PUSTEBLUME
JOURNAL OF TRANSLATION

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The lines of verse quoted on the rear cover are taken from a Hungarian poem, “A Hortobágy poétája” (“The poet of the Hortobágy”) by Endre Ady (1877-1919), appearing in Volume VII of In Quest of the Miracle Stag: The Poetry of Hungary. The English translation shown is modified from a translation by Anton Nyerges.
Editorial Note

The *Pusteblume* community has grown much larger since No. 0 was released last year. Our network of collaborators and readers now reaches far beyond Boston, with connections in many countries, including Spain, Switzerland and Kenya. The Journal itself has also undergone change; more so than in our first issue, we have emphasized the role of commentary and translator notes for each piece, and have been particularly diligent in seeking permission from copyright holders to print original texts. Also, several languages are represented for the first time in this issue: Japanese (in scholarly discussion), Italian (through translation), and finely-aged Latin (by way of ambitious modernization). Finally, to give you a taste of what’s to come in the fall, we’ve included a kernel of Hungarian on the back cover.

Our readers and advisors noted the absence of permissions in our first print issue (since corrected online and in the print-on-demand edition). We take seriously the intellectual and artistic rights of authors, and consider it a privilege to reprint their works. We are grateful for having been alerted to this oversight.

I am greatly indebted to the current editorial crew—including all the new faces who’ve signed on in the past year. Their creativity and dedication allowed us to improve upon our debut issue, and raised the standard for future editions. And as before, the meticulous work of Zachary Bos warrants my most heartfelt gratitude.

My term as Editor comes to a close when I graduate this month. Therefore, I welcome Amanda Cardenas to the *Pusteblume* team as my successor. As I gather my wits and attempt to translate an education into vocational success, I leave confident that the Journal will continue to serve well those who love language and literature.

As you read the issue in your hands, please consider contributing your own submissions or feedback. I hope you enjoy, as much as we do, the play of the languages that mingle herein. *Merci beaucoup!*

Matthew I. Kelsey
Contributors

AMBAR CASTILLO, influenced by Telemundo and Univision since birth, aspires to work as a journalist for a Spanish news outlet. A freshman at Boston University, she hopes to receive degrees in both Journalism and International Relations, with a concentration in Latin America.

MARIA FELLIE is a senior at Boston University, majoring in English and Spanish. Her interest in translation was sparked last spring, during a semester abroad in Spain. She will be attending the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill next fall, pursuing an M.A. in Spanish literature. She thanks Dr. Christopher Maurer for his guidance and support.

JAMES JOHNSON is the Dean of the Core Curriculum and Associate Professor of History at Boston University. He is the author of Listening in Paris. A Cultural History (1995) and is at work on a book tentatively titled Modern Masks. Venice, Paris, Vienna. His articles and reviews have appeared a variety of publications, including Eighteenth-Century Studies, The Journal of Modern History, Nineteenth-Century Music, the Times Literary Supplement, and The Boston Globe.

SHELDON GILMAN teaches German language courses at Boston University. He is interested in etymology, the aural/evocative qualities of words, language imagery, and the birth/evolution of words and expressions.

ILYA GUTNER will graduate from Boston University in Spring 2007 with an English major, a Russian minor, and no specific aspirations for post-college life, although he would like to become a teacher of languages and possibly a linguist. Born in Moscow, he moved to the United States at the age of 10. His current hometown is Staten Island, where he may be staying while applying to graduate schools and translating more Russian writers whose work should be more well-known.

DOUG HERMAN is a sophomore at Boston University, majoring in Ancient Greek and Latin with a minor in Linguistics.

GEORGE KALOGERIS is an adjunct professor in the Department of Humanities and Modern Languages at Suffolk University. He is also a professor of Humanities at Boston University. His poetry has appeared in publications including Harvard Review, Ploughshares, Partisan Review, The Journal of the Core Curriculum, and AGNI. His book Camus: Carnets is avail-
able from Pressed Wafer Press.

**Marcia Karp** is a graduate of the University Professors Program at Boston University. She has poems and translations in *Partisan Review, News from the Republic of Letters, Literary Imagination, The Guardian, Seneca Review, Agenda, Harvard Review, Ploughshares*, and Penguin Books’ *Catullus in English*, and *Petrarch in English*—and forthcoming in the TLS. She read her poems at Balliol College, Michaelmas Term 2005, at the invitation of the Oxford Professor of Poetry, Christopher Ricks.

**Robert Levine** is a medievalist who, since 1958, has taught English at Boston University, Brown University, Cornell University, Montpellier III (Paul Valéry), and Rensselaer Polytechnical Institute.

**Louisa Mandarino** is a Ph.D. candidate at the Editorial Institute at Boston University. The focus of her dissertation is the 20th-century Italian historian Gaetano Salvemini. She graduated in 2005 from Boston University’s University Professors Program with a B.A. in Literary Editing and Translation.

**Christopher Mulrooney**—born in Athens, Georgia, and currently living in Los Angeles, California—has poems and translations in *Zoland Poetry, The Hollins Critic, Knock* and *Upstairs at Duroc*, among other places; criticism in *Elimae, Blue Fifth Review* and *Parameter*; and a volume of verse called *notebook and sheaves* (AmErica House, 2002). “Ut” and “dream-holes in the net” are two of his several online workspaces.

**Anastasia Skoybedo** graduated from Boston University with degrees in International Relations and Philosophy. She hails from St. Petersburg, and enjoys Spanish, Russian and German prose, and most kinds of poetry.

**Gabriel Sosa** graduated from Boston University with his B.A. in Philosophy in January 2007. He enjoys oil painting, French New Wave film, and Latin American literature. He is currently an intern at *Metropolis Magazine* in New York City.

**Mark Steuer** is a Boston University student from the Philadelphia region. A modern-day ‘Japhy’, Mark has hiked the Pyrenees, biked the Alps, and ruined his bowels in Morocco, where he trekked the Sahara, camelback.

**Dygo Tosa** is a junior at Boston University studying Ancient Greek and Latin with an interest in comparative literature. He enjoys drawing during his free time, practices fencing saber, and hopes to earn a black belt in tae kwon do.
“Yes, it’s losses, losses, that bring our greatest sorrows. But why should what we lack truly matter when what we still possess is not yet depleted? Surely, so much can be loved that no discouragement is final. To know how to suffer is to know how to love. When everything crumbles, just start over, richer for the pain, and yes perhaps a bit happy for the feeling of unhappiness.”

– Albert Camus

“Oui, ce sont des manques, ce sont des manques qui font naître nos pires douleurs. Mais qu’importe vraiment ce qui nous manque quand ce que nous avons n’a pas été épuisé? Tant de choses sont susceptibles d’être aimées que sans doute aucun découragement ne peut être définitif. Savoir souffrir, savoir aimer. Et lorsque tout croule, reprendre tout, simples, plus riches de douleur, presque heureux du sentiment de notre malheur.”

Translated by James Johnson from “Perte de l’être aimé…” in Premiers écrits ("Loss of a Loved One…” in First Works), 1933.
Photograph by Mark Steuer, 2006.
The Tone of Hell

In “Après une lecture de Dante” (“After Reading Dante”), Hugo draws an analogy between the life of the poet Dante and the world he creates in his *Inferno*. Dante ‘paints’ his picture of hell with images that embody the perils humans face in ordinary life. This connection with reality enables his readers to visualize readily the punishments of the afterlife, as well as those to be endured in the living world. Just as people must avoid being overcome by the adversity they face throughout their lives, Dante’s guide Virgil remains calm and urges him to confront the immobilizing horrors he encounters.

Hugo provides an intense description of Dante’s hell and those who inhabit it. He employs rhyming couplets to evoke the trudging rhythm of the walking pilgrim. Hugo reinforces the resonance between this hell and the quotidian by *personifying* the vile aspects of human nature—“la pâle misère,” “la luxure immonde,” “l’avare infâme”—rather than presenting them as Dantean allegories or abstract entities; that is, as persons instead of monsters. A rhyming triplet marks the appearance of this trio, startling and unsettling the reader who had become accustomed to the monotonous pace. The significance of a triplet resounds with numerology of the *Commedia*: thirty-three cantos in each of three canticas; the three beasts that beset the pilgrim Dante, lost in the woods during the Easter Triduum; the interlacing rhyme of the poet’s *terza rima*.

In his translation, Johnson does not reproduce Hugo’s rhyme scheme, though his placement of line breaks does correspond with that of the original, preserving the rhythm if not the rhyme. This must be recognized as prudence, given the poverty of end rhyme in English compared to its abundance in Romance languages. To be sure, he translates the consonantal clamor and alliteration, but by relocating it, freely mixing tones and imagery in order to avoid compromising the overall atmosphere for the sake of mere fidelity. As a result, the reader of Johnson’s version is placed in a scene as shrouded and macabre as Hugo’s, but the visual details have been rendered in language whose connotative weight and sheer sound convey the dense texture and oppressive feel of the original.

The French text on the following pages is taken from *Poésies* by Hugo, printed by Pelicier of Paris in 1822.
Après une lecture de Dante

Quand le poète peint l’enfer, il peint sa vie,
Sa vie, ombre qui fuit de spectres poursuivie;
Forêt mystérieuse où ses pas effrayés
S'égarent à tâtons hors des chemins frayés;
Noir voyage obstrué de rencontres difformes;
Spirale aux bords douteux, aux profondeurs énormes,
Dont les cercles hideux vont toujours plus avant
Dans une ombre où se meut l’enfer vague et vivant!
Cette rampe se perd dans la brume indécise;
Au bas de chaque marche une plainte est assise,
Et l’on y voit passer avec un faible bruit
Des grincements de dents blancs dans la sombre nuit.
 Là sont les visions, les rêves, les chimères;
 Les yeux que la douleur change en sources amères;
 L’amour, couple enlacé, triste et toujours brûlant,
 Qui dans un tourbillon passe une plaie au flanc;
 Dans un coin la vengeance et la faim, soeurs impies
 Sur un crâne rongé côté à côté accroupies;
After Reading Dante

When the poet painted Hell, he was painting his own life,
His life, a harried shade in flight from specters;
A darkling wood where fearful steps
Grope forward, beyond the trail;
A passage blocked by monstrous forms;
The spiral’s crumbling sides and plunging depths,
Its frightful rings that circle down
Into a pit where the living Hell stirs!
The slope dissolves in a smudge of fog;
At the base of each step a sufferer sits,
And as you pass you hear the rasp
Of white teeth grinding in the dark night.
There are visions, dreams, illusions here;
Eyes that pain turns into bitter streams;
An entwined couple—love!—sad and still aflame,
Who pass in a gust with a wound in their side;
Vengeance and hunger crouch in a corner,
Unholy sisters ranged on a skull;
Puis la pâle misère, au sourire appauvri;
Et la luxure immonde, et l’avarice infâme,
Tous les manteaux de plomb dont peut se charger l’âme!
Plus loin, la lâcheté, la peur, la trahison
Offrant des clefs à vendre et goûtant du poison;
Et puis, plus bas encore, et tout au fond du gouffre,
Le masque grimaçant de la haine qui souffre!

Oui, c’est bien là la vie, ô poète inspiré,
Et son chemin brumeux d’obstacles encombré.
Mais, pour que rien n’y manque, en cette route étroite,
Vous nous montrez toujours debout à votre droite
Le génie au front calme, aux yeux pleins de rayons,
Le Virgile serein qui dit: Continuons!

— Victor Hugo
And pallid woe with her depleted smile,
And filthy lust, and shameful greed:
Leaden cloaks, all, that weigh down the soul!
Farther still, betrayal, fear, and cowardice
Offer their balm, reeking of poison;
And deeper yet, at the base of the pit,
The grimacing mask of hatred in pain!

Yes, inspired poet, that is life,
With its path, choked and clogged.
But that nothing should lack on this narrow route,
You show us a shade on your right,
Always there, with a calm brow and lucid eyes,
Serene Virgil, who says: Let us go on!

— James Johnson
“To lose is the seduction of time.” Photograph by Jane Losaw, Bilbao 2005.
Mimicking and Mocking

The satirical “Mohamlet in Manhattan” demonstrates the limits of translation across centuries and cultures. The narrator, under the false impression that Hamlet is an immigrant, translating lines from Shakespeare’s great play rather literally, mangling meaning in the process. When he takes “He smote the sledded poles” to mean that the prince was a hockey prow, our narrator seems to be working off of a text that has changed the original “Polacks” to the more acceptable “Poles.” Translator Sheldon Gilman questions the reliability of Ehrenstein’s narrator: “Mimicking and mocking the scholarly and critical habit of agonizing about the problems of attribution and trustworthiness of sources, Ehrenstein offers a narrator whose constant need to provide ingenious glosses, rigorous revisions, and elegant emendations for almost everything he says prevents the sentences from flowing gracefully, thereby depriving the translators of one of the possible accomplishments their harmless drudgery might have achieved. Unlike the narrator, however, the translators were not driven mad by their task.” Perhaps because the typesetter gave the translator a helping hand. The (injured) quotes from Hamlet are rendered in a different typeface, thereby seeming more removed, as was the effect of the distorted, untranslated English excerpts in the original German story. This typographic hierarchy reinforces the narrator’s detached, scholarly view of his source texts, an attitude the translators had to convey without seeming to endorse.

About the Author

The Austrian Jewish poet Albert Ehrenstein (1886-1950) was part of the German Expressionist movement. Deemed unfit for service in WWI, he became a vocal critic of the war, publishing his views in the early Dadaist magazine Neue Jugend. During the 1920s, he traveled throughout Africa and Asia, settling in China. The culture influenced his novel Mörder aus Gerechtigkeit (1931), and he published numerous translations of Chinese poetry (Nachdichtungen). When he returned to Europe in 1932, Ehrenstein settled in Switzerland only to be blacklisted by the Nazis. He eventually fled to New York City in 1941 where he died, impoverished, nine years later. “Mohamlet in Manhattan,” written in 1942, was not published until Ehrenstein’s later works were collected in the 1960s.

The German text on the following pages is taken from Erzählungen (“Narrations”), printed by Boer of Munich in 1991, reprinted here by permission of the publisher.


We all know how strict the immigration laws in the United States are and must be, particularly regarding people who seem to have blood on their hands. All the greater was my surprise, then, when I recently had occasion to leaf through a prematurely yellow anniversary issue of Manhattan (from the year 2867). An article dealt at length with the commonly accepted fact that the former Prince Hamlet had tarried somewhat longer in New York—spending his twilight years there while Europe was experiencing the Fascist epidemic.

My astonishment at this anachronistic, first-class achievement only diminished when I became aware of how few fragments of Shakespeare had survived the chronic bombardments of that century. It was a time of matriarchy, during which the authorship of the works of Shakespeare were of course attributed to women—for example, Othello, to Mrs. Beecher-Stowe. Apart from that, we had only summaries and phrases of his works, from Hamlet only the quotations that follow. Disbelievers might be convinced by a (glossed) account of the aforementioned local news report or “historical reminiscence,” in which, by the way, even the name of the Danish prince has been garbled. Let me begin:

From fragments of the works of an earlier, well-known Old English female historian named W. Shakespeare, we know that she was also concerned, in her undoubtedly reliable annals, with the intricate fortunes of a melancholy Prince Mohamlet of Denmark. Few of our learned readers, however, may have guessed where and how he died. We can have no doubt about it: in New York State. How this murderer of several men happened to obtain a U.S. visa can no longer be determined exactly. Probably this bloody avenger, who used several kinds of self-defense slipped in under another royal title. That Mohamlet, in the process, eliminated three stupid diplomats—fork-tongued courtiers and horse thieves—named Rosencrantz, Guildenstern, and Polonius, hardly merits being strung up on the gallows. For particularly in the aforementioned Polonius Shakespeare seems to have glorified the Polonius-like nature of most nations and leaders. But in the throes of a violent step-father-and-mother complex, Mohamlet killed his throne-robbing uncle, the treacherous murderer of his father and seducer of his mother. Only the fifth killing (of a young fencing master, Laertes), blamed on the Dane, might not have happened, but rather may be an

Denn Laertes gehört bekanntlich einem andern, viel älteren Sagenkreis an: er gilt allgemein als reicher Vater des trojanischen Pferdezüchters Ulysses von Ithacia und kann also nicht gut Mohamlet mit vergiftetem Rapier getötet haben. Vielmehr: In Begleitung seines Feudels Horatio (wohl des in England infolge chronischen Flirts mit Lady Hamilton mißliebig gewordenen Nelson, dem zuliebe auch heute ein New Yorker Telefonamt Trafalgar heißt) kam Mohamlet, vermutlich an Bord der Aprilflower, in New York an. Die historischen Worte, mit denen er den Boden dieser Stadt begrüßte: »Camel or Chesterfield, —that is the question« scheinen sich auf der indianischen Rothäute jener Zeit Rauchopfer oder Lieblingstabake zu beziehen, mit denen sie ihre Friedenspfeifen oder Kriegsbacken vollstopften.

Der sehr legere Aufzug, in dem Mohamlet erschien, hat lange Zeit auf die Saloppheit einer Herrenmode Einfluß gehabt:

»Mohamlet, with his doublet all unbraid
No hat upon his head; his stockings foul’d,
Ungerter’d, and down-gyved to his ankle;
Pale as his shirt.«

In ehrfürchtigem Andenken daran hängen noch heute vielen Herren in den Untergrundbahnen die losen Socken tief über die Knöchel.

»Thrift, thrift, Horatio! The funeral bak’d meats
Did coldly furnish forth the marriage tables.«

Daraus zieht ein verfressener Scholastiker, der gewiß nicht in Wittenberg studiert hatte, den logischen Schluß, Hamlet wäre Manager einer dänischen Seemanns-Kneipe gewesen. Beliebt bei den Sportsleuten, weil schon sein königlicher Vater ein ausgezeichneter Eishockeyspieler war, von dem es bekanntlich heißt:

»So frown’d he once when, in an angry parle,
He smote the sledded pole—on the ice«,
inartistic interpolation, an obscure insertion. For Laertes belongs clearly to another, older cycle of sagas; he is generally considered an ancient avatar of the Trojan horse-breeder Ulysses of Ithaca, and thus could not very well have killed Mohamlet with a poisoned rapier. Moreover, accompanied by his friend Horatio (probably Nelson, who, according to subsequent English chronicles had fallen out of favor as a result of his flirtation with Lady Hamilton, and in whose honor a New York telephone exchange is still called Trafalgar), Mohamlet came to New York, apparently on board the Aprilflower. The exact words with which he greeted the soil of this city, “Camel or Chesterfield, that is the question,” seemed to have something to do with the human sacrifices or preferred tobacco with which the redskin Indians of that time filled their peace-pipes or war-painted cheeks.

The very informal outfit in which Mohamlet appeared had, for a long time, an influence on the informality of men’s fashion.

“Mohamlet, with his doublet all unbraid
No hat upon his head; his stockings foul’d
Ungarter’d, and down-gyved to his ankle;
Pale as his shirt.”

In reverential memory, many gentlemen, even to this day, in the subway wear loose socks barely covering their ankles.

How did Mohamlet support himself in New York?

“Thrift, thrift, Horatio! The funeral bak’d meats
Did coldly furnish forth the marriage tables.”

From this a gluttonous scholar, who certainly had not studied in Wittenberg, would draw the logical conclusion that Hamlet had been the manager in a Danish seamen’s bar. Popular with sports fans because his royal father had been a fine hockey player, as this passage reveals:

“So frown’d he once when, in an angry parle,
He smote the sledded pole—on the ice.”

But by no means should one believe an irreverent, completely disgusting tale, which claims falsely that Mohamlet earned a living as a ventriloquist, projecting shadowy figures on the wall, using the ghost of his father to tell fortunes. That was not necessary for Mohamlet, especially since, as

Aber tatsächlich lebte Mohamlet so fern einer Welt der Kneipen oder bauchrednerischen Schminke, daß es ihm nicht einmal im Traume eingefallen wäre, eine snobistische Billionärin zu erhören. Er, der von sich sagte:

»Man delights not me, no, nor woman neither.«

Er lebte seinen Erinnerungen, seinen Toten—zu sehr! Zuletzt wählte er die Liberty Statue verfolge ihn mit Liebesanträgen. Eines kranken Tages mietete er ein Boot (ob Ruber, Segel oder Motor—darüber verwickeln sich die Bärte der Gelehrten zu Zöpfen). Er ließ sich in die Nähe der Freiheitsstatue bugsieren und brüllte ihr unaufhörlich durchs Sprachrohr zu:

»Go thy ways to a nunnery.«

Mag er nun eine tyrannisch wilde Zukunft befürchtet haben, gewiß ist—auf eine Anfrage bei der Polizei von New York erfolgte die beruhigende Auskunft, die Freiheitsstatue, die dauerhafteste Jungfrau dieser Welt, habe ihm keinerlei Avancen gemacht.

Wenn man die Schriften eines Seelenarztes für beweiskräftig halten darf, hat jedenfalls S. Freud ihn psychoanalysiert —denn »something is rotten in the State of Denmark.«

Streng vertraulichen Berichten zu folge brachte man Mohamlet in ein Sanatorium, eine einem Männerkloster recht ähnliche, von Dr. Jekyll und Mr. Hyde nach dem »System of Doctor Tarr and Professor Fether« geleitete, mitten in der Natur gelegene Nervenheilanstalt, die wir unseren geneigten Lesern wärmstens empfehlen zu können glauben.

»Rest, rest, perturbed spirit!«
Shakespeare’s most profound creation, he understood, as some of his remarks demonstrate, more about the theater and acting than any critic on earth. Certainly Hollywood would rather have entrusted the Burial of Hecuba to him than to anyone else, including director Max Reinhardt.

But Mohamlet in fact lived so far from a world of bars or ventriloquist’s makeup that he would never have even dreamed of yielding to a snobbish female trillionaire. He, who says of himself:

“Man delights not me, no, nor woman neither.”

He lived his memories and the people he killed—much too much! At the end he believed that the Statue of Liberty was pursuing him with offers of marriage. On one of his worst days he rented a boat (whether with rudder, sail, or motor—about this learned men have twisted their beards into pig-tails). He had himself towed close to the statue of freedom and shouted to her incessantly through a megaphone: “Go thy ways to a nunnery.”

Now he might have feared a tyrannically rough future, —what is certain, however, is that an inquiry made of the New York police produced the calming information that the Statue of Liberty, the most endurable virgin in this world, had made no advances of any sort towards him.

If the writings of a psychiatrist can be accepted as evidence, Sigmund Freud, in any case, psychoanalyzed him—because “something is rotten in the State of Denmark.”

According to highly confidential reports, Mohamlet was brought to a sanitorium, something very much like a monk’s cloister, located in the country, run by Doctor Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, according to the “system of Doctor Tar and Professor Feather,” a mental hospital which we believe we can recommend most warmly to our gentle readers.

