

Translation as Transnational Conversation: Exploring and Translating Postwar Women Poets from Two Languages

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The final copy of this thesis has been examined by the signatories, and we find that both the content and the form meet acceptable presentation standards of scholarly work in the above mentioned discipline.

ABSTRACT

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from Two Languages

Thesis directed by Professor Janice Brown

This project includes an introduction to and translations of a selection of early poetry by two twentieth century poets, Ibaragi Noriko and Luciana Frezza, who wrote in Japanese and Italian, respectively. These two writers and languages are placed alongside each other in hopes of showing some of both the similarities and the differences across nations within poetry written by women in wake of World War II. The poems experiment with modernism and grapple with various expectations and concerns related to their position as women. My aim is to put them in conversation with one another other, with myself as their translator, and with other women writers among whom their works might find a place.

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Preface
Towards A Transnational Theory of Modernist Women's Poetry

The poems translated here come from two collections, written by two different poets in two different languages and published in different countries in the same year: Ibaragi Noriko's 見えない配達夫 *Mienai Haitatsufu* (*Invisible Deliverymen*, 1958) and Luciana Frezza's *Cefalù ed altre poesie* (*Cefalù and other poems*, 1958). Writing from their respective locations, these two women illustrate similar ideas and experiences in their poetry, and for this reason and others, I aim to put them into a kind of conversation — with each other, and with myself as their translator — and to create a kind of cross-cultural communication in text that our lived realities never allowed the chance to take place. Translation, I hope, will operate as a kind of *transnational relation*, carrying words across disparate countries to meet and to resonate alongside and through each other. This project is an experiment; an exploration of what it might look like to place two distinct works alongside each other; to translate from two languages into one. The poems are arranged in a way that is intended to show their voices intermingled — as if they are taking part in the same conversation, although they might have different things to say.

Thematically, I propose that both sets of poetry draw on the domestic sphere and the natural world for their central images, and proceed, to varying degrees, to distort these things— not unlike the poems of Sylvia Plath, Amy Lowell, Mina Loy, and other modernist women poets across oceans from where they lived and wrote. The poems deal persistently with the roles ascribed to women in their respective societies, as well as in a more globalized world. The works might be read to raise similar questions, particularly regarding the experience of womanhood, and the way that it evolves through different stages of a woman's life.

There are a handful of parallels between these texts — both are published in 1958, when both authors, who were both born in 1926, are 32. Both appear early in the poet's career. Both grapple with the aftermath of war — a war in which both countries were defeated. Both operate from the perspective of a young woman in a nation trying to reconstruct itself. This particular moment in history offers an opportunity to consider side by side two countries, two languages, that we would scarcely perceive of as similar. This is certainly not to say that the circumstances in each country after the war were identical — far from it — but that some similarities in positioning brought out some similar styles and themes in some poetic works. Neither writer here should be seen as representative of their time and place as a whole. But my hope is that by placing their voices next to each other, by listening to them together, a sense of solidarity might emerge.

These similarities on the surface provide part of the basis for approaching the works together. My hope, though, is that a deeper relationship might be found between the disparate poetics of these distance places; that putting them in conversation might reveal not an essential truth about poetry or womanhood but a coexistence of similarities as well as differences within the broad categories of “poet” and “woman,” at this moment in the 20th century in particular. That they are, in my interpretation, both writing women's poetry, postwar poetry, and modernist poetry should help to situate such similarities; that they are writing in different languages will no doubt help to situate such differences.

A Brief Note on Approaches to Translation

My aim is to put these poets in conversation with one another. My own voice, therefore, is all over this project — my hand is visible in the poems I've chosen, the order I've put them in here, and the English language that I'm bringing both the Italian and the Japanese into. I've tried to be faithful to each poet's unique voice as I perceive it, but inevitably the translations are in my voice, as well, which likely makes each of theirs harder to distinguish. I've placed each translation alongside its original, in the hope that this will help the reader perceive some of the visual and sonic effects of the Japanese and the Italian that couldn't quite be carried over. One of my goals is to highlight the translator's subjectivity and visibility, and to undermine the translator's objectivity or authority. This is why my notes, where they appear, offer information that might clarify or might contest some of the choices I've made, but are not intended to defend them. In the Japanese, in particular, where multiple correct interpretations are possible, I want to make note of other possible readings, and don't intend to suggest that mine is the best or most accurate. In many cases of translation, I don't believe there is a right answer—only a possible way of presenting something. I present these poems from my own standpoint, but hope to allow the reader their own.

