jacking the Surrey Cres night.

Brothers are hustling rib cage v-necks
 Japanese girls break and fuck
 eyes running miracle circuits
 we live a ten-speed twenties.

His lipped girlfriend stills her cheeks
 a lone guitarist crawling leather
 forging new religion
 wide enough to cite design as art
 as many as the ark of hearts will impart

le tipe menton tutte, tutte menton come me
tutti noi fatti come noi
in un gruppo impettito
a volte addosso le stesse cose
non parliamo la lingua
ridiamo un sacco

ragazzi in discoteca vestiti di pelle ci urlano dietro
ubriachi in lingua madre
ti danno il drink che hanno in mano
colpiscono le macchine che passano e c'è sempre
il fratello di qualcuno

che grida che i Manu Sina
hanno fatto casino in K Road
facendo la Manu Samoa
per strada al volo

prendendosi a schiaffi
finché fa male
finché le ragazze
sono arrossite.

Membra a mezzanotte

Troppo tardi per scalare mattoni di cemento
quest'incrocio farà di noi
duri ragazzi notturni, in croce come Gesù
scrocca-rete nella notte di Surrey Cres.

I fratelli s'infilano magliette con gabbie toraciche
le giapponesine scoppiano e scopano
gli occhi percorrono circuiti miracolosi
viviamo i vent'anni a mille.

La ragazza labbrona di lui ferma le guance
pelle brulicante di chitarrista solitario
forgia nuova religione
ampia abbastanza da dire il design arte
per quanti ne dispensi l'arca di cuori

she won't leave him to the pink formica

looming intersections will not have us
the talking revolution posy slow deaths
maroon roses forearm clawed
outside the metric city heats

dirty hundred dollar clouds
setting sky of wighted noir
born to rush and hold the air
artists window lean and shake
inhaling all the land has been.

Back home

It's 2,40am back home
there's a new law writing itself overnight
nobody will be moving to the jungle line
the dark has smoothed them
into faceless fields.

I miss the faces of girls back home
girls with their faces over square sinks
there is no sea just sinks full of tears
piped to the ground to the field back home.

The field is a sinking mass of fears
a crop of bosom-held despair
bearing animal buildings
she is quiet in her suffering
back home.

Aitu

Crickets sing
aitu move in the trees
sacred things play dead
taking sight in the light night
crickets sing for me

Flax diamonds lie on the floor

lei non lo lascer[^] in pasto alla formica rosa

gli incroci incombenti non ci avranno
morti lente di mazzolini memori di rivoluzione
rose marroni avambracci artigliati
al di fuori del caldo della città metrica

nuvole da cento dollari sporche
che fanno il cielo noir pesante
nate per correre e trattenerne il fiato
finestra d'artista che pende e trema
e inala tutto ciò che la terra è stata

A casa

Sono le 2,40 a casa
c'è una nuova legge che si scrive nottetempo
nessuno si trasferir[^] al confine con la giungla
l'oscurità li ha appiattiti
in campi senza volto.

Mi mancano i volti delle ragazze a casa
ragazze con i volti su lavandini quadrati
non c'è mare solo lavandini pieni di pianto
che tubi collegano al campo a casa.

Il campo è un ammasso di paure che affonda
una semina di angoscia serbata nel petto
sorregge edifici animali
lei è silenziosa nel dolore
a casa.

Aitu

Grilli cantano
aitu si muovono negli alberi
cose consacrate si fingono morte
prendendo la mira nella sera leggera
grilli cantano per me.

Diamanti di lino sul pavimento

the birth of the evening heavens
with spirit in the trees
cicadas call for me

A man stands at the door
taller than beauty
I do not let him in
spirits come for me

They are taking sight in dry fields
moving babies in bellies
I hear them pushing off
dead men like boats

Moments bicker in twilight
through the window I see us
young again with crooked fringes
nobody has left us

We dance through the leaning clothes line
thin as summer sheets
it is like, I never began.

Transmigration of Souls

searching for pacific books
hidden in Oregon
thinking of you
doubting the cold

radio pumping 80's hits
crazy people calling
sun blitzing the building
builders smoking in

the ceiling no love left
no room to house
the consumed.

la nascita dell'empireo serale
gli spiriti negli alberi
cicale chiedono di me
C'è un uomo alla porta
più alto della bellezza
non lo faccio entrare
spiriti vengono per me

Ora prendendo la mira in campi aridi
bambini irrequieti nelle pance
li sento prendere il largo
uomini morti come barche

Istanti bisticciano al crepuscolo
attraverso la finestra vedo noi
di nuovo giovani con le frange sghembe
nessuno ci ha lasciato

Danziamo attraverso i fili storti del bucato
sottili come lenzuola estive
è come se non avessi cominciato mai.

Trasmigrazione di anime

alla ricerca di libri sul pacifico
nascosti in Oregon
penso a te
perplessa dal freddo

la radio pompa hit anni 80
gente folle che grida
il sole martella il palazzo
gli operai fumano sul

tetto niente più amore
né spazio per accogliere
i consumati.



3. Salciccie/Suck in Your Gut, sausage gut and lace, shelf and cloth.

Confronti Poetici / Poetic Comparisons

Edited by Luigi Fontanella

Confronti Poetici / Poetic Comparisons

Edited and translated by Luigi Fontanella

The purpose of this “rubrica” is to feature two poets, an American and an Italian, who in the opinion of the editor share affinities or embody different approaches to poetry. The editor will select one poem for each poet and provide both the Italian and the English translations, thus acting as a bridge between them. In this manner two poets, whose approach to poetry may be quite different, will be conversing through the translator.

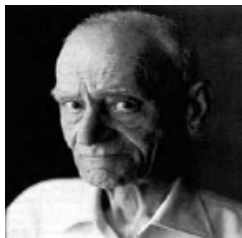
For this issue I present a poem by Wystan Hugh Auden and a poem by Giorgio Caproni.



Arcinota e ormai ricchissima la bio-bibliografia oggi disponibile su **Wynstan Hugh Auden**, forse e senza forse è uno dei più grandi poeti — insieme a T.S. Eliot, Montale, Celan, Pessoa, Alexandre, Yeats e pochi altri — del Novecento occidentale.

Nato a York, in Inghilterra, il 21 febbraio 1907, si trasferì a New York nel 1939 e nel 1946 divenne cittadino americano. Insegnò per alcuni anni in università statunitensi per poi tornare alla sua attività di libero scrittore a tempo pieno. Dal 1948 in poi trascorse tutte le estati in Europa, prima a Ischia e in seguito, dal 1958, in Austria. Morì a Vienna il 29 settembre 1973. Tutta la sua opera poetica è raccolta nel volume *Collected Poems* (New York: Vintage International, 1991).

Più specificamente, la poesia qui riprodotta e da me tradotta (*Johnny*) - che vuole anche essere un minuscolo omaggio per il quarantennale della sua morte - fa parte di un gruppo di dieci testi, scritti tra il 1932 e il 1939, molti dei quali per la musica di Benjamin Britten. I dieci componimenti apparvero poi in un volumetto col titolo *Tell Me the Truth About Love*, uscito anche in Italia presso Adelphi nel 1994, con la traduzione di Gilberto Forti e una Nota di Iosif Brodskij. In esse si sente già il presentimento dell'imminente seconda guerra mondiale, contro la cui "insensatezza" e "sete di potere", Auden contrappone l'amore, la leggerezza, la memoria, la forza dell'immaginazione e la capacità di penetrare a fondo nella condizione umana. Quando il libretto uscì negli States, Bodskij, grande ammiratore di Auden, ebbe a scrivere che egli si distingue rispetto a ogni altro poeta per "l'enorme generosità del suo spirito e per l'intelligenza con cui viene incontro al lettore in ognuno dei suoi versi." Versi impeccabili, sia per l'elegante maestria tecnica sia per il loro struggente potere evocativo, non esenti da un certo disincanto ironico e amaro insieme che gli erano propri.



Nato a Livorno nel 1912, ma poi vissuto gran parte della sua vita a Roma dov'è morto nel 1990, **Giorgio Caproni** può considerarsi tra i massimi poeti italiani del Novecento. Forse non c'è nel nostro ventesimo secolo poeta più genuinamente legato alla realtà. Nella sua poesia si ritrovano soprattutto due città, attraverso tre temi fondamentali: la città, la madre, il viaggio. Le due città sono Genova (dove egli andò a vivere all'età di dieci anni, oggetto del suo innamoramento) e Livorno (città materna e della sua infanzia, che lui rievcherà in non poche e commosse liriche). Ecco i vapori dei bar all'alba, i rumori dei tram, le prime macchine che attraversano le strade cittadine, le voci che vanno animando mercati, porti, piazze e vari altri luoghi cari alla sua memoria. Il suo viaggiare in questi posti si colora subito di un velo onirico-visionario che paradossalmente ne rafforza la presenza e l'immanenza mentale. Ha scritto Giovanni Raboni, fra i più attenti lettori della poesia caproniana, che non si possono avere dubbi sulla "fisicità, sulla natura stupendamente terrestre e nient'affatto retorica dell'amore di Caproni per queste città. Quest'amore è un amore corrisposto e realizzato - finché visse in esse -, un amore *da vicino*. Ma quando Caproni va a vivere a Roma, diventa un amore *da lontano*, un amore impossibile, infelice. Diventa il rimpianto di un amore."

La poesia qui proposta è tratta da un bellissimo volume antologico, curato dallo stesso Raboni: *L'ultimo borgo. Poesie 1932-1978*, Milano, Rizzoli, 1980)



12. Ties That Bind; shoes and silk thread.

W. H. Auden**Johnny**

(from *Collected Poems*, New York: Vintage International, 1991, section titled *Tell me the Truth About Love*).

O the valley in the summer where I and my John
Beside the deep river would walk on and on
While the flowers at our feet and the birds up above
Argued so sweetly on reciprocal love,
And I leaned on his shoulder; "O Johnny, let's play":
But he frowned like thunder and he went away.

O that Friday near Christmas as I well recall
When we went to the Charity Matinee Ball,
The floor was so smooth and the band was so loud
And Johnny so handsome I felt so proud;
"Squeeze me tighter, dear Johnny, let's dance till it's day":
But he frowned like thunder and he went away.

Shall I ever forget at the Grand Opera
When music poured out of each wonderful star?
Diamonds and pearls they hung dazzling down
Over each silver or golden silk gown;
"O John I'm in heaven," I whispered to say:
But he frowned like thunder and he went away.

O but he was as fair as a garden in flower,
As slender and tall as the great Eiffel Tower,
When the waltz throbbed out on the long promenade
O his eyes and his smile they went straight to my hearth;
"O marry me, Johnny, I'll love and obey":
But he frowned like thunder and he went away.

O last night I dreamed of you, Johnny, my lover,
You'd the sun on one arm and the moon on the other,
The sea it was blue and the grass it was green,
Every star rattled a round tambourine;
Ten thousand miles deep in a pit there I lay:
But you frowned like thunder and you went away.

W. H. Auden

Johnny

Oh, la valle d'estate dove io e il mio John
Ce ne andavamo su e giù lungo il profondo fiume
Mentre i fiori per terra e gli uccelli nell'aria
Ragionavano dolci di reciproco amore,
Ed io appoggiata sulla sua spalla gli dicevo: "Dai, John,
[giochiamo":
Ma lui si rabbuiò e mi abbandonò.

O un Venerdì sotto Natale - ben lo ricordo -
Quando noi due andammo a quel Ballo di Beneficenza,
Così liscia la pista e così rumorosa l'orchestra,
E Johnny così bello ed io così fiera;
"Strizzami forte, Johnny, con te fino all'alba ballerò
Ma lui si rabbuiò e mi abbandonò.

Potrò mai scordare la sera al Gran Galà
Quando la musica si versava da ogni stella
E perle e diamanti pendevano luccicanti
Da ogni vestito di seta argentata o dorata;
"Oh, John, sono in paradiso", la mia voce gli bisbigliò:
Ma lui si rabbuiò e mi abbandonò.

Oh, sì, lui era perfetto: un giardino in fiore,
Alto e snello come la grande Torre Eiffel,
Quando si spense il valzer sull'ampia promenade
Oh, quel sorriso e quegli occhi mi andarono dritti al cuore;
"Sposami, Johnny, io ti amerò e obbedirò":
Ma lui si rabbuiò e mi abbandonò.

Questa notte, Johnny, amore mio, t'ho sognato,
Avevi su un braccio il sole e sull'altro la luna,
Tutto azzurro era il mare e verde era l'erba,
Ogni stella tintinnava come un tamburello;
Io giù in un pozzo diecimila miglia profondo
Ma tu ti rabbuiasti e mi abbandonasti.

Giorgio Caproni**Preghiera**

Anima mia leggera,
Va' a Livorno, ti prego.
E con la tua candela
timida, di nottetempo
Fa' un giro; e, se n'hai il tempo,
perlustra e scruta, e scrivi
se per caso Anita Picchi
è ancor viva tra i vivi.

Proprio quest'oggi torno,
deluso, da Livorno.
Ma tu, tanto più netta
di me, la camicetta
ricorderai, e il rubino
di sangue, sul serpentino
d'oro che lei portava
sul petto, dove s'appannava.

Anima mia, sii brava
e va' in cerca di lei.
Tu sai cosa darei
se la incontrassi per strada.

Giorgio Caproni

A Prayer

My light and kind soul,
I pray you, go to Livorno.
And with your gentle candle
at night go around;
and, if you have time,
search and scout and tell
if by chance Anna Picchi
is still among the living.

Only today I'm returning,
disappointed, from Livorno.
But you, so much more thorough
than me, her blouse
will sure remember, and the ruby
like blood on that golden pendant
she used to wear on her chest,
where it would soon look misty.

My soul, be good,
and go searching for her.
You know what I would do and give
if I could just meet her in the street.



6. Tessuto di Vita/Fabric of Life; woven fettuccine and paint.

New Translators

Edited by John DuVal

***Funeral Train* by Aldo Quario and Paola De Stefani**

Translated by Vito Giuseppe Clarizio

Vito Giuseppe Clarizio graduated from California State University Long Beach with a Bachelor degree in Italian Language and Literature in 2011. In 2012, he won a grant to study Teacher Education in Italy at the University of Modena and Reggio Emilia, where he attended classes and taught English for six months. He plans to continue studying the Italian language with a strong interest in translating/interpreting.

Aldo Quario, born in 1964 in Biella, a town in the northern Italian region of Piedmont, spent his adolescent years in Morocco. Upon returning to Italy, he graduated with a degree in electrical engineering, was married, became licensed as a glider-pilot, tried and failed to become an astronaut, had a child, and writes short stories, at times by himself, at times with his wife, Paola. Some of his short stories have been published in anthologies and have been distinguished in literary competitions.

Paola De Stefani was born in Biella in April of 1962. She studied to become an elementary school teacher, receiving a degree in Educational Psychology at the University of Turin. She taught elementary school for many years, followed by middle school then high school, where she currently teaches Italian language and literature, history and geography. Joy and passion motivate her writing, which she hopes to continue for a long, long time.

Note

In 2010 Professor Clorinda Donato, teaching an undergraduate Italian-translation workshop at the California State University, Long Beach, assigned each of her students a short story to translate from the recent anthology, *Funeral Train e altri racconti*. Like Adriana Guarra's translation of Paolo Cortesi's "Il segreto di Anna" in the fall 2012 issue of *Journal of Italian Translation* and Elisabeth Siever's translation of Alida Pellegrini's "Una vera signora" in this issue, Vito G. Clarizio's translation of the title story, "Funeral Train," is a product of Professor Donato's workshop. We look forward to another story from that same workshop next issue, and we have invited Professor Donato to write a brief account of how her workshop came to be and achieved such good results.