“Rest, rest, perturbed spirit!”
As far as we know, Catullus (c. 84-c. 52 BC) finished 116 poems, written in various meters on a range of subjects. Three fragments—a quatrain and two partial lines—are thought to be his, as well. He is known as the first of the great Roman lyric poets. Virgil (70-19), Horace (65-8), and Ovid (43 BC-AD 18) knew, and were influenced by, his work. Martial (c. AD 40-104) brought him into the Common Era, though the Catullus of the epigrams was less the Neoteric poet from Verona than a Silver Age contemporary of Martial’s. Then, no word of him until a single manuscript of his poetry was found, around 1300, when he seems to have been awoken from a sleep lasting 11 centuries. As late as 1700, Martial’s epigrams could be confused with Catullus’ by as knowledgeable a poet as John Dryden. Still, poets writing in English—including Sir Walter Raleigh, Jonathan Swift, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Thomas Hardy, Ezra Pound, Stevie Smith, and David Ferry—have read, treasured, and translated from that gift, Catullus’ *libellus,* that Circumstance restored to the world.

Dryden’s misapprehension has to do with the state of textual scholarship, and should not be recorded as a demerit to be weighed against his familiarity with, and appreciation of, the true Catullus. Some few years earlier, in “A Discourse Concerning the Original and Progress of Satire” (1673), Dryden finds a way to yoke Catullus to the better known poets of the next generation:

It is manifest that some particular ages have been more happy than others in the production of great men in all sorts of arts and sciences, as … that of Augustus for heroic, lyric, dramatic, elegiac, and indeed all sorts of poetry in the persons of Virgil, Horace, Varius, Ovid, and many others, especially if we take into that century the latter end of the commonwealth, wherein we find Varro, Lucretius, and Catullus…

Catullus, though, needs no chronological loophole in order to be among the Roman poets. He is an urbane student of the human condition, who, as well as any literary man, could also rework traditional stories. Catullus’ Lesbia is his muse; she appears in, among other poems, *carmen 51,* his version of Sappho’s “Phainetai Moi.” The aptly-numbered *carmen 101* is Catullus’ best known poem. It has been the model for other poems that
express deep and seemly sorrow for brothers actual and poetic. It ends with
the dignified expression of grief—*ave atque vale*, “hail and farewell”—which
may be all of Catullus’ work that some people know.

Horace on the other hand wrote so much, and so much of what he
wrote has survived, that chances are you already know him as the writer of
odes, or of satires, or of epistles, maybe the one known as *Ars Poetica*, The
Art of Poetry. Horace is sometimes considered Vergil’s peer, or if not peer,
missing the mark only because he’d not written epic. In that 1700 preface,
to *Fables Ancient and Modern*, Dryden—whom we call an Augustan poet
because of his affinity with the actual Augustans—slyly engrafts Horace
onto Virgil’s branch of honor as one of the founding members of the clan of
poets that complements Homer’s. (Is it in spite of, or because of, his trans-
lation of all of Virgil’s works that Dryden adopts Homer as his lineal
ancestor?) The rhetorician Quintilian (c. 35-c. 95) considers Horace to be a
writer for all ages, though not all of the poet at all of the ages. He writes,
“even in Horace there are passages which I should be unwilling to explain
to a class.”

Catullus has his own share of poems that might incite a blush in the
school teacher’s cheeks and a different sort of fever in the students’. His car-
men 97 is one of those that treat the body in the Catullan mode of easy
bawdiness. My memory is that tending to a mill’s beast of burden was a crim-
inal punishment. My memory, too, is that I have translated rather literally,
trying to keep the sanctity of Catullus’ lines as much as possible. Please, if
you find my memories are corrupt, could you blame it on the poetic compa-
ny I keep?

Horace’s ode is known as the Cleopatra Ode; it was written upon the
military defeats and deaths of both Antony and Cleopatra in 30 BC. I made
a mistake when writing it—I set it to a tune. It was an appropriate tune, but
I have never been able to hear what I wrote without the music interfering.
I’ll keep the tune to myself and hope that the translation fares better in your
ears than it does in mine. Though *superbo*—“proud” or “haughty”—modifies
Octavian’s victory, Horace tempts us to apply it to the enemy, Cleopatra,
who, by the end of poem, cuts an admirable figure. I tried to keep the ambi-
guity and yet not violate the meaning. ✿

The Latin text by Gaius Valerius Catullus on the following pages is taken—with minor typographical
changes—from *Carmina*, edited by R.A.B. Mynors for Typographeo Clarendoniano, Oxonii, 1958. The Latin
text by Horace is taken from The Odes of Horace, translated by David Ferry for Farrar, Straus, and Giroux,
Carmen 97

Non (ita me di ament) quicquam referre putavi,
utrumne os an culum olfacerem Aemilio.
Nilo mundius hoc, nihiloque immundius illud,
verum etiam culius mundior et melior:
nam sine dentibus est. Hoc dentis sesquipedalis,
    gingivas vero ploxei habet veteris,
praeterea rictum qualem diffissus in aestu
    meintis mulae cunnus habere solet.
Hic futuit multas et se facit esse venustum,
et non pistrino traditur atque asino?
Quem siqua attingit, non illam posse putemus
    aegroti culum lingere carnificis?

— Gaius Valerius Catullus
Holy Gods, the whole of him stinks—
    the hole where food enters; the hole where it leaves—Aemilius
might swap them about. Yet the truth of the stench is
    it’s sweeter below, for his seat has no teeth and the teeth
for his meat are each half a foot over a foot,
    carried upon grey invertebrate pallets, no gums
holding fast. When he laughs he flaps open, portraying
    a she-mule who puddles the dust of a summer gone sour.
He has his women and thinks he’s quite comely,
    and he’s never been given to tend to the back of a grinding-wheel’s
drudge-ass. Don’t we think, yes we do, that the woman
    who knows him dines on the refuse the hanging man leaves?

— Marcia Karp
Carmen I.37

Nunc est bibendum, nunc pede libero
pulsanda tellus, nunc Saliaribus
ornare pulvinar deorum
tempus erat dapibus, sodales.

Antehac nefas depromere Caecubum
cellis avitis, dum Capitolio
regina dementis ruinas,
funus et imperio parabat

contaminato cum grege turpium
morbo virorum, quidlibet impotens
sperare fortunaque dulci
ebria. Sed minuit furorem

vix una sospes navis ab ignibus,
mentemque lymphatam Mareotico
redegit in veros timores
Caesar, ab Italia volantem

remis adurgens, accipiter velut
mollis columbas aut leporem citus
venator in campis nivalis
Haemoniae, daret ut catenis

fatale monstrum. Quae generous
perire quaerens nec muliebriter
expavit ensem nec latentis
classe cita reparavit oras;

ausa et iacentem visere regiam
vultu sereno, fortis et asperas
tractare serpentes, ut atrum
corpore combiberet venenum,

deliberata morte ferocior;
saevis Liburnis scilicet invidens
privata deduci superbo
non humilis mulier triumpho.

— Quintus Horatius Flaccus
An Horatian Toast

Drink! O Romans! Beat with your feet,
now free, on our ground that is freed.

Feast! O Romans! Feast from the couches
fitted for feasts of the gods by Mars’ priests.

It was a sin when the Queen prepared death
for Roman men to uncork our fine wines.

Pestilent puff-breasted Egypt-bred dregs
courted her, drank with her drunk on her luck. But

burnt ships mixed her madness with wa-
tered flight from Octavian’s hawk.

He the hunter and she the hare, this rare demon-
stratión, O Caesar you’ll snare.

Yet, unfainting at Antony’s sword,
not veiling her fleet in an embracing shore,

she milked the asps at her breasts, Salut-
ed her palace, gave orders to death.

No Liburnian escort for her
past Caesar triumphant in Rome. Drink!

— Marcia Karp
Ink and watercolor by Joanna Rieke, 2006.
About Khlebnikov

Poet, critic, theorist, scholar of Sanskrit and other languages, Velimir Khlebnikov (1885-1922) was a central figure in the Russian futurist movement of the early 20th century. His visions of the future were of civilizations with free global exchange, whose technologically facilitated mass transit and information systems would allow knowledge to become a universal resource.

Khlebnikov is also known as one of the originators of zaumniy poetry, in which the sounds and syllables of words are given meanings independent of the words themselves. This style of writing emphasizes the aesthetic qualities not only of poetry as a finished product, but the artistic nature of the tools of language themselves: the appearance and shape of letters and words are weighed equally with those words’ conventional definitions. His most famous zaum poems—“Incantation by Laughter,” “Bobecobi Sang the Lips,” “The Grasshopper”—demand that the reader abandon any expectation that the syllables correspond to conventional meanings.

Translator’s Notes

In the process of translating this piece, I grappled with the difficulty of transcribing Russian letters into English. Since Velimir Khlebnikov based his new language on the Russian alphabet, direct transcription of Russian letters could not have been avoided. I have attempted to provide, in square brackets, an English alphabetical and phonetic equivalent to each of the Russian letters 1-19. Since some Russian sounds have no English equivalent, in some cases the reader is left only with an approximate transcription.

As far as the “beyond-mind” terminology is concerned, I decided to translate it only when Khlebnikov used it as an adjective, while leaving it in its original Russian form in the last sentence where it given as the title for this new category of linguistic expression. Other authors may use zaumniy (sometimes called zaum) to mean “beyond-mind” in both adjectival and nominal contexts, but when one wants to use it as a term, rather than as a descriptive property, zaumniy is preferable.

ХУДОЖНИКИ МИРА!

написано Велимир Хлебников

Мы долго искали такую, подобную чечевицу, задачу, чтобы направленные ею к общей точке соединенные лучи труда художников и труда мыслителей встретились бы в общей работе и смогли бы зажечь обратить в костер даже холодное вещество льда. Теперь такая задача—чечевица, направляющая вместе вашу бурную отвагу и холодный разум мыслителей,—найдена. Эта цель—создать общий письменный язык, общий для всех народов третьего спутника Солнца, построить письменные знаки, понятные и приемлемые для всей населенной человечеством земли, затерянной в мире. Вы видите, что она достойна нашего времени. Живопись всегда говорила языком, доступным для всех. И народы китайцев и японцев говорят на сотне разных языков, но пишут и читают на одном письменном языке. Языки изменили своему славному прошлому. Когда-то, когда слова разрушили вражду и делали будущее прозрачным и спокойным, языки, шагая по ступеньям, объединили людей 1) пещеры, 2) деревни, 3) племени, родового союза, 4) государств—в один разумный мир, союз меняющих ценности рассудка на один и те же меновые звуки. Дикарь понимал дикаря и откладывал в сторону слепое оружие. Теперь они, изменив своему прошлому, служат делу вражды и, как своеобразные меновые звуки для обмена рассудочными товарами, разделяли многозыкое человечество на станы таможенной борьбы, на ряд словесных рынков, за пределами которого данный язык не имеет хождения. Каждый строй звучных денег притягает на верховенство, и, таким образом, языки как таковые служат разъединению человечества и ведут прирачные войны. Пустой письменный язык будет спутником дальнейших судеб человека и явится новым собирающим вихрем, новым собирателем человеческого рода. Немые—начертательные знаки—помирают многоголосицу языков.

На долю художников мысли падает построение звуков понятий, строя основных единиц мысли,—из них строится здание слова.

Задача художников краски дать основным единицам разума начертательные знаки.

Мы сделали часть труда, падающего на долю мыслителей, мы стоим на первой площадке лестницы мыслителей и застаем на ней
For a long time we have been searching for an objective, which being similar to a lens and being so that the joined rays of labour of artists and labour of thinkers, directed by it towards a common point, would meet in a shared work and could light up and convert into fire even the cold substance of ice. Now this objective, or lens, which jointly directs your bravery and the cold mind of thinkers, has been found. This goal is to create a common written language, common to all peoples of the third satellite of the Sun, to construct written signs, understandable and acceptable to the whole humanly populated star, lost in the universe. You see that it is worth our time. Painting has always been speaking with a language accessible to everyone. And peoples of China and Japan speak hundreds of various languages, but write and read in one written language. Languages have betrayed their glorious past. Once upon a time when words destroyed animosity and made future clear and calm, languages, ascending the steps, united the people (1) of caves, (2) of villages, (3) of tribes, of clan unions, (4) of states—into one rational world, a union of those who exchange valuables of the mind into identical exchange sounds. A savage understood a savage and set aside blind armour. Now they, betraying their past, serve hostility and, as idiosyncratic exchange sounds for trading mental commodities, have divided a multilingual humanity into custom-fighting camps, into several world-markets beyond which any given language has no use. Each system of sound money strives to dominate and, in this way, languages as such serve the separation of humanity and lead phantasmic wars. Let one written language be a companion to future fates of humanity and become a unifying maelstrom, a new unifier of humanity. The mutes—written signs—will make peace between the multi-soundness of languages.

It is for artists of thought to construct the alphabet of concepts, a system of foundational units of thought—from them the edifice of “word” is constructed.

The task of artists of paint is to give foundational units of mind graphic signs.

We have completed part of the task of thinkers, we are standing on the first step of the staircase of thinkers and encounter there artists of China and Japan, who have ascended it already—hello to them! This is what we see from the staircase of thinkers: the sights of an all-human alphabet, opening
на ней уже подымавшихся художников Китая и Японии — привет им! Вот что видно с этой лестницы мыслителей: виды на обще человеческую азбуку, открывающиеся с лестницы мыслителей. Пока, не доказывая, я утверждаю, что:

1) **В** на всех языках значит вращение одной точки кругом другой или по целому кругу или по части его, дуге, вверх и назад.

2) Что **Х** значит замкнутую кривую, отделяющую преградой положение одной точки от движения к ней другой точки (защитная черта).

3) Что **З** значит отражение движущейся точки от черты зеркала под углом, равным углу падения. Удар луча о твердую плоскость.

4) Что **М** значит распад некоторой величины на бесконечно малые, в пределе, части, равные в целом первой величине.

5) Что **Ш** значит слияние нескольких поверхностей в одну поверхность и слияние границ между ними. Стремление одномерного мира данных размеров очертить наибольшую площадь двумерного мира.

6) Что **Π** означает рост по прямой пустоты между двумя точками, движение по прямому пути одной точки пройдя от другой и, как итог, для точечного множества, бурный рост объема, занимающего некоторым числом точек.

7) Что **Ω** означает пустоту одного тела, заполненную объемом другого тела, так что отрицательный объем первого тела точно равен положительному объему второго.

   Это полный двумерный мир, служащий оболочкой трехмерному телу — в пределе.

8) Что **Λ** значит распространение наиболее низких волн на наиболее широкую поверхность, поперечную движущейся точке, исчезновение измерения высоты во время роста измерений широты, при данном объеме бесконечно малая высота при бесконечно
from the staircase of thinkers. I assert, for now without proof, that:

(1) $B$ [Ve, V] in all languages signifies a rotation of one point around another, either in a full circle or only in its part, an arch, up and down.

(2) That $X$ [Kh] signifies an enclosed curve, which separates with an obstacle a position of one point from a movement towards it of another point (a protective line).

(3) That $Z$ [Ze, Z] signifies a reflection of a moving point from a surface of a mirror at an angle, equal to the angle of refraction. A light ray, striking a hard surface.

(4) That $M$ [Em, M] signifies a disintegration of one value into infinitely small, in a limit, parts, which, when combined, are equal to the original value.

(5) That $\Omega$ [Sh] signifies a confluence of several surfaces into one surface and the diffusion of borders between them. The desire of a single-plane world of given measurements to circumscribe the biggest possible surface of a two-plane world.

(6) That $\Pi$ [Pe, P] signifies a growth, according to the straight line of emptiness between the two points, the movement along a straight line of one point away form another and, as a result, for a point set, a rapid growth in volume, occupied by some number of points.

(7) That $\Psi$ [Tch] signifies a void of one body filled by a volume of another body so that a negative volume of the first body equals exactly the positive volume of the second. This is a hollow two-dimensional world, which, in a limit, serves as a wrapper to the three-dimensional world.

(8) That $\lambda$ [El, L] signifies a distribution of the lowest frequency waves across the widest surface, perpendicular to a moving point; the disappearance of the height measurement concurrent with the growth of width measurement; at this given volume, the infinitely small height concurrent with the other infinitely large axis is the transformation of a body from two-dimensional into three-dimensional.

(9) That $K$ [Ka, K] signifies a complete absence of movement; a rest of a network of points; their preservation of their
больших двух других оси—становления тела двумерным из трехмерного.
9) Что $K$ значит отсутствие движения, покой сети и точек, сохранение ими взаимного положения; конец движения.
10) Что $C$ значит неподвижную точку, служащую исходной точкой движения многих других точек, начинающих в ней свой путь.
11) Что $T$ означает направление, где неподвижная точка создала отсутствие движения среди множества движений в том же направлении, отрицательный путь и его направление за неподвижной точкой.
12) $A$ значит переход точки из одного точечного мира в другой точечный мир, преображенный присоединением этой точки.
13) Что $G$ значит наибольшие колебания, вышина которых направлена поперек движения, вытянутые вдоль луча движения. Движения предельной вышины.
14) Что $I$ значит отсутствие точек, чистое поле.
15) Что $B$ значит встречу двух точек, движущихся по прямой с разных сторон. Борьба их, поворот одной точки от удара другой.
16) Что $II$ значит проход одного тела через пустое место в другом.
17) Что $III$ означает разбивку поверхности, целой раньше, на разные участки, при неподвижном объеме.
18) Что $P$ значит разделение тела «плоской пещерой» как след движения через него другого тела.
19) Что $Ж$ значит движение из замкнутого объема, отделение свободных точечных миров.

Итак, с нашей площадки лестницы мыслителей стало ясно, что простые тела языка—звуки азбуки—суть имена разных видов пространства, перечень случаев его жизни. Азбука, общая для многих народов, есть краткий словарь пространственного мира, такого близкого вашему, художнику, искусству и вашей кисти.
respective positions; the end of movement.

(10) That $C$ [$Es$, $S$] signifies a static point, which serves as a departure point for movement of many other points, which start their movement from this point.

(11) That $T$ [$Te$, $T$] signifies a direction, where a static point has created an absence of movement amongst the plurality of movements in the same direction; a negative course and its following of a static point.

(12) That $\mathcal{D}$ [$De$, $D$] signifies a transition of a point from one point-world into another point-world, which is transformed by the addition of this point.

(13) That $\Gamma$ [$Ghe$, $G$] signifies the highest oscillations from one point to another, the height of which is situated perpendicularly to the movement, and which are stretched along the ray of movement. The movement of limited height.

(14) That $H$ [$En$, $N$] signifies an absence of points, a clean field.

(15) That $\mathcal{E}$ [$Be$, $B$] signifies a conjunction of two points, moving along a straight line from opposite directions. Their fight is a veer of one point, caused by a blow of another.

(16) That $\mathcal{U}$ [$Ts$] signifies a passing of one point through an empty space in another.

(17) That $\mathcal{U}$ [$Sch$] signifies the fractionation of a surface, intact before, into different sections, while maintaining an unchanged volume.

(18) That $P$ [$Er$, $R$] signifies a split of a body by a “flat cave” as a result of a movement of another body through it.

(19) That $\mathcal{J}$ [$Zh$] signifies a movement out of an enclosed volume; a separation of free point worlds.

Thus, from our landing of the staircase of thinkers it has become apparent that the simple bodies of language—the sounds of the alphabet—in essence name types of space, and are an enumeration of instances of its existence. The alphabet, common to many peoples, is a concise dictionary of spatial world, which is so close to your, artists, art and to your brush.

A single word is similar to a small labour union, where the first sound of a word is similar to a chairman of the union, governing the multiplicity
Отдельное слово походит на небольшой трудовой союз, где первый звук слова походит на председателя союза, управляя всем множеством звуков слова. Если собрать все слова, начатые одинаковым согласным звуком, то окажется, что эти слова, подобно тому, как небесные камни часто падают из одной точки неба, все такие слова летят из одной и той же точки мысли о пространстве. Эта точка и принималась за значение звука азбуки, как простейшего имени.

Так, 20 имен построек, начатых с Χ, защищающих точку человека от враждебной точки непогоды, холода или врагов, достаточно прочно несут на своих плечах тяжесть второго утверждения и т. д.

Задачей труда художников было бы дать каждому виду пространства особый знак. Он должен быть простым и не походить на другие. Можно было бы прибегнуть к способу красок и обозначить м темно-синим, а—зеленым, б—красным, с—серым, л—белым и т. д. Но можно было бы для этого мирового словаря, самого краткого из существующих, сохранить начертательные знаки. Конечно, жизнь внесет свои поправки, но в жизни всегда так бывало, что вначале знак понятия был простым чертежом этого понятия. И уж из этого зерна росло дерево особой буквенной жизни.

Мне Βἐ кажется в виде круга и точки в нем: ○

Χα — в виде сочетания двух черт и точки: ↘

Σε — вроде упавшего Κ, зеркало и луч: ✡

Λ — круговая площадь и черта оси: ⬇

Ψ — в виде чашки: ☯

Θ — пучок прямых: ←

Но это ваша, художники, задача изменить или усовершенствовать эти знаки. Если вы построите их, вы завяжете узел общеизвестного труда.

Предполагаемый опыт обратить заумный язык из дикого состояния в домашнее, заставить его носить полезные тяжести
of sounds of the word. If one assembles together all the words that begin with the same consonant sound it will happen that these words, similar to how heavenly stones frequently fall from one point in the sky, that all these words fly from one and the same point of spatial thought. It was this point that was considered to be a meaning of a sound of alphabet as a simplest name.

Thus, 20 names of constructions, which begin with X and protect a human point from a hostile point of bad weather, cold or enemies, carry the weight of the second statement quite firmly on their shoulders, and so on.

The main objective of the work of artists would have been to give each type of space its own sign. It has to be simple and not similar to others. It would have been possible to resort to a colour method and to designate \( \text{M} \) as dark-blue, \( \text{G} \) — green, \( \text{R} \) — red, \( \text{C} \) — grey, \( \text{W} \) — white, etc. However, it could have been possible to preserve for this worldly dictionary, which is most concise of presently existing, to preserve written signs. Of course, life will bring in its own corrections, but it has always been so in life—that a sign of concept initially was only a graphic representation of this concept. And only from this seed did the tree of special letter-life grow.

\[ \text{Ve} \] appears in a form of a circle with a point inside of it: \[ \circ \]

\[ \text{Kha} \] — in a form of a connection between two lines and point: \[ \downarrow \]

\[ \text{Ze} \] — as a fallen K, a mirror and a ray: \[ \swarrow \]

\[ \text{J} \] — a circular square and an axis line: \[ \circ \]

\[ \text{U} \] — as a chalice: \[ \Upsilon \]

\[ \text{Es} \] — a knot of straight lines: \[ \leftrightarrow \]

But it is your task, artists, to change or to perfect these signs. If you build them, you will tie the knot of a star-wide work.