This project is influenced by more experimental translators and radical theories of translation, and follows the dictum that “readers read the poem they have made,”¹ and that a translator is not simply a conveyer but a collaborator and creator of a work. There is a move in some fields of translation studies towards thinking of translation as a kind of cultural studies, which entails, not taking “language,” “culture,” or “gender” for granted as given, easily definable

¹ Schweickart 1986 qtd in Fisher, Lina. “Theory and Practice of Feminist Translation in the 21st Century,” in *Translation: Theory and Practice in Dialogue*, edited by Antionette Fawcett, Karla L. Guadarrama García, and Rebecca Hyde Parker. Continuum, 2010, p.36

categories. Work by earlier scholars on feminist practices of reading have been adapted by today's feminist scholars of translation, to emphasize the role of subjectivity in the translation process and in some cases to undermine the authority of a given text and/or the hegemonic dominance of a given language.² It is important in this framework to acknowledge the subjective, intrusive role of the translator in a translated text. I locate myself within this project because I have inserted myself into it, knowing "translators are involved in the materials through which they work; they are fully invested in the process of transfer."³ And yet I still do attempt, to the best of my ability, to let these poems and their original poets speak for themselves, rather than to speak for them. I call attention to my own voice in part to point out its failings to fully achieve this. Neither language is native to me; neither poet's words enter my mind with ease.

Because I am not fluently multilingual, translation for me is in part a means of furthering my understanding of another language, by relating it to what I understand in my own tongue. I worry that this practice depends upon and thus reinforces the dominance of English, which is not my intention. But English is what I have and what I exist in. English acts in this project as a meeting place where I can bring these two poets together, not because it is a universal language, but because it is my language. The reader, I hope will conceive of English not as a bridge between two other languages and cultures, but as a perspective from which to consider them.

Continuing to think about the politics of location implicit in this project, I want to speak briefly to my relationship with each of the languages I translate here. The Italian language has always had a place in my life, though I learned to speak and to read it only recently. I have less formal knowledge, but perhaps, as a third-generation Italian-American, more "authority," in the

² Such scholars include William Spurlin (2014), Eleonora Federici (2011), Luise von Flotow (1997; 1999), Sherry Simon (1996), Naoki Sakai (1997), and others. (See bibliography.)

³ Simon, Sherry. *Gender in Translation: Cultural Identity and the Politics of Transmission*. London ; New York: Routledge, 1996, p.5

eyes of someone reading my last name, to translate it. Japanese I have studied longer, and yet, because it shares far fewer characteristics with my native English, I still feel farther away from. There are also tensions of history to be considered: these poems, as I have noted, grew out of the aftermath of war — a war in which my own country fought opposite the countries of these poets; a war in which America dropped an atomic bomb on Japan, and after which America's military occupied Japanese soil. The destruction of the earth that Ibaragi writes about in her poems resulted from global political tensions and systems that I, as an American citizen, am complicit in. Translation, writes William Spurlin, “also includes the spaces where various cultural systems, in addition to language, intersect, converge, and transform.”⁴ It must account, therefore, for the relationships between the cultural entities it tries to bring together. Although the events of World War II transpired long before my birth (when my own ancestors were still living in and fighting for Italy), such problematic transnational histories are important to acknowledge when doing this kind of cross-cultural work. I cannot pretend to truly know where either of these poets is coming from; I can only present their work from my own standpoint.

From that standpoint, what I could learn about these poets, in the traditional sense — acquiring facts and details about their lives, their persons — is somewhat limited, due in part to the lack of biographical information out there about them, and in part to my lack of access to what information does exist, considering constraints of language and location. Instead, I could get to know them primarily through their poetry — could attempt to listen to what they communicated on the page, and could attempt, through reading and through translation, to communicate something back. It happens that both Ibaragi Noriko and Luciana Frezza also

⁴ Spurlin, William J. “Queering Translation.” *A Companion to Translation Studies*. First Edition. Ed. Sandra Bermann and Catherine Porter. Wiley-Blackwell, 2014, p.299

worked as translators, and I can only hopefully assume that this would have made them sympathetic to what I am doing with their own work.