John DuVal

Funeral Train

Se chiedeste a uno qualunque degli abitanti di Jessup, Maryland, dove fosse la sera di sabato 8 giugno 1968, vi direbbe: lungo la ferrovia. Chiunque vi risponderebbe così, tranne mio padre.

Molti aspettavano dal pomeriggio, sotto un sole bruciante che faceva salire dai ciottoli e dalle traversine dei binari ondate oleose e puzzolenti. Ma nessuno si lamentava. Attendevano, in un silenzio intontito, che la salma del senatore Robert Francis Kennedy transitasse sulla linea, in direzione di Washington.

Il treno era in ritardo di quasi quattro ore. Si diceva che ci fosse stato un incidente a nord, a Elizabeth, New Jersey. Due uomini si sarebbero avvicinati troppo ai binari per osservare la bara, e un treno che proveniva dalla direzione opposta li avrebbe investiti.

Peter, Ronnie e io avevamo deciso di andare a vedere il convoglio quel pomeriggio, ma in una zona più defilata, appena fuori città; non mi andava che qualcuno potesse riferirlo a mio padre.

«Perché non possiamo stare qui?» chiese Ronnie guardandosi intorno, lungo Jessup Road, quasi che quella strada fosse il posto più bello del mondo.

C'era tantissima gente ad attendere il treno, a fianco dei binari. Bambini, giovani, vecchi, donne, bianchi, afroamericani. Qualcuno stringeva tra le mani la bandiera, qualcuno pregava, inginocchiato per terra, qualcuno piangeva. C'era, su tutta quella folla, una specie di immobilità pesante, una tensione stordita, come chi si sveglia da un sogno appena ucciso dalla luce cruda dell'alba e ancora stenta a credere a quello che vede davvero.

Lo avevamo seguito tutti in televisione. Era successo solo tre giorni prima, eppure sembrava passato già tanto tempo. Gli avevano sparato nelle cucine dell'Hotel Ambassador, a Los Angeles, mentre festeggiava la vittoria alle primarie californiane. Avevano trasmesso l'attentato in diretta, perché c'erano ancora numerosi giornalisti presenti alla conferenza stampa appena terminata. E questo era stato uno shock ancora più grande. L'America intera aveva sentito gli spari e le urla e aveva visto la confusione, ed era rimasta paralizzata. Era come se qualcuno avesse di colpo voltato pagina alla Storia. Era come se avessimo ricevuto tutti una pugnalata, perché con le sue parole Bob Kennedy aveva scaldato il cuore dell'America. E anche il mio.

Funeral Train

If you were to ask any one of the residents of Jessup, Maryland, where they were on Saturday evening June 8th, 1968, they would tell you: beside the railroad tracks. Any one of them would respond to you like that, except for my dad.

Many had been waiting since the afternoon, under a scorching sun that made pungent and oily waves rise from the cobblestones and railroad ties. But no one complained. They waited, in a dazed silence, as the corpse of Senator Robert Francis Kennedy traveled on the tracks, in the direction of Washington.

The train was almost four hours late. They said that there was an accident up north, in Elizabeth, New Jersey. Apparently, two men got too close to the tracks in their attempt to look at the coffin, and a train coming from the opposite direction ran them over.

Peter, Ronnie, and I had decided to go and see the procession that afternoon, but in an area much less crowded, just outside of the city. I didn't like the idea that someone might tell my dad.

"Why can't we stay here?" asked Ronnie, looking around along Jessup Road, as if that street were the most beautiful place in the world.

There were a ton of people waiting at the side of the tracks for the train: kids, teenagers, old people, women, white people, and African-Americans. One person's hands gripped the flag tightly, someone else was down on their knees praying, and another person was crying. A heavy kind of immobility weighed upon the entire crowd, a bewildered tension, like when someone abruptly wakes up from a dream killed by the crude light of dawn and is still trying to figure out their surroundings.

We had all followed it on television. It had happened only three days earlier, and yet it seemed like a lot of time had already passed. They shot him in the kitchen of the Ambassador Hotel in Los Angeles while he was celebrating his victory in the California Primaries. Since many journalists were still there following the news conference, the attack was broadcast live, and this was an even bigger shock. All of America had heard the shots and the screams, had seen the confusion, and was paralyzed. It was as if someone had struck a blow to the pages of history. It was as if we had all received a blow, because with his words, Bob Kennedy had

«Qui non va bene» gli risposi senza guardarlo.

«Hai paura che qualcuno vada da paparino a fargli la spia? Ehi, gente, George Merrill è qui! Guardatelo!» gridò Ronnie indicandomi.

«Piantala! Sei un deficiente» dissi.

«E tu un cacasotto» cantilenò Ronnie e poi si tolse gli occhiali, ci sputò sopra e si mise a pulirli con un lembo di quella sua maglietta lercia che non cambiava da giorni. Aveva delle lenti spesse come il fondo delle bottiglie di Coca cola e i suoi occhi, là dietro, sembravano fessure piccole e gonfie. Si rimise gli occhiali e si guardò intorno soddisfatto. Per lui era facile parlare. Nonostante avesse solo tredici anni, come noi, faceva tutto quello che voleva. I suoi non sapevano mai dove fosse, né se ne preoccupavano. A loro interessava solo che Ronnie portasse a casa i soldi che guadagnava alla stazione di servizio di Norman Morris, dove lavava automobili dall'ora di apertura a quella di chiusura, per tutta l'estate. Anche se solo Dio sapeva come le pulisse quelle macchine, visto che era cieco quanto una talpa.

«Proprio un gran cacasotto!»

Mi ficcai in bocca tutto intero il Baby Ruth che stavo scartando e il caramello coloso e morbido mi legò insieme i denti facendomi partire la salivazione a mille.

Non avevo voglia di rispondergli o di giustificarmi, non avrei nemmeno potuto, con quella roba che mi riempiva la bocca. Semplicemente, mio padre non mi avrebbe mai permesso di assistere al funerale. Mi limitai ad alzare le spalle.

Papà era il direttore del carcere di Jessup. Aveva quarant'anni ed era un repubblicano convinto. Diceva che c'era da aspettarselo che prima o poi qualcuno lo avrebbe tolto di mezzo, quel Kennedy. Andava imbottendo la testa degli americani di strane idee. Uno così non può che finir male, una volta o l'altra, sosteneva. È un comunista.

Comunisti, fannulloni, negri, omosessuali erano di volta in volta i bersagli delle sue requisitorie. Nella foga a delle sue arringhe una raffica di goccioline di saliva gli usciva dalla bocca, come una sventagliata umida e rabbiosa. In quei momenti era inutile cercare di parlare con lui. Non mi avrebbe ascoltato. E comunque, non mi ascoltava mai. Eppure non perdeva occasione per voler fare di me quello che lui si ostinava a considerare un vero uomo.

warmed the hearts of America. And mine too.

“‘Here’s no good,’ I said to him without looking.”

“Are you afraid someone will go to your dad and tell on you? Hey, guys, George Merrill is here! Look!” cried Ronnie, pointing at me.

“‘Quit it! You’re an idiot,’ I said.”

“And you’re a chicken-shit” chanted Ronnie, who removed his glasses, spit on them, and set himself to cleaning them with an edge of that filthy shirt of his that he hadn’t changed for days. He had lenses like the bottom of Coca Cola bottles and his eyes, behind them, seemed like tiny swollen slits. He put his glasses back on and looked around satisfied. For him talking was easy. Even though, like us, he was only thirteen, he did whatever he wanted. His folks never knew where he was, nor did it worry them. All they cared about was the money Ronnie brought home that he earned from his job at Norman Morris’ service station, where he washed cars from the moment they opened to the moment they closed. He did it for the entire summer, even though God only knows how he could have washed those cars, seeing that he was blind as a bat.

“Such a chicken-shit!”

I stuffed the entire Baby Ruth bar that I was unwrapping into my mouth, and the soft, sticky caramel bound my teeth together, making my saliva gush.

I had no desire to answer him or to justify myself, nor would I have been able to with that stuff filling my mouth. Simply put, my dad never would have allowed me to be at the funeral. I just shrugged my shoulders.

My dad was the director of Jessup’s prison. He was forty years old and a diehard Republican. He used to say that sooner or later, you could expect someone to get rid of that Kennedy. He was filling the heads of Americans with strange ideas. Someone like him can do nothing other than come to a bad end one time or another, my dad maintained. He was a communist.

Communists, deadbeats, blacks, and homosexuals were the targets of his reproaches time after time. In the passion of his rants, a blast of spit would surge out from his mouth in a rabid, humid gust of air. In those moments it was useless to try and talk with him. He wouldn’t have listened to me. And all the same, he never listened to me. And yet he never let an opportunity go by to make

La domenica mattina mi portava con sé, a caccia, a Iron Spring, Pennsylvania. Era un viaggio di due ore. Io odiavo la caccia. Odiavo la sveglia alle quattro del mattino, soprattutto di domenica, quando avrei potuto starmene tranquillo, nel letto e invece mio padre apriva le tende, spalancava le finestre e mi strappava le coperte. Odiavo pulire il fucile, lucidarlo con l'olio di noce, caricarmelo in spalla e trascinarlo nel bosco, senza poter pronunciare nemmeno una parola, per non spaventare la selvaggina.

«Allora ti sbrighi? Hai mangiato abbastanza» mi metteva premura e io ero costretto a lasciare nel piatto più di metà colazione.

Poi mi trascinava fuori, caricava il pick-up con tutto l'equipaggiamento, cibo in scatola, pentole, fucili.

«Oggi è una giornata sensazionale per cacciare. Vedrai che ti fai onore anche tu» affermava. E mi guardava dritto negli occhi, troppo a lungo e troppo da vicine e io sentivo un buco proprio in mezzo allo stomaco e non riuscivo a capire se era fame, paura o vomito.

Non facevamo mai soste fino a Iron Spring, e quando arrivavamo dovevo precipitarmi dietro un albero a fare pipì. Poi aiutavo mio padre a scaricare l'auto e quando eravamo pronti ci infilavamo nella vegetazione in silenzio. Io dietro, mio padre in testa. Io cercavo di assumere le posizioni che mi aveva insegnato, quando mi faceva esercitare dietro casa, con le bottiglie di Dr Pepper allineate sul muretto.

Mi faceva una pena infinita il carniere pieno di piccoli volatili straziati dai pallini. Tuttavia, ogni volta speravo di catturare qualcosa, non fosse stato altro che un minuscolo uccellino; trovarlo già morto sarebbe stato il massimo.

Una volta ero stato sul punto di sparare a un picchio. Si trovava a pochi passi da me, posato su un ramo, immobile. L'avevo proprio davanti, non potevo sbagliare. Sarebbe bastato tirare il grilletto ed era fatta. Mi guardai rapidamente attorno per vedere se mio padre mi stava osservando. Chiusi un occhio, presi la mira, trattenni il fiato. Stavo quasi per sparare, quando all'improvviso qualcosa mi cadde sul braccio, infilandosi sotto la manica della mia maglietta. Gettai il fucile a terra, partì un colpo mentre io cominciavo a gesticolare senza controllo.

«Papà» urlai con tutta la voce che avevo in corpo «papà, papàààà!»

out of me what he himself stubbornly considered to be a real man.

Sunday mornings he took me hunting to Iron Spring, Pennsylvania. It was a two-hour trip. I hated hunting. I hated the 4am wake-up call, especially on Sundays, when I would have been able to relax peacefully in bed. Instead my dad would open the blinds, throw open the windows and strip my blankets off of me. I hated cleaning the rifle, polishing it with walnut oil, loading it on my shoulder and dragging myself through the woods without being able to utter even one word, so as to not scare away the game.

"So, can you hurry up? You've eaten enough", he tried to rush me along, and I was forced to leave more than half my breakfast on the plate.

Then he dragged me outside, loaded the pick-up with all the gear, canned food, pans, and rifles.

"Today is a great day for hunting. You'll see, even you will do it credit." He affirmed. And he looked straight into my eyes far too long and far too close, and I felt a hole right in my gut, and I couldn't tell if I was hungry, afraid, or sick to my stomach.

We never made a stop until Iron Spring, and when we got there I had to dash behind a tree and pee. Then I helped my dad unload the truck and when we were ready, we slipped silently into the brush. I was in the rear, my dad in the lead. I tried to assume the positions he had taught me when he made me practice behind the house with Dr. Pepper bottles lined up along the wall.

The game bag full of little birds mangled by pellets filled me with immense sorrow. However, every time I hoped to capture something, even if nothing other than a tiny little bird; finding it already dead was the best I could hope for.

One time I was on the verge of shooting at a woodpecker. It was only a few steps away, sitting on a branch, motionless. I had it right in front of me, there was no way I could miss. It would have been enough to pull the trigger and he was done. I quickly looked around to see if my dad was watching me. I closed an eye, took aim, and held my breath. I was almost ready to shoot, when all of a sudden something fell on my arm, slipping under my shirtsleeve. I flung the rifle to the ground, a round fired off while I started to flail uncontrollably.

"Dad" I yelled with all the voice my body could muster, "dad, daaaaad!"

Lui era poco lontano, ma mi sembrò che ci impiegasse un secolo per arrivare. Vedevo i suoi movimenti come al rallentatore mentre ero scosso da una serie incontenibile di fremiti. Sentivo sulla pelle le zampette uncinata che si muovevano velocissime verso il mio collo. Mio padre mi tolse la maglietta. Sul mio braccio un coleottero verde sollevò le antenne come a chiedere che cos' a fosse tutta quell'agitazione.

«È solo un insetto» disse mio padre «pensavo che ti fossi sparato in un piede».

Scacciò il coleottero con un gesto veloce, ma io lessi nei suoi occhi qualcosa che non avrei dimenticato. Quel giorno tornammo a casa più presto del solito, e io non osai parlare per tutto il viaggio.

«Allora forza, andiamo» disse Peter «se stiamo ancora qui a perder tempo va a finire che il treno passa e non lo vediamo neanche».

Ronnie fece cenno di sì e io pure.

Passammo attraverso il cortile della fabbrica di tubi di cemento, accanto alla ferrovia. Qualcuno stava lavorando, nonostante fosse sabato, perché c'era una radio accesa, e sentimmo le ultime note di *Mrs Robinson* di Simon & Garfunkel che in quel periodo era al primo posto della Billboard Hot 100. Subito dopo il giornale radio annunciò che l'assassino di Martin Luther King Jr. era stato catturato quel pomeriggio a Londra, all'aeroporto di Heathrow. Parlarono del funerale di Kennedy, poi la linea passò a Peter Arnett, corrispondente dal Vietnam.

Quell'anno i giornali non facevano che citare sondaggi su quanto la popolazione disapprovasse il continuo invio di truppe in Vietnam. L'America seguiva a mandare uomini laggiù, senza intravedere la speranza della fine del conflitto.

Non sapevo se scavalcare la massicciata e passare dall'altra parte dei binari, oppure camminare per un tratto lungo le rotaie, verso nord, oltre il vecchio Harry, lo sfasciacarrozze. Da quella parte, per quasi un miglio non c'erano case, mentre da questa sarei stato pericolosamente vicino al muro di cinta del carcere, dove lavorava mio padre. L'eventualità di incontrarlo mi fece preferire la seconda ipotesi.

Ci avviammo per Old Jessup road, tornando indietro di un pezzo per poi imboccare Dorsey Run road che ci avrebbe portato fuori città. Era una strada secondaria che terminava in una specie

He wasn't too far away, but it seemed to take him a century to get there. I saw his movements in slow motion as I was shaking from an overwhelming series of shudders. On my skin I could feel the little hooked legs that were quickly moving toward my neck. My dad took my shirt off. On my arm a green beetle lifted his antennae as if to ask what the fuss was all about.