The suggested experiment of turning a beyond-mind language from a wild species into a domesticated one and of forcing it to wear useful weights is worth paying attention to.

For “\text{vritti}” means “rotation” even in Sanskrit, while “\text{hata}” is “\text{hata}” in Egyptian.

The goal of a unified universal, scientifically constructed, language is
заслуживает внимания.
Ведь «вритти» и по-санскритски значит «вращение», а «хата» и поэгипетски «хата».
Задача единого мирового научно построенного языка все яснее и яснее выступает перед человечеством.
Задачей вашей, художники, было бы построить удобные меновые знаки между ценностями звука и ценностями глаза, построить сеть вступавших доверие чертежных знаков.
В азбуке уже дана мировая сеть звуковых «образов» для разных видов пространства; теперь следует построить вторую сеть—письменных знаков—немые деньги на разговорных рынках.

*

Конечно, вы будете бояться чужого вдохновения и следовать своему пути.
Предлагаю первые опыты заумного языка как языка будущего, с той оговоркой, что гласные звуки здесь случайны и служат благозвучно. Вместо того, чтобы говорить:
«Соединившись вместе, орды гуннов и готов, собравшись кругом Аттилы, полные боевого воодушевления, двинулись далее вместе, но, встреченные и отраженные Аэсием, защитником Рима, рассеялись на множество шаек и остановились и упокоялись на своей земле, разлившись в степях, заполняя их пустоту»,—не следовало ли сказать:
«Ша+ со (гуннов и готов), в Аттилы, на но, со бо, но бо+ло Аэция, хо Рима, со мо эз+ли со, ло ли степей + чо». Так звучит с помощью струн азбуки первый рассказ.
Или: «Ба со человеческого рода бз гозвыков, вэ умов вэ со ита языков, бо мо слов мо ка разума на звуков но со бо лу земля мо со языков вэ земли». То есть: «Думая о соединении человеческого рода, но столкнувшись с горами языков, бурный огонь наших умов, врачаюсь около соединенного заумного языка, достигая распылением слов на единицы мысли в оболочке звуков, бурно и вместе идет к признанию на всей земле единого заумного языка».
Конечно, эти опыты еще первый крик младенца, и здесь предстоит работа, но общий образ мирового грядущего языка дан . Это будет язык «заумный». [13 апреля 1919] *
becoming clearer and clearer to humanity.

It would have been your task, artists, to construct practical exchange signs between valuables of sound and valuables of eyes, to construct a network of trustworthy graphic signs.

A universal network of sound “images” for different types of space has already been given in an alphabet, now a second network should be built—written signs—mute money for conversation markets.

Of course you will be afraid of alien inspiration and will follow your own path.

*  

I am offering first experiments with the beyond-mind language as a language of the future, with a reservation that vowel sounds here are accidental and only serve the purpose of sonority. Instead of saying:

“Coming together, the hordes of Huns and Goths gathered in a circle around Attila and full of combative enthusiasm continued onward together, but, faced and beaten off by Aetius, the defender of Rome, disbanded into multiple gangs and stopped and calmed in their land, spread over the steppes, filling their emptiness”— would it not be better to say:

“scha+so (Huns and Goths), ve Attila, cha po, so do, but bo+zo Aetius, kho Rome, so mo ve + ka so, lo sha steppes + cha.”

Thus, using the strings of the alphabet, sounds the first tale.

Or: “ve so of humankind, be go of languages, pe of minds, pe of minds ve so sha of languages, be mo of words mo ka of mind cha of sounds po so do lu of earth mo so of languages ve of earth.”

Which means: “Thinking about the unification of humankind, but encountering mountains of languages, the boisterous flame of our minds, revolving around one unified beyond-mind language, reaching with diffusion of words into singular units of thought into a shell of sounds, headily and together moves towards a recognition on the whole earth of one unified beyond-mind language.”

Of course, these experiments are only the first cry of a newborn baby, and much work is needed here, however, a general outline of a future world language is given. This will be a “ząumniy” language. [13 April, 1919] *
About Neruda

Pablo Neruda (1904-1973) developed an affinity for poetry at a very early age. Born in Temuco, Chile, he lived happily on the fertile land surrounding him and fed on the words of Chilean poet Gabriela Mistral. As he matured, Neruda attempted to create a voice that would not remain bottle-stopped within the borders of his own nation, but would spread across the American continents like an overturned jug of wine. By addressing the popular (and not yet dead) concept of romance, he found immediate success. One of his first collections, Twenty Love Poems, is a popular read for couples even today. Neruda’s talents grew proportionally with age, seeming to culminate in the collection Extravagaria, in which he boldly confronted the autumnal days leading to his death.

To say that Neruda’s continental influence is derived merely from his creative works is incorrect. On top of his many works of both poetry and prose, Neruda was also an important diplomat, acting as the Chilean ambassador to France from 1970 until the decline of his health in 1973. During this time, he was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature.

A Short Discussion of Short Lines

The task of recasting Neruda’s “Oda al Vino” is made particularly difficult by the poem’s format; its short lines isolate individual words, forge non-syntactic connections between phrases by stacking them atop one another, and transect longer sentences by splaying wide their conceptual components. Furthermore, the intricate topology of the poem—the “sinuous, vertical” outline of Chile, according to Robin Robertson in Poetry, April 2007—is prominently visible against the open whiteness of the page, daring the translator to preserve its contours.

Thus when it comes to preserving both the meaning and aesthetic qualities of the original, a special emphasis must be placed upon the connotations of English words chosen in relation to those in the Spanish, since one may not rely upon the inclusion of additional phrases to incorporate nuances of meaning. An example of this difficulty is the phrase “la sabrosa que amo;” while a sense of “juiciness” or “succulence” is conveyed by “sabrosa,” it becomes the task of the translator to interpret whether this is the sweetness of an object, such as a grape, the carnal sweetness of a lover, or sweetness in a less physical sense, such as “my sweet.” Here, Maria Fellie has chosen to use the term “beloved,” which avoids a sense of objectification or excessive lust and also mimics the rhythm of the word “sabrosa.”
Word order also becomes an issue when adjectives placed at the ends of lines in Spanish are shifted inward due to the different word order in English, such as “vino con pies de purpura / o sangre de topacio,” which Fellie translates as “wine with crimson feet / or topaz blood.” This diverts the focus from the link between “purpura” and “topacio,” a reflection of the emphasis on color from the previous two lines, to one of “feet” and “blood,” which fails to convey the full intention of the poem’s original structure.

Given these mostly unavoidable complications, the translator has to compensate for what’s lost in one aspect—whether word, sound, tone, etc.—by bringing forth the strengths of another. Fellie adheres to the line lengths of the Spanish original in her translation, so that at a glance hardly any difference between the two may be noticed. Her preservation of this poem’s striking vertical form demonstrates the kind of success a translator can achieve with diligent attention to a glorious source text.

The Spanish text on the following pages is taken from Neruda’s Odas Elementales, printed by Debolsillo of Barcelona in 2003, and reprinted courtesy of Fundación Pablo Neruda.

“Dry cleaning, Pilates, Kosher restaurant.” Photograph by Mark Steuer.
Oda al vino

Vino color de día,
vino color de noche,
vino con pies de púrpura
o sangre de topacio,
vino,
estrellado hijo
de la tierra,
vino, liso
como una espada de oro,
suave
como un desordenado terciopelo,
vino encaracolado
y suspendido,
amoroso,
marino,
nunca has cabido en una copa,
en un canto, en un hombre,
coral, gregario eres,
y cuando menos, mutuo.
A veces
te nutres de recuerdos
mortales,
en tu ola
vamos de tumba en tumba,
picapedrero de sepulcro helado,
y lloramos
lágrimas transitorias,
pero
tu hermoso
traje de primavera
es diferente,
el corazón sube a las ramas,
el viento mueve el día,
nada queda
dentro de tu alma inmóvil.
Ode to Wine

Wine color of day,
wine color of night,
wine with crimson feet
or topaz blood,
wine,
star-covered child
of the earth,
wine, smooth
as a blade of gold,
soft
as a tousled velvet,
wine swirled
and suspended,
amorous,
oceanic,
you have never fit into a glass,
nor in a song, nor in a man,
you are choral, sociable,
mutual at least.
At times
you feed on mortal
memories,
on your wave
we move from tomb to tomb,
stonecutter of icy sepulchers,
and we weep
evanescent tears,
but
your elegant
spring garments
are different,
the heart rises to the branches,
wind impels the day,
nothing remains
inside your motionless soul.
El vino
mueve la primavera,
crece como una planta la alegría,
caen muros,
peñascos,
se cierran los abismos,
nace el canto.
Oh tú, jarra de vino, en el desierto
con la sabrosa que amo,
dijo el viejo poeta.
Que el cántaro de vino
al beso del amor sume su beso.

Amor mío, de pronto
tu cadera
es la curva colmada
de la copa,
tu pecho es el racimo,
la luz del alcohol tu cabellera,
las uvas tus pezones,
tu ombligo sello puro
estampado en tu vientre de vasija,
y tu amor la cascada
de vino inextinguible,
la claridad que cae en mis sentidos,
el esplendor terrestre de la vida.

Pero no sólo amor,
beso quemante
o corazón quemado
eres, vino de vida,
sino
amistad de los seres, transparencia,
coro de disciplina,
 abundancia de flores.
Amo sobre una mesa,
cuando se habla,
la luz de una botella
de inteligente vino.
Wine
moves springtime,
joy grows like a plant,
walls and cliffs
collapse,
depths are locked tight,
then song is born.
Oh you, jug of wine, in the desert
with my beloved,
said the ancient poet.
Let the pitcher of wine
to love’s kiss add its own.

My love, suddenly
your hip
is the full curve
of the cup,
your breast is the cluster,
the liquor’s radiance your tresses,
the grapes your nipples,
your navel the lone seal
emblazoned on your vessel’s womb,
and your love the inextinguishable
cascade of wine,
a clarity which spills onto my senses,
the earthly splendor of life.

But not only love,
a fiery kiss
or an inflamed heart
are you, wine of life,
but
friendship between souls, transparency,
a chorus of discipline,
a wealth of flowers.
I love it when, over a table,
people are talking,
the light of a bottle
of intelligent wine.
Que lo beban,
que recuerden en cada
gota de oro
o copa de topacio
o cuchara de púrpura
que trabajó el otoño
hasta llenar de vino las vasijas
y aprenda el hombre oscuro,
en el ceremonial de su negocio,
a recordar la tierra y sus deberes,
a propagar el cántico del fruto.

— Pablo Neruda
Let them drink it,
let them remember in each
drop of gold
or glass of topaz
or spoonful of crimson
that the autumn labored
until the vessels were brimful of wine
and let every man learn,
in the rituals of his trade,
to remember the earth and his duty,
to forever sow the hymn of your fruit.

— Maria Fellie
“… and I don’t know who you are.” Photograph by Jane Losaw, Madrid 2005.
Komoyo-Mikomochi: Translating the Opening of the Man’yōshū and the Difficulty of Translating Classical Poetry

by Dygo Tosa

The Man’yōshū, or Ten Thousand Leaves represents the earliest published poetry of Japanese civilization. The collection poetically illustrates the development of a centralized government and culture and colorfully describes a broad spectrum of the Japanese identity. The poems are written by court aristocrats to anonymous lovers, on topics ranging from love and death to socializing. Thus the Man’yōshū contains the sentiments and psychology of an ancient society captured in moments of time, which became a literary foundation for later Japanese writers and poets.

In Donald Keene’s Anthology of Japanese Literature, the Man’yōshū section (and the entire collection) start with the poem attributed to Emperor Yūryaku1. It is reprinted below, with parentheses enumerating the syllables per line. The poem begins:

Your basket, with your pretty basket (3-6)  
Your trowel, with your little trowel, (3-6)  
Maiden, picking herbs on this hillside, (2-7)  
I would ask you: Where is your home? (4-4)  
Will you not tell me your name? (7)

[Keene 33]

Here is the Japanese with the rōma-ji2 reading for critical comparison.

籠もよ み籠もち  
ふくしもよ みふくしもち  
komoyo mikomochi (3-4 or 7)  
fukushimoyo mifukushimochi (5-6)

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1 Emperor Yūryaku, “雄略天皇” (418-479).
2 Rōma-ji (“Roman-letters”) is the set of Japanese characters used to depict Western words phonetically. I have kept some of the archaic readings, with “ihe” for “家” and “uoka” for “岡”.
Much of Japanese classical poetry follows the five- and seven-syllable per-line form characteristic of the waka and tanka, also shortened centuries later in the haiku. Yet here there is clearly a different sort of rhythm. The translator for Keene’s anthology has adapted the first two lines well, although they do not quite replicate the original’s flow. One could imagine “pattycake, pattycake, baker’s man, / bake me a cake as fast as you can” in the first two lines, the Japanese sounds like a nursery rhyme. It is important to observe the rhythm because the poems were probably composed orally and meant to be read aloud. Further, it is characteristic of the Japanese language to rely on rhythm rather than rhyme due to its vocal structure. This can still be seen today in the Japanese New Years’ tradition of playing Hyakunin-Ishhu, where various tanka are read aloud in a memory and matching card game.

Keene cites the prestigious “Japanese Classics Translation Committee under the auspices of the Nippon Gakujutsu Shinkōkai” including the poet Ralph Hodgson as the source for the English translation, and the talent and attention of their work is apparent (Keene 33). For an English comparison, here is I. H. Levy’s translation, from his Japanese-language book on translating the Man’yōshū:

Girl with your basket, (5)
   with your pretty basket, (6)
with your shovel (4)
   with your pretty shovel, (6)
gathering shoots on the hillside here, (9)
I want to ask your home. (6)
Tell me your name! (4)
[Levy 3]

Levy’s work is less archaic, but the rhythm is lost in the initial lines with

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4 They are not just poems but songs, “歌” (uta).
5 Ralph Hodgson, English “Georgian” poet (1871-1962).
the repeated prepositions and the line breaks. As can be seen in both English translations’ syllabic counts, neither attempts to reproduce the original form, but the first adapts the form better. Levy received the National Book Award for Translation in 1982 for his *Ten Thousand Leaves* for undertaking the huge task of translating the *Man’yōshū*, but there are many problems with his translations. On a whole, Levy’s own interpretation has taken a priority over accuracy, which makes it difficult to understand the exact sense of the original. Older translations can be more precise, but often use expressions and constructions alienating to a modern audience.

Of course, the criticism of archaic diction may be anachronistic, as interpretation is one of the primary methods of translation. A dated interpretation like Hodgson’s would, as a result of its historical context, use language specific to the early half of the 20th century. But there are also cases in which archaic diction is not necessarily the source of different language. For example, the word “葉” (*na*) is interpreted by Keene’s edition as “herbs” while Levy uses “shoots.” The modern usage of “葉” has many meanings, whether as specific as “rapeseed” or as general as “vegetables” and “vegetation.” Each translator’s guess on what could be found on the Yamato hillside formed his translation. The *Obunshya Revised Classical Japanese Dictionary* definition is just as vague, and even quotes the *Man’yōshū* poem in question as its first usage: “the generic term for edible vegetation” (*Obunshya* 817). In the end, it does seem to be of too much importance to know what sort of plant the child is putting into her basket, but similar examinations bring about differences in the interpretation of the poem itself.

The translators also interpret another word “児” (*ko*) differently. The classical Japanese dictionary defines it as “any young thing” (Obunshya 433-434). The modern usage is the same: a general term used for a child, boy or girl. There is no gender specified by the word, much like the English word “child,” but a gender and age can be inferred by the actions of the child. The translator may assume that in early Japanese civilization, young girls were the ones who would go to hillsides and pick plants. The use of “maiden” by Keene’s edition may even have the effect to raise the child’s age in the reader’s mind, and make the figure very gender specific.

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6There has been much literary discussion about whether English translations of Japanese poetry, especially *haiku*, should preserve the original syllable count. As with translations of songs, the differences of rhythm and syllable length in the two languages have adverse effects on the translated piece.

7A mustard-like plant.

8Another definition, not applicable in this context, is “a term of endearment between men and women.”
Yet the maiden of the land greeting the traveler is not an exotic image, especially to the Western-educated reader. After all, the scene appears in the popular Odyssey, here with Robert Fitzgerald’s translation:

... As [Odysseus] set foot in the pleasant city, the grey-eyed goddess came to him, in figure a small girl child, hugging a water jug. Confronted by her, Lord Odysseus asked: “Little one, could you take me to the house of that Alkínoös, king among these people?”

[Homer 111-112 (Bk.VII ll.21-26)]

Fitzgerald has no difficulty with gender ambiguity here: the “small girl child” is παρθενίκη (“parthenike”), which is female-specific and translated often as a young girl or maiden, while “little one” is from τεκος (“tekos”), which is non-gender specific and indicates a child of whatever sex, as in Japanese. The shared “ko” sound in the Japanese and Greek surely points to some linguistic coincidence. Of course, in many ways the Man’yōshū is different from the Odyssey, and it would be quite a challenge to interpret the child in the Man’yōshū as incarnate of an Athena-like kami-god, since no such epic context is present. The premise here is rather how early literature between different cultures provides a harmonious comparison. The two works have images in beautiful resonance: a girl out on chores encounters a traveler; she is a young representative of a thriving community. Both poems are trying to show the Yamato people and the Phaiákians as thriving civilizations; yet the chores of gathering plants or retrieving water are actually quite primitive. One could suppose that these poems are therefore rooted in an even deeper tradition, with the imagery originating from a time before agriculture and irrigation. The girl carrying simple tools, such as the basket and trowel or the water jug, signify that she is a part of a larger, developed community able to craft such items for spare use for their children. There are further comparisons.

There is a common misstep with the two English translations in the fourth line of the Man’yōshū poem that has a cross-cultural parallel. The word “家” (ihe) is translated as “home,” but this ignores the unit of the tribe in Japanese society. Prevalent in ancient times and even today, the “家” is not merely a home but the tribe and bloodline of a Japanese person; it is part of someone’s identity. Thus asking for a child’s home is rather asking about the child’s parents and even the rank of his or her family in the society. In
the *Man‘yōshū*, the child’s family is especially important, in a time when different clans around Japan were being absorbed into the common entity of the Yamato nation. The child’s name not only signifies status within his or her family, but also places him or her as a member of the Yamato nation.

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I would like to present my own translation of the opening lines in an attempt to reconcile some of my criticisms constructively. I have presented two variations; in the first I have retained the syllabic structure, while in the other I have slightly adapted the form for better understanding.

A basket, a cute basket (3 - 4)
Holding a shovel, holding a cute shovel (5 - 6)
O child upon this hill, picking the green herbs (5 - 5)
Who are your parents and what is your name? (5 - 5)

You’ve got a basket, such a basket so pretty (5 - 7)
You’ve got a shovel, such a shovel so pretty (5 - 7)
Hey little girl, picking green herbs on the hill (4 - 7)
What is your name and who are the people you call home? (5 - 8)

In the first version I have used simplified language to maintain the meaning of the original, which could work in the syllabic constraint. I have attributed the child no specific gender, and rather than asking *where* the child lives, I thought it better to ask *who* the parents are: points of interpretation that I justified earlier. The second attempts to create a more song-like voice in English, as well as the familiar tone presented in the original. I have tried to reduce the indirectness of Keene’s translation without going as far the exclamation mark of Levy’s. The exclamation mark is a somewhat all-purpose tool that translators resort to when cornered by indirect speech, but there are certainly more elegant expressions. Levy’s prevalent use of it in his other translations is by no means exceptional from a broad range of Japanese literature in translation in English. The English use of exclamations is not very prevalent in the first place, after all. The ability to relate to the reader depends on using language as the reader understands best. Every translation is a balancing act between interpretation and there are certainly things gained and lost by any method. My intentions here have been to compose first a faithful reproduction for English, and then to create an accurate, lit-
erary reading of the poem in English. The study of the Man’yōshū brings out the many parallels between early literature in developing civilizations, and close attention to language brings out details that can carry deeper significance. The translator of classical poems into English must consider each element that constitutes the original poem’s poetry and meaning, interpreting both accurately and in context.