茨木のり子 Ibaragi Noriko: An Introduction

Ibaragi Noriko was born in Osaka on June 12, 1926 (Taishō 15). She grew up Aichi Prefecture, graduated from the Imperial Women's Pharmaceutical College, and married a physician when she was twenty-three.⁵ She began writing poems soon after she married, and soon became was a founding member of *Kai [Oars]*, a poetry collective that included Kawasaki Hiroshi, Ōoka Makoto, and Tanikawa Shuntarō, among others, and in which she was, at the beginning, the only woman. She published her first collection in 1955, and her second collection, *Mienai Haitatsufu [Invisible Deliverymen]*, from which the poems translated here are taken, in 1958. For a useful foundation, I borrow Greg Vanderbilt's description of the poet from his piece dedicated to her remembrance published in *The Asia Pacific Journal* following her death in 2006:

“Among the first poets to emerge in a new generation (and often considered the first and best-known woman among them) after the 1945 defeat, Ibaragi was sui generis in a time when poets were part of rebuilding the imagination of a citizenry, seeking to “cultivate” (*tagayasu*, her favorite verb, she said) in the language, place, and time where they happened to make their homes. With her beret and dark-rimmed glasses, her ever-present slim cigarettes and mellow voice, and her keen, youth-filled observations, she cut an unforgettable figure to the end of her life. A comment she made in her last months may well be a fitting summation: “I never thought I would have any affiliation, but in the end I can say I was affiliated with the Japanese language.”⁶

Ibaragi's poems, strongly rooted in Japanese life and land, often exhibit this apparently accidental affiliation with the language. She seems concerned, in particular, with the place of women within the Japanese language — with the ways they are constructed through their own speech and through the labels and monikers applied to them. One of the poems in *Mienai Haitatsufu*, my translation of which appears later and is excerpted below, is aptly titled “onna no kotoba” (“women's words”), and contemplates the position of Japanese women and their

⁵ Ibaragi Noriko. *Koto-no-ha*. Chikuma Shobō, 2002

⁶ Vanderbilt, Greg. ““Your Own Sensitivity, At Least”: Remembering the Postwar Poet Ibaragi Noriko, an Appreciation and Four Translations.” *The Asia-Pacific Journal* Vol 9, Issue 6 No 1, February 7, 2011, p.1

expected ways of speaking. “onna no kotoba” has a double meaning here, as the poem is about women’s speech, but is itself also an instance of women’s language — in this way the poem exemplifies the self-reflexive, ironic, and sometimes paradoxical nature of her writing. Ibaragi at first seems to celebrate the varied possibilities of women’s language, highlighting its uses in providing affection and nurture:

for loved ones
let us give plenty of pet names
little animals Greek gods
likened to some kind of beast
at night when we love one another
tender words
secret invitations
under cover of darkness

for children
let us tell every piece of the tale
accepting any kind of fate
like catching a dodgeball

But the third stanza expresses frustration, at none other than the inability of “women’s words” to express frustration:

in the middle of a crowded train
if our foot is stomped on
let us cry out idiot!
who do you think you’re stepping on

This paradox repeats itself throughout the poem: while women’s words are “supple” and “full of fragrance,” they are also “standardized goods,” “frozen foods with no luster,” and “miserable manmade lakes!”⁷ But worst of all, in the end, they are meaningless; sounds that signify nothing:

eventually without noticing the two people
become two little koi
their mouths just opening and closing *paku paku*
chattering on about meaningless things
to a big red carp!
sooner or later the two little fish become tired

⁷ Ibaragi Noriko, “onna no kotoba” (“women’s words”), 1958. Translation mine. (See page 40)

with talking with talking
slowly their spirits go off to those distant places
this is
nothing but a tragedy of broad daylight
as my fins go numb
moving slowly
I sound the whistle
become a gesture⁸

The poem betrays a kind of desperation — the desire to communicate coupled with the inability to. Ibaragi personifies the experience of being unheard — an experience she is no doubt familiar with. Such a thing is conceived of as ordinary for women — a “tragedy of broad daylight.” They are reduced to nothing more than little fish, who, tired of opening their mouths to no avail, go numb, and fade further into obscurity. Her metaphor morphs into a kind of magical realism as two ordinary women morph into the little fish they resemble with their meaningless “*paku paku*” sounds. Ibaragi writes this surrealist tragedy in the plain and deceptively cheerful style she is known for — “the bright and lively tone of a typical Japanese housewife in the west of Japan.”⁹ This underscores the double-meaning of the poem’s title — Ibaragi plays with and mocks the idea of “womanspeak,” but also utilizes this so-called “women’s language,” wrapping her message in its quotidian tone. This is what Leith Morton refers to as the poet’s “feminist irony,” citing Toril Moi: “in the ironic discourse, every position undercuts itself, thus leaving the politically engaged writer in a position where her ironic discourse might just come to deconstruct her own politics.”¹⁰ He explicates this position further, using the lens provided by Moi in

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Atsumi Ikuko. “Modern Japanese Women Poets: After the Meiji Restoration.” *The Iowa Review* Vol. 7, No. 2/3, International Writing Program Anthology (Spring - Summer, 1976), p.233

¹