"It's only an insect", said my dad, "I thought you had shot yourself in the foot". With a quick move he shooed the beetle away, but I read something in his eyes that I would not forget. That day we returned home sooner than usual, and I didn't dare talk for the whole trip home.

"Alright let's go, let's get outta here", said Peter, "If we stick around here we'll waste time, the train will go by, and we won't even see it."

Ronnie signaled his agreement and so did I.

We passed through the cement-pipe factory's work yard next to the railroad. Even though it was Saturday someone was working because a radio was on, and we heard the last notes of Simon & Garfunkel's *Mrs. Robinson*, which topped the charts of the Billboard Hot 100. Right after, the newscast announced that Martin Luther King Jr.'s murderer had been apprehended at Heathrow airport that afternoon in London. They talked about Kennedy's funeral, then the line passed to Peter Arnett, the Vietnam correspondent.

That year the newspapers didn't do much else besides quote opinion polls on how much the people disapproved of the continual movement of troops into Vietnam. America continued to send men down there, without foreseeing hope of an end to the war.

I didn't know whether to step over the roadbed and go to the other side of the tracks, or to walk along the rails for a while, going north, past old man Harry, the junkyard operator. From that point on, for almost a mile, there were no houses, while on this side I would have been dangerously close to the wall surrounding the prison where my dad worked. The chance of running into him made me prefer the second idea.

We approached Old Jessup road, going backwards a bit to run into Dorsey Run Road that would have taken us out of town. There was a secondary street that ended in some kind of open, unpaved area. When we got there no one was around. A little further, behind the trees, there were the railroad tracks. If a train was running on

di spiazzo sterrato. Quando arrivammo non c'era nessuno. Poco oltre, dietro gli alberi, c'era la linea dei binari. Se fosse sopraggiunto un treno avremmo potuto sentirlo.

«Tagliamo da questa parte, là c'è la ferrovia» disse Ronnie.

Attraversammo la boscaglia e ci arrampicammo sulla massicciata scivolosa e sporca. Faceva ancora molto caldo nonostante fosse sera. Sentivo le gocce veloci di sudore scivolare lungo le tempie e giù per il collo. Ci fermammo a guardare la cava dall'altra parte dei binari. Davanti e dietro di me, il tracciato perfetto delle rotaie, roventi di sole, divideva l'orizzonte in due metà esatte. Una lunga, improbabile, scriminatura della terra.

Restammo senza parlare, poi Peter disse:

«Questo è un buon posto, da qui si vede bene» si lasciò cadere sui binari, si asciugò il sudore con una mano e si tolse le Keeds. I suoi piedi, con i calzini raggrinziti sulla punta, sembravano strani lombrichi gialli. Sollevò in alto una scarpa, la rovesciò e ci guardò dentro. La scosse un paio di volte e alcuni sassolini rotolarono fuori, poi se la infilò di nuovo. Ci mise molto tempo a rifare i nodi. Teneva i lacci piegati in un occhiello, stretti tra il pollice e l'indice di ogni mane, e cercava di incrociarli tra loro, con quelle sue dita tozze, mentre la lingua sporgeva da un angolo, delle labbra come una specie di radice rosa.

Peter McCarron, tra i miei compagni di scuola, non era di quelli che avrei potuto definire brillanti. Tanto per far capire il tipo, qualche mese prima era piombato a casa mia sventolando una rivista, «Esquire», o poteva anche essere «Fortune», non ricordo bene. Peter era tutto sudato e quando era riuscito a parlare ci aveva mostrato un articolo sulle bombe atomiche e sull'importanza di possedere un rifugio antinucleare. Ci aveva fatto vedere delle foto, puntando l'indice sulla carta patinata e lasciando le sue impronte qua e là, mentre, tutto eccitato, ci illustrava le caratteristiche che il rifugio avrebbe dovuto avere, come avrebbe fatto il Massimo esperto mondiale di bunker in cemento armato. Le foto presentavano due persone, comodamente sistemate in un rifugio che loro stessi, a dire della rivista, avevano costruito nel seminterrato. Un uomo sorrideva con denti scintillanti mentre controllava i livelli di radioattività all'interno; dovevano essere molto bassi vista la sua espressione di totale relax. Una donna, seduta a un piccolo tavolo sorseggiava una bibita come se fosse in vacanza alle Hawaii.

the tracks we could have heard it.

"Let's cut through this part, the railroad is over there", said Ronnie.

We went through the brush and climbed up the dirty, slippery roadbed. It was still really hot even though it was the evening. I felt the swift drops of sweat slide down my temples toward my neck. We stopped to look at the quarry on the other side of the tracks. Both in front of and behind me, the perfect route of the tracks, red hot from the sun, divided the horizon in two exact halves. A long, improbable, parting of the earth.

We hung around without talking, then Peter said, "This is a good spot, from here you can see real good." He let himself fall on the tracks, wiped the sweat away with his hand and took off his Keds. His feet, with his socks wrinkled at the tips, seemed like strange yellow earthworms. He lifted up a shoe, turned it upside down and looked inside of it. He shook it a couple times and some little pebbles rolled out, then he put it on again. It took him a while to retie his shoes. He held the laces bent at the eyelets, gripped between the thumb and index finger of each hand, and he tried to cross them with those stumpy digits, while his tongue was sticking out at an angle from his lips like some kind of pink root.

Peter McCarron, among all of my classmates, wasn't one you would define as particularly brilliant. Just to give you an idea of what he's like, a few months ago he descended upon my house leafing through a magazine, "Esquire", or maybe it was "Fortune", I can't really remember. Peter was covered with sweat and when he managed to talk he showed us an article about atomic bombs and the importance of having a nuclear-bomb shelter. He made us look at the pictures, pointing his index finger on the glossy page and leaving his finger prints here and there, while, all excited, he showed us the characteristics that a shelter should have, as if he were the top expert in the world on cement bunkers. The pictures showed two people snugly arranged in their shelter that, according to the magazine, they had built themselves in their basement. A man with sparkling teeth was smiling while he checked the radiation level inside; judging from his completely relaxed expression, it must have been pretty low. Seated at a small table, a woman was sipping a beverage as if she were on vacation in Hawaii.

Ronnie and I were watching the last episode of "Voyage to the

Ronnie e io stavamo guardando l'ultimo episodio di "Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea". Il sottomarino Seaview aveva appena compiuto un viaggio a ritroso nel tempo fino alla rivoluzione americana. Avevamo a malapena lanciato un'occhiata distratta all'articolo di Peter, ma ci eravamo accorti, guardando la copertina, che era una copia del febbraio del 1957, vale a dire di undici anni prima.

Peter l'aveva trovata nel sottoscala di casa e aveva preso la cosa molto seriamente. Dopo quel giorno aveva cominciato ad accumulare in cantina ogni sorta di vettovaglie: latte condensato, fagiolini in scatola, gelatina, batterie, coperte e via dicendo. Ammucchiava tutti i suoi articoli in un piccolo sgabuzzino nel retro della lavanderia. Per giorni Ronnie e io avevamo cercato di fargli capire che, se mai ci fosse stato un attacco nucleare, tutti i suoi sforzi sarebbero stati completamente inutili, ogni forma di vita sarebbe stata spazzata via in pochi secondi e se anche qualcuno fosse riuscito a sopravvivere, l'acqua, il suolo e il cibo sarebbero stati contaminati a tal punto da essere inservibili.

Ronnie raccolse delle pietre e prese a lanciarle. Contro i pali del telefono che correivano paralleli alla ferrovia. Poi tirò fuori dalle tasche tre penny e li sistemò sui binari, uno dietro l'altro, sapendo che il treno, quando sarebbe passato, li avrebbe schiacciati e scagliati tra l'erba come piccoli proiettili di metallo.

Io mi sdraiai sulle traversine. Sentivo sotto la testa le assi dure e le schegge di legno e l'odore oleoso e fuligginoso della ferrovia. Sentivo il sole farsi strada sulla mia pelle fin dentro le ossa e cuocermi la carne. Chiusi gli occhi e per un attimo provai a immaginare come doveva essere quando sei morto, quando sei soltanto un cadavere vuoto come Bob Kennedy. La pelle grigia, il sangue e il cuore fermi, dentro di te, in un nulla senza tempo, né spazio. Provai a controllare e a rallentare i battiti cardiaci e tutti i rumori e le sensazioni che provenivano dall'interno del mio corpo. E i pensieri e i sentimenti. Cercai di immergermi in una bara di silenzio e per qualche secondo trattenni il fiato, fino a quando ne fui capace. Ma il reticolato di luce che il sole mi disegnavo sotto le palpebre e i muscoli delle spalle e delle braccia che incominciavano a farmi male, mi fecero desistere. Mi sollevai e sedere.

«Ehi, gente, io non vedo arrivare nessun treno e ho sete. Andiamo a cercare un po' d'acqua» gridò Peter.

Bottom of the Sea." The Seaview submarine had just completed a trip back in time all the way to the American Revolution. We had barely cast a distracted glance at Peter's article when we realized by looking at the cover that it was a copy from February of 1957, meaning that it was from eleven years earlier.

Peter had found it in the closet under the staircase and he took it very seriously. From that day on he started accumulating all sorts of supplies: a milk condenser, canned beans, gelatin, batteries, blankets and the list goes on and on. He piled up all of his equipment in a little closet in the back of the laundry room. For days Ronnie and I had tried to make him understand that if there ever were a nuclear attack, all of his efforts would be completely futile, every form of life swept away within seconds. And if someone managed to survive, the water, soil, and food would be contaminated to the point of being useless.

Ronnie picked up some stones and started throwing them against the telephone poles that ran parallel to the railroad tracks. Then he pulled three pennies out of his pockets and placed them on the tracks, one behind the other, knowing that the train, when it passed, would crush and scatter them into the grass like little metal projectiles.

I lay down across the railway ties. Under my head I felt the hard planks, the splinters, and smelled the oily and blackened scent of the railroad. I felt the sun making a path on my skin down to the bone and cooking my flesh. I closed my eyes and for a minute I tried to imagine what it had to be like when you're dead, when you're only an empty cadaver like Bob Kennedy. Grey skin, blood and heart stopped inside of you, in a nothingness without time or space. I tried to control and slow down my heartbeat, and all of the sounds and sensations that came from inside my body. My thoughts and feelings as well. I tried to immerse myself in a coffin of silence and for a few seconds I held my breath until I couldn't hold it any longer. But the net of light that the sun had sketched on me, under my eyelids, under the muscles of my shoulders, under my arms, started making me sick. I made myself stop. I got up and sat down.

"Hey, guys, I don't see any train coming and I'm thirsty. Lets go get some water," Peter cried.

"There's no water here. We have to go to the Ewell's house, down there," and Ronnie pointed to a vague spot along the route that we had made to finally get here.

«Qui non c'è acqua. Dobbiamo andare alla casa degli Ewell, laggiù» e Ronnie indicò un punto vago, sul percorso che avevamo fatto per arrivare fin lì.

«È meglio che ci muoviamo, allora, prima che arrivi il treno» feci io.

Tornammo indietro attraverso gli alberi, ma quando fummo vicini allo spiazzo di prima arrivò una Plymouth Fury, rosso fuoco, tirata a lucido. Parcheggiò da una parte, ma non scese nessuno. Dentro, al di là dei finestrini calati, c'erano un ragazzo e una ragazza; avranno avuto vent'anni. Mi sembrava di conoscerli ma per via della distanza non ne fui sicuro. Per non essere visti ci acquattammo nell'erba, così potevamo spiarli.

I due cominciarono ad armeggiare, nella macchina. Non distinguevo bene i loro movimenti, ma a un tratto mi parve che lui la aiutasse a togliersi i vestiti. Vedevo Ronnie e Peter attenti, il collo tirato nello sforzo di non perdersi niente. Vedevo i loro occhi, sgranati, quelli di Ronnie dietro le lenti spesse come vetro. Avevano le orecchie paonazze e non era per il caldo.

Osservavo anch'io, mimetizzato nell'erba. La mia attenzione si concentrava sul ragazzo, non riuscivo a staccare lo sguardo da lui, dalle sue mani leggere, mentre parlava e si muoveva dentro la macchina, dietro i finestrini abbassati. Mi affascinava il modo in cui muoveva la testa e soprattutto le mani. Era bellissimo. Una specie di danza contenuta. Disegnava nell'aria figure come un prestigiatore. Mi muoveva il capo e i suoi capelli neri, lucenti, si spostavano come onde di pece liquida sulle spalle larghe e rotonde di muscoli. Immaginai di infilare le dita tra quei capelli. Ricordo che pensai proprio questo: avrei voluto toccare i suoi capelli di seta e lasciarmeli scorrere come acqua sul palmo della mano.

Guardavo lui e gettavo occhiate ai miei due compagni, terrorizzato che potessero accorgersi che non stavamo cercando la stessa cosa.

Sentii in mezzo allo sterno e in mezzo alle gambe una fitta potente di colpa e di desiderio - fu solo molti anni più tardi che imparai a distinguere le due cose, e a capire che non dovevano per forza presentarsi assieme - una spinta imperiosa e assoluta, una scarica elettrica che mi attraversò il corpo dal basso verso l'alto e che mi obbligò ad aggrapparmi al terreno per non cedere alla tentazione di alzarmi, andare fino alla macchina e toccarlo davvero.

"It's better that we move then, before the train gets here," I said.

We came back through the trees, but when we were close to the clearing from before, a Plymouth Fury pulled up. It was fiery red and polished to a shine. It parked to one side, but no one got out. Inside, through the lowered windows, there were a boy and girl; they were about twenty years old. I thought I recognized them, but because of the distance I wasn't sure. To avoid being seen, we crouched down in the grass to spy on them.

The two started to mess around in the car. I couldn't make out their movements very well, but all of the sudden it seemed that he was helping her take off her clothes. I saw Peter and Ronnie attentive, their necks stretched out, straining to not miss anything. I saw their eyes, wide open, Ronnie's behind thick lenses like windowpanes. They had purple ears and it wasn't because of the heat.

I was watching too, camouflaged in the grass. My attention was concentrated on the boy, I couldn't take my eyes off of him, off of his delicate hands, while he talked and moved around inside the car, behind the lowered windows. The way he moved his head, and especially his hands, fascinated me. It was beautiful. A kind of contained dance. He designed figures in the air like a magician. He moved his head and his shiny, black hair shifted like waves of liquid tar on his wide shoulders, bulging with muscles. I imagined slipping my fingers through that hair. I remember thinking exactly this: I would have loved to touch his silken hair and let it run like water through the palm of my hand.

I watched him and shot a couple glances at my two companions, terrified that they might realize that we were not looking for the same thing.

In the center of my chest and between my legs I felt a sharp pang of guilt and desire - it was only many years later that I learned to distinguish between the two things, and to understand that they didn't necessarily have to present themselves together - an absolute and imperious shove, an electric shock that traveled through my body from the bottom to the top, forcing me to cling to the ground and not give in to the temptation to get up, go to the car and touch him for real. My cheeks burned as I followed the boy's movements.

Ronnie and Peter were dumbstruck, swallowing with difficulty.

Le guance mi bruciavano mentre seguivo i movimenti del ragazzo.

Ronnie e Peter erano ammutoliti, deglutivano a fatica.

«Chi sono, tu li conosci?»

Non ci fu risposta.

«Ehi, stanno...?» volle sincerarsi Peter.

«Sì. Credo di sì. Forse» Ronnie non lo sapeva con certezza.

«George, ehi, George, secondo te lo stanno facendo?»

Io non riuscivo ad accettare quello che stavo provando, non potevo credere che fossi proprio a pensare quelle cose.