Sources and Supplemental Resources:
The following reminiscence is taken from a talk de Kooning (1904-1997) gave in New York in the 1950’s entitled “What abstract art means to me,” a larger portion of which appears in the biography de Kooning: An American Master by Mark Stevens and Annalyn Swan (New York: Knopf, 2004). Our editorial staff prepared translations into Spanish, French, and Japanese, pairing the multilingual text with paintings that in their varying degrees of abstraction express without coercion. When asked why he chose this particular pensée to accompany the appearance of these paintings in Pusteblume, Gabriel Sosa explained that he was drawn to its humor, quirkiness, and particularly incisive perception: “In this brief anecdote, de Kooning shows that inspiration as well as explanation often resides in those curious, seemingly irrelevant places that most people probably wouldn’t even consider.”
“About twenty-four years ago, I knew a man in Hoboken, a German who used to visit us in the Dutch Seaman’s Home. As far back as he could remember, he was always hungry in Europe. He found a place in Hoboken where bread was sold a few days old—all kinds of bread: French bread, German bread, Italian bread, Dutch bread, Greek bread, American bread and particularly Russian black bread. He bought big stacks of it for very little money, and let it get good and hard and then he crumbled it and spread it on the floor in his flat and walked on it as on a soft carpet. I lost sight of him, but found out many years later that one of the other fellows met him again around 86th street. He had become some kind of a Jugend Bund leader and took boys and girls to Bear Mountain on Sundays. He is still alive but quite old and is now a Communist. I could never figure him out, but now when I think of him, all that I can remember is that he had a very abstract look on his face.”
“Hace como veinte y cuatro años que conocía a un hombre en Hoboken, un alemán que nos visitaba en la casa del marinero holandés. Él recordaba haber pasado siempre mucha hambre en Europa. Encontró un lugar en Hoboken donde vendían pan que ya tenía unos días… todo tipo de pan: pan francés, pan alemán, pan italiano, pan holandés, pan griego, pan americano y particularmente un pan negro de Rusia. Compraba montones de este pan por muy poco dinero, dejaba que se pusiera bien duro, lo desmenuzaba y lo tiraba por el suelo en su apartamento y después caminaba encima como si fuera una alfombra muy suave. Perdí contacto con él, pero me enteré muchos años después que uno de los otros muchachos se había encontrado con él cerca de la calle 86. Se había convertido en un tipo de líder Jugend Bund y llevaba grupos de jóvenes a Bear Mountain los domingos. Todavía está vivo, pero está bastante viejo y ahora es comunista. Nunca podía entenderle, pero ahora cuando pienso en él, la única cosa de que me recuerdo es que tenía una mirada muy abstracta en su cara.”
« Il y a environ vingt-quatre ans, j’ai connu un homme à Hoboken, un Allemand qui avait l’habitude de nous rendre visite Chez le Marin Hollandais. Dès que l’homme a pu se rappeler, il avait toujours faim en Europe. Il a trouvé un endroit à Hoboken où l’on vend du pain vieux de quelques jours—tous les types de pains : le pain français, le pain allemand, le pain italien, le pain hollandais, le pain grecque, le pain américain, et en particulier le pain noir de la Russie. Il ramassait les grandes piles du pain pour peu d’argent, et après que le pain était devenu très dur l’homme l’émitterait et le répandrait sur le plancher de son appartement et marcherait là-dessus comme si c’était un tapis mou. Je l’ai perdu de vue, mais on m’a dit beaucoup d’ans après qu’un de mes amis était réuni avec l’homme près de la rue 86. Il était devenu un type de chef de Jugend Bund et menait les petits-enfants à Bear Mountain le dimanche. Il est vivant encore mais il est tout à fait vieux et devenu communiste. Je ne pourrais jamais rien comprendre à cet homme-là, mais maintenant quand je pense à lui, tout ce que je me souviens est qu’il avait un regard très abstrait sur son visage ». 
「二十四年くらい昔、あるホポーケン市のドイツ人がオランダの船乗りの家に訪れてきた。俺が覚えてる限り、この男はヨーロッパでいつも腹を空かしていた。そしてホポーケンで何日かたったパンを売る店を見つけた。それも様々なパン。フランスパン、ドイツパン、イタリアパン、オランダパン、ギリシャパン、アメリカパン、特にロシアの黒パン。この男はそのパンを何袋も安価で買い、まずパリパリに硬くなってから、粉々にし、床に撒いて柔らかい絨縁のようにその上を歩いた。ある時その男を見失ったが、数年後、仲間の誰かが八十六番道でその男と会った。バンジョゲンか何やらずのリーダーになって、日曜日には少年少女を連れ熊山に登っていたそうだ。今は年を取っていてまだ生きているが、コミュニストだ。俺はあいつが何者か全く解らなかったが、今から考えると、覚えているのは、ただあいつがとても抽象的な顔をしていたことだろう。」
Seferis and Mycenae

The Greek poet Giorgos Seferis (the pen-name of Giorgos Seferiadis) was born in 1900 in Smyrna. Located in a region of frequent conflict, Smyrna has had a tumultuous history, passing back and forth between Western and Anatolian hands on many occasions since antiquity and through the early 20th century. Today the city is home to substantial Greek, Turkish, Jewish, and Levantine populations. Seferis studied law at the University of Paris and enjoyed a long career in diplomacy (1931-1961), which took him to countless nations and brought him face to face with many of the century’s greatest triumphs and tragedies. During WWII he accompanied the Free Greek Government into exile from Nazi-occupied Greece.

His writing draws heavily on his travel experiences in times of war and peace, and emphasizes themes of alienation, wandering, and death. Much of Seferis’ work evinces a struggle to come to terms with conflicting notions of personal, national, and historical identity. He is the author of many volumes of poetry, as well as a book of essays (Dokimes), and translations from the works of American, English, and French poets. In 1963, he received the Nobel Prize in Literature for “his eminent lyrical writing, inspired by a deep feeling for the Hellenic world of culture.” He spent his final years at home in Athens with his wife, reading and collecting seashells. Giorgos Seferis died on September 20th, 1971.

Translator’s Note

The challenges here are many, and so, of course, this translation has changed somewhat over the months since I first wrote it. I am pleased to report, however, that my initial experience was auspicious: Seferis’ Greek melted into English with surprising ease. Perhaps this is because I was already familiar with his inspiration.

Mycenae is an old place. Its Bronze Age inhabitants lived at one, if not the, epicenter of a vast and remarkable civilization that left its archeological footprints—gold jewelry, expertly wrought bronze weapons, massive stone tholos tombs and palaces, colorful frescoes—throughout much of the Greek world. The Mycenaean were the first people to write in Greek, using a part syllabic, part ideogrammatic script borrowed from the Minoans, five hundred years before Homer and nine hundred years before Plato. The mountaintop citadel at Mycenae was believed by the ancients to have been
the home of king Agamemnon (of Trojan War fame) and the Atreid family. Its walls are built of stones so tremendous that supposedly the Cyclopes had a hand in their construction. Visitors enter passing under the famous Lion Gate, whose imposing headstone, with its depiction of exotic fauna, bears witness to the extent of Mycenaean trade and interaction with foreign cultures. One wonders what kings and queens were laid to rest in the long, stone “shaft graves” arrayed beside the main road, and in the high tombs scattered around neighboring hillsides. On the far side of the palace is a deep underground cistern, into which you can still descend with confidence that its sturdy, four thousand year-old rock ceiling will not collapse.

We likely expect no less from the Greeks. After all, they gave us democracy, philosophy, drama, and irony. But those cultural milestones are thousands of years in the past. Seferis, writing only a few decades ago, knew a very different Greece. He saw Greeks and Turks fighting for control of his home city, each side claiming birthright to the land. He saw his country fall to Axis forces in World War II, and he was there when independence and freedom were restored. In reading Seferis, we must ask ourselves, as he did, what it means today to be Greek, to be an individual, and to be a nation. To write poetry in the Greek language is to carry the burden of millennia, but it is a weight that must be balanced with attention to modern life.

In the summer of 2006, two months before chancing upon “Mycenae” in a book of Seferis’ collected poems, I walked through the Lion Gate and stood in the citadel myself. Unlike in the poem, it was midday, bright and blistering hot. Down in the cistern, though, the air was cool and heavy, and it was too dark to see your hand in front of your face. In that most ancient of places it is always night. Best, then, let the poet guide you through.

The Greek text on the following pages is taken from Ποιήματα (“Poems”), printed by Icarus of Athens in 1989, reprinted here by permission of the publisher.
ΜΥΚΗΝΕΣ

Δος μου τα χέρια σου, δος μου τα χέρια σου, δος μου τα χέρια σου.

Είδα μέσα στη ψύξτα
tη μυτερή κορυφή του βουνού
eίδα τον κάμπο πέρα πλημμυρισμένο
με το φως ενός αφανέρωτου φεγγαρίου
είδα, γυμνίζοντας το κεφάλι
τις μαύρες πέτρες συσπειρωμένες
και τη ζωή μου τεντωμένη σα χορδή
αρχή και τέλος
η τελευταία στιγμή
tα χέρια μου.

Βουλιάζει ὁ ποιός σηκώνει τις μεγάλες πέτρες
τούτες τις πέτρες τις εσήκωσα όσο βάσταξα
τούτες τις πέτρες τις αγάπησα όσο βάσταξα
τούτες τις πέτρες, τη μοίρα μου.
Πληγωμένος από το δικό μου χώμα
τυραννισμένος από το δικό μου πουκάμισο
καταδικασμένος από τους δικούς μου θεούς,
tούτες τις πέτρες.

Σέρω πως δεν ξέρουν, αλλά εγώ
που ακολούθησα τόσες φόρες
το δρόμο απ' το φονιά στο σκοτωμένο
από το σκοτωμένο στην πληρωμή
κι' από την πληρωμή στον άλλο φόνο,
ψηλαφώντας
την ανεξάντλητη πορφύρα
το βράδυ εκείνο του γυρισμού
που άρχισαν να σφυρίζουν οι Σιδηρές
στο λιγοστό χορτάρι —
eίδα τα φίδια σταυρωτά με τις οχίες
πλεγμένα πάνω στην κακή γενιά
Mycenae

Give me your hands, give me your hands, give me your hands.

I saw in the night
the jagged peak of the mountain.
I saw the plain beyond it flooded
with the light of an invisible moon.
I saw, turning my head,
the black stones huddled ‘round
and my life stretched out like a cord:
beginning and end,
the last moment,
my hands.

Those who lift great stones flounder.
These stones, I lifted as many as I could bear.
These stones, I loved them as much as I could bear:
these stones, my fate.
Wounded by my own soil,
tormented by my own shirt,
condemned by my own gods,
these stones.

I know they don’t know, but I,
who followed so many times
the road from murderer to murdered,
from murdered to reprisal,
and from reprisal to the next murder,
groping
the inexhaustible purple,
that evening of return
when the Furies began to shriek
on the spare grass —
I saw the serpents crisscross with the vipers
woven over the evil generation,
τη μόρα μας.
Φωνέσ από την πέτρα από τον ύπνο
βαθύτερες εδώ που ο κόσμος σκοτεινίζει,
μνήμη του μόχθου ριζωμένη στο ρυθμό
που χτύπησε τη γη με πόδια
λησμονημένα.
Σώματα βυθισμένα στα θεμέλια
tου άλλου καιρού, γυμνά. Μάτια
προσηλωμένα προσηλωμένα, σ’ ένα σημάδι
που όσο κι αν θέλεις δεν το ξεχωρίζεις
η ψυχή
που μάχεται για να γίνει ψυχή σου

Μήτε κι η σιωπή είναι πια δική σου
εδώ που σταματήσαν οι μυλόπετρες.

(Οκτώβρης 1935)

— Γιώργος Σεφέρης
our fate.
Voices from stone, from sleep,
deeper here where the world darkens,
memory of the toil rooted in the rhythm
beaten on the earth by feet
forgotten;
bodies sunk into the foundations
of the other Time, naked. Eyes
riveted, riveted, on a mark
that, much as you want to, you can't pick out:
the soul
that strives to become your soul.

Now not even the silence is yours,
here where the millstones have stopped.

(October 1935)

— Doug Herman
Conveying the Unspoken

The familiar end rhymes of regular English verse occur in the last syllable of the last word, but the end rhyme of French poetry often leaves a tail of unpronounced consonants and vowels dangling from the end of the line. Just because these letters are silent, however, does not mean they are superfluous; in French poetry, the spoken and the unspoken elements of words together constitute the rhyme, which results in an intriguing disparity between poetry as it is written and poetry as it is read.

In English, the criterion for distinguishing between the two types of rhymes is the placement of the stressed syllable—a spoken trait. In French, however, feminine rhymes employ words ending in a silent “e” or “es.” The effect of this feminine rhyme is similar to that of the English one, since the emphasized sound is pushed back from the end of the word itself. The difference, though, is that in French the sound is removed from the end not by another syllable but by a placeholder of silent letters. As a result, masculine and feminine rhymes are visually, not vocally, distinguishable in French.

The degree of a French rhyme is determined by a word’s pronounced sounds, but also by the letters that go unpronounced. For instance, even though “moment” and “lourdement” only have one vowel sound in common, which would seem to classify the rhyme as a rime pauvre, or “poor rhyme,” because they have the two silent consonants “n” and “t” in common, the rhyme is actually considered a “sufficient rhyme,” or a rime suffisante.

This capacity to reinforce rhymes by aligning their unpronounced letters, the flexibility to either tuck in or leave exposed the vocalized portions of words, is not as available to the English-language poet. Therefore, although the rhyme scheme of a French poem may be reproduced in English by matching the end rhyme, this fails to convey the fully integrated texture of the original rhyme structure.

In Mulrooney’s translation of “Le Souper des Armures,” many rhymes are centered within the end words of the lines, e.g. “rock” and “demolished,” or are paired in a hard, masculine manner, e.g. “past” and “last.” By placing rhyme in the middle of words, emphasis is diverted away from the final syllable, thus reproducing the textual/verbal tension created in French by partially-silent line endings.

Another difficulty arises in searching for an English counterpart to the traditional French octosyllabic line. A four-foot line sounds hurried or bouncy to the English-speaker’s ear, though a French reader doesn’t hear this
'lightness’—it’s a standard form, and emotionally neutral. A comfortable compromise is to add an extra foot and write in pentameter—as normal sounding in English as the octosyllabic line is in French. The translator thereby avoids introducing a tone not present in the original (... but an extra foot is an extra foot, and distorts the visual form of the poem; everything comes at a cost). Consider the line “Le coq chante, les spectres fuient,” in which the monosyllable “chante” can be given an additional stress—”chan-tuh”—by enunciating the usually silent ending. The reader obligingly does this when the line would otherwise come short of the required eight syllables. But such flexibility is scarce in English, though from time to time the reader reads “every” as “ev-uh-ry” or encounters the accent grave, “è”. Mulrooney emphasizes similarities of meter and line length within individual stanzas, rather than enforcing a single strict method throughout, leaving room to shift diction as needed. As always in translation, the translator must balance integrity—fidelity to the technical aspects of the original poem—with the practical effects of each decision in the new language.

About the Author

French poet, painter, novelist, journalist, and playwright Théophile Gautier (1811-1872) defended new standards for literary content and criticism in the nineteenth century by demanding that classical criteria be subordinated to the pursuit of l’art pour l’art. The primary principle of his art criticism—that paintings may be replicated and rendered immediate through description—is also embodied in his fictional works, wherein the fantastic mingles with the somatic, imbuing surreal elements with a meaty directness.

The public domain French text on the following pages is taken from Émaux et Camées (“Enamels and Cameos”), printed by G. Charpentier of Paris in 1888.
Le Souper des Armures

Biorn, étrange cénobite,
Sur le plateau d’un roc pelé,
Hors du temps et du monde, habite
La tour d’un burg démantelé.

De sa porte l’esprit moderne
En vain soulève le marteau.
Biorn verrouille sa poterne
Et barricade son château.

Quand tous ont les yeux vers l’aurore
Biorn, sur son donjon perché,
A l’horizon contemple encore
La place du soleil couché.

Ame rétrospective, il loge
Dans son burg et dans le passé ;
Le pendule de son horloge
Depuis des siècles est cassé.

Sous ses ogives féodales
Il erre, éveillant les échos,
Et ses pas, sonnant sur les dalles,
Semblent suivis de pas égaux.

Il ne voit ni laïcs, ni prêtres,
Ni gentilshommes, ni bourgeois,
Mais les portraits de ses ancêtres
Causent avec lui quelquefois.

Et certains soirs, pour se distraire,
Trouvant manger seul ennuyeux,
Biorn, caprice funéraire,
Invite à souper ses aïeux.
The Supper of Armor

Bjorn, a strange coenobite,
On the plateau of a bare rock,
Inhabits, out of the world and time,
The tower of a fortress demolished.

At his door the modern spirit
In vain lifts up the weighty knocker.
Bjorn bolts his postern shut
And his castle keeps tight-locked.

When every eye is toward the dawn
Bjorn, perched upon his dungeon,
Gazes still the horizon upon
At the place of the setting sun.

Retrospective soul, he lodges
In his fortress in the past,
The pendulum of his grandfather clock
Some centuries ago worked last.

Underneath his ogives feudal
He wanders, waking up the echoes,
And his steps, the flagstones moot all,
Seem to be followed by even steps.

He sees no laymen nor any preisters,
Nor gentlemen, nor men of town,
But the portraits of his ancestors
Talk with him again and now.

And certain nights, to lend him spice,
Finding dinner alone a bore there,
Bjorn, a funerary caprice,
Asks to supper all his forebears.
Les fantômes, quand minuit sonne,
Viennent armés de pied en cap ;
Biorn, qui malgré lui frissonne,
Salue en haussant son hanap.

Pour s’asseoir, chaque panoplie
Fair un angle avec son genou,
 Dont l’articulation plie
En grinçant comme un vieux verrou ;

Et tout d’une pièce, l’armure,
D’un corps absent gauche cercueil,
Tendant un creux et sourd murmure,
Tombe entre les bras du fauteuil.

Landgraves, rhingraves, burgraves,
Venus du ciel ou de l’enfer,
Ils sont tous là, muets et graves,
Les roides convives de fer !

Dans l’ombre, un rayon fauve indique
Un monstre, guivre, aigle à deux cous,
Pris au bestiaire héraldique
Sur les cimiers faussés de coups.

Du mufle des bêtes difformes
Dressant leurs ongles arrogants,
Partent des panaches énormes,
Des lambrequins extravagants ;

Mais les casques ouverts sont vides
Comme les timbres du blason ;
Seulement deux flammes livides
Y luisent d’étrange façon.

Toute la ferraille est assise
Dans la salle du vieux manoir,
Et, sur le mur, l’ombre indécise
Donne à chaque hôte un page noir.
The phantoms, when tolls the midnight bell,
Arrive in armor pie-a-cap,
Bjorn, who shivers in spite of himself,
Salutes by lifting high his hanap.

To seat itself, each panoply
With its kneejoint makes an angle,
Whose articulation yields
Grating like an old doorbolt.

And all of a piece, the suit of armor,
Gauche casket of a body not there,
Making a dull and hollow murmur,
Falls twixt the arms of an easy chair.

Landgraves, rhinegraves, also burgraves,
Come from heaven or from hell,
They are all there, silent and grave,
Stiff convives of hardened steel!

In the dark, a wild beam plays
On a monster, wyvern, two-necked eagle,
From the heraldic bestiary
Upon their crests by many blows mangled.

From the snout of beasts deformed
Raising up their nails arrogant,
Spring forth varied plumes enormous,
Lambrequins extravagant,

But the open helmets are void
As the timbre on coats of arms;
Only two flames that are livid
Gleam within like strange alarms.

Every bit of scrap iron sits
In the hall of the old manor,
And, on the wall, a shadow flits
Giving each guest a page of honor.
Les liqueurs aux feux des bougies
Ont des pourpres d’un ton suspect ;
Les mets dans leurs sauces rougies
Prennent un singulier aspect.

Parfois un corselet miroite,
Un morion brille un moment ;
Une pièce qui se déboîte
Choit sur la nappe lourdement.

L’on entend les battements d’ailes
D’invisibles chauves-souris,
Et les drapeaux des infidèles
Palpitent le long du lambris.

Avec des mouvements fantasques
Courbant leurs phalanges d’airain,
Les gantelets versent aux casques
Des rasades de vin du Rhin,

Ou découpent au fil des dagues
Des sangliers sur des plats d’or…
Cependant passent des bruits vagues
Par les orgues du corridor.

D’une voix encore enrouée
Par l’humidity du caveau,
Max fredonne, ivresse enjouée,
Un lied, en treize cents, nouveau.

Albrecht, ayant le vin féroce,
Se querelle avec ses voisins,
Qu’il martèle, bossue et rosse,
Comme il faisait des Sarrasins.

Échauffé, Fritz ôte son casque,
Jadis par un crâne habité,
Ne pensant pas que sans son masque
Il semble un tronc décapité.
The liquors in the fire of candles
Are purplish with a tint that’s suspect,
Each course within its red sauce spangled
Takes on a singularmost aspect.

Now and again a corslet sparkles,
A morion shines for just a moment,
A piece that’s come unhinged quite tumbles
Down upon the tablecloth groaning.

One listens to the beating wings
Of bats that are invisible,
And along the wainscoting
Flags of infidel nations tremble.

With the most fantastical movements
Curling their phalanges of bronze
Gauntlets pour into the helmets
Glassfuls of the Rhineland’s wines,

Or with a dagger’s edge, they cut
On golden plates a wild boar…
While vague noises pass from out
The organs of the corridor.

With a voice that still is hoarse
From the dampness of the tomb,
Max hums, playful drunkenness,
A lied, in thirteen hundred, new.

Albrecht, having wine that’s fierce,
Quarrels with his quondam cousins,
Whom he pounds on, humped and beastly,
As he did the Saracens.

Overheated, Fritz unhelms,
Where no skull was ever sunk,
Never thinking his unmasked self
Looks just like a headless trunk.
Bientôt ils roulent pêle-mêle
Sous la table, parmi les brocs,
Tête en bas, montrant la semelle
De leurs souliers courbés en crocs.

C’est un hideux champ de bataille
Où les pots heurtent les armets,
Où chaque mort par quelque entaille,
Au lieu de sang vomit des mets.

Et Biorn, le poing sur la cuisse,
Les contemple, morne et hagard,
Tandis que, par le vitrail suisse
L’aube jette son bleu regard.

La troupe, qu’un rayon traverse,
Pâlit comme au jour un flambeau,
Et le plus ivrogne se verse
Le coup d’étrier du tombeau.

Le coq chante, les spectres fuient
Et, reprenant un air hautain,
Sur l’oreiller de marbre appuient
Leurs têtes lourdes du festin !

— Théophile Gautier
Quickly now they roll pell-mell
Beneath the table, among the crocks,
Head below, showing the sole
Of their shoes curvate with hooks.

It’s a hideous battlefield
Where an armet hits a pot,
Where the dead by each cut yield
No blood but each course in a vomit.

And Bjorn, his fist upon his thigh,
Contemplates them, drawn and haggard,
Whileas, through the Swiss stained glass,
Sunup casts its blue regard.

The troupe, whom a sunbeam crosses,
Grows pale like a torch at noon,
And the drunkenmost back tosses
The stirrup cup before the tomb.

The cock crows, the specters fly
And with a lofty air replete,
On the marble pillow lay
Their heads still aching from the feast!

— Christopher Mulrooney
Translator’s Notes

I feel that translators inevitably take on the role of behind-the-scenes editors: there is a tendency for the translator to want to clarify that which is ambiguous in an original. Fenoglio loves the ambiguous, the verging-on-clear, the merely suggestive. His text is delicate terrain—one must tread carefully. The question is, How to handle the ambiguities? Obviously a translator should not introduce ambiguity into his or her translation where there was none in the original text. If the original is comprehensible, the translation must be comprehensible. And if for a moment the original is ambiguous, even incomprehensible? Then the translation must bravely reflect this.

And yet, temptations to stray from the original—“to clean it up” or “smooth it out”—abound. When young Fenoglio’s step-uncle rubs his jaw “as though he were messing around in iron filings,” as a translator I felt the urge to make this description clearer somehow, to add “stubbly” before jaw, perhaps, though I knew this type of “clarification” would be far too heavy-handed—there is no such modifier in the Italian. As Nabokov argues, one doesn’t want to substitute “easy platitudes for the breathtaking intricacies of the text.” And what was Nabokov’s solution to the problem of ambiguity? “I want translations with copious footnotes,” he declared, “footnotes reaching up like skyscrapers to the top of this or that page so as to leave only the gleam of one textual line between commentary and eternity.”* Though of towering footnotes I cannot approve—as each footnote inevitably heightens the readers’ awareness that what they are reading is not the original—there were rare occasions on which I felt I had to give in to the translator-as-editor’s urge to annotate. Namely, those moments in the original text which, strange or particular to the culture or locality of the original, though not necessarily idiomatic, would be understood by the average Italian reader, and yet for which a literal rendering would prove all but incomprehensible to the English reader. In this piece I found two such instances: that of the police officials with lasagna on their caps, and that of the “Constitution festival.” In the first instance the use of “lasagne,” unusual though not incomprehensible in the Italian, is almost certainly a derisive

* Quoted from his 1955 essay “Problems of Translation: Onegin in English.” Nabokov did indeed prefer to keep “platitudes” outside the text of his translation—his literal rendering of Pushkin’s Eugene Onegin is about 245 pages long; his commentary on this translation is over three times that.
reference to the decorations adorning the caps of the “important” officials; in the second instance, a reference of this sort to the “Constitution” would have been, to a reader of the original in Italian, clearly a reference to Charles Albert’s Constitution of 1848.