Ronnie e Peter risero, i visi rossi e concltatt, una risata nervosa e secca che mi spaventò.

Che cosa mi stava accadendo?

Non ci hai mai pensato? Non dirmi che non ci hai mai pensato.

Sì, certo ci avevo pensato, magari solo un paio di volte. Magari ci avevo pensato quelle notti, quando mi svegliavo in un bagno di sudore per aver fatto sogni che non avrei dovuto, sogni che mi avevano turbato, di cui: non ricordavo più che i contorni indistinti, ma che mi lasciavano molle di un piacere rubato, così forte da seguirmi a lungo, durante le ore del mattino. Ma era sbagliato pensarci per solo più di un attimo, così come era sbagliato, mi sembrava, quello che provavo in quel momento.

Eppure qualcosa di strano mi era ben passato per la testa quando, qualche anno prima, sottraevo di nascosto dall'armadio la parrucca bionda di mia madre. Era dentro una cappelliera cilindrica blu. Aprivo con attenzione le ante di legno del guardaroba, nella stanza dei miei genitori. Accarezzavo le sciarpe di chiffon color pastello appese ordinate alle grucce e sulle dita mi rimaneva un po' del profumo di mia madre: Stradivari. Un nome italiano che evocava dentro di me un'eco misteriosa.

Spostavo il contenitore dal ripiano, con tutte e due le braccia. L'appoggiavo sul letto. Facevo scattare in alto le alette delle chiusure laterali, sollevavo la parte superiore della scatola e la mia immagine riflessa nello specchio rotonda sotto il coperchio mi sorprendevo con un'espressione da ladro. All'interno, c'era la parrucca. Appoggiata con cura sopra una testa bianca in polistirolo, fissata con degli spilli che ne trapassavano la delicata trama di garza interna e penetravano nel sostegno con uno scricchiolio che mi metteva i brividi.

Toglievo gli spilli a uno a uno e li piantavo di lato, su quella

"Who are they, you know them?"

There was no response.

"Hey, are they – ?" Peter wanted to find out.

"Yes. I think so. Maybe" Ronnie didn't know for sure.

"George, hey, George, what do you think, are they doing it?"

I couldn't accept what I was feeling, I couldn't believe that it was actually me thinking those things.

Ronnie and Peter laughed, their faces red and excited, a nervous and dry laugh that frightened me.

What was happening to me?

Did I never think about it? Don't tell me you never thought about it.

Yeah, definitely, I've thought about it, if only a couple of times. Even if I thought about it those nights when I woke up in a shower of sweat for having had dreams that I shouldn't have had, dreams that disturbed me, indistinct contours that I no longer remembered, but that they left me soft from a stolen pleasure, so strong to follow me at length during the hours of the morning. But it was wrong to think about it for more than a minute, so it seemed to me what I was experiencing in that moment was wrong.

And yet something strange had gone through my mind when, a few years before, I had removed my mom's blonde wig from its hiding spot in the closet. It was inside a blue cylindrical hatbox. I gently opened the wooden doors of the closet in my parents' room. I caressed the pastel-colored chiffon scarves hung neatly from coat hangers and a little bit of my mom's perfume lingered on my fingers: Stradivari, an Italian name that evoked a mysterious echo inside of me.

With both arms, I removed the container from the shelf. I laid it on the bed. I flipped up the wings of the lateral fasteners, I lifted the top of the box and my reflected image in the round mirror under the cover surprised me with its thief-like expression. Inside, there was the wig. It was laid with care on a white polystyrene head, secured with some pins that pierced the delicate weave of the gauze lining, penetrating the wig-holder with a little creaking sound that gave me the creeps. I took out the pins one by one and planted them on the side of that head that was now bald. Then I slipped the wig onto my short mane of hair trimmed down to a crew cut. The fabric was really itchy against my face.

testa ormai calva. Poi mi infilavo la parrucca, sopra la zazzera corta tagliata a spazzola. Il tessuto contra la pelle mi dava prurito.

Mi trasferivo davanti allo specchio sull'anta del guardaroba e cercavo di rimanere immobile. Indugiavo lì a rimirarmi a lungo, cercando di assumere le pose che Kim Novak o Lana Turner o Shirley MacLaine avevano sui cartelloni pubblicitari fuori dal Jessup Theatre. Provavo gli stessi sguardi languidi, fatali, il collo reclinato da un lato, gli occhi socchiusi in un abbandono hollywoodiano, dentro quello specchio che rifletteva alle mie spalle una stanza nota, eppure sconosciuta.

Guardavo la mia immagine riflessa, ed era un po' come toccare qualcun altro che non ero sicuro di raggiungere. Dentro la lastra argentata che rifletteva il mio corpo c'era un altro me stesso che si muoveva come me, che aveva i miei stessi tratti, ma che non ero sicuro di essere io. Allora tiravo verso di me le ante a specchiera, in modo che il mio riflesso si moltiplicasse all'infinito. Diventavo quattro, dieci, cento. Il mio braccio infilato tra gli sportelli che oscillava su e giù diventava lo spettacolo incantato e inspiegabile di un esercito di soubrette sincronizzate alla perfezione.

Una volta, per poco mia madre non mi sorprese. Entrò nella stanza e io feci appena in tempo a chiudere l'armadio dentro cui avevo ficcato in malo modo scatola e parrucca.

«Che stai facendo?» mi chiese, e per un attimo vidi una scintilla di interesse per me, nei suoi grandi occhi verdi. Ma fu solo un secondo, poi era già intenta a cercare qualcosa di carina da mettersi per il concerto di quella sera. Le sue lunghe unghie laccate di rosso corallo erano già infilate nei cassetti a frugare tra le camicette. Non ebbi neppure bisogno di giustificarmi. Mi rivolse un bacio distratto spedito sulla punta delle dita con le sue labbra morbide e bellissime. Perché lei era bellissima e mi ci volle molto tempo, dopo quel giorno, per capire che davanti allo specchio io cercavo di imitare lei, di catturarla, di tenerla tutta per me.

Sentii la mano di Ronnie su una spalla.

«Stai bene amico?» mi bisbigliò.

«Sì» risposi automaticamente, ma la mia voce suonò falsa e stridula. Mi scostai da lui, indietreggiai carponi, in mezzo alla vegetazione poi mi alzai di scatto e mi avviai verso la ferrovia. Fu in quel momento che il treno di Kennedy arrivò. Lo vidi da lontano, risalire lungo I binari, lentamente. Capii subito che era il suo. Pro-

I moved in front of the mirror on the wardrobe's door and tried to remain motionless. I lingered there, to look at myself at length, trying to assume the poses that Kim Novak, Lana Turner, or Shirley MacLaine had on the publicity posters outside of Jessup Theatre. I attempted the same languid, fatal smiles, my neck reclined to one side, my eyes half-closed in Hollywood abandon in that mirror that reflected a well-known room behind me, and yet unknown.

I looked at my reflected image, and it was a little like touching someone else that I wasn't sure I could reach. Inside the silvery slab that reflected my body there was another me that moved like me, that had my same traits, but I wasn't sure that it was me. So I drew the mirrored doors toward me in a way that multiplied my reflection infinitely. I became four, ten, one hundred. Inserted through the doors, swaying up and down, my arm became the enchanted and inexplicable performance of an army of perfectly synchronized soubrettes.

One time, my mom nearly caught me. She came in the room and I had just enough time to close the closet, where I had carelessly rammed the hatbox and wig.

"What are you doing?" she asked me, and for a second, in her big, green eyes, I saw a spark of interest in me. But it was only a second, by then she was already intent on looking for something cute to wear for the concert that night. Her long nails, polished coral red, were already inserted into the drawers to rummage between her blouses. There was no need to justify myself. She directed a quick, distracted kiss on the tip of her finger toward me with her soft and beautiful lips. Because she was so beautiful and it took a lot of time, after that day, for me to understand that I was trying to imitate her in front of the mirror, to capture her, to have her all for myself.

I felt Ronnie's hand on my shoulder.

"You ok man?" he murmured to me.

"Yeah" I responded automatically, but my voice sounded false and shrill. I shifted away from him, withdrawing on all fours, in the middle of the shrubbery. Then I sprang up and set off toward the railroad. It was in that moment that Kennedy's train arrived. I saw it from afar, and I slowly climbed back up along the tracks. I knew immediately that it was his. Just then the conductor of the train sounded the horn as if he had seen me. I knew the horn wasn't

prio allora il conducente del treno fece suonare la sirena, come se mi avesse visto. Io sapevo che non suonava per me. Suonava la sirena e basta, ma a me piacque pensare che era me che voleva salutare.

Il convoglio avanzava con maestosa tristezza, a passo d'uomo. Avremmo potuto affiancarlo e seguirlo se avessimo voluto. Avremmo potuto scortarlo per un pezzo di strada.

Ronnie e Peter mi raggiunsero, sulla massicciata. Il treno era lungo e silenzioso. Ci passò davanti sferragliando, un treno della Pennsylvania Railroad, di dieci vagoni. I tre penny che Ronnie aveva messo sulle rotaie schizzarono nell'erba, deformati dall'impatto con le possenti ruote della locomotiva. A un certo punto, all'altezza dei finestrini, i nostri occhi trovarono la bara, la bara del senatore. Era sollevata all'altezza giusta perché tutti potessero vederla, e traballava come se fosse stata poggiata in modo malfermo sui sedili. Con la fronte contro il legno del feretro c'era una donna. Forse la moglie di Kennedy, forse solo qualcuno che stava pregando o piangendo.

Arrivarono anche i ragazzi della Plymouth rossa. Si tenevano per mano e restavano lì, in piedi, dritti, proprio accanto a noi. Lei piangeva, lui guardava il treno e a un certo punto alzò una mano in un saluto.

Non so perché, ma in quel momento pensai a mia madre e a mio padre, e a quel ragazzo, lì accanto, che salutava il treno. Con il suo gesto leggero che sembrava una carezza. L'amore e il dolore, a volte, hanno la stessa faccia; hanno denti appuntiti che ti azzannano le viscere e non ti lasciano andare. E io sapevo che quei morsi non si sarebbero mai sopiti. Non ci sarebbe stato niente da fare, d'ora in avanti. Niente. Nessun discorso, nessun gesto, avrebbe potuto cambiare le cose. Chiusi gli occhi e ispirai profondamente. Quando li aprii il treno era ancora lì, a bucare l'azzurro del cielo con la sua marcia lenta e cigolante. Ronnie era lontano. Anche Peter era distante. Il treno, passando, fece frusciare dolcemente i vestiti contro la mia pelle.

Cercai la mia immagine, riflessa sulle pareti lucenti dei vagoni: dieci, cento, mille me stesso che mi guardavano come da uno specchio, anche adesso, come quando mi guardavano dalle ante dell'armadio.

Ma questa volta li conoscevo un po' più a fondo e forse, un giorno, avrei perfino saputo chi era ciascuno di loro.

for me. The horn blew and then that was it, but I liked to think that it was me he wanted to greet.

The procession advanced with majestic sadness at a man's pace. We could have stayed next to it and followed it if we had wanted to. We could have escorted it for a short ways.

Ronnie and Peter reached me on the roadbed. The train was long and silent. It passed clattering in front of us, a Pennsylvania Railroad train, with ten train-cars. The three pennies that Ronnie had put on the tracks shot out into the grass, deformed by the impact of the locomotives powerful wheels. At a certain point, at the height of the windows, our eyes found the coffin, the Senator's coffin. It was raised to the right height so that everyone could see it, and it tottered as if it was resting improperly on the chairs. There was a lady with her face against the wood of the coffin, maybe Kennedy's wife, maybe just someone that was praying or crying.

The two kids from the red Plymouth came too. They were holding hands and stayed there, standing, upright, right next to us. She was crying, he looked at the train and at a certain point he raised his hand to wave.

I don't know why, but in that moment I thought about my mom and dad, and about that young guy right there who was waving to the train, with his delicate gesture that seemed like a caress. At times, love and pain have the same face. They have sharpened teeth that savage your insides and don't let you go. And I knew that those bites would never be appeased. There wouldn't be anything I could do about it from now on. Nothing. No debate, no gesture, could have changed things. I closed my eyes and breathed deeply. When I opened them the train was still there, to pierce the blue of the sky with its slow and creaky march. Ronnie was far away. Peter was distant too. The train, passing, made my clothes gently rustle against my skin.

I looked for my image reflected on the shiny walls of the train cars: ten, one hundred, a thousand me's, all staring at me as if from a mirror, now, as then, like when they stared at me from the closet doors.

But this time I knew them a little better inside and out, and maybe, one day, I would even know who each one of them was.



4. Bound Together; garlic skin, wood base.

“Una vera signora” by Alida Pellegrini

Translated by Elisabeth Sievers

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Una vera signora

Dunque succede così. Un po' di debolezza, ti ricoverano. Dicono bugie evidenti, non sono dotati in questo senso. Gentilissimi in verità e non è poco, rispettosi. Capisci.

Quando sei riuscita a controllare il tutto di nuovo, a non mostrare quello che è così umano (troppo stupore, perché proprio a me?) cerchi di prendere decisioni.

Vivere da soli richiede un grande sforzo d'orgimizzazione che gli altri non immaginano: spesa, pulizie, lavoro, tempo libero, amici.

«Soffrirò, dottore?»

«Direi di no. Vediamo come prosegue, può darsi che l'evoluzione sia lentissima. In questo campo non si può mai dire».

Nel tardo pomeriggio se non usciva per guardare le vetrine o fare acquisti c'era un attimo così piacevole! Il sole rendeva dorata la luce che, attraverso le persiane, illuminava alcuni punti della stanza. Guardando il pavimento lucido pensava a cosa le sarebbe piaciuto leggere: Tolstoj o Hardy? Oggi Tolstoj. Toccava i petali dei fiori sul tavolo, gioia.

Voleva tornare a casa per rivivere quei momenti ma c'era un problema: gli altri.

«Le chiedo espressamente di non far sapere a nessuno della mia malattia».

«Mio dovere».

«Basterà la lettera al medico curante, inoltre vorrei parlare con gli analisti».

«Le ho già spiegato di che si tratta».

«No, non in quel senso, chiedo solo discrezione. In questa città si sa sempre tutto. Posso tollerare che immaginino, non che sappiano. È l'unica cosa che chiedo».

«Le assicuro che per quanto mi riguarda... »

Non fu rassicurata dai giuramenti. Conoscere il nome di una malattia, il decorso, le previsioni spesso non porta pietà e compassione. Ricordava l'impudico pellegrinaggio di due conoscenti a una col! ega che era stata da loro emarginata per una vita; erano andate a trovarla solo per sentirsi caritatevoli.

Voleva evitare agli altri il dovere di compatirla e a sé la violenza di visite sgradite.

Il quotidiano aiuta. Aveva già imparato che nei momenti di

A True Lady

So this is how it happens. A little bit of weakness and take you to the hospital. It's pretty obvious when they're lying, they're not very good at it. But they're really very kind and that's saying a lot, respectful too. You understand.

When you've succeeded in regaining control of everything, in not revealing something so human (I couldn't believe it; why me?) you try to make decisions.

Living by oneself requires great organizational effort that others don't realize: groceries, cleaning, work, free time, friends.

"Doctor, am I going to suffer?"

"I don't think so. Let's see how it progresses, it might develop very slowly. You can never tell with this type of thing".

In the late afternoon if she didn't leave the house to peruse the stores or do some shopping, she reveled in this pleasant time of day. The sun would gild the light, which, through the blinds, would illuminate parts of the room. Looking at the gleaming floor she thought about what she would have liked to read: Tolstoy or Hardy? Today Tolstoy. She touched the flower petals on the table, a simple joy.

She wanted to go back home in order to relive those moments but there was just one problem: the others. "I'm asking you explicitly not to let anyone know about my illness."

"It's my duty."

"The letter to the general practitioner will be enough. I would also like to speak to the experts."

"I've already told you about it."

"No, not like that, I'm just asking for discretion. Everybody knows everything in this town. I can tolerate that they're guessing, but not that they know. That's the only thing I ask."

"I can assure you that as far as I'm concerned..."

She wasn't comforted by these assurances. Knowing the name of an illness, its course, and expected symptoms often doesn't incur pity and compassion. She was remembering the shameless pilgrimage made by two acquaintances to a long alienated colleague; they had gone to visit her just to feel charitable.

She wanted to save others from the obligation of feeling sorry for her and to save herself from the violence of unwelcome visits.

dolore le giornate sono lunghe, interminabili, da regolare; il tempo si dilata, si allarga, cambia.

Doveva prendere, non appena possibile, la situazione sotto controllo, difficile affrontare il colpo inaspettato.

Accettare, concentrarsi; non si può creare nulla senza solitudine.

Dette notizie piu blande possibili per non allarmare, poi si rese conto che erano tutti impauriti sì, ma per se stessi.

Si appellava continuamente al suo self-control, lo aveva rafforzato. Inutile chiedere. Cosa? Conforto, attenzione, affetto?

Gli altri hanno molto da fare, la vita prosegue, lo sapeva, lo aveva sperimentato. Meglio evitare troppi coinvolgimenti, prepararsi, nel frattempo vivere come se tutto fosse lo stesso; non facile, ma fattibile.

Veniva ghermita da un senso di spaesamento, di vortice quasi, quando rientrando, chiudeva la porta di casa. Sola.

Si era data dei compiti precisi: teatro, cinema, conferenze.

Credevano a questa normalità? A loro bastava chiedere: "Come stai?" frugandole il viso. Aveva imparato a non rispondere, rafforzato il trucco e cercato vestiti adatti. Qualcuno - peccato non poterlo raccontare, rabbia e indignazione se le vietava - le aveva detto:

«Come sei abbronzata! oppure: «Sei ingrassata!» Fondo tinta e pieghe servivano dunque.

Avrebbero dovuto sapere che lei non aveva mai usato belletti e non lo avrebbe fatto se non fosse stata obbligata dal colore del viso; ulteriore dimostrazione di scarsa attenzione e disinteresse, male così diffuso da essere considerate accettabile.

Pregava guardando di sfuggita la foto di suo padre, solo lui avrebbe potuto consolarla. Non è vero, anche altri, pochissimi, ma un imperativo era non coinvolgere. Forse Marta non l'aveva ingannata, ma cosa poteva fare? Nulla. Aveva tre figli, tanti impegni, una sensibilità eccessiva. Avrebbero pianto se si fosse confidata, inutile. Trovava impudico mostrare apertamente i propri sentimenti; poche persone sanno man tenere le distanze che, talvolta, si rendono necessarie.

Qualche telefonata poteva bastare, lei comunque non telefonò più a nessuno; aspettava che lo facessero ma non era un evento così comune, non lo era mai state. Sapeva che si sarebbero stancati

A daily routine helps. She had already learned that in times of pain the days were long, endless even, and needed to be filled; time opens up, broadens, changes.

She had to get the situation under control as soon as possible, hard to face an unexpected shock.

To accept, to concentrate; you can't create anything without solitude.

She talked about it in the vaguest terms possible so as not to cause alarm, but she then realized that they were all frightened, yes, but for themselves.

She continuously appealed to her self-control, which she had bolstered herself. No use asking. What? Comfort, attention, affection?

The others have much to do, life goes on, she knew that, she had lived it. Better to avoid too much involvement, to prepare oneself, in the meantime live as if everything were the same; not easy, but doable.

When she came home she would close the front door. Alone. And she was seized by a sense of displacement, almost like a vortex.

She had given herself specific tasks: theatre, movies, lectures.

Did they believe this normality? It was enough for them to ask, "How are you?" while searching her face. She had learned not to respond, to apply heavier makeup and to choose the right clothes. Someone $\frac{3}{4}$ a pity not to be able to say who, anger and indignation prevented her $\frac{3}{4}$ had said to her, "Look how tan you are!" or, "You've gained weight!" So foundation and pleats did work. They should have known that she had never used cosmetics and she never would have if she hadn't been obliged to by the pallid color of her face. Just further proof of limited consideration and indifference, an iniquity so widespread it was considered acceptable.

She used to steal hasty glances at her father's photo as she prayed; only he could have been able to console her. That's not true, others as well, but very few. However the order was not to get involved. Maybe Marta hadn't tricked her, but what could she do? Nothing. She had three kids, lots of commitments, and was overly sensitive. They would have cried if she had opened up, but it was no use. She thought it improper to openly express one's sentiments; few people know how to maintain their distance, which is, at times, necessary. A phone call or two was all that was needed;

senza scambio, era quello che voleva.

Era così umano e sciocco: m'interesse se anche tu fai lo stesso.

«Chi si crede di essere?»

«Forse vuole stare sola!»

Non proprio, ma era meglio; del resto durante la malattia di sua madre, le visite di cortesia, orologio alla mane, causavano solo lavoro. Tè, banalità, parlare di disgrazie; quelle presenti non bastavano.

Quando se n'andavano era sposata. Mai più, si riprometteva, eppure non si può dire di no all'interesse, anche se finto; allora di nuovo a casa, un pacchetto di pasticcini con il fiocco rosso e via con il: «Ma lo sai?»

La mamma partecipava volentieri. Era stata un gran peso, non l'amava. Che bello aver definite e accettato questo, un tassello inserito.

I malati succhiano sangue ed energie, non solo soldi, sua madre più di altri.

Morta lei c'era stata libertà: passeggiare senza dire esco, vade, ritorno. Acquisti di vestiti leggeri ed eleganti, di rossetti rosati, serate ai concerti. Al ritorno la Austen o la Morante? Leggeva con fervore. Anni tranquilli, si era concessa un lusso: astrarsi, isolarsi.

Decise con calma, un pezzetto alla volta: il testamento, il vestito- odiava la sciatteria - 'il luogo' l'aveva già acquistato da tempo, era previdente.

Rimise a posto la casa con cura. Quanta zavorra accumuliamo in una vita: fogli, ricevute, agende, foto. Si rese conto che, inutili, lo erano sempre stati, questo fu l'aspetto più triste.

Spostare mobili, quadri, non aveva più sense; com'è facile a un certo punto capire quello che è importante e quello che non lo è.

Nitore, eleganza erano necessari, qualcuno diceva asepsi, lasciamoli dire, inevitabile.

Ringraziava Dio per la mancanza di dolore, per quel suo pulito perdere forze e carne.

Sapeva che non l'avrebbero capita, la sua discrezione presa per diffidenza, freddezza; per molti ad esempio il fatto che non si fosse sposata voleva dire che forse non era riuscita ad amare, una vita sprecata. Chilo diceva? Gente con amori spezzettati come i vetri colorati di un caleidoscopio.

E poi non era vero che non conosceva gli uomini: l'altra meta

anyway, she no longer called anyone. She waited for them to call, but it wasn't a very common occurrence, it had never been. She knew if she didn't answer that they would get tired of calling, and that was what she wanted. It was so human and silly: I'm only interested in you if you're interested in me.

"Who does she think she is?"

"Maybe she just wants to be alone!"

Not exactly, but it was better that way. Besides, during her mother's illness, the perfunctory visits, watch in hand, they were just a lot of trouble. Tea, banality, discussing misfortune; the ones we had weren't enough.

When they would leave she was worn out. Never again, she promised over and over, and yet one can't say no to concern, even if it is fake. So at home once again, a pastry box with a red bow and then came the "Have you heard...?"

Her mother took part willingly. It was a great burden; she didn't love her. It was nice to have determined and accepted this, one more piece of the puzzle.

Sick people suck up one's essence and one's energy, not just money, her mother more than others.

Once her mother was dead she felt free: impromptu walks without saying I'm going out, I'm leaving, I'll be back later. Buying fun and fashionable clothes, rosy lipsticks, concert nights. On the way back Austen or Morante? She read voraciously. Carefree years, she allowed herself one luxury: the opportunity to withdraw from reality, to isolate herself.

She decided calmly, a little at a time: the will, the dress $\frac{3}{4}$ she hated loose ends $\frac{3}{4}$ "the resting place" she had already bought some time ago. She had thought things out.

She carefully tidied up the house. We accumulate so much junk in a lifetime: papers, receipts, notebooks, pictures. She realized that they had all been useless, that was the saddest part.

Moving furniture, paintings; it no longer made any sense. How easy it is to finally understand what's important and what's not. Brightness and elegance were necessary, someone said a sepsis, let them say it, it's inevitable.

She thanked God that there was no pain, that it was a clean loss of strength and flesh. She knew that they would never have understood her, her discretion taken for diffidence, coldness. For

del mondo. Lui era impressa nel suo DNA, i suoi capelli neri dovevano averle invaso i polmoni, il cuore, macchiato il sangue; l'indugiare della sua mano nel ravviarli - quello snodare leggeri grovigli, pensoso - era stampato negli occhi, nelle arterie, la faceva ancora tremare. Indelebile come un calco aveva creato un vuoto, una voragine che non era mai stata riempita.

Si era offesa e l'aveva offeso rinunciando.

Come hanno fatto a non vederlo?, pensava, guardando le giovani analiste che avevano valutato l'entità del suo male, dandogli anche un nome e una scadenza. Tutte prese dai loro amori non lo avevano individuato, invece sarebbe dovuto venir fuori insierhe ai risultati sballati della TAC, dei raggi, di tutti quegli orrori che le avevano imposto per dirle che era condannata.

Dopo la disperazione le era venuto in mente - tanto per far dell'ironia - che non avevano detto nulla di nuovo, lo sapeva da sempre, destine comune la morte e poi persino sulla data erano tuttora discordi.

Chiusa in camera- ma perché? non c'era nessuno-ascoltava quel disco e si sentiva in un'altra casa, quella che avrebbe voluto avere con lui. Calore, certezza che il loro sarebbe stato un raro matrimonio riuscito.

Sapendo sulla sua pelle quanto tempo ti rubano gli altri, adesso voleva viziarsi, lo centellinava, n'era diventata golosa. Cucinare con calma, riposo, lettura, musica. Equilibria - lo cercava da una vita - e di solito quello che si cerca si trova. Aveva imparato ad attendere che passassero gli impeti, le grandi simpatie; il tempo delinea ogni cosa con semplicità, basta aspettare.

Pochi restano, lui era rimasto, insieme alla musica.

Lo intravedeva ogni tanto, ancora un sorriso.

La musica era l'unica libertà che aveva sempre avuto, era quello che era esistito e che sarebbe accaduto, un annuncio d'eventi futuri, i rintocchi di quelli passati, gentili o crudeli.

La prigione e la libertà: gli altri.

Loro compiangevano il suo vivere defilata, giudicando il suo tailleur, i risultati del suo lavoro, tutta la sua vita.

Si sa, nessuno è perfetto, ognuno ha i suoi limiti, voleva dire. Accetto i miei, disprezzo i tuoi.

Ora c'era persino la malattia, un altro viaggio insieme a quelli che aveva fatto e a quelli che non avrebbe mai realizzato, aile amici-

example, for many, the fact that she had never married meant that perhaps she had never loved, a wasted life. Who said this? People with love as fragmented as the colored glass in a kaleidoscope.

Anyway, it wasn't true that she didn't know about men: the other half of humanity. He was imprinted in her DNA, his black hair should have invaded her lungs, her heart, stained her blood; how his hand lingered when he ran it through his hair to get out all the little tangles, thoughtful. He was inscribed in her eyes, in her arteries, it still made her tremble. He left an indelible mark, created an empty space, an abyss that had never been filled.

She had taken offense, and by leaving him, he was offended as well. How could they not have seen it? she thought, watching the young female analysts who had evaluated the extent of her sickness, even giving it a name and an estimated time. All of them so absorbed in their own love stories that they hadn't caught it, instead it had to be discovered along with the unceremonious results of the CAT scan, the x-rays, all the horrors they imposed on her in order to inform her that she was doomed.

After the desperation, it struck her that they hadn't told her anything new, how's that for irony. She had always known it, death is an inevitable fate, and they couldn't even agree on the exact date.

Locked up in her room $\frac{3}{4}$ but why? Nobody was there $\frac{3}{4}$ she listened to that record and imagined herself in a different house, the one she had wanted to have with him. Warmth, certainty that their marriage would have been one of the rare few to succeed.

She felt on her skin just how much time people take up. She wanted to pamper herself now; she milked every moment, and loved every second of it. Taking the time to cook, rest, reading, music. Balance $\frac{3}{4}$ she had been searching for it for a lifetime $\frac{3}{4}$ and more often than not you find what you look for. She had learned to wait for the waves of great pity to pass; time clarifies all, all you have to do is wait.

Few stay, he had stayed, along with music.

She caught a glimpse of him every now and then, still with a smile. Music was the only freedom she had ever had, it was what had existed and what would have happened, an announcement of future events, the tolling of those passed, kind or cruel.

Prison and freedom: other people.

They pitied her reclusive lifestyle, judging the cut of her suit,

zie così grandiose e perfette, calde, avvolgenti e ricche che avrebbe voluto e quelle timide e claustrali che era riuscita ad avere, ritrarsi dalla pazza folia e nello stesso tempo amarla seppur a distanza.

Forse, senza accorgersene, aveva davvero cancellate tante cose: i dolori, le aspirazioni, i desideri d'assoluto; troppo tardi, quella era la sua vita.

Solo la musica la sollevava: suoni che s'incontrano e scontrano, minuscoli rivoli che s'intersecano in rapide, cateratte, caseate, fino al mare bizzarro e ricco.

Un dono eterno, aver orecchio; lì non era arrivato il senso del dovere così feroce che l'aveva segnata.

Non si odiava, si era persino perdonata la ribellione stridente e confusa che aveva opposto ai suoi.

Quel poco che possiamo incidere sulla nostra vita dovremmo gestirlo al meglio, lei non c'era riuscita, cattiva scelta di modo e di tempo. Che aveva fatto dopo la 'gran rinuncia'?

Aveva avuto una storia con uno qualunque, n'era attratta.

"Ormoni?" si era chiesta. "Desiderio di maternità?"

Già nel mezzo della vicenda si era giustificata. Quel che aveva sempre immaginato era superiore a quanto era successo tra tappeti e schedari. Certo non era amore, forse nemmeno desiderio, comunque poteva concederselo, pietosa anche verso se stessa.

Chiuse. Di lui non le piacevano gli abiti, i rapporti con gli altri, i capelli (eterno, infantile metro di confronto).

Era stato un caos senza melodia, accordi spuntavano ogni tanto facendo tendere i nervi come archetti, poi venivano inghiottiti dalla confusione. Eterne prove, quello che avrebbe dovuto essere suonato lo sentiva nella testa ma non arrivava mai al suo udito.

Nulla a che vedere con gli eventi che la circondavano e che fluivano come le immagini di un film.

Flash: se stessa, virginea, eretta, nella mente delle vecchie zie che frequentava e che sempre sottolineavano il suo essere 'ragazza'. Non è proprio così, avrebbe voluto dire e le veniva in mente una stanza, lui no, lo aveva solo usato e non era stato fair play, le zie non avrebbero approvato.

Orchestre sinfoniche o quartetti: adagio, andante con brio, allegro, lento.

Ascoltare era stato il tempo meglio impiegato della sua vita, il più felice, ma non voleva rimpiangere nulla, persino le ore, gli

the outcome of her work, her entire life.