The reader will notice that my translation is a bit longer than the original. While some of the discrepancy in length is due to the fact that the Italian language is more inflected than the English language, much of it is due to the nature of Fenoglio’s Italian, which is dense and idiosyncratic. In translating Fenoglio I often had to “unpack” his sentences into English sentences, and this process inevitably added to the length of my translation.

If much is lost in translation much, too, is found. The world of “Un giorno di fuoco,” the world of Fenoglio’s childhood summertimes, is a vivid one—the language is rich, the descriptions filled with localisms, the imagery surprising yet never overbearing. It is a world in which readers will find the sky thundering like a shaken bed sheet, a severe aunt who speaks in gusts of icy words, and a matriarchal bus that shakes her haunches as she passes by.

About the Author

Beppe Fenoglio was born in Alba, in Northern Italy, in 1922. Many of his most celebrated works, including Il partigiano Johnny (Johnny the Partisan), were not published until after his death from lung cancer in 1963. He is considered one of Italy’s major postwar writers. 

The Italian text on the following pages is taken from the collection Un giorno di fuoco, printed by Einaudi of Torino in 2000, reprinted here by permission of the publisher.

“Mi vida la dejé entre Ceuta y Gibraltar” (lyric by Manu Chao). Graphic modified from a photograph, by Jane Losaw, 2005, of stenciled graffiti spraypainted on an exterior wall.
Un giorno di fuoco
Scritto da Beppe Fenoglio

Alla fine di giugno Pietro Gallesio diede la parola alla doppietta. Ammazzò suo fratello in cucina, freddò sull’aia il nipote accorso allo sparò, la cognata era sulla sua lista ma gli apparí dietro una grata con la bambina ultima sulle braccia e allora lui non le sparò ma si scaraventò giú alla canonica di Gorzegno. Il parroco stava appunto tornando da visitare un moribondo di là di Bormida e Gallesio lo fulminò per strada, con una palla nella tempia. Fu il piú grande fatto prima della guerra d’Abissinia.

L’indomani della strage di Pietro Gallesio era per me un normale giorno di vacanza a San Benedetto, separato da una sola collina dal paese dove Gallesio era nato e vissuto ed aveva ammazzato. Il fatto l’avevo saputo verso le dieci della sera, già nella mia stanza sottotetto, con l’orecchio applicato a una fessura dell’impiantito, proprio sopra la cucina dove mia zia, mio ziaastro ed i vicini dell’ufficio postale stavano parlando, con voci ora soffocate ora tonanti. A sentir loro, la notte non si sarebbe potuto dormire, per il lungo fracasso dei camion dei carabinieri che convergevano su Gorzegno da Alba e da Ceva; in giro si sapeva che il brigadiere di Cravanzana aveva telefonato al superiore comando che per Gallesio ci volevano non meno di cento uomini.

Io invece dormii come ogni altra notte e mi svegliai piú tardi del consueto, e come uscii nel sole mi sorprese veder mio ziaastro seduto sul tronco a ciccar tabacco. Gli domandai subito come mai e lui mi rispose che la zia l’aveva obbligato a fermarsi a cassa, per paura che Gallesio latitante battesse i boschi del Gerbazzo e lui alzando a caso la schiena se lo vedesse davanti col fucile spianato.—Pensare,—disse,—che di Gallesio io non ho la piú piccola paura.

Io l’ammirai.—Ti sentiresti di far lotta con Gallesio?
—Non farei la lotta con Gallesio. Voglio dire che son sicuro che a me e a tutti i cristiani come me Gallesio non farebbe un’oncia di male.
—Tu lo conoscevi questo Gallesio?
—L’ho visto una volta alla fiera di Cravanzana.

Gli guardai gli occhi, gli occhi che una volta s’erano riempiti della figura di Gallesio, ma subito dovemmo tutt’e due scattar la testa in alto, che il cielo sopra Gorzegno aveva preso a sbattere come un lenzuolo teso sotto raffiche di vento.
—I carabinieri,—disse mio ziaastro, alzandosi.—I carabinieri attaccano a
A Day of Fire
Translated by Louisa Mandarino

At the end of June, Pietro Gallesio let his double-barrel shotgun do the talking. He killed his brother in the kitchen; his nephew rushed in after the shot and Pietro blew him away on the threshing-floor; his brother’s wife was on his list, but he saw her behind a window grate with the youngest child in her arms and so he didn’t shoot her but instead hurled himself down to the rectory of Gorzegno. The priest was just returning from a visit to a dying man near the Bormida and Gallesio struck him down in the street, with a bullet like a lightning bolt to the temple. It was the biggest piece of news before the Abyssinian War.

For me, the day after Pietro Gallesio’s massacre was a vacation day like any other in San Benedetto, just one hill over from the town where Gallesio was born and had lived and killed. I found out what had happened at about ten in the evening, already up in my attic room, with my ear glued to a crack in the floor just above the kitchen where my aunt, my step-uncle, and their neighbors from the post office were talking, their voices hushed one moment and thundering the next. From what they were saying, no one would be able to sleep that night because of the endless noise made by the police trucks converging on Gorzegno from Alba and Ceva; rumor had it that the police sergeant from Cravanzana had called up his superiors to say that it would take at least a hundred men to catch Gallesio.

I, however, slept as if it were any other night and woke up later than usual, and as I went out into the sun, I was surprised to see my step-uncle sitting on a tree stump near our wall, already chewing tobacco. Right off the bat I asked him why he was sitting there, and he told me that my aunt had forced him to stay home, for fear that the fugitive Gallesio was beating a path through the woods of Gerbazzo, and that he, chancing to straighten up from his work, might very well see Gallesio in front of him with a leveled gun. “And just think,” he said, “I’m not the least bit afraid of Gallesio.”

I admired him. “Would you fight Gallesio?”

“No, I wouldn’t fight him. I mean, I’m sure Gallesio wouldn’t do me, or any Christian like me, a bit of wrong.”

“You knew him?”

“I saw him once at the Cravanzana fair.”

I looked him in the eyes, eyes that at one time had been filled with the image of Gallesio, but suddenly both our heads sprung up: the sky above
sparare. L’hanno scovato. Chissà dove, chissà in che posto della Bormida—
. Era tutto dritto, atletico e sgangherato insieme, e non batteva piú ciglio, e
il tabacco gli tingeva gli angoli della bocca.

Da dietro la chiesa sbucò la 501 di Placido e scivolò per qualche metro
in folle. Tre, quattro, cinque uomini del paese ci si ficcaron dentro d’assalto, 
mentre Placido bestemmiava che facessero con garbo e non gli sfasciassero
la macchina, già che per quella specialissima corsa a Gorzegno praticava
una tariffa che gli salvava sí e no la benzina.

La macchina si avviò sempre in folle e frenò proprio davanti a noi. 
Placido sporse fuori la testa e disse:—Fresia, ci state ancora. Andiamo a
Gorzegno a vederci la battaglia di Gallesio coi carabinieri. Con due lire vi
porto e vi riporto.

Dalla voglia mio zia stava ballonzolando tutto, ma subito ci soffiò dentro la
voce ghiacciata di mia zia.—Fresia non ci viene,—disse a Placido,—Fresia
non le spende due lire per andare a Gorzegno a vedere un fico di niente e
magari ricevere nella testa la prima palla spersa.

Disse uno della spedizione:—Ma ci ripariamo dietro gli alberi. 
Lasciatelo venire il vostro uomo, lui ha fatto la guerra e potrà darci tante
spiegazioni.

E un altro:—Sapete, Fresia, chi comanda l’azione? Il capitano di Alba in
persona. Se non ci sono cento carabinieri non ce n’è uno.
—Cosa dici cento? Saranno duecento. Ci sono anche tutti i carabinieri
di Millesimo.

Ma mia zia disse con la sua voce uguale:—Partite, Placido, non state a
perder tempo, perché il mio uomo da San Benedetto non si muove.

Placido, che conosceva mia zia, ingranò la marcia. Mio zia staccò le
mani dalla capotta e domandò forte:—Ma dove l’hanno scovata Gallesio?
Batteva i boschi?

—Macché!—fecero in tempo a rispondergli da dentro.—Era tornato a
casa sua. Si è chiuso nel fiore e si difende. Ha cento cartucce, è stato il bar-
barossa di Feisoglio a vendergli la polvere e le palle.

La macchina partí. Mio zia si voltò verso mia zia e le disse:—
Bagascia!—con tanta intensità che con la parola gli uscì uno schizzo di saliva
tabaccosa. Ma lei non si riscaldò, gli rispose con quella sua calma:—E già, io
per risparmiar due lire di corriera me la faccio a piedi fino ad Alba e tu eri
pronto a buttarle via per andarti a vedere il teatro di Gallesio.

Rientrò in casa e subito ne rispuntò, con la colazione per me: due tagli
di pane ovali e pallidi come pesci, con delle lische di marmellata. Anche a
lui diede da mangiare, una pagnotta grande come un cappello e un culetti-
Gorzegno had begun to thunder like a bedsheets stretched tight and beaten by gusts of wind.

“The police,” my step-uncle said, getting up. “They’re starting to shoot. They’ve driven him out of hiding. Who knows where, who knows at what spot along the Bormida.” He was upright and unblinking, athletic yet uncoordinated, tobacco staining the corners of his mouth.

Placido’s Fiat 501 shot out from behind the church and slid a few meters in neutral. Three, four, five men from town stormed up and pushed their way into the car, while Placido swore that they’d better behave and not damage it, because for that very special trip to Gorzegno he was charging a fare that would barely cover his gas.

The car set off again, still in neutral, and came to a halt right in front of us. Placido leaned his head out and said: “Fresia, you can still fit. Let’s go to Gorzegno to see Gallesio’s battle with the police. Two lire’ll get you there and back.”

My step-uncle bounced eagerly from one foot to the other, but suddenly we heard my aunt’s voice blowing like an icy wind from inside: “Fresia’s not going,” she said to Placido. “Fresia won’t spend two lire to go to Gorzegno to see a bit of nothing and probably get the first stray bullet to the head.”

One of the passengers said: “But we’ll hide behind the trees. Let your man come—he fought in the war and can give us all sorts of advice.”

Another added: “You know who’s running the show, Fresia? The Captain from Alba himself. If there aren’t a hundred policemen there there’s not a one.”

“Who said a hundred? There will be two hundred! And all the policemen of Millesimo!”

But my aunt, in her even voice, said: “Get out of here, Placido; don’t stay and waste your time, because my man isn’t budging from San Benedetto.”

Placido, who knew my aunt, threw the car into gear. My step-uncle took his hands off its roof and demanded: “But where’d they find Gallesio? Was he roaming the woods?”

“Hell no!” they had just enough time to respond from inside. “He’d already gone home. He’s holed himself up in his hayloft and is defending himself. He’s got a hundred rounds of ammunition—that man with the red beard from Feisoglio sold him the gunpowder and bullets.”

The car left. My step-uncle turned to my aunt and spit the word “Slut!” at her with such intensity that a spray of tobacco-tinted saliva shot out of his
no di salame che egli appoggiò contro il suo enorme pollice orribilmente tagliuzzato. Gli disse:—Dopo mi spacchi la legna e mi tiri l’acqua,—e si ritirò.

Mangiavamo insieme parandoci a vicenda le mosche, mio ziaastro rumoreggiava quanto un bue ed io ci pativo, perché allora ero delicatino, tuttavia quella mattina mio ziaastro mi piaceva ed io parteggiavo decisamente per lui. Avevo ancora tutto intero lo scudo d’argento che mia madre mi aveva dato alla partenza; gli avrei fornito volentieri quelle due lire, lui mi
mouth. But she didn’t get angry, and responded to him in her calm way: “And as it is, to save the two lire it costs to take the bus, I’ve been going on foot all the way to Alba—and you were ready to throw money away to go see Gallesio’s little show.”

She went back into the house and reappeared soon after with breakfast for me: two slices of bread, oval-shaped and pale like fish, with thin fish-bones of marmalade. She gave him something to eat, too: a round loaf of bread as big as a hat and a butt-end of salami that he rested against his thumb, which was enormous and badly scarred. She said, “Later you can cut me some wood and fetch some water,” and went inside.

While we ate together, fighting off the circling flies, my step-uncle rumbled as much as an ox and I endured it, because I was young and delicate back then, and besides, that morning I liked my step-uncle and was definitely on his side. I still had the silver coin my mother had given me when I left; I would’ve happily given him those two lire—he would’ve repaid me with stories from Gorzegno—but at the time I didn’t know how to go about offering them to him. Even though every now and then a swear that sounded like the one he’d spit at my aunt earlier came out of his food-filled mouth, by that point he seemed pretty much resigned.

That flip-flap sound in the sky could still be heard, and after a little while my step-uncle said: “Look how he defends himself, look how he holds his own. Gallesio was a great hunter.” He straightened up, because he’d noticed in the clearings of Gerbazzo squadrons of men passing by at full speed, as though they had Germans on their asses; no doubt they were all hurrying off to see the fight in Gorzegno. He flung his arms down with such abandon that his bread flew from his hand to the ground.

As we finished up eating, the shooting down in Gorzegno stopped and my step-uncle said: “It must be over already. Gallesio was outnumbered. That’s why I didn’t go with Placido. It could’ve been over before we were halfway down the road.”

Scolastica, the mailwoman, was coming our way, announced as always by the smell of urine that wafted out from the large skirt she never changed. She came up to us and said: “Fresia—you fought in the Great War. Were those gunshots?”

The reflection of the sun in her finger-thick glasses was frightening. “Yes, Scolastica, they were shots fired by Gallesio and the police.”

Suddenly the sound of gunshots returned, lashing the sky. “Oh!” cried the old woman. “Will it go on much longer?”

“I hope so,” he grumbled.
avrebbe poi ripagato col racconto dei fatti di Gorzegno, ma non avevo saputo come fare ad offrirglielie. Del resto sembrava ormai rassegnato, anche se ogni tanto spingeva fuori del boccone un suono che somigliava alla solita parolaccia per la zia.

Si sentiva sempre quel flip-flap nel cielo, e dopo un po’ mio ziaastro disse:—Guarda come si difende, come tiene testa. Gran cacciatore che è stato Gallesio—. E poi si rizzò, perché aveva scorto, sulle radure del Gerbazzo, passare uomini a squadre, e tutti con un gran passo come se avessero gli alemanni al culo, e non c’era dubbio che si affrettavano tutti a vedersi la battaglia di Gorzegno. Lui abbassò le braccia con tanto abbandono che il pane gli scappò di mano in terra.

Come noi si finì di mangiare, laggiù a Gorzegno cessarono di sparare e mio ziaastro disse:—Dev’esser già finita. Gallesio era troppo solo. È per questo che non sono andato con Placido. Poteva finire prima che noi fossimo a metà strada.

Veniva verso di noi Scolastica, l’ufficialessa postale; l’annunziava l’odore di orina che sempre si spandeva dalla gran sottana che non cambiava mai. Venne e disse:—Voi Fresia che avete fatto la grande guerra, quelli erano ben spari?

Il sole dalle sue lenti spesse un dito traeva riflessi paurosi.
—Sí, Scolastica, erano gli spari di Gallesio e dei carabinieri.

In quell’attimo le schioppettate tornarono a staffilare il cielo.
—Oh!—si lamentò la vecchia.—Ma la dureranno ancora tanto?
—Spero di sí,—bofonchiò lui.

Ci scoppì dietro la voce di mia zia.—Ma, o disgraziato, o delinquente anche tu tieni per Gallesio?

Il sole dalle sue lenti spesse un dito traeva riflessi paurosi.
—O bagascia frustra, tengo per chi mi pare.

S’intromise Scolastica.—Ma ha ammazzato mezzi i suoi,—disse,—e soprattutto ha ammazzato quel buon parroco.

Gridò mio ziaastro:—Di lui mi rincresce molto meno che di tutti gli altri. Questi porci di preti, sempre lì a dirti: « Guarda dietro l’angolo che c’è il babu », e tu gli dai retta e ti sporgi a guardare e loro dietro ne approfittano per rubarti la roba e la donna.

—Sporcaccione!—urlò mia zia.—Non ti permetto di parlar cosí dei preti. Ricordati che tua moglie è la madre di un ragazzo che studia de prete.

Scolastica era già scappata, come un’elefantessa, e mio ziaastro le disse dietro:—Si capisce che scappa, lei che era l’amica del parroco vecchio.

Mia zia quasi gli ficcò le dita negli occhi.—Non dare scandalo al bambino! Vammi a spaccar la legna e spaccamene per un po’ di giorni, già che
My aunt’s voice erupted from behind us: “Why, you wretch, you delinquent, you’re pulling for Gallesio too?”
“You worn out old slut, I’ll pull for whoever I like!”
Scolastica jumped in. “But he killed half his family,” she said, “and worst of all, he killed that nice priest.”
“I’m less sorry about him than about the rest of them,” my step-uncle shouted back. “These damned priests, always there telling you, ‘Look around the corner, the bogey-man is waiting,’ and you believe them and you lean to look and meanwhile behind your back they rob you of your things and take your woman.”
“You filthy man!” my aunt yelled. “I won’t let you talk that way about priests. Don’t forget your wife is the mother of a boy who’s studying to be a priest.”
Scolastica had already run off, lumbering like an elephant, and my step-uncle said after her: “We know why she runs away; she was friends with the old priest.”
My aunt nearly poked his eyes out. “How dare you say such things in front of the boy! Go chop me some wood and make it enough for a few days—because of all this fuss over your Gallesio I can’t even send you out to work in the fields.”
He set out, spitting on his hands, and as I was about to follow him she said sharply, “I’d think twice about going after him, or at the end of the summer I’ll be returning you to Alba with your soul ruined for good, and your mother will come here and tear out every hair on my head one by one. Go find Marcelle.”
Marcelle was the daughter of Louisette, a woman from San Benedetto who’d had the rare distinction of getting married in Monte Carlo. This was the first summer Marcelle was spending in her mother’s village, and she’d quickly become the pretty little pest, always wearing a dress so short that below its hem a half a hand’s width of her underwear showed; the priest had made this observation to her mother, but ever since she’d lived in Monte Carlo Madame Louisette paid no mind to priests. Marcelle was too lively for me, and I constantly had to put up with her and listen to her saying “S----” or worse every five minutes. Imagine me wanting to waste that extraordinary morning by spending it with her! Nevertheless, I went to find Marcelle, because my aunt was not an easy woman to cross, but luckily Madame Louisette told me from the window that la petite wasn’t home, that she’d gone with her father to Bossolasco in the Peugeot, that car that always made me laugh because of its pointy radiator.
per colpa di quell’assassino del tuo Gallesio oggi non ti posso mandare ai campi.

Lui s’incamminò, già sputandosi sulle mani, e poiché io mi disponevo a seguirlo lei mi disse secchissima:—Tu guai se gli vai dietro, o alla fine dell’estate mi torni ad Alba rovinato nell’anima per sempre e tua madre viene su e mi strappa uno per uno tutti i capelli che ho in testa. Va’ a trovare Marcelle.

Era la bimba della signora Louisette, una donna di San Benedetto che aveva avuto la rara occasione di sposarsi a Montecarlo: questa era la prima estate che Marcelle passava al paese di sua madre, e ne era subito diventata la graziosa peste, sempre con una vestina così corta che le mutandine le passavano sotto di mezzo palmo, finché il parroco aveva fatto osservazione a sua madre, ma da quando viveva a Montecarlo la signora Louisette non dava più nessun ascolto ai preti. Marcelle era troppo esuberante per me, dovevo continuamente subirla e mi diceva M... e macaroní ogni cinque minuti. Figurarsi la mia voglia di sprecar con lei quella mattinata straordinaria. Andai comunque a cercar di Marcelle, perché mia zia non la si poteva contraddire in niente, ma per fortuna la signora Louisette mi avvisò dalla finestra che la petite non c’era, andata via con suo padre, a Bossolasco, sulla Peugeot, quella macchina che mi faceva tanto ridere con quel suo radiatore puntuto.

Potei così tornarmene da mio ziastr, che sentivo darci dentro con la scure, e per paura che mia zia mi intercettasse non passai davanti a casa ma l’aggirai per il ciliegeto del vecchio Braida e prendendo per il gioco da bocce arrivai da mio ziastr. Mi sedetti dirimpetto a lui, a una certa distanza per via delle schegge, ma non così lontano che non mi giungesse l’odore pungente del suo sudore. Mi disse:—Per il rumore che faccio non sento bene. A Gorzegno sparano sempre?

—Sempre.
—Che giuraddio è Gallesio,— disse lui fra i denti.
Allora gli domandai perché Gallesio aveva sparato a tutta quella gente.
—Gliel’hanno fatta sporca.
—Come?
—Gli hanno fatto dei torti.
—Anche il parroco?
—Lui piú degli altri.
—Che razza di torti?
—Nell’interesse. Tu sei troppo piccolo, ma i torti nell’interesse sono quelli che ti avvelenano.— Sospese di spaccare, posò un piede sulla toppa e si asciugava la fronte con un fazzoletto color ruggine.—A Gallesio le cose
So I was able to go back to my step-uncle, who, as I could hear, was really having at it with the axe. Afraid that my aunt might intercept me, I didn’t cross in front of the house, but instead went around back through old Braidia’s cherry orchard and along the bocce-ball court until I reached my step-uncle. I sat opposite him, a ways away because of the flying woodchips, but not far enough to escape the pungent odor of his sweat. He said to me: “I’m making too much noise to hear properly. Are they still shooting down in Gorzegno?”

“Yes, still.”

“That’s Gallesio, by God,” he said through his teeth.

I asked him why Gallesio had shot all those people.

“They did bad things to him.”

“How’s that?”

“They did him wrong.”

“Even the priest?”

“The priest worst of all.”

“What kinds of wrongs?”

“They meddled in his business. You’re too young to understand, but that sort of meddling is poisonous.” He stopped chopping, put a foot up on the chopping-block and wiped his forehead with a rust-colored handkerchief.