Everyone knows nobody is perfect, everyone has their limits, she meant to say. I accept mine, I disdain yours.

And now there's even illness, another journey along with all the others that she's had and those that she'd never go on, the great and most perfect, warm all-encompassing and rich friendships that she would like to have had, and the shy and cloistered ones she did manage to have; to withdraw oneself from the crowd and at the same time love her even from a distance.

Maybe, without even realizing it, she had actually done away with a lot of things: the pain, the longing, the unbridled desire. Too late, it was already her life.

Only music comforted her: sounds that merged and collided, miniscule trickles that intersect in torrents, in cataracts, in waterfalls, all the way to the bizarre and rich sea.

An eternal gift, to have a musical ear; her sense of duty hadn't compromised it. She didn't hate herself; she had even forgiven herself for the jarring and confusing rebellion she had imposed upon her parents.

What little we can influence our own lives should be to the best of our ability; she had never succeeded in this bad choice of manner and time. What had she done after the 'great rejection'?[1]

She had had a relationship with an average guy; she felt an attraction to him.

"Hormones?" she asked herself. "Maternal desire?"

Halfway through the ordeal she forgave herself. What she had always imagined was better than what had happened among the rugs and filing cabinets. It wasn't love, of course, and maybe not even desire, but she let it happen, full of pity even for herself.

Endings. She didn't like his clothes, his relationships with others, his hair (an eternal, childish standard of judgment).

It had been an unmelodic chaos. Chords emerging every now and then testing her nerves and setting her on edge; then they were engulfed by the confusion. An eternal rehearsal, in her head she heard what should have been played, but it never made it to her ear.

Nothing to do with the events surrounding her, flowing around her like scenes in a film.

Flashback: she sees herself, virginal, sitting up straight, in the minds of the old aunts that fixated upon and always pointed out

anni che aveva sciupato ole avevano sottratto si erano trasformati in semplici visioni: falene che sbattono contra la luce, inutile cacciarle, la lampada si spegnerà prima o poi.

Poche persone rimanevano dentro. Suo padre le aveva dedicato attenzione, tenerezza, interesse ma l'aveva anche convinta, spietato e sicuro, che 'lui' non era l'uomo adatto, così poco rappresentativo, colto. Negli ultimi anni le aveva chiesto se ci pensava sempre, se era ancora convinta della sua decisione (sua?)

Non aveva risposto, era un rodimento che non aveva potuto risparmiargli.

Sua madre invece era scomparsa, cancellata. L'aveva accudita con quel rigore che ci si aspettava da lei: rispetto delle regale e delle convenzioni, nulla di più, nulla di diverso. Durante le visite di prammatica, mentre spostava le tazze, i piattini, le fette di limone si vedeva su un autobus americana, lungo un rettilineo chilometrico, stava in prima fila, vomitava, come ora.

Dovere lo chiamavano, si potrebbe definire anche morte anticipata, scontento atroce, privazione dolorosa di un'idea di futuro. L'aveva già provata, niente di nuovo ma forse non era vero, aveva preso dalla vita quello che aveva potuto, come tutti.

Per lunghi anni aveva sperato che qualcuno, guardandola negli occhi, le chiedesse: "La tua anima come sta?" Smise di pensarci quando capi che non avrebbe mai risposto a una domanda così diretta.

Marta forse l'avrebbe anche fatta, ma lei glielo aveva impedito mostrando distrazione, come allora, come con 'lui'.

Lui era sempre presente, lui, quando gli aveva detto che la loro storia non aveva futuro, che era meglio lasciarsi.

Gli occhi inquieti gli frugavano il viso, mai abbastanza veloci: «Devo stamparlo, conoscerlo come una mappa, averlo dentro».

Un delirio di sofferenza.

«Ha deciso la tua famiglia».

«Come ti permetti?»

«Forse è meglio così, non hai abbastanza forza per opporti a loro».

In quel momenta si era vista dall'esterno: era forse debole, sperduta, sola?

No, che diceva, cos'era quest'emotività? Potevano esserci persone più adatte (adatte come?), più importanti (per chi?) e poi

her "innocence." Not exactly, she would have liked to say, and a room came to mind, not him, no. She had just used him and it hadn't been fair play; her aunts would not have approved.

Symphonic orchestras or quartets: *adagio*, *andante con brio*, *allegro*, *lento*.

The time that she spent listening was the best spent time of her life, her happiest time. But she didn't want to regret anything, even hours. The years that she had ruined, that had been subtracted had been transformed into simple visions: moths that hurl themselves at the light, useless to catch them, the lamp will go off sooner or later.

Few people remained within her. Her father had showered her with attention, tenderness, and concern, but he had also convinced her, remorseless and unfailingly, that 'he' wasn't the perfect man; he wasn't educated and he didn't really belong. In the last years he had asked her if she thought about it often, if she was still sure of her decision (hers only?)

She hadn't answered; it was an anxiety she hadn't been able to spare him.

Her mother, on the other hand, had disappeared completely. She had cared for her with a rigorousness that was expected of her: respect for rules and conventions, nothing more, nothing different. During the customary visits, while she was moving the teacups, the saucers, the lemon wedges, she saw herself on an American bus, along an endless stretch of road. She was in the front, vomiting, like right now.

They called it a duty; one could even define it as premature death, terrible unhappiness, painful deprivation of the idea of a future. She had already tried, nothing new, but maybe it wasn't true, she had taken from life what she could, like everyone else.

For long years she had hoped that someone, looking into her eyes, would ask her: "How is your soul?" She quit hoping when she realized that she would never have answered such a direct question. Marta perhaps would have asked, but was discouraged by her distraction, like now, like with "him."

He was always present, him, when she had told him that they had no future, that it was better to break up.

Her worried eyes searched his face, never quickly enough: "I have to memorize it, remember it like a map, and keep it inside me".

A delirium of suffering.

non era una decisione così estrema, poteva sempre ripensarci.

«Non è la morte di nessuno» diceva sua madre.

Non era vero e lei lo sapeva.

Com'è lento il capire, non si arriva mai, manca sempre qualcosa.

Anche ora doveva piegarsi senza troppo intendere, affidarsi a quel Dio che pregava, senza certezze che non fossero note, suoni, melodie; non voleva altro, nemmeno le immagini, faticose.

La scelta era quindi il silenzio (elemento fondamentale della musica, attimi d'attesa, misteriosi).

Leggeva sempre meno, la concentrazione era un lusso, poteva solo ascoltare.

Aveva già fatto tutto quello che doveva - necessaria e duro, senza cedimenti - aveva preparato, previsto quello che poteva.

La morte arrivò, con meno sconquasso di quanto si creda.

"Your family made the decision."

"How dare you."

"Maybe it's better this way, you're not strong enough to stand up to them".

In that moment she saw herself from the outside: maybe she was weak, lost, alone?

No, she said, what was this emotionality? There could have been better suited people (better suited how?), more important (to whom?). It wasn't even a terribly extreme decision, she could always reconsider.

"It's not like someone died" her mother said.

That wasn't true and she knew it.

How slow understanding is, one can almost never truly understand, something is always missing.

Even now she had to give in without much comprehension, and trust in that God to whom she prayed, without certainty that her prayers weren't just notes, sounds, melodies. She wanted nothing else, not even a mental picture, arduous as they were.

And so she chose silence (a fundamental element of music, mysterious moments of rest).

She read less and less, concentration was a luxury, she could only listen.

She had already done everything she had to $\frac{3}{4}$ necessary and hard, without yielding. She had prepared and planned for everything she could.

Death arrived, with less commotion than one would believe.

[1] Pellegrini's use of "la gran rinuncia" in the original Italian could be an allusion to the protagonist's romantic relationship. In any case, the author clearly evokes Dante's "il gran rifiuto" from Canto III of the *Inferno*, a reference to Pope Celestine who abdicated the papal throne in 1294 after only 5 months.



Mosaic, pasta installation.

Traduttori a duello / Dueling Translators

Edited by

Gaetano Cipolla

A text of poetry or prose, translated by ten equally skilled translators, will result in ten different texts. In theory, the different versions should convey the kernel meaning, that is, the basic message contained in the original text. This section of *Journal of Italian Translation* will test this theory by asking our readers to translate a text chosen by the editor, using whatever style or approach they consider best. The submissions will then be printed with the original text. We will publish as many entries as possible.

The challenge for this issue was a sonnet in the romanesque dialect by Giuseppe Gioacchino Belli entitled "Er giorno der Giudizzio" from *I sonetti*, a cura di G. Vigolo, Milano: Mondadori, 1952.

Here is the sonnet:

Er giorno der Giudizzio

Cuattro angioloni co le trombe in bocca
 se metteranno uno pe ccantone
 a ssonà: poi co ttanto de voscione
 cominceranno a ddi: "Fora a cchi ttocca".
 Allora vierà ssù una filastrocca
 de schertri de la terra a pecorone,
 pe rripijja figura de perzone,
 come purcini attornu de la bbiocca.
 E sta bbiocca sarà Ddio bbenedetto,
 che ne farà du' parte, bbianca e nera:
 una pe annà in cantina, una sur tetto.
 All'ultimo usscirà 'na sonajjera
 d'angioli, e, ccome si ss'annassi a lletto,
 smorzeranno li lumi, e bbona sera.

We received three translations of the sonnet, one from Peter D'Epiro, the second from Charles Martin, and the third from Florence Russo. It is interesting to see how the decision to follow the rhyming scheme of the original can have an effect on the translations. The first two chose to rhyme, the third did not. We are pleased to publish all three versions.

Judgment Day

Translated by Peter D'Epiro

Four huge archangels, grasping horns that quicken,
Will perch on the foursquare corners of the sky,
Blow hard, and then with brassy voice will cry:
"All out! This is the plot that does not thicken."
And then, out of the ground, the terror-stricken
Skeletons, on all fours, their bones awry,
Will hunt for erstwhile nose and ear and eye
Like baby chicks around their mother-chicken—
Except this chicken is the Lord instead,
Who'll make two groups of them— one black, one white:
One to the attic, one downstairs will head.
And last, after a song or two, a flight
Of angels, as if going off to bed,
Will snuff out all the candles, and— good night.

The Day of Judgement

Translated by Charles Martin

Four angels, all with upraised trumpets pressed
Against their lips, each from his corner plays;
And then, in a thunderous voice, each angel brays,
"Come out if it's your turn, whoever's next!"

Then from the earth will come what once were men,
A row of skeletons scrambling from the grave,
Each one resuming the shape he used to have,
As baby chicks surround a brooding hen.

The hen here will be God, who'll separate
The dead into two groups, one white, one black,
And the cellar or the roof will be their fate.

A vast array of angels all in flight,
And looking like they're headed for the sack,
At last will turn the lamps out and good night!

The Day of Judgment

Translated by Florence Russo

Four mighty angels will take their position
with trumpets in their mouths, one at each corner,
and blare away. Then with a frightful voice
they'll say: "Whose ever turn it is, come out!"

Then a parade of skeletons will climb
out of the ground, emerging on all fours,
and will take up their human shapes again,
circling like chicks around a mother hen.

This hen will be our Blessed Lord and He
will make two groups of them: one white, one black,
one for the cellar, the other for the roof.

A host of angels will emerge at last,
and they'll put out the light, as at bedtime,
good night and that will be the end of it.

The challenge for the next issue of *Journal of Italian Translation* is a poem by Gabriele D'Annunzio, "Stabat Nuda Aestas" from *Alcyone*.

Stabat Nuda Aestas

Primamente intravidi il suo piè stretto
scorrere su per gli aghi arsi dei pini
ove estuava l'aere con grande
tremito, quasi bianca vampa effusa.
Le cicale si tacquero. Più rochi
si fecero i ruscelli. Copiosa
la rèsina gemette giù pe' fusti.
Riconobbi il colùbro dal sentore.

Nel bosco degli ulivi la raggiunsi.
Scorsi l'ombre cerulee dei rami
su la schiena falcata, e i capei fulvi
nell'argento pallàdio trasvolare
senza suono. Più lungi, nella stoppia,
l'allodola balzò dal solco raso,
la chiamò, la chiamò per nome in cielo.
Allora anch'io per nome la chiamai.

Tra i leandri la vidi che si volse.
Come in bronzea mèsse nel falasco
entrò, che richiudeasi strepitoso.
Più lungi, verso il lido, tra la paglia
marina il piede le si torse in fallo.
Distesa cadde tra le sabbie e l'acque.
Il ponente schiumò ne' suoi capegli.
Immensa apparve, immensa nudità.

Reviews

Dante Alighieri, *Inferno/Ferri* Bilingual Italian-Albanian Edition, translated from Italian into Albanian by Cezar Kurti. Legas: Mineola, New York 2013.

The aim of Cezar Kurti's translation of Dante's *Inferno* is to make available to students and to the Albanian readers of literature the most important literary text for an understanding of the religious structure as well as the historical and philosophical thinking of the late Middle Ages in Europe. The vigorous, detailed and yet concise biographical information on Dante, complete with a larger picture of the political and economic forces at work, found in the introduction make this translation of the *Inferno* a valuable work in itself. Beyond that, Cezar Kurti's volume also establishes an easy bridge for the Albanian academia and for readers at large. It was about time that an Albanian university professor with skills in the art of translation and with knowledge of the cultures of the East and West of Europe build this literary understanding.

Professor Kurti's translation of the *Inferno* is a scholarly work. The informative bibliographical notes, the index of names, with brief but useful biographical information, as well as an accurate general index attest to the seriousness of this translation. Beyond that, Professor Kurti is to be commended for his artistry in bringing the rhythm, cadence and perfect flow of Dante's *terza rima* into Albanian.

It is apparent that Cezar Kurti can draw upon a rich storehouse of vocabulary in both languages. Indeed, his precision elucidates the exact social role or onomatopoeic value of a word. For example, Verse 68, Canto I reads: "e li parenti miei furon lombardi." Another translator might have rendered "parenti" simply as "parenti" and left the matter at that. Kurti, tellingly, chooses to distinguish those relatives of old and the new ones. "Lombarde i pata te paret e mi te vjeterë."

Perhaps it is in the field of linguistics that Professor Kurti best reveals his skill, knowledge and sensitivity to both the Italian and the Albanian cultures. Albanian is the oldest European language of Indo-European origin. As a linguistic system, it has undergone singularly few changes. It is a language that expresses an intimate bond between the word as sound and sign with the real of sensations. Italian, on the other hand, has a metaphysical thrust which

allows it to break away, at times, from the world of sensation. Dante's *Inferno* is exactly a fusion, a perfect union between the physical and the metaphysical. The dominant references by Dante to the world of flowers, animals and especially birds are not made idly; rather, they are brilliantly planned. Cezar Kurti is keenly aware of this fusion. He reveals great linguistic skill in making accessible to the Albanian reader the metaphysical realm which Dante aspires to describe.

Further, Professor Kurti's translation of Dante's *Inferno* reveals a deep and wide understanding of ancient cosmology, of Greek mythology, and of the relation of Christian cosmology to Hebrew and Islamic thought. Kurti's meticulous study of words is, in fact, reminiscent of the manner in which Ezra Pound translates Provençal poetry. As such, it can teach much even to those who are altogether familiar with Dante's works. With the eye of a philologist, Professor Kurti is able to unveil the intimate relationship between Dante's views on religion and philosophy and the Arabic philosophy of nature and the cosmos.

Cezar Kurti's translation of Dante's *Inferno* most certainly will become a standard reference work for scholars. As such, it is likely to be an important volume in most good colleges and universities. However, the one who will profit the most from this translation will be the Albanian reader-at-large who, for the first time, has in her hands a modern translation of a major literary work in the Western pantheon. That work offers a priceless window into the maze and complexity of the Western philosophical, literary and cultural world.