“Things weren’t going so well for Gallesio; they never went well for him; he was obsessed with hunting, so he couldn’t care for his land the way he should have. And so, in order to cope, he’d borrowed a certain sum from his brother and was paying him interest at a rate not even a Jew would expect. Such a rate, in fact, that Gallesio was always at the tavern saying: “My brother ought to stop making a profit only off of me!” His sister-in-law, an ugly busy-body, knowing full well that Gallesio was in bad shape, would press her husband to get the loan repaid, and if that weren’t possible, to take Gallesio’s field and his small pasture. Gallesio’s only way out was to marry—and marry fast—a woman from Gorzegno who was worth a little something and who fancied him. After they were married, they would sell her things to repay his brother, which would allow Gallesio to keep his land and his peace of mind. The woman’s mind was made up, but at the last minute she thought to ask the priest his opinion: you know the type, one of those unmarried women who ask the priest how much salt they should put in the soup. And what does the priest do? He tells her awful stories about Gallesio, painting an exaggerated picture of those few little mistakes of his in order to scare her, all because he had his own plan: that she wouldn’t marry at all and instead would leave all her goods to the church. She took his words as the
non andavano bene, non gli sono mai andate bene, aveva troppo la malattia della caccia per poter accudire a dovere la sua campagna. E così, per far fronte, s’era fatto prestare una certa cifra da suo fratello e gli pagava un interesse che nemmeno un giudeo pretenderebbe. Tant’è vero che Gallesio diceva all’osteria: « Mio fratello dovrebbe smetterla di combinare buoni affari soltanto con me ». Sua cognata, una grintaccia, ben sapendo che Gallesio non era in condizione, aizza suo marito a farsi restituire il prestito e in mancanza a strappargli il campo e il prato. L’unica salvezza di Gallesio era di sposarsi al galoppo con una donna di Gorzegno che aveva un po’ di roba e per Gallesio une forte inclinazione. Si sposavano, con la roba di lei liquidava suo fratello, liberava la sua compagna e pace. La donna era decisa, ma come ultimo passo pensa di chiedere il parere del parroco: sai, una di quelle donne sole che al prete domandano perfino quanto sale debbono mettere nella minestra. Il parroco cosa fa? Le dà di Gallesio bruttissime informazioni, esagerando al massimo quel poco male che in coscienza si poteva dire di Gallesio, insomma gliene fa un quadro tale da spaventarla, ma tutto perché aveva il suo piano, che la donna restasse da sposare e lasciasse poi i suoi beni alla chiesa. Lei gli ha creduto come vangelo e ha chiuso la porta in faccia a Gallesio. E allora Gallesio ha sparato. A suo fratello, per essersi dimenticato d’esser suo fratello e ricordato soltanto d’essere il marito di una strega. A suo nipote, perché era quello che in definitiva si sarebbe goduta la sua terra. E al parroco, per quelle porcheria, quel tradimento delle informazioni false.

Io allora non capii proprio tutto, ma mi sembrò di poter concludere che in fondo Gallesio non era tanto cattivo.

—Un originale sicuramente, ma non cattivo.

—La zia dice che hanno ragione i giornali a chiamarlo il folle di Gorzegno.

Lui rise secco.—Folle, Gallesio? I giornali la raccontino ai cittadini. Un po’ vivo, ma non folle.

Io, a questo punto, col mio occhio terribile vidi volar giù per la discesa di Niella il figlio del cantoniere, sulla sua bici da corsa, e intuìi che tornava da Gorzegno certamente con qualche gran novità.

A correre, arrivavamo in piazza che Remo si slacciava i cinghietti. E corremmo, incuranti che la zia ci vedesse e ci fulminasse dalla finestra, mio ziaastro dicendo col fiatone:—Significa che è morto, che l’hanno finito. Infatti, senti, non sparano più.

Arrivammo in piazza, tra le due chiese, che Remo metteva piede a terra, con tanta gente subito addosso da togliergli il respiro. Disse che Gallesio meno di un’ora fa aveva ammazzato un carabiniere, uno dei tanti che lo asse-
gospel and closed the door in Gallesio’s face. And so Gallesio started shooting. He shot his brother for forgetting he was his brother, and remembering only that he was the husband of a witch. He shot his nephew because in the end he’d be the one to enjoy Gallesio’s land. And he shot the priest for that dirty deed, those treasonous lies.

I didn’t understand it all then, but he basically seemed to be concluding that Gallesio wasn’t so terrible.

“An original, for sure, but not so terrible.”

“Auntie says that the newspapers were right to call him the madman of Gorzegno.”

He laughed dryly. “Mad? Gallesio? That story’s for the city folk. A little high-strung, but not mad.”

Just then, with my eagle eye, I saw the road laborer’s son flying down the Niella hillside on his racing bike, and I sensed that he was returning from Gorzegno with some big news.

We set off running to the piazza where Remo was undoing his pedal straps. We ran—not caring that my aunt saw us and was yelling at us out the window, her words like little lightening bolts—and breathlessly my step-uncle said: “It means he’s dead, that they’ve finished him off. In fact, listen, they’re not shooting anymore.”

We arrived in the piazza, between the two churches, just as Remo was stepping off his bike, and suddenly so many people had crowded around him that he had trouble catching his breath. He said that less than an hour before Gallesio had killed a policeman, one of the many attacking him—a bullet straight to the forehead, as was his style.

“A southerner,” my step-uncle said, promptly and decidedly.

A man from the crowd cleared his throat and said: “It’s possible he was a local.”

“No, no, I tell you he’s a southerner,” my step-uncle repeated.

In any case, the news had a bad effect on everyone and people scattered, leaving Remo all alone and asking in vain for someone to buy him a soda in return for the important news.

We slowly headed home to sit on the front steps of the house, and I asked my step-uncle how he could be so dead sure that that policeman was from the South. “Nine out of ten,” he said, “nine out of ten are southerners. All policemen are southerners.” But his voice and face seemed to have aged. He rubbed his jaw as though he were messing around with iron filings.

My aunt came up behind us, so close that we felt the tips of her slippers on the smalls of our backs, and said, “So he’s killed a policeman too!”
diavano. Una palla in piena fronte, nel suo stile.

—Un napoli,—disse pronto e reciso mio ziaastro.

Ma un altro, schiarendosi prima la gola:—Può anche darsi che fosse delle nostre parti.

—No, no, vi dico io che è un napoli,—ripeté mio ziaastro.

Ad ogni modo, la notizia fece a tutti quanti un brutto effetto e la gente si sparpagliò lontano, lasciando solo Remo a chiedere invano chi gli pagava una gazosa in cambio della importante notizia.

Tornammo adagio a sederci sugli scalini di casa, ed io domandai a mio ziaastro come potesse esser così mortalmente sicuro che quel carabiniere era della Bassa Italia.—Nove su dieci,—mi rispose,—nove su dieci è un napoli. Son tutti di loro nei carabinieri —. Ma la sua voce era come invecchiata, e così la sua faccia. Si passò le mani sulle mascelle ed era come se pasticciasse nella segatura di ferro.

Ci arrivò dietro la zia, così vicina che entrambi sentimmo al fondo della schiena la punta delle sue ciabatte, e disse:—E cosí ha ammazzato anche un carabiniere.

—E con questo?—replicò lui, senza voltarsi e senza foga.—Guerra è guerra. Loro gli sparano a piombo e lui dovrebbe rispondere a sputi?

—Adesso sí che è completamente perso. Ammazzare un carabiniere. Faceva meglio a buttarsi in un gorgo di Bormida o impiccarsi al trave del secctatoio —. E poi:—Manca mezz’ora a pranzo. Intanto ti tagliassi la barba.

—Non è mica sabato sera per tagliarmi la barba.

—Non fossi il mio uomo, credi che m’importerebbe che tu somigli ad un orso?—ma non insistette di piú e tornò in cucina.

Ora io, per collocare un po’ meglio questi grandi fatti, avevo bisogno di saper qualcosa del paese di Gallesio, ma non osavo riportar lí il discorso, viste le durezze che a motivo di Gallesio lo ziaastro aveva dovuto sopportare da parte della zia. Poteva anche darsi che ora ne avesse abbastanza e che a riaprirgli il discorso mi rispondesse male. Lui invece mi incoraggiò, a un certo punto dicendo come a se stesso:—Tiene testa, tiene sempre testa,—con gli occhi alti al cielo di Gorzegno, dove l’eco degli spari galoppava ancora e sempre.

—Zio, dimmi qualcosa di questo paese Gorzegno.

—Gorzegno io lo conosco bene, perché in gioventú ci andavo sovente con mio padre a caricarci il vino e le castagne. Ho fatto anche un po’ di carrottiere, e per questo in guerra m’hanno messo conducente di muli. Dunque, Gorzegno è un po’ piú grosso del nostro San Benedetto, ma è un paese sbagliato, perché senza ragione è diviso in due parti, e non c’è poco dall’una
“So what?” he retorted slowly, not bothering to turn around. “War is war. They shoot straight at him and he’s supposed to just spit back?”

“Now he’s done for. Killing a policeman. He’d have been better off throwing himself in the Bormida or hanging himself from a rafter in the drying room.” And then she added: “Lunch is in half an hour. Least you could do is shave.”

“I don’t have to shave—it’s not like it’s Saturday night.”

“Do you think it’d matter to me at all that you look like a bear if you weren’t my man?” But then she dropped the matter and returned to the kitchen.

In order to get a better handle on the day’s events, I needed to know something about Gallesio’s town, but I didn’t dare bring up the discussion again, seeing all the trouble my step-uncle had had to deal with from my aunt because of Gallesio. It was likely that by then he’d had enough and if I tried to reopen the discussion he’d be rude to me. But instead he encouraged me, saying at a certain point, almost as if to himself: “Don’t back down, don’t ever back down,” with his eyes to the sky over Gorzegno, where the echo of gunshots, like the gallop of hoofs, could still be heard.

“Uncle, tell me something about this town Gorzegno.”

“I know Gorzegno well, because when I was young I often went there with my father to stock up on wine and chestnuts. I was even a cart-driver for a while, and because of this I was made a mule-driver in the war. Anyway, Gorzegno is a little bigger than our San Benedetto, but it’s a mess of a town, because for no reason at all it’s divided into two parts, and they don’t have much to do with one another. The lower part is on the banks of the Bormida. You ever seen the Bormida? Its water is the color of clotted blood, because it picks up all the waste from the factories in Cengio and not a blade of grass grows on its banks anymore. Water so filthy and poisoned that it freezes the marrow in your bones, especially when you see it at night in the moonlight. And then there’s the castle, also in the lower part, that at one time must’ve been even more beautiful than the one in Monesiglio, but is now crumbling into ruin and the town’s just letting it go.”

Gorzegno interested me mostly because it was Gallesio’s town and so I asked if he knew the house in which Gallesio was barricaded. He said no, he could’ve passed it a thousand times, but he couldn’t say he knew it.

Then my aunt called us to eat. As he was sitting down, my step-uncle said suddenly: “Today I’d rather drink than eat.”

“Here’s all the wine we’ve got,” she said, lifting the liter bottle up to the light.
all’altra. La parte bassa è in riva a Bormida. Hai mai visto Bormida? Ha l’acqua color del sangue raggrumato, perché porta via i rifiuti delle fabbriche di Cengio e sulle sue rive non cresce più un filo d’erba. Un’acqua più porca e avvelenata, che ti mette freddo nel midollo, specie a vederla di notte sotto la luna. E poi c’è il castello, sempre nella parte bassa, che una volta doveva essere anche più bello di quello di Monesiglio, ma adesso se ne va in brici-ole e il comune ce lo lascia andare.

A me però Gorzegno interessava principalmente come paese di Gallesio e domandai se conosceva la casa dove Gallesio stava asserragliato. Mi rispose di no, poteva esserci passato davanti le mille volte, ma non poteva dire di conoscerla.

Poi la zia ci chiamò a mangiare. Mio ziaastro disse subito, nell’atto di sedersi:—Oggi mi sento più di bere che di mangiare.

—Il vino è tutto qui,—disse lei, alzando il pintone controluce.

Avevamo davanti una frittata verde e mangiammo in silenzio per dieci minuti, senza guardarcì in faccia nel masticare. Poi mio ziaastro scattò, che io non me l’aspettavo e forse nemmeno lei. Batté sulla tavola un tal pugno che per il contraccolpo io sentii la scossa elettrica al gomito, e gridò:—Però, o donna, che tu non mi lasci andare a Gorzegno per una spesa di due lire, mentre tutti gli altri mezzi uomini sono padroni di andarci senza render conto alle loro donne...

—Soltano per veder la battaglia di Gallesio?—Non era intimorita nemmeno un po’.


—E magari prenderti una pallottola da non saper chi ringraziare?

—Non me la sono presa in guerra.

—Appunto, hai avuto fortuna una volta.

—No, non fortuna,—disse lui, acido come non l’avevo mai sentito.—Ero in gamba, ero giovane e in gamba.


Allora lo vedemmo drizzarsi, districarsi dalla panca e fare una ginnastica come se volesse saltar sulla tavola a piedi giunti; era in uno stato che poteva da un attimo all’altro ridere e farci ridere o ululare come un lupo e spaventarsi a morte.

—Il suo primo uomo!—sbratò.—Parla del suo primo uomo! Donna, io e Taricco eravamo nello stesso battaglione, quindi di storie a me non ne puoi
We had a green-vegetable frittata in front of us and we ate in silence for ten minutes, chewing and not looking in each other’s faces. Then my step-uncle flew into a rage—I wasn’t expecting it, and I bet my aunt wasn’t either. He pounded so hard on the table with his fist that it felt like I’d gotten an electric shock to my elbow. He shouted: “Why, woman, won’t you let me go to Gorzegno for a measly two lire, when anyone who’s even half a man has the right to go there without telling his woman…”

“Just to see Gallesio’s fight?” She wasn’t the least bit intimidated.

“Yes, just for that. Why? That doesn’t seem worth it to you? If you miss it, you miss it for good. It’s not exactly the feast of the patron saint, a fight like this.”

“And get shot and not even know who to thank for it?”

“I didn’t get shot in the war.”

“Exactly. You were lucky, once.”

“No, it wasn’t luck,” he said, more sour than I’d ever heard him. “I was strong, I was young and strong.”

“That means nothing. There were others killed who were stronger than you. Take my first man.”

At this point we watched him stand up straight, extricate himself from the table bench, and make a wild movement as though he wanted to jump onto the table with both feet; he was in quite a state: from one moment to the next he could’ve laughed and made us laugh or howled like a wolf and scared us to death.

“Your first man!” he screamed. “You talk about your first man! Woman, Taricco and I were in the same battalion, so don’t try and tell me stories about him! What’s this about your first man getting shot? Taricco’s belly did such a flip-flop at the first sound of gun-fire that we had to drag him to the hospital in Tarcento—ah, I see you know the name Tarcento! To the hospital with diarrhea, and that’s how he kicked the bucket. That’s the whole of it. Your first man. Don’t get us mixed up; I am totally different from him, even if you did marry me only because you didn’t know how to handle the fields by yourself.”

My aunt had been standing the entire time; she crushed a dozen cherries into my hand and ordered me to go up and eat them on the balcony. I left, and I don’t know how it turned out, but they certainly were shouting for quite a while.

Afterwards I found my step-uncle in front of the house, as calm as if they’d not fought at all or at least as if they’d worked things out to his satisfaction; he was picking his teeth with a used matchstick.
contare! Ma che pallottola s’è preso il tuo primo uomo? Taricco alla prima cannonata ha avuto una tale rivoluzione nella pancia che abbiamo dovuto portarlo di peso all’ospedale, a Tarcento, ah, non ti è nuovo questo nome di Tarcento! e all’ospedale con la diarrea gli è uscita l’anima. Questo è quanto. Il tuo primo uomo. Non fare confusioni, io sono tutt’un altro uomo, anche se tu m’hai sposato solo perché non sapevi come mandare avanti i campi.

Mia zia era in piedi fin dal principio, mi schiacciò in mano una dozzina di ciliegie e mi comandò di ritirarmi a mangiarle sul ballatoio. Uscii, e non so come la finirono, certo vociarono per un bel po’.

Dopo, ritrovai lui davanti a casa, calmo come se non avessero affatto litigato o l’avessero alla fine rappattata benissimo; si stuzzicava i denti con uno zolfanello usato.

In fondo alla strada del camposanto apparí Meca, la vedova: saliva pun-golando con una mano la sua capra e con l’altra serrando il gonfiore del suo grembiale arrotolato alla vita. Saliva tutta sbilenca e mio ziastro appena l’ebbe a tiro le disse:—O Meca, con che demonio d’uomo siete stata per camminare così storta?

Lei non si offese.—È giusto che scherziate, Fresia, dato che oggi non lavorate —. E additando la langa di Feisoglio: È Gallesio che combina tutto questo bordello?

—Lui. Lui e i carabinieri.

La vecchia parve riflettere se le convenisse o no parlare, infine si decise e disse:—Ebbene, non dava l’aria d’essere un uomo così e che avrebbe fatto questa fine.

Mio ziastro sussultò sul tronco.—Volete dirmi che avete conosciuto Gallesio?

Lei ridacchiò.—Mi fece ballare tre volte di fila sul ballo a palchetto a Feisoglio. Era il pomeriggio dell’Ascensione. Parlo di quarant’anni fa.

—Quarant’anni fa? Ma voi vi confondete. Guardate, Meca, che a Gorzegno di Gallesio ce n’è una mezza dozzina.

—Non mi confondo. Proprio Gallesio Pietro, quello di oggi,—e ci lasciò in fretta, perché la capra si era già troppo distaccata, ma mio ziastro fece ancora in tempo a domandarle dietro che età aveva dunque Gallesio.

—Sessanta passati. Di poco, ma passati.

Io ci rimasi. M’ero figurato Gallesio nel pieno delle forze, per poter sostenere una battaglia simile, qualcosa come mio padre che a quest’ora stava sulla porta del suo macello in Alba, così raccolto e nerboruto, che non dovevo pensarci per non patirne la nostalgia, quasi fosse già l’imbrunire.

Mio ziastro mormorò:—Più di sessanta. Ma allora non è quello che cre-
At the end of the cemetery road I saw Meca, the widow: she was walking up towards us, one hand prodding her goat along, the other clutching a bundle of the apron that was rolled up at her waist. She was walking up, all bent out of shape, and as soon as she was within earshot my step-uncle said to her: “Oh Meca, what devil of a man have you been with who could make you walk all crooked like that?”

She wasn’t offended. “Go ahead and have your joke, Fresia, since you’re not working today.” And pointing at the hills of Feisoglio: “Is it Gallesio who’s raising such a ruckus?”

“It’s Gallesio. Gallesio and the police.”

The old woman considered for a moment whether or not to speak, and at last decided to say: “Well, he didn’t seem like the sort of man who’d come to this end.”

My step-uncle jumped onto the tree stump. “You mean to tell me you knew Gallesio?”

She chuckled. “He asked me to dance three times in a row on the bandstand in Feisoglio. It was Ascension-Day afternoon. This was forty years ago.”

“Forty years ago? You must be mixed-up. Look, Meca, there are half a dozen Gallesios in Gorzegno.”

“I’m not mixed-up. It was Pietro Gallesio, the one you’re talking about.” She left in a hurry, because her goat was already too far ahead, but not before my step-uncle managed to ask her Gallesio’s age.

“Over sixty, but not by much.”

I stood there, shocked. To be able to fight like that, I’d figured Gallesio was in his prime, like my father, who at this time of day was usually standing, compact and muscular, at the door of his butcher-shop in Alba; I was unable to think of him without feeling homesick, as though it were already dusk.

My step-uncle murmured: “Over sixty. But then he’s not the Gallesio I thought he was, the one from Cravanzana.” He seemed almost ashamed, as if he’d given me a reason to lose confidence in him. He went on: “But then who is this Pietro Gallesio? No doubt he must still be as strong as a cannon.”

We spent five minutes in silent admiration for old Gallesio, staring each other in the eyes; he stuck out his lower lip and I swung my head back and forth; we both had our hands clasped between our knees.

The shooting in Gorzegno continued: it sounded like the opening day of hunting season, when busloads of Ligurian hunters invade the hills.

He touched my arm to see if I heard Placido’s car off in the distance returning from Gorzegno. I listened and then shook my head, and so he let
devo io, non l’uomo di Cravanzana—, Sembrava quasi vergognoso, come se mi avessi dato motivo di togliergli la stima. Riprese:—Ma allora chi è questo Pietro Gallesio? Certo che dev’essere ancora robusto come un cannone.

Spendemmo cinque minuti di muta ammirazione per il vecchio Gallesio, guardandoci negli occhi, e lui sporgeva il suo labbraccio inferiore ed io oscillavo la testa, entrambi con le mani giunte tra i ginocchi.

E a Gorzegno sparavano sempre: pareva il giorno dell’apertura della caccia, quando invadevano le langhe, a torpedoni completi, i cacciatori della Liguria.

Mi toccò il braccio, se sentivo lontano la macchina di Placido di ritorno da Gorzegno. Io ascoltai e poi crollai la testa e lui lasciò subito perdere perché del mio udito ci si poteva fidare. Quindi si addormentò sul tronco, la schiena contro il muro caldo, e ogni tanto sbatteva la testa come una bandieretta di latta sotto la brezza. Io mi feci sotto allo spigolo di casa, a osservare le viavai delle formiche sul muro.

Non so quanto stemmo, lui a dormire ed io a studiar le formiche—della zia nessun segnale—finché ci riscosse entrambi il ruggito della macchina. La intravvidi mentre sorpassava il pilone dell’Ausiliatrice e corremmo ad aspettarla al peso pubblico.

Inchiodò sulla ghiaia, con un rumore di disastro. Per qualche istante nessuno dei viaggiatori parlò, come se avessero tutti sofferto la macchina o pretendessero che noi li pregassimo in ginocchio. Poi scesero, si sgranarono le gambe e a gran voce ordinaronio la menta glaciale all’osteria.

—Allora?—disse mio ziastro con la voce che gli ballava.

—Ha ammazzato un carabiniere,—sillabò uno della spedizione.

—Un altro?

—Come un altro?

Mio ziastro sogghignò.—Ah, ma voi siete ancora al carabiniere di stamattina, quello che ci ha detto Remo, con la palla in mezzo agli occhi. Ma noi lo sappiamo da quattro ore.

Questo li mortificò, e come per riacquistar prestigio Placido disse in fretta:—Questa però non la sapete: che Gallesio ha ferito il capitano dei carabinieri, quello di Alba. Gli ha scarificato una tempia. Tanto così più in centro e lo fa secco.

Disse mio ziastro:—L’ha tolto da far lo spiritoso. Credeva d’essere ad Alba alla festa dello Statuto?

La ragazza dell’osteria portò le mente e tra una sorsata e l’altra ci informarono che a Gorzegno si aveva l’impressione di essere al fronte. Gorzegno, e nessun altro paese delle langhe, aveva mai conosciuto un giorno così.
it go, because I had very good hearing. He fell asleep on the tree stump, his back against the warm wall, and every now and then his head tapped against the wall like a tin can in the breeze. I bent down by the water spigot and watched the comings and goings of the ants on the wall.

I don’t know how long we stayed like that, he sleeping and I studying the ants—my aunt nowhere to be seen—before we were both roused by the roar of Placido’s car. I glimpsed it as it was passing the sign for the Church of the Madonna, and we ran to meet it at the weigh station.

The car skidded to a stop on the gravel, with a disastrous sound. For a few moments none of the passengers uttered a word, as if they were all stunned from the car ride or expecting us to get on our knees and beg them. Then they got out, stretched their legs, and in loud voices ordered mint ices from the café.

“So?” my step-uncle asked, his voice shaking.
“He killed a policeman,” one of the men declared.
“Another?”
“What do you mean ‘another’?”

My step-uncle sneered. “Eh, you’re still talking about the officer from this morning, the one Remo told us about, the one who was shot between the eyes. But we’ve known about him for four hours now.”

This mortified them all, and as if to redeem them Placido said hurriedly, “But this you don’t know: Gallesio wounded the Captain, the one from Alba. His shot took the skin right off the Captain’s temple; just a bit more to the center and he’d have killed him.”

“Maybe now he’ll start taking this all more seriously,” my step-uncle said. “Where’d he think he was, in Alba at the Constitution1 festival?”

The waitress brought out the mint ices, and between gulps they informed us that being in Gorzegno was like being at the front. Neither Gorzegno nor any other town in the area had ever seen a day like this. There was a spectator behind every tree, and the lucky ones with binoculars swore that every now and then they could see Gallesio’s eyes flashing between the cracks in the barn; these people wouldn’t give up their binoculars, even when offered money in exchange for a few minutes of viewing. The police who were crawling along on their bellies and shooting from the grass were visible even without binoculars. Two huge cars of journalists and photographers had arrived from Turin, with the names of newspapers on their license plates: Gazzetta del Popolo, La Stampa. Police officials, the ones with all the

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1 The Statuto Albertino of 1848.
Dietro ogni albero c'era uno spettatore, e i fortunati provvisti di binocolo giuravano di veder di quando in quando balenar gli occhi di Gallesio tra le fessure dell'asito del fiore, ma non cedevano il binocolo nemmeno a offrire uno scudo per pochi minuti di visione. I carabinieri che sparavano e strisciavano affondati nell'erba, quelli si vedevano senza bisogno di binocoli. Da Torino erano arrivate due macchinone di giornalisti e fotografi, coi nomi dei giornali sulle targhe: la «Gazzetta del Popolo», la «Stampa». Gli ufficiali dei carabinieri, ma di quelli con tante lasagne sul berretto, passeggivano su e giù per lo stradale, nervosi, e rispondevano seccamente anche ai giornalisti, che naturalmente erano i soli che si azzardassero ad interrogarli. Ogni cinque minuti consultavano l'orologio sotto la manica gallonata e poi alzavano gli occhi alla nuovlaccia carboniosa che si era sviluppata da tutti quegli spari, ancorata sopra Gorzegno come un dirigibile. Perché Gallesio desse fondo alle sue munizioni, i carabinieri avevano studiato di alzare allo scoperto i loro berretti in punta a dei bastoni, e sulle prime Gallesio c'era cascato e non ne perdonava uno, ma poi aveva capito il trucco e risparmiava i colpi, ciononostante i carabinieri non riuscivano a serrar sotto di quel tanto che permettesse il lancio delle bombe lacrimogene.

Come conclusione Placido disse:—Gallesio s’è tirato addosso lo Stato. Oggi possiamo dire d’aver visto lo Stato. Madonna, cos’è lo Stato! Noi abituali a veder sempre e solo il mostro parroco e il Podestà di Niella —. E si accingeva a ritirar la macchina, quando si presentarono a dirgli di portarli a Gorzegno altri quattro, due del paese e due ferrovieri di Savona che erano li in ferie.

Lo vedemmo ripartire, mio ziastro dicendo:—Ma guarda che giornata d’oro fa far Gallesio a Placido.

Adesso andava a tirar l’acqua per la zia e io indugiai sulla piazzetta con una improvvisa voglia di breve solitudine, indeciso se scendere a Belbo per fissar l’acqua dei gorghi e veder fino a che punto resisteva alla sua attrazione oppure entrare nel camposanto e girar per le tombe e segnarmi nomi e date: erano tutt’e due fra i miei giochi solitari.

Quando dal cancello della casa della maestra esce la sua ospite misterosa e si siede, nell’onda della gonna turchina, sulla panca di pietra sotto il tiglio. Era giovane, ma da non potersi definire se di venti o trent’anni, era bionda come una donna d’altri paesi, gli occhi sempre protetti da occhiali neri per modo che nessuno poteva dire d’aver sentito la sua voce. Secondo mia zia, era una professoressa di Torino ed aveva uno strano male inguaribile.

Come sempre accavallò le gambe, così belle ma così di cera che io temevo dovessero sciogliersi se le esponeva un po’ tanto al sole. Il sole infatti non
lasagna on their caps, were nervously patrolling the length of the road and responding curtly to the journalists, who naturally were the only ones who dared to question them. Every five minutes the policemen would check their watches under their striped sleeves and then look up at the huge cloud of black smoke from all the gunshots that was anchored in the sky above Gorzegno like an airship. In order to get Gallesio to use up his ammunition, the police had tried raising their caps up into the open on the ends of sticks; at first Gallesio had fallen for it and hit every one of them, but soon he’d caught on and began saving his shots. Nevertheless, the police still couldn’t get close enough to use tear gas.

To sum up, Placido said: “Gallesio’s got the whole State on his back. Today we can truly say we saw the State in action. My God, what a thing the State is! We’re used to seeing no one but our priest and the Mayor of Niella!” He was about to put the car in reverse when four more men—two locals and two railway workers on holiday from Savona—showed up and asked him to take them to Gorzegno.

As we watched him leave, my step-uncle said: “What a day for Placido—Gallesio’s making him a fortune!”

He went off to fetch water for my aunt, and I lingered on the piazza with a sudden desire to be alone for a little while. I wasn’t sure whether to go down to Belbo to see how long I could stare at the water in its gorges before I could no longer resist its lure, or to go to the graveyard and wander around among the tombstones, noting names and dates—these were two of the games I played when I was alone.

Just then the gate in front of the schoolmistress’ house opened and her mysterious house guest emerged and sat, among the waves of her deep-blue skirt, on the stone bench under the linden tree. She was young, maybe twenty or thirty, I couldn’t tell. She was blond like girls from other countries and always wore dark sunglasses that hid her eyes, so that no one could ever say they’d seen them, just as very few could say they’d heard her voice. According to my aunt, she was a professor from Turin who had some strange, incurable illness.

As always, she crossed her legs, legs that were beautiful but seemed to be made of wax—so much so that I feared they’d surely melt if she were to expose them to the slightest bit of sun. Indeed, she never went in the sun, and on the rare occasion she left town she invariably went and hid deep in the woods of Agrifogli. I’d always tremble when she called me over, and

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2 “Lasagna” here is a mocking reference to the ribbons and other decorations on the caps of the policemen.
lo cercava mai, e le rariissime volte che usciva dal paese andava invariabilmente a nasconderesi in fondo al bosco degli Agrifogli. Io tremavo quando mi chiamava accanto a lei, e soffrivo lungamente quando non si accorgeva di me o mi lasciava passare senza invitarmi. Qualche volta, verso sera, m’invitò alla panca di pietra: io mi sedeva sull’erba, a tre palmi da quelle sue speciali gambe venate d’azzurro, e lei mi diceva di cantare. Mi trovava una bellissima voce ed un sentimento non normale in un ragazzino, sicché, dopo la seconda volta, mi disse:—Tra qualche anno t’innamorerai, ed avrai certamente un amore tremendo.

Quel giorno si sedette e subito le apparve in mano un libro, segno infallibile che in quel momento non desiderava vicino né me né altri. Difatti io le passai davanti il piú adagio possibile, ma lei non solevò dal libro il capo biondo.

Per non starmene solo con quella tristezza mi misi alle calcagna di mio zastro che stava già scendendo, con due secchi a bilancere, alla fontana pubblica.

—È già un po’ tardi, ma tua zia vuole che vai a far merenda. Pane e pesche, mandate da tua madre con la corriera.

—Non ne ho voglia —. Con le dita immerse grattavo il verde che tappezzava la vasca.—Che bestie sono, che fanno zzz?

—Sono cicale. Ma non conosci nemmeno le cicale, o cittadino?

—Zio, a Gorzegno non sparano piú.

Strinse le labbra.—Saranno riusciti a lanciargli le bombe lacrimogene e a prenderlo vivo.

—Non è meglio che lo prendano vivo?

Mi si rivoltò da mozzarmi il fiato.—No! No, bambino, no! Quando si fanno certe cose, dopo bisogna morire. Certa cose si fanno proprio perché si è sicuri di aver dopo la forza di morire. Guai se non fosse cosí. Guai a Gallesio!

Si caricò il bilancere e tornammo a casa. Lasciandolo andare a versar l’acqua, vidi per un attimo mia zia—appariva e spariva come uno spirito—e mi disse che per domenica mi avrebbe fatto agnolotti e se ero contento. Risposi di sí, anche se tra i suoi agnolotti e quelli di mia madre c’era come dal giorno alla notte.

Finiti i giri per l’acqua, mio zastro venne a sedersi con me sul tronco e si mise a scegliere tra cicche di toscano la piú adatta per masticare. Calava il sole, lentissimamente, come un vecchio che per scendere tasta scalino dietro scalino, e un’arietta da chissà dove dava nella nostra meliga, con un rumoreno di pioggia rada. In quella pace esplose, nel cielo di Gorzegno, una
would suffer endlessly when she didn’t notice me or when she’d pass me by without calling to me. Sometimes, as evening was falling, she’d invite me over to the stone bench: I’d sit on the grass, only a foot away from those exceptional legs streaked with pale-blue veins, and she’d tell me to sing. She thought my voice was very beautiful and that I felt things other boys my age didn’t feel, and because of this, after our second meeting, she said to me: “Within a few years you’ll fall in love, and it will be a very deep love.”

That day she sat down and immediately a book appeared in her hand, a sure sign that she didn’t want to be around me or anyone else. In fact, I passed in front of her as slowly as possible, but she didn’t raise her blond head from the book.

So as not to be alone in my misery I ran to catch up with my step-uncle, who was already on his way down to the public fountain with two buckets balanced on a pole.

“It’s already pretty late, but your aunt wants you to go home and have a bite to eat. Your mother sent bread and peaches in the mail.”

“I don’t want any.” My fingers were immersed in the fountain water and scraping at the algae that covered the wall of the basin. “What animals are they, the ones that go ‘zzz’?”

“They’re cicadas. You don’t even know about cicadas, city boy?”

“Uncle, the shooting in Gorzegno’s stopped.”

He lips grew tight. “They’ve probably used tear gas and taken him alive.”

“Isn’t it better that they take him alive?”

He turned towards me so sharply that it took my breath away. “No! No, boy, no! Some things, after you do them, it’s best to die. Some things we do precisely because we’re sure that after doing them we’ll have the strength to die. And God save us if it turns out differently. God save Gallesio!”

He hoisted the pole onto his shoulders again and we went home. Leaving him to go pour the water, I saw my aunt for a second—she’d been appearing and disappearing like a ghost—and she said she’d make me stuffed pasta on Sunday, if I wanted. I said yes, even though the difference between her agnolotti and my mother’s was like the difference between day and night.

Finished with the water, my step-uncle came and sat with me on the tree stump, and began poking around in the stubs of his Tuscan cigars looking for the best one to chew on. The sun was setting very slowly, like an old man feeling his way down the stairs one by one, and a light breeze from who knows where was blowing through our yellow corn, sounding like scattered rain. Then, in that peaceful moment, the sky over Gorzegno exploded with
fucileria così fitta e furiosa che noi due saltammo in piedi, quasi che il pericolo ora fosse a San Benedetto. E mio ziaastro disse:—Gli stanno dando l’attacco. Io lo so. Anche noi in guerra quando sparavamo tanto così era perché subito dopo attaccavamo.

Fissammo come a interrogarle, due nuvolette sospese sopra Gorzegno, poi ci risedemmo adagio, mentre le detonazioni scemavano.

—Bisogna esserci stati per sapere cos’è stare sotto il fuoco. Provare per credere. Tuo padre ti ha mai raccontato?

Dissi di no, mentendo, perché mio padre, quand’era in vena di raccontare, non aveva mai altro argomento che la guerra del quindici, ma mentii perché ora volevo sentire qualcosa da mio ziaastro.

—Una sera o l’altra, tanto ti fermerai qui per molto, ti parlerò dell’Ortigara. Tuo padre c’era all’Ortigara?

—Non lo so, ma credo di sì, perché mio padre ha fatto tutto in quella guerra.

—Già, se era negli alpini, all’Ortigara non può esser mancato. Una sera o l’altra te ne parlerò.

Allora mi alza e salii a postarmi sotto l’ippocastano, per avere perfettamente sgombra la visuale del Passo della Bossola. Si avvicinava l’ora della corriera di Alba—madama la corriera di Alba, la chiamava mio ziaastro—and, a meno che mi trovassi distante nei boschi, non ne perdevo mai un passaggio, perché a quell’ora sotto vespro avevo sempre una dolorosa voglia di Alba. La sua tromba potentissima faceva alzar la testa a tutti nella conca di San Benedetto, uomini e bestie, e per le strette curve del passo ancheggiava proprio come una matrona, lasciandosi dietro un polverone come un reggimento di cavalleria. Quando l’ultimo atomo di quella polvere era ricaduto, allora, abbandonavo la mia specola e mi voltavo, sospirando, al paese già sommattato dalle prime fumate della sera.

Aspettai, con l’orecchio teso alla tromba e l’occhio fisso al nudo passo sul quale, di contro al cielo grigio unito, un carro di fieno avanzava e ondeggiava impercettibilmente. Ma quel giorno mancai il passaggio della corriera di Alba, perché dopo dieci minuti di attesa un rombo di motore e un grido di mio ziaastro mi fecero scattare verso la piazza col cuore in bocca. Tornava la macchina di Placido, con gli occupanti a mezzo busto fuori dei finestrini e gesticolanti come ossessi.

Mio ziaastro mi raggiunse al peso pubblico dicendo:—Stavolta è finita,—e l’ansia lo faceva balbettare. E mi mise una mano sulla spalla quasi che si trattasse di dover difendermi.

Prima ancora di scendere Placido faceva già con le mani, ripetutamente,
the sound of gun-shots so dense and furious that we both jumped to our feet, as though San Benedetto itself were in danger. My step-uncle said: “They’re closing in on him. I know it. When we fired like that in the war it meant we were about to attack.”

We stared at two small clouds suspended over Gorzegno, as if to question them, and then we slowly sat again as the gunshots died down.

“You have to have been through it to know what it’s like to be under fire. You have to experience it to believe it. Your father ever tell you about it?”

I said no, which was a lie because my father, when he was in the mood to tell a story, never talked about anything but the war in ‘15. I lied because I wanted to hear my step-uncle tell it.

“One of these evenings, since you’re here for a while, I’ll tell you about Ortigara. Was your father at Ortigara?”

“I’m not sure, but I think so, because my father went through everything in that war.”

“Of course, if he was in the mountain regiment he couldn’t have missed the Ortigara. One of these evenings I’ll tell you about it.”

I got up and went down to stand under the horse-chestnut tree, in order to get a perfectly clear view of the Bossola Pass. It was coming time for the Alba bus to arrive—Her Ladyship the Alba bus, my step-uncle called her—and, unless I was off in the woods, I never missed her going by, because around dusk I always felt a painful longing for Alba. Her loud horn raised the heads of man and beast in the San Benedetto valley, and she swayed around the tight curves of the pass like the matron she was, her backside wagging, leaving behind a dust cloud as big as those left by cavalry regiments. When the last speck of dust had settled, I’d leave my lookout and turn, sighing, back towards town, already covered over with the first smoke of evening.

I waited, my ear straining to hear that horn and my eyes fixed on the empty road on which a lone hay-wagon was advancing, wobbling imperceptibly, in contrast to the uniform grey of the sky. But that day I missed the passing of the Alba bus, because after ten minutes of waiting the rumbling of a motor and a yell from my step-uncle made me jump up and run to the piazza, my heart in my mouth. Placido’s car was back, its occupants busting halfway out its windows and gesturing as though possessed.

My step-uncle joined me by the weigh station, saying, “It’s all over now,” and stammering in his anxiety. He put his hand on my shoulder as though he had to protect me.

Even before Placido got out of the car he was gesturing with his hands over and over again: curtain down. And then he said, as loud as a town crier:
il gesto di chi chiude un sipario. E poi disse, forte come un banditore:—
Tutto finito. È morto.

Mio ziaastro respirò tre volte e poi domandò semplicemente in che modo
l’avevano ammazzato.
—Non l’hanno ammazzato i carabinieri. Si è sparato lui, in bocca. Si era
avanzata una cartuccia.

Mio ziaastro non chiese altro e cominciò a spingermi verso casa. Io vole-
vo saperne infinitamente di più, cimentare Placido fino a farmi dire l’ultimo
particolare, soprattutto se aveva visto il cadavere di Gallesio, ma mio ziaastro
premette un po’ più forte sulla mia spalla e dovetti incamminarmi.
—Cosa volevi sapere di più? È morto, si è ammazzato, non c’è nient’alt-
ro da sapere —. E poi:—Bravo Gallesio.
—Perché gli dici bravo?
—Perché è stato al gioco. Tutt’oggi ho vissuto con la paura matta che si
arrendesse, che si facesse prendere vvo, ma lui è stato al gioco. Non m’ha
fatto pentire. Di Gallesio voglio ricordarmene fin che campo —. Poi si voltò
a guardare un’ultima volta il cielo sopra Gorzegno. Anch’io, e sembrava un
lago dove fossero finalmente finiti i cerchi provocati dai tonfi di migliaia di
pietre.

Sull’uscio mio ziaastro chiamò la zia e subito ridiscese gli scalini per las-
ciarle il posto sulla soglia. Lei comparve in un minuto, stava asciugandosi le
mani, con estrema energia, quasi volesse staccarsi le dita.

Le disse:—Tutto è finito. È morto. Ma non gli ha dato la soddisfazione
d’ammazzarlo o di prenderlo vivo. Si è sparato lui, in bocca, con l’ultima cart-
cuccia, e naturalmente non s’è sbagliato. Domani mattina torno a lavorare
sulla langa di Feisoglio. Sei contenta?

Lei lo fissò con quei suoi occhi neri, insopportabilmente, poi buttò l’as-
ciugamanì dentro casa e disse, a me ma per lui:—Tra dieci minuti ceniamo.
Tu lavati le mani. Io scappo in chiesa a pregare per le anime delle vittime di
Gallesio ed anche per l’anima sua. E chiederò al Signore che ci perdoni tutti
e ci illumini, perché tutto il male che capita su queste langhe la causa è la
forte ignoranza che abbiamo. ✝
“It’s all over. He’s dead.”

My step-uncle took three deep breaths and then simply asked how they’d killed him.

“The police didn’t kill him. He shot himself in the mouth. He had one round left.”

My step-uncle asked nothing else, and began pushing me back towards the house. I wanted to know a lot more, wanted to make Placido tell me everything, down to the last detail, especially whether or not he’d seen Gallesio’s body, but my step-uncle pressed a bit harder on my shoulder and I had to start walking.

“What more do you want to know? He’s dead. He killed himself. There’s nothing more to know.” And then: “Well done, Gallesio.”

“Why ‘well done’?”

“Because he played the game to the end. All day I’ve lived with this crazy fear that he’d surrender, or that they’d take him alive, but he played to the end. He didn’t let me down. I want to remember Gallesio as long as I live.” Then he turned to look one last time at the sky above Gorzegno. I looked too, and it seemed to me like a lake, calm at last after the circular ripples caused by a hailstorm of a thousand stones have all been absorbed by the shore.

From the doorway my step-uncle called in to my aunt and then quickly went back down the steps to leave room for her on the threshold. After a minute she came out, drying her hands with such energy it was almost as if she were trying to pull out her fingers.

He said to her: “It’s all over. He’s dead. But he didn’t give them the satisfaction of killing him or taking him alive. He shot himself, in the mouth, with his last round, and naturally he did the right thing. Tomorrow morning I go back to work in the fields in Feisoglio. You happy?”

She fixed her dark eyes on him in an unbearable stare, threw her towel inside the house, and speaking to him but looking at me said: “Dinner’s in ten minutes. Wash your hands. I’m going to run to the church to pray for the souls of Gallesio’s victims and also for his soul. And I’ll ask God to forgive us all and enlighten us, for all the evil that happens in these hills is due to our great ignorance.”
Huidobro’s Creationism

Indisputably one of the great Latin American poets of the twentieth century—along with Neruda, Paz, Vallejo, and Parra—Vicente Huidobro (1983-1948) is nonetheless much less widely known that the others of that pantheon. As the founder of Creacionismo, and its Spanish offshoot Ultraísmo, Huidobro argued that the literary act is autonomous of reality, and that writing should be an act of genuine creation. Huidobro founded many literary journals, and socialized in Paris and Spain with avant-garde painters, poets, and musicians of the pre-WWI years including Picasso, Jacques Lipchitz, and Max Ernst. He became politically involved when he returned to Chile, supporting Communist and antifascist activities and running for President as a candidate by the Youth Party. After his semi-serious campaign failed, he left Chile to fight in the Spanish Civil War and then traveled from battle to battle during WWII as a correspondent. He eventually died from causes related to war wounds. Huidobro’s most famous Creationist works include Non serviam (“I Will Not Serve”), Poemas árticos (“Arctic Poems”), Saisons choisies (“Chosen Seasons”), and Sátiro; o, el poder de las palabras (“Satyr; or, the Power of Words”).