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Mia Lecomte, *For the Maintenance of Landscape: Selected Poems*. Translated by Johanna Bishop and Brenda Porster. Toronto, Canada: Guernica Editions, Pp125.

Published by Guernica Editions, in a bilingual, Italian-English edition, *For the Maintenance of Landscape: Selected Poems*, provides a bountiful introduction to Mia Lecomte's poetry to English-speaking

readers. It comprises two published collections, *Unlived Autobiographies* (2004), (*Autobiografie non vissute*), translated by Johanna Bishop, and *Land of Debris* (2009) (*Terra di risulta*), translated by Brenda Porster, as well as her unpublished collection, *Meanwhile the Time* (*Intanto il tempo*) also translated by Porster.

One of Italy's leading experts on the literature of migration, Lecomte directs the series *Cittadini della Poesia* (*Citizens of Poetry*), dedicated to migrant poetry written in Italian and she edited the pioneering anthology, *Ai confini dei versi: Poesia della migrazione in italiano* (*On the Borders of Verse: Migration Poetry in Italy*), (Florence, 2006). In addition, she co-edited, with Luigi Bonaffini, *A New Map: The Poetry of Migrant Writers in Italy* (New York, 2011).

In her Introduction to *A New Map*, Lecomte writes that "migrant writers and poets 'know' in a more real and painful manner than any native writer, that the worlds which come together with him, and through him, are not those they have crossed and have settled in, but an inner place of their own unvaried estrangement towards the external world . . . It is an existential estrangement known to every writer – especially poets . . . one cannot absolutely be a writer without being a migrant . . . He should be recognized as a 'motionless' traveler."

Her poetry is infused with these characteristics of estrangement and motionless travel. In her first poem from *Unlived Autobiographies*, she writes: "Life is what is left when all else is lost." Her voice is a counter-cultural one because as Sally Read writes in her Preface: "Lecomte doesn't value the personal, the use of the 'I' . . . The narrators of these poems are just that: narrators skillful enough to shoulder the emotional, philosophical, and imaginistic vision that Lecomte offers."

For the most part, her language is simple, clear, direct – although the shades of meaning, paradox, contradiction and rhythm are rich and complex. Overall, the translation from Italian to English is well-served by a style that mirrors that of Lecomte. For example, "Rarely," one of two poems that preface the book, adds a melancholic sweetness to her estrangement: "The days/when there are no days/the nights get tired early/and you can sip yourself/slowly, slowly, over/and over."

In the interest of clarity, more of her poem titles could have benefited with explanatory notes. For example, many of the titles of

the poems in *Engadine Metamorphoses* are names of cities unfamiliar to me, and a note anchoring their geographic location would have been useful.

Lecomte lived in Switzerland, and in her poem "Chastè," a city in the Swiss Alps, she gives us a piece of her "unlived autobiography:" "The peninsula is the perfect compromise/between prerogative and absence/it is what is left of land/once it has run out of reasons/for being so intensely land,/the intra-Alpine impasse of the soul/unwilling to risk another try/at the rush and the surrender."

"Unwilling to risk another try" sounds a bit awkward in English. Perhaps translating more literally the original lines in Italian */che non osa tentare da capo/ lo slancio e l'arresa/* (that doesn't dare to try again/the dash and surrender) would have given them a quicker, more urgent quality.

In her vibrantly-titled poem, "Asylum," Lecomte writes about Rome, the city where she currently lives: "This Rome of light/checkerboarded/gaze and grille." The translator, Johanna Bishop, is sensitive to Lecomte's use of consonance and translates *sguardo e schermo* as "gaze and grille." However, while the word gaze accurately defines the word *sguardo*, grille is far removed from *schermo*—screen. The next line begins with *riflettergli*—reflecting him—which makes the use of the English word screen for *schermo* even more necessary. In this case, I would suggest that clarity of meaning come before sound and screen be part of the translation.

In the poem's last sentence, Lecomte directly ties her interior state to the concept of migration: "My Rome of interiors/all the nested boxes/to open up repose,/all the simple spaces/from silence to silence/with his buried song/migrating back home."

Lecomte plays with perspective, perception and time. In her poem "Bifocal" she writes: "A concave lens/on the right/to implode me into crystals,/little birds chiselled snowflake by snowflake/in keen-edged shards./The left one/convex/to explode me in the meantime/leisurely spreading out/with the patience of a glacier/from era to era."

The Italian lines: *uccellini sagomati neve a neve/in schegge acute/* are rendered by the translator into powerful and beautiful English verse: "little birds chiseled snowflake by snowflake/in keen-edged shards./"

While Lecomte has a keen eye for detail and an often objective distance to her lines, this doesn't mean her poems are devoid of emotion and rich imagery. Prefacing *The Land of Debris*, an untitled poem casts a sense of transience over place and relationships. "Pity on us, pity/on the grass that does not grow, pity,/on the roof and the façade, on threshold . . . pity, on us here inside, pity/with the false windows/pity, on living here absent/on not being able to stay/pity, pity, pity/on us in this house, pity,/in this our house of others."

The lushness of Lecomte's imagery is illustrated in "Corsican Nocturne," vividly translated into English by Brenda Porster: "where a huge grouper languishes in the fish-tank/and two milk-white boars run through/the needle eye of a tiny haystack."

The last line in the original Italian is *la cruna di un minuscolo pagliaio*/. Perhaps a longer, less mellifluous substitute for tiny such as miniature would capture better the longer bumpier-sounding Italian line.

"Hattan 3" is a poem whose location is not revealed to the reader. From what I can gather through some cursory research, it is located in Dubai. It exemplifies what was noted earlier about Lecomte's view of "foreignness," migration and the existential space most congenial to the writer's creative process. Porster's translation captures both the portentous mood and directness of the original Italian. "We add no more sugar/to our ginger tea/we drink the root like this/watered down out of existence/sipping our dissolved root/without mixing the only/root we'd have if we were/really placated at home/among aging relations in the evening/and children of absolute morning/bending side by side on the sofa/the cup for a while in our hands/concentrated simply on blowing."

Line eight in the original Italian is *a casa nostra davvero placate*/"Really placated at home" in English sounds somewhat stiff and unwieldy. Maybe at peace or content, as a translation of *placate*, would be more in harmony with the sense of the poem.

Although Lecomte's poetry eschews conventional autobiographical references, "Diploma" resonates with a strong autobiographical beat: "The little girl who writes poems/ . . . /says you know I write poems/and colours the glasses on her nose/swells her name with blushing feathers/frees grammars, a teeny/tiny miracle, frees the pain/laid out in her silky case."

The original Italian lines: *libera la grammatiche, un miracolo/piccino picciò, libera il dolore/* "frees grammars, a teeny/tiny miracle, frees the pain/" are brilliantly translated into English, maintaining the cadence, consonance and meaning of the original text.

In her poem "Ikea," after providing us with a long list of the products sold at the Swedish transnational superstore, including: beds, chairs, plates, toys, screws, bolts, instructions, she returns with an almost mocking irony to an earlier theme: "you don't find what will be left/of you after all this living/what will be left to live." The first line in the original Italian was: *non trovi cosa resterà di te*. In order to more closely approximate the flow and syllabic count in Italian I would suggest not breaking the line in English after left, but instead read: "you don't find what will be left of you/."

The last poem in her *Selected Poems* is titled appropriately enough "Curtains," that concludes with: *Per solidarietà di cose/apparenti*, "For the fellowship of things/apparent." My suggestion would have been to use these two lines as the title of her book. I find *For the Maintenance of Landscape* to be a rather cumbersome title in English, especially because there is so often a pleasing limpidness to Lecomte's poetry, as well as its English translation, as rendered by Johanna Bishop and Brenda Porster.

After reading and rereading Lecomte's book, that is, engaging more deeply in her poetic world, I've come away feeling that it is not so much her narrative techniques, her apparent lack of "ego" that make her verse so intriguing and enjoyable, but the power of her poetic lines, the freshness of her voice, and the intellectual ferment that she stirs up.

Gil Fagiani

Gabriela Fantato, *The Form of Life: New and Selected Poems 1996-2009*. Translated by Emanuel di Pasquale. New York: Chelsea Editions, Pp183.

Published by Chelsea Editions, in a bilingual, Italian-English edition, *The Form of Life: New and Selected Poems 1996-2009*, provides us with a powerful sampling of Gabriela Fantato's poetry culled from seven published collections, with an additional two unpublished poems.

Fantato's poetry explores the human condition with a blend

of lyrical passages, stark imagery and fantastic leaps of imagination, all fashioned into unusually limpid lines. Above all, she does it in a way that arouses strong emotions. The translator, Emanuel di Pasquale, gives us access to Fantato's complex poetic world, capturing the free-flowing quality of her verse, her imaginative spirit and the intense feelings she awakens.

Her poem "paolo pini" is taken from her collection *Multitude* (2001), *Multitudine* (2001). As a footnote indicates, Paolo Pini was formerly a psychiatric hospital that is now a cultural center. This poem is a masterly exploration of the suffering, squalor, and estrangement of institutional psychiatry. The following are the last two stanzas: *striscia un vocio pietroso come biglie/bambine su sassi, come un cane/alla porta che raspa l'entrata/(il passo d'esilio e d'uscita)/quelle teste lisce oscillano/il vuoto pulito dei camici, contato/di cicche spente una, una su altre*

resto fuori, al silenzio impigliata/e ai bordi le sillabe di sempre/tangibile certezza, nemmeno mai compresa

Di Pasquale translation reads: "a stony shouting crawls like billiard balls/little girls on rocks, like a dog,/at the door, scratching the entry/(the road of exile and the exit)/these smooth heads oscillate/the clean emptiness of the shirts, counted/by cigarette butts bunched up on each other"

"I stay outside, entangled in silence/and at the edges the usual syllables/a tangibile certainty, never ever understood"

Di Pasquale's fine poetic sensibility allows him to compress some of Fantato's words without losing any of the original cadence or meaning. For example, *di cicche spente una su una, una su altre/"* by cigarettes bunched up on each other."

Fantato's lines flow clearly, carrying along sadness and love in her poem "In the background," dedicated to her parents, from her collection *Northern Geographies* (2000), *Geografie a Nord* (2000). Her first stanza begins: *vi ho visti svanire piano, piano/contro il bordo del tavolo in cucina/perduti nella stanza dilatata/girando la minestra con la zucca/(solo restano le risate di mia madre/ragazza di trent'anni che mi culla.*

Di Pasquale's translation maintains the clarity and flow: "I

saw you fade away slowly, slowly/against the edge of the kitchen table,/vanish in the expanded room/while stirring the pumpkin soup/(only my mother's laughter remains,/that thirty-year old girl cradling me."

The poem "To Your Delta, II," from her collection *The Prophecy Was the Sea* (2006) *La profezia era il mare* (2006) is dedicated to her father. Di Pasquale recreates in English the grim images, the musicality, and quick pace of the Italian. The second and fourth stanzas of the original Italian text read: *Non ci sono passi, solo orme di cani/in corsa e un tempo assetato di racconti./Sulla riva una scarpa, un guanto/senza più le dita.*

Le anguille non le vedo,/si agitano prigioniere al largo/come i sogni

"No footsteps here, only the paw prints of dogs/running and a time thirsty for tales./On the shore a shoe, a glove/with no fingers left.

I cannot see the eels,/prisoners writhing off the coast/like dreams."

The second to last line in particular is rendered with gut-gripping directness.

An example of Di Pasquale's supple style is his translation of the third stanza of the poem "Song for Galileo, III.", taken from Fantato's collection *Terrestrial Codex* (2008), *Codice Terrestre* (2008). *Vorrei essere la corteccia/di un albero, la molle fibra che lo riveste/e sopra ci scriva con la punta/chi viene di passaggio,/dica – il nome. Lo saprà il prato, le formiche rosse.*

"I would like to be the bark/on a tree, the soft fiber that re-clothes it/and writes over it with thea point/that passes by,/and says – the name. The field, the red ants, will know, the red ants."

In the above, Di Paquale translates *lo riveste* as "re-clothes" rather than the more literal dresses again, and repeats again the red ants (*le formiche rosse*) which only appears once in the original Italian text.

At times, Fantato's lines come together and jump from the page in an epigrammatic way, such is the last three lines in her poem "Subterranean City III." again from *Terrestrial Codex* (2008). *È un vizio la pietà,/una crepa nel battito cardiaco/prima che la lama dica il male.*

Di Pasquale maintains the grim, straightforward quality of the original: "Mercy is a vice,/a crack in the heartbeat/before the blade reveals the ill."

In her poem, "Parking in America III." – in *Three Steps*, from her *Unpublished Poems (2007-2008)*, *Inediti (2007-2008)*, Fantato touches on some of the core myths of the United States; the wild frontier, violence, opportunity, with vivid images and language rich with implication and meaning. Starting with line nine: */ Chi scrisse la storia, dimmi,/chi il paesaggio/nella verità di cavalli bradi/ e fucili?/ Qui è tutto enorme,/il silenzio, un foro nel bicchiere/e la carta dopo il picnic./L'orizzonte non lascia scampo,/sceglie la strada a picco/nel bianco.*

Di Pasquale translates: "Who wrote the history, tell me,/ Who – the landscape/in the truth of untamed horses/and rifles?/ Here all is enormous:/the silence, a hole in the glass/and the napkins after the picnic./The horizon leaves no escape,/choosing the sheer street/within the whiteness." Perhaps rendering *la strada a picco* as the sheer drop of the street rather than the sheer street would have sounded a bit less awkward in English.

Fantato's book ends with "At Minimal Distance," a long poem dedicated to her father, from her collection *At Minimal Distance* (2009) *A distanze minime* (2009). It is a poem of suffering and death but also wonderment, love, acceptance and filial devotion.

It sets a tone of beauty, and wonder: *Parla, parla piano, ha gli occhi bassi/ – incurabile./Non capisco, come se il dizionario/si fosse aperto a caso/in quel punto.*

Di Pasquale's translation reads: "He speaks, speaks softly, lowers his eyes/ – incurable./I do not understand, as if the dictionary/had casually opened/at that spot."

Di Pasquale's rendering of *si fosse aperto a caso* to had casually opened rather than a more literal translation such as opened at random, works to retain the poignancy of the opening moment.

While overall, his colloquial use of English is impeccable, there are a few places where he could have lowered the register or

loosened the syntax and used a more relaxed English. For example, in the first stanza of the poem *Ai Pochi*, I., he translates the opening line, *Il sorriso copre l'assenza dei volti*, as "The smile covers the absence of visages." While his translation captures the exact syllabic count of the original Italian line, visages, clangs a bit against the generally even tone of the poem. Also, in line 4 of III of *At Minimum Distance* he translates, *Dici – c'è la neve nella stanza*, "You say – the snow is in the room." A more colloquial usage would have been "there's snow in the room."

In the first stanza of *At Minimal Distance XII*, the poem's earlier sense of wonderment gives way to a searing expression of love and impending loss. Di Pasquale maintains the flow and cadence of the original Italian. *Mi portavi sempre dei regali,/piccoli oggetti inutili, anche una biro . . ./Mi parlavi come parla la materia/senza esagerare, senza dighe.*

"You always brought me gifts,/small useless things, even a pen . . ./You spoke to me as matter speaks,/without exaggerating, without barriers."

Fantato ends her poem *At Minimal distance, XVII.* – and the last poem in her book – with sadness, verve, and with poignant markers to the writer's craft (the sheet of paper, the word): *Tempo, mio tempo illuso/in cui il mondo, tutto il mondo/entrava dentro il foglio/e la parola era illesa nel mattino./Solo un attimo, solo allora/è stata certa le presenza/ – una corsa a perdifiato./*

Ora tutto è di spalle e siamo/già più oltre./Avanti.