The English translation of this excerpt from Sátiro remains true to the straightforward discourse of Ultraísmo, scrupulously avoiding any phrase that might be called meandering, didactic, vague, or verbose. The translator has taken to heart Huidobro’s insistence that a work actively bring a new “object” into existence rather than being content to merely represent or analyze. What Huidobro created in this story, and which Castillo re-creates, is a unique psychological malady driven by the distressing repetition of the word sátiro. The satyrs of ancient Greece were mythical, caprine half-men with an insatiable sexual appetite. Huidobro augments this meaning with a threatening force, making the word the center of Bernardo’s torment. So much of this effect depends upon the sound of the word that Castillo decides to keep it untranslated, forcing the English-language reader to understand it in completely new terms, unconstrained by its usual denotation and symbolic invocation of the lustful goat-god 🐐

The Spanish text on the following pages is taken from the 1939 edition of Sátiro, o El poder de las palabras, printed by Editora Zig-Zag of Santiago, Chile, reprinted with the permission of the publisher.
Front cover of the 1939 printing by Editora Zig-Zag
Bernardo se pasea por la sala, contempla sus cuadros con ojos vagos. Siente un verdadero terror a la idea de acostarse. Va al comedor y se bebe media botella de oporto. El oporto, el coñac, su panacea universal. Todo en vano, no le viene sueño y el terror persiste en su pecho. Afuera sopla un viento fuerte. Bernardo escucha pasar el viento que da la vuelta al mundo, y siente ganas de llorar amargamente sobre el pecho de alguien, sobre el regazo de su madre, sobre un regazo que no existe. Recuerda la muerte de su madre, él era tan niño entonces y, sin embargo, pensó: Un muerto es un poco de eternidad en la casa. Recuerda que esa idea le distrajó y no lloró más en aquel día. Si un muerto es un poco de eternidad, con los muertos el tiempo retrocede un instante y se detiene.

“Nadie me quiere, nadie me comprende.”

Sigue aullando el viento. Bernardo se pasea por la sala y al pasar junto al espejo se encuentra frente a un hombre desesperado de soledad.

Una idea horrible se le clava en el cerebro: “Estoy dejando de ser yo mismo.” Su cuerpo tiembla como si comenzara a entrar en la agonía.

Apaga todas las luces de la casa y así a obscuras, como si tuviera miedo de mirarse el rostro, se acuesta en su cama resignado a todo.

Cuando la palabra sátiro surgió en su cerebro Bernardo batió la cabeza sobre la almohada con una ansiedad resignada. El ya lo sabía, ya lo presentía. Era inevitable, no había modo de evitarlo. “Se muy bien que esa palabra me persigue y se me figura que de un tiempo a esta parte, todo lo que he hecho, lecturas, paseos, mujeres, viajes, sólo ha sido para huir de ella. He querido dejarla atrás y no lo he logrado, no creo que sea posible lograrlo.”

Bernardo abre los ojos desesperados en medio de la oscuridad y golpea las sábanas con sus puños. “Sí, lo lograré, no creo que sea imposible, no puede ser imposible. Es una injusticia, es una injusticia. Yo también tengo derecho a un poco de tranquilidad, tengo derecho a pasar una buena noche, a dormir como todo el mundo. ¡Ah, dormir, dormir un año entero, si yo pudiera dormir un año entero!”

Bernardo cree saber ahora que todo lo que ha hecho durante este último tiempo lo ha hecho sólo por librarse de la terrible palabra. “Ah, poder dormir un año entero. No importa los sueños que se tenga, soñar con la muerte, si, soñar y pensar en la muerte; no importa; tener miedo a la muerte, sudar frío de terror a la muerte, no importa. Que todos los árboles sean...
Bernardo paces around the living room, contemplating his paintings with idle eyes. He feels true terror at the idea of lying down to sleep. He goes to the dining room and drinks half a bottle of port wine. Wine, cognac, his universal panacea. It is all in vain, for sleep does not come to him and the terror persists in his chest. A strong wind blows outside. Bernardo listens to the wind journeying around the world, and feels an urge to cry bitterly on someone’s chest, on his mother’s lap, on a lap that doesn’t exist. He recalls the death of his mother, when he was just a small child and yet, at the time, thought: A dead person is a little bit of eternity in the house. He remembers being comforted by that notion and not crying any more that day. If a dead person is a little bit of eternity, then time turns back and stops with the departed.

“No one loves me, no one understands me.”

The wind howls on. Bernardo walks around the living room and, passing in front of the mirror, finds himself facing a desperately lonely man.

A horrible idea fixes in his mind: “I am ceasing to be myself.” His body trembles as if about to begin its final state of agony.

He shuts off all the lights in the house and, in the dark, as if afraid to look at his own face, lies down in his bed in utter resignation.

When the word sátiro cropped up in his mind Bernardo beat his head against the pillow with a resigned anxiety. He knew it already, he had had a premonition. It was inevitable; it couldn’t be helped. “I very well know that this word pursues me and it seems to me that up to now, everything I have done—reading, walking, women, traveling—has been solely to flee from it. I have wanted to leave that word behind and have not succeeded; I don’t believe it’s possible…”

Bernardo opens his despairing eyes in the middle of the dark and beats the sheets with his fists. “Yes, I will do it; I do not believe it is impossible, it cannot be impossible. It is an injustice, an injustice. I also have the right to a little peace, to a good night’s sleep like everyone else. Oh, to sleep for an entire year!”

Bernardo now realizes that everything he has done in this last moment has been solely to free himself from that terrible word. “Oh, to be able to sleep for an entire year. The dreams one would have do not matter, as long as one could dream about death, yes, dream and think about death; it does-

from Sátiro
Translated by Ambar Castillo
ataúdes, que cada día sea un ataúd, que cada semana sea un ataúd, que todas las camas y todas las mesas sean ataúdes. Por adentro de cada ciprés veo ascender al espacio una fila de muertos delgados, subiendo, subiendo, llevan el corazón mordido en la boca igual que una lámpara y van subiendo como los pescadores de perlas, que salen a respirar. Al llegar a la copa de cada ciprés los muertos se deshacen en el aire con un ruido imperceptible, lo mismo que los globos de jabón se evaporan en el cielo. La muerte ¡qué dulce obsesión! Que pasen por mi cerebro todos los entierros del mundo… Cualquier cosa menos esa palabra abyecta, espantosa. Sátiro, sátiro, sátiro. Esta casa está embrujada. Sátiro, sátiro.”

Bernardo se sienta en la cama con aire desafiante. Mira hacia todos lados, escruta la oscuridad. La palabra sátiro se desprende entre las otras, se destaca entre sus pensamientos. Ya lo ha visto, ya lo ha experimentado tantas veces. Ahora mismo acaba de constatarlo una vez más, la horrible palabra cobró de pronto algo así como un relieve, se condensó en piedra o en un metal brillante; luego se fue agrandando y llenó toda la pieza, acaso desbordó de ella y llenó todo el mundo.

Rendido de fatiga, dolorido como si le hubieran apaleado, Bernardo volvió a echar la cabeza sobre la almohada. Le parecía que la palabra fatal salía de sus sueños profundos, brotaba como un gran árbol del fondo más obscuro de su ser, de un rincón perdido en alguna parte de su alma. A veces le parecía oírla como una voz, otras veces le parecía verla como escrita en el aire ante sus ojos, y frecuentemente ni la veía ni la oía, la sentía adentro de su cabeza, la adivinaba presente en su organismo.

Se revolcaba en la cama y volví a incorporarse.

“Sátiro, sátiro, regalando chocolates en la calle Valmont. Un gran paquete de chocolates. Inmundo sátiro.”

Bernardo creía ver frente a él a la pequeña de la calle Valmont, que le miraba con ojos inmensamente tristes. Luego la niña se esfumaba ante su mirada atónica y aparecía en su sitio la Magdalena de doce años, hija del pescador ahogado. Bernardo se desesperaba. De pronto sus ojos se tornaban nebulosos, su cerebro se enturbiaba, luego se iba en medio de una neblina temblorosa, salpicada de flores. ¡Qué maravilla! Tenía la sensación exacta de ir viajando por una caverna o mejor por una gruta llena de laberintos. Bajaba mucho y luego veía una luz al fondo de la gruta. Debajo de la luz, una niña de diez años le sonreía y le invitaba a comer chocolates a su lado.

¡Qué hermoso sueño! Si pudiera seguir soñando eternamente al fondo de esa gruta maravillosa. 😘
n’t matter; it isn’t the cold sweat of death; it’s the cold sweat of the fear of death. Let all the trees be caskets, let every day be a casket, every week be a casket, let all the beds and all the tables be caskets. Within every cypress tree I see a line of thin dead people ascending into space, rising, rising, carrying their hearts in their mouths just like lamps and rising like pearl-fishers who emerge from the water to breathe. Arriving at the crown of every cypress, the dead dissolve in the air with an imperceptible sound, as soap bubbles evaporate in the sky. Death, that sweet obsession! Let all the dead of the world pass through my mind… Anything except that wretched, terrifying word. Sátiro, sátiro, sátiro. This house is haunted. Sátiro, sátiro.”

Bernardo sits on the bed with an air of defiance. He looks all around, scrutinizes the darkness. The word sátiro detaches itself from the others, stands out among his thoughts. He has seen it already; he has experienced it so many times. He has just verified it once more, as the horrible word suddenly produced something like a relief, condensed itself into stone or bright metal; then it began to grow and filled the entire room, perhaps overflowed and filled the entire world.

Defeated by fatigue, aching as if he had been beaten, Bernardo again threw his head against the pillow. It appeared to him that the fatal word came from his deepest dreams, sprang up like a giant tree from the darkest depth of his being, from a lost corner of some part of his soul. Sometimes he seemed to hear it in the form of a voice, other times he saw it as though written in the air before his very eyes, and often he neither saw nor heard it, merely felt it in his head, supposed it was present in his organism.

He tossed and turned in bed and started to sit up again.


Bernardo believed he saw in front of him the little girl from Valmont Street, who looked at him with immensely sad eyes. Then the girl faded away before his astonished gaze and in her place appeared twelve-year-old Magdalena, daughter of the drowned fisherman. Bernardo grew desperate. Soon his eyes became hazy, his mind clouded, and then he was in the middle of a quivering mist, scattered with flowers. How marvelous! He had the exact sensation of journeying through a cave or, better yet, through a labyrinthine grotto. He was falling, falling, and then he saw a light at the bottom of the grotto. Beneath that light, a small girl of ten years smiled at him and invited him to eat chocolates beside her.

What a beautiful dream! If only he could keep dreaming eternally in the depths of this marvelous grotto. 🌸
Fairy Tales Against Fascism

The works of Russian playwright Eugene Schwartz (1896-1958), while intended for adult theater-goers, are suffused with the language and imagery of fairy tales; the sense that every detail of the environment is specially intended, that every word uttered has the potential to invoke unseen powers.

He is most famous for his modernized fairy tales, including stage versions of “The Emperor’s New Clothes” in 1934, “Little Red Riding Hood” in 1936, and Hans Christian Andersen’s “Snow Queen” in 1938. The peculiar imperatives of the fairy world—taboos to be heeded, rituals to be obeyed—mimic the political regulation of life in the Soviet Union, where every person either lives ‘righteously’ or suffers the fate of the disobedient child and is punished in vivid, admonitory ways.

Though he was himself employed by Gosizdat, a centrally-controlled state publishing house, Schwartz opposed Fascism and totalitarianism throughout his literary career. In his satirical play, The Dragon (1944), the hero Lancelot liberates the people—cynical, complacent, even collaborationist as they are—from the eponymous Dragon, only to face an even more insidious tyrant, the politician who replaces the ousted monster.

Schwartz’s interest in translation and adaptation of children’s literature was shared by the avant-garde group OBERIU, “Association of Real Art.” Several of the group’s young members made ends meet with jobs in children’s publishing when they weren’t performing each other’s scripts or circulating samizdat materials. Many of Schwartz’s imaginative retellings were performed at the Akinov Comedy Theatre, a home for writers and actors whose artistic attitudes had grown out of the violently satirical drama of Gogol’s Russia. The attitudes cultivated there would powerfully influence the Absurdist literature of the post-WWII era. The Theatre itself went into decline during the War when its staff and cast was called into service, but has since recovered, and is now a St. Petersburg landmark. Even today, the Akinov continues its sponsorship of Schwartz—the photo and Russian text on the following pages are reprinted from HTTP://SHVARTS.KOMEDIA.RU, an initiative to assemble online all of Schwartz’s writings.

Translator’s Note

Schwartz is not a difficult author to read in Russian, though difficult to appreciate fully. In a sense he is a children’s writer, even when he is writing about midnight depression or remembering the war; his uneven sentences
are lopsided, stop and start chopply, and may seem too simple to be examples of ‘good writing’. Translating him is an exercise in modesty: it is so easy to outdo him in terms of stylistic complexity that one risks losing that original, charming simplicity which so disarms the reader, profundities cloaked in off-kilter phrasing. Schwartz did not value artificially “balanced” clauses, and I have translated this poem so as to preserve this lack of artifice.
Я прожил жизнь свою неправо,
Уклончиво, едва дыша,
И вот—позорно моложава
Моя лукавая душа.

Ровесники окаменели,
И как не каменеть, когда
Живого места нет на теле,
Надежда на отдых нет следа.

А я все боли убегаю
Да лгу себе, что я в раю.
Я все на аудио играю
Да тихо песенки пою.

Упрекам внемлю и не внемлю.
Все так. Но твердо знаю я:
Недаром послана на землю
Ты, легкая душа моя.

— Евгения Шварца
I’ve lived my life not righteously,  
Sidesteppingly, a quiet type,  
And it’s embarrassing now, quite,  
How young my smirking soul can be.

My fellows have all grown and hardened  
All petrified, and who would not  
When all your body is one dead spot,  
And rest’s a hope you haven’t got.

But I just flee from pain meanwhile,  
And lie, I am in heaven, I,  
And I just play upon my pipe  
And sing songs softly all the time.

I hear the reproofs and don’t hear them.  
It’s all so. But I firmly know:  
You weren’t sent for no good reason  
To dwell on earth, you, my light soul.

—Ilya Gutner
The Verse of Lucretius

Very little is known about the life of Lucretius (94-55BCE), a Roman philosopher-poet from the late Republic era. He wrote only one work, De Rerum Natura ("On the Nature of Things"), an unfinished didactic epic in six books in which he expounds the theories of Epicurus and the Atomist philosophers Leucippus and Democritus. In the poem, the universe is described as following mechanical laws, though in this otherwise deterministic system the soul and the mind are permitted a degree of free will by an intrinsic spontaneity in the movement of atoms: the infamous swerve.

It's somewhat misleading to describe Lucretius as 'a Roman poet of the Latin language'—he considered himself a philosopher first and a poet second. Though he was influenced by early Roman poets like Ennius, he complained of Latin's literary weaknesses and did not hesitate to invent words when he found the language lacking. Nonetheless, Vergil himself admired and was deeply influenced by Lucretius, giving him a glowing panegyric in Book 2 of his Georgics (translated by H. Rushton Fairclough in Virgil, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001.): "Felix, qui potuit rerum cognoscere causas, atque metus omnis et inexorabile fatum subiecit pedibus strepitumque Acherontis avari," "Blessed is he who has succeeded in learning all the laws of nature's working, has cast beneath his feet all fear and fate's implacable decree, and the howl of insatiable Death."

Translator’s Note

Lucretius famously defended his decision to write Epicurean philosophy in verse by referring to the poetry as the “honey around the lip of the cup,” a sweetness that was meant to help the reader digest the bitter medicine of its stringent message. What drew me to this particular passage is the way that the learned tone of the “science lecturer,” in his effort to convey the material evidence for atomic theory, is overwhelmed by the fecundity and beauty of the natural world he is trying to put into words.

Though the Latin uses hexameter verse without regular stanza breaks, I chose to set my version in pentametrical tercets because I felt I could hear the poem, as a poem in English, better in this form. For one thing the tercets seemed to give the dense descriptions more breathing space, and to lend formal gravity by framing the philosopher’s perceptions in lucid, rational units. On the other hand, the pentameter allowed me to keep a more intimate conversational tone; and because the stanzas are so short, the sudden shifts in emotion and the voluptuous stream of detail keep spilling over the
line endings and stanza breaks. Thus I hope the form helps to convey both the stoic philosopher devoted to *ataraxia* (tranquility), as well as the racing heart of a man flooded with the sensuous brilliance of a world that seems to be taking shape before his eyes, like the combining and recombining atoms he describes.

If St. Jerome is correct in stating that Lucretius was driven mad by a love-potion, I’d like to think the philosopher’s brimming cup was spiked with the honey of the Muses. ☼

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Nunc locus est, ut opinor, in his illud quoque rebus
confirmare tibi, nullam rem posse sua vi
corpoream sursum ferri sursumque meare.
ne tibi dent in eo flammamarum corpora frudem;
sursus enim versus gignuntur et augmina sumunt
et sursum nitidae fruges arbustaque crescunt,
pondera, quantum in se est, cum deorsum cuncta ferantur.
nec cum subsiliunt ignes ad tecta domorum
et celeri flamma degustant tigna trabesque,
sponte sua facere id sine vi subiecta putandum est.
quod genus e nostro com missus corpore sanguis
emicat exultans alte spargitque cruorem.
non ne vides etiam quanta vi tigna trabesque
respuat umor aquae? nam quo magis ursimus altum
derecta et magna vi multi pressimus aegre,
tam cupide sursum removet magis atque remittit,
plus ut parte foras emergant exiliantque.
nec tamen haec, quantum est in se, dubitamus, opinor,
quin vacuum per inane deorsum cuncta ferantur.
sic igitur debent flammeae quoque posse per auras
aeris expressae sursum succedere, quamquam
pondera, quantum in sest, deorsum deducere pugnent.
nocturnasque faces caeli sublime volantis
And now I’d like to show you how such tiny
Particulars are moving. Once atoms have taken shape
As something, no matter what it is, Nature

Will never allow it to rise without the help
Of something else. Nothing can lift itself.
Don’t be deceived by the hovering flame that seems

Composed of floating particles. Though the weight of things
Inexorably draws them down to earth, we must also
Acknowledge that shining clusters of trees and crops

Have sprung from seeds, as if they were born to surge
Towards the sky. And just as a leaping flame
Can reach a roof-beam, and lick along the rafters

Until that voracious tongue devours the house,
So in the very same way a crimson spray
Of blood may gush from a wound, all but exultant

As it arches through the air. But don’t assume
That either the fire or the blood can ever do this
Spontaneously: they always need some other

Force to reinforce them. Haven’t you noticed
How powerfully a pool of water can instantly expel
Thick planks of wood? However many hands

Are shoving them down the water’s throat, the water
Insists on vomiting those planks back up at us—
As if it delighted in seeing the wood buoyant
nonne vides longos flammarum ducere tractus 
in quas cumque dedit partis natura meatum? 
non cadere in terras stellas et sidera cernis? 
sol etiam caeli de vertice dissipat omnis 
ardorem in partis et lumine conserit arva; 
in terras igitur quoque solis vergitur ardr.
transversosque volare per imbris fulmina cernis, 
nunc hinc nunc illinc abrupti nubibus ignes 
concursant; cadit in terras vis flammea volgo.  
Illud in his quoque te rebus cognoscere avemus, 
corpora cum deorsum rectum per inane feruntur 
ponderibus propriis, incerto tempore ferme 
incertisque locis spatio depellere paulum, 
tantum quod momen mutatum dicere possis. 
quod nisi declinare solerent, omnia deorsum 
imbris uti guttae caderent per inane profundum 
nec foret offensus natus nec plaga creata 
principiis; ita nihil umquam natura creasset.  
Quod si forte aliquis credit graviora potesse 
corpora, quo citius rectum per inane feruntur, 
incidere ex supero levioribus atque ita plagas 
gignere, quae possint genitalis reddere motus, 
avius a vera longe ratione recedit. 
nam per aquas quae cumque cadunt atque aera rarum, 
haec pro ponderibus casus celerare necessest 
propterea quia corpus aquae naturaque tenever 
aeris haud possunt aeque rem quamque morari,
Enough to break the surface by half a length.
(Though the wood could never have done this without the water.)
And yet, beyond a shadow of doubt, atoms

Are always streaming away, just dense enough
To sink in a vacuum, down and away they go
En masse through empty space. And fire, it stands

To reason, is no exception. Fire is a clear
Expression of something that strives to rise in the air
Shimmering all around us. Yet light as fire is,

The weight of its atoms is heavy enough to drag
It down incessantly. Don’t you see how dark
The night would be without those blazing torches

Ascending the heavens? Yet even at the height
Of evening, their fiery wake only tracks the course
Laid out for them by Nature, from whose guidance

The torches of nightfall take their lead each night.
And when the night is over, isn’t it obvious
That all that’s left of all that impending gloom

Has dropped out of sight—along with all the stars
And the streaking meteors? As soon as the open fields
Have seen the light of day, the sun is already

Radiant enough to turn the furthest furrow
Golden by noon. And then the sun sinks back
To earth, as it must. Which only goes to show

That light, no matter how high it shines in the sky,
Is bound to descend, just like everything else.
Steeped in torrential rain, the lightning slants

Precipitously. But first it’s the glow of cloudburst,
Spreading like wildfire across the darkening sky
As it crackles overhead. Then the abrupt bolt
sed citius cedunt gravioribus exsuperata;
at contra nulli de nulla parte neque ullo
tempore inane potest vacuum subsistere rei,
quín, sua quod natura petit, concedere pergat;
omnia qua propter debent per inane quietum
aeque ponderibus non aequis concita ferri.
haud igitur poterunt levioribus incidere umquam
ex supero graviora neque ictus gignere per se,
qui varient motus, per quos natura gerat res.
quare etiam atque etiam paulum inclinare necesset
corpora; nec plus quam minimum, ne fingere motus
obliquos videamur et id res vera refutet.
namque hoc in promptu manifestumque esse videmus,
pondera, quantum in sest, non posse obliqua meare,
ex supero cum praecipitant, quod cernere possis;
sed nihil omnino recta regione via
declinare quis est qui possit cernere sese?

— Titus Lucretius Carus
Flashes like rods of the fasces in thunder’s grip.
Lightning, as everyone should know by now,
Can strike at any place, and at any time.

Finally, there’s one more point regarding matter
That I wish to convey: even as atoms are falling
Through empty space, each one dropping down

Straight as a plumb line, and carried along by the pull
Of its own weight, at certain moments they swerve
Together ever so slightly, and though it’s just

Enough to say that a change in direction occurred,
We can never predict where and when it will happen.
And if this swerving never happened, then atoms

Would never collide with each other; and since
Creation depends on the unpredictable impact
Of colliding atoms, Nature would then have created

Nothing, though the atoms themselves would still
Be falling through empty space, falling like drops
Of rain falling by themselves forever

— George Kalogeris
“As much as the work is translated into English, English should be translated to and around the work. Before being a stomach in which to break down and absorb the work, the translator must, like a starfish, turn himself and his language inside out in order fully to surround the work, still intact and asserting its form.”

– Roger Shattuck, in “Artificial horizon: Translator as navigator” from The Craft and Context of Translation (1961), which he edited with William Arrowsmith.