Di Pasquale's translation captures the solemn, dramatic quality of Fantato's lines: "Time, my deluded time/wherein the world, all the world/entered inside the sheet of paper/and the world was unharmed in the morning./Only an instant, only then/the presence was certain/ – a race at breakneck speed.

Now everything is behind us, and we are/already further on./Onwards."

In summary, Gabriela Fantato's book *The Form of Life: New and Selected Poems 1996-2009* represents an outstanding collaboration between a very talented poet and an equally talented poet/translator, Emanuel Di Pasquale, who is particularly suited to capture the lyricism, imaginative language, and powerful emotions her

work evokes.

Gil Fagiani

Maria Luisa Spaziani, *Painted Fire: A Selection of Poems 1954-2006*, translated with an introduction by Lynne Lawner. Chelsea Editions, 2009, 196 pages.

Painted Fire draws many of the finest pieces from Spaziani's long and productive poetic career. Always moving, intriguing, and sometimes disturbing, the poems in this volume are culled from eleven of Spaziani's previously published works and translated by a poet who herself is gifted and who seems to have an eye for the best that poetic language has to offer.

Lawner's introduction provides an intelligent albeit brief insight into the soul of a well-established yet always surprising Italian artist, whose chiaroscuro rendering of her own reality yields new and ever clearer images as we read and reread her poems. For non-native Italian speakers, the vision is enhanced by Lawner's re-creation of Spaziani's images and insights. The term "re-creates" is appropriate because, as the best interpreters of poetry know, the mission of the translator is not simply to recapture meaning and the sense of the text but also to create a new entity reflective of the poet's vision, which is expressed in an idiom often distinct from yet faithful to the original. That is exactly what Lawner has done. And so, in *Painted Fire*, we have two collections of poetry, which ignite the reader's imagination and shed luminous insight upon both writers.

Lawner introduces her translation with a dedicatory poem to Spaziani, an item that reflects the kind of imagery – sometimes clear and overpowering, sometimes shadowy and soft – that we see in Spaziani's own poetry. At times, Lawner forces herself to go beyond the literal while remaining faithful to the text, gifting us with images that she knows are fully absorbable by a mind that thinks only in English. So it is in her translation of "Resta con me per sempre..." (page 22), where "Resta con me nei secoli, fa' sciogliere/ogni sigillo col tuo fuoco" is rendered as "Stay for centuries, let your heat/melt wax seals." We see this again in "Giudecca" (page 26), another poem from *Le acque del Sabato* (Sabbath Waters) 1954, where "Dolce sera; e la luna si disfoggia/lenta sulla palude

dell attesa" becomes "Mild evening; and the moon sheds leaves of light/slowly onto marshes of expectation."

Lawnor's desire to respect the literality of the work whenever and as much possible becomes quite apparent in her translations of poems from *La luna è già alta* (2006). "Non parlo a vuoto" on page 180 is a good example. In her translation of the title, she uses "to myself" rather than "in vain," the more exact meaning of "a vuoto." But the change simply adds richness to the assertion in the first stanza, where the poet tells us that she speaks to God. At times, in fact, Lawner demonstrates that it is best to leave well enough alone. In "Ricordo una stagione" ("I Remember a Season"), page 28, for example, "notturna tramontana" ("nocturnal tramontana") is left untouched, capturing both the poet's intent and her very vocabulary.

The same thing occurs in several poems, all of them short, from *Poesie dalla mano sinistra* (2002) (Poems Written in the Left Hand). Here the clarity that Spaziani claims for her poetry – a claim cited in Lawner's introduction – is wonderfully evident and refreshing. In "I saccheggiatori" ("The Marauders") on page 132, the translator reproduces the sense of ambivalence that emanates from contact with and over-cultivation of nature. "Already the grapevines weep," is a faithful if not perfect rendering of "già piangono i tralci," which creates an emotional paradox between our love of the fruits of nature and our need to rape her.

At times, however, the translator knows she must meet the needs of her readers by re-creating meaning, sound, and image. In "Se a chi riverso..." ("Someone Lying on Her Back"), page 34, another poem from *Sabbath Waters*, Spaziani employs exotic phraseology and complex sentence structure, through which images seem to meander, making it somewhat difficult for the neophyte or anyone else who has not mastered the idiom not to miss important signposts and lose her way along this tangled route. The translation, however, makes things clearer, more direct, and builds our confidence. In this and other such items, interestingly enough, Lawner creates poems redolent of Emily Dickinson's. At times, this tendency becomes so pronounced that the translator seems to have created an entirely new artifact, enlarging and enriching the experience – at least for English readers. All of this is done deftly, honestly, and cautiously. In "Le lunghe dita" (page 40), the first

line of the translation uses “slender” for “lunghe” in order to fit more logically with the image that follows: “kept/a thread of her printed dress.” In “Scherza col vento,” (page 46), which Lawner translates as “Dancing with the Breeze,” we are forced to ask if this is a translation or a separate poetic entity. Is it distinct from the original, or is it an aesthetic complement? Such questions are central to understanding Lawner’s treatment of Spaziani’s work, and they go to the heart and scope of translation.

In some rare but beautiful instances, Lawner draws out and develops the potential hidden within Spaziani’s choice of words and images. She takes on the role of an artistic midwife, who manages the birth of a new reality. In “Nigredo” (page 68), a poem from *L’Occhio del ciclone 1970 (In the Eye of the Cyclone)*, the chiaroscuro effects for which Spaziani is famous are nurtured and made more palpable. Contrast the original with the translation:

E fu forse ad Aleppo, tra i lenoni
e macilente prostitute accanto
a un bivacco notturno tra i bracieri
che leggemmo nel fuoco i nostri neri
emblemici di sconfitta.

Surely at Aleppo, we’d descry
the fiery signs of imminent defeat
while around us pimps and worn-out whores
mill near a night-time bivouac of farm-hands.

In the poem that follows, “Il mare” (“The Sea”), the translator captures the tenuous strength that emanates from the original. There is something tough here under a layer of anxiety that, while not being absolutely faithful to the literal sense of the text, captures and transforms it into a precious gift for the reader. Near the end of the poem, Spaziani imagines a shipwrecked sailor, “il naufrago,” who waves a lantern and cries out in anguish bemoaning his isolation and his confusion as he longs for the serenity of the ship’s sails, for “the steady hand/on the rudder”; it is a lament with which even the bravest can identify.

Something similar happens in “Un vento dall’ Est” (“A Wind from the East”), page 138, another item from *Poems Written with the*

Left Hand. Here, the emotionally charged ending is rendered no less powerful when Lawner translates “sappiamo le urla e i massacri di tre millenni di storia.” Another, less confident, translator might have written “we recognize the screams and massacres of three thousand years of history.” Instead, Lawner writes: “We Italians have a three-millennia history of massacres!” Interestingly, the word “Italians” appears nowhere in the original, and the word “urla” plays no part in the translation. So again, are we dealing with a translation or a new creation? Our inability to answer definitively is testament to the translator’s skill and courage!

Lawner’s translations of Spaziani’s poetry in *Painted Fire* provide the reader –whether a new student of Italian or an accomplished speaker – a delicious, moving, and exciting challenge. The work is all that one can ask of a poet and of an admiring poet/translator. Bravo to both!

Santi Buscemi

Middlesex County College

Antonella Zagaroli, *Mindskin: A Selection of Poems, 1985-2010*
Translation and Introduction by Anamaria Crowe Serrano.

Antonella Zagaroli, in both her work and her art, is a humanitarian with an American Masters degree in Poetry Therapy. She is also the founder of Onlus Laubea, a nonprofit Italian Association for Poetry in Psychology. The word Laubea is a new word invention that takes its inspiration from the Laura of Francesco Petrarca (Petrarch) and the Beatrice of Dante Alighieri. This collection reflects her preoccupation with the workings of the mind as well as the soul.

The volume is organized so that the Italian poetry is accompanied on the opposite facing page with the English translation. In this way one can examine the translating style, line by line and word by word. The translator is Anamaria Crowe Serrano, an Irish woman who lives in Dublin. Her translation of this collection of complex poems is studied, well-crafted and serviceable. To deliver the fluidity of Italian poetry through the medium of the English language can be a formidable task. She has worked hard at trying to duplicate the poet’s playing with words and sounds, something enormously difficult to do from the Italian to the English. Ser-

rano, in an effort to convey the sound and meaning of the original poetry, has created a kind of parallel poetic construct, a parallel (uni)verse for the translated selection. In other words, the result becomes another poem altogether – by the translator. Like the plays of Aristophanes, which are so topical in nature that a literal translation leaves the reader baffled, any translation must become an almost original new adaptation of the material. This technique is what serves Serrano in this compilation. Serrano warns in her introduction that she prefers “to take some license despite the risks.”

Antonella Zagaroli examines the workings of the mind and explores the psyche, while discovering and exposing feelings and making observations, whether those of the present moment, the distant past or a foreseeable future. The arrangement of the words on the page are part of the artistry of the poetry. Sometimes they are splayed out with generous spacing between lines or words or stanzas, sometimes neatly lined up in columns, sometimes considerably long and at other times enticingly short, as with haiku. One might infer that the spacing is there so the reader can take time to breathe deeply, almost sigh, and when it is absent and lines follow quickly together, perhaps the spacing style is meant to evoke a breathlessness on the part of the reader. Many selections are untitled altogether. Whatever the poet’s intent, one cannot help but be affected by the visual canvas of the printed poetry, sometimes in italics or bold font, algebraic, mathematical formulas outlined, indentations and clusters of quatrains positioned strategically and unexpectedly on the page.

Serrano remains faithful to the original physical and typographical formatting by Zagaroli but avows herself that in some cases “these are impossible to translate,” particularly with the poem “Autoritratto” (Self-portrait) from the collection entitled *La Maschera della Gioconda* (1985-1986) (*The Gioconda’s Mask*).

vispa	vivacious .
veste dal viso verbale	vestment with a verbal visage
vorrei vincere il volo	I’ve vowed to vanquish aviation
varcare voragini	vault over vortices
dal vallo alla vetta col verso	from the vallum to vertex with verse
vistandio veleno	validating venom
vistoso vociare visioni	vociferous vaunting visions

di vittime valori venduti of victims values advanced
 Da venti di vetro by vitreous vapors
 Nel vuoto del ventre in the void of the womb

In this selection, particularly one can see how the translator chooses to mimic the uniform alliteration of the original at the “risk” (sacrifice) of the original meaning. The decision of whether to be literal or adaptive is never ideal, something is always lost in translation. In this case, the translator faithfully re-creates the “sound” of the original, by substituting English words that sound like but do not necessarily translate the original words. The reader must decide whether or not this is satisfactory, depending on what one looks for in a translation. Serrano is resigned to the fact that “Whether or not the resulting translation is satisfactory is a matter of opinion.”

In the Foreword to this edition, the publisher, Alfredo De Palchi, stresses the importance of language and style in his choice of poetry to publish, especially as regards this compilation. *Mindskin* is a fascinating collection of vivid poems by Zagaroli, only some of which have never been published, and many others which have been published in various collections, as well as taking on new life as part of a performance piece or a photographic essay. Indeed, one section titled “Costruzioni Cinematografiche” (Cinematographic Constructs), resembles a film script.

Zagaroli’s poetry and choice of language are fluid and lyrical, playing on words and with words for their onomatopoeic and alliterative values, and calling up images and references from both classical literature – Dante and Petrarch – and modern literature – James Joyce and Paul Valery – and mathematics and science – Albert Einstein. The subject matter is always introspection, whether the poet speaks in the first person, to the second person or about the third person, but always achieving an introspection. Serrano, the translator, has labored long and hard in considering how to treat this body of work.

She illustrates her method in great detail as she considers how she dealt with the seemingly simple word *ombra* that appears in the first poem of the collection *La Maschera della Gioconda* (1985-1986). Simply translated the word could mean shadow or shade. But the translator instead has struggled with the mean-

ings of alternate versions of the word: darkness, ghost, obscurity. Finally, after much consideration, she lands on the word *spectre* (her spelling), explaining that in her discussions with the poet, the original intent was meant as “ghostly and unreal;” thus, the choice of the word *spectre*, a word that might seem to travel far from the original *ombra*. Many such decisions permeate this project. All of this illustrates what a formidable task for a translator this collection represents. In this translation of Zagaroli’s unique creativity, the poetic flavor undoubtedly comes through with clarity but is it the singer or is it the song?

Emelise Aleandri



PIONEERING ITALIAN AMERICAN CULTURE

ESCAPING LA VITA DELLA CUCINA

ESSAYS, INTERVIEWS, REVIEWS BY AND ABOUT

DANIELA GIOSEFFI

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY ANGELINA OBERDAN

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DANIELA GIOSEFFI, American Book Award winning author of 16 books of poetry and prose, has traveled widely, presenting on campuses and at book fairs both here and abroad. She's appeared on NPR, NYC and BBC Radio and TV. She won The John Ciardi Award for Lifetime Achievement in Poetry, OSIA's NY State Literary Award and grants from the NY State Council for the Arts. She's published in major periodicals, i.e. *The Paris Review*, *The Nation*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Ms.*, *Chelsea*, *VIA*. A pioneer of Italian American Culture, she began publishing in the 1960's, causing her to be featured in *Feminists Who Changed America, 1963-75*, as well as in *La Storia: Five Centers of the Italian in America* wherein she's called "the most celebrated author of Italian American background." She co-founded The Bordighera Poetry Prize. Her verse is etched in marble on a wall of Penn Station, NY, with Walt Whitman's. Her first book of poetry was, *Eggs in the Lake* (BOA Editions, 1977), and her sixth, *Blood Autumn* (VIA Folios, 2008). She edits www.PoetsUSA.com/ and www.Eco-Poetry.org/

Daniela Gioseffi is a pioneering presence in contemporary American literature. Her poetry has won international acclaim. Herein, we see Daniela as a first-rank progressive intellectual. We learn how her art and activism allowed her to transcend some times stultifying traditions of Italian American society; and inspire two generations of feminists, multiculturalists and many others who desire a better America.

— GEORGE GUIDA, President: Italian American Studies Association, Professor of English: City University of New York

If it were not for her Italian name, Daniela Gioseffi would be all over the map of American literature for her accomplishments as a poet, essayist, novelist, feminist, Emily Dickinson Scholar and an avant-garde heroine for justice among her peers. Her writings are emblematic of her commitment to resist oppression and stereotyping of Italian Americans authors who struggle against Chauvinistic literary powers. We find resistance to prejudice and oppression in her life and writings.

— ALFREDO DE PALCHI, author: *The Scorpion's Dark Dance*, Editor: Chelsea Editions, Ltd.

Daniela Gioseffi's *Blood Autumn*; *Autunno di sangue*, underscores the unique role she's played in the Italian American canon and contemporary poetry. Winner of prestigious awards, she continues to win accolades. *Blood Autumn* brings together traditions that link the deeply personal with the mythic and social in the intensity of lived experience.

— JOSEPHINE GATTUSO HENDIN, Professor of English: New York University, Author: *The Right Thing to Do*

Since the 1960s Daniela Gioseffi has been an irrepressible and unforgettable voice in many of the key debates in American culture. Her . . . advocacy has given a special validity to her work in the fields of civil rights and of anti-war activism no less than in the struggles against mafia stereotypes and for an Italian American literary tradition. This book displays the depth and range of her commitment and contribution.

— ROBERT VISCUSI, Author: *Astoria and Ellis Island*, Founding President: The Italian American Writers Association

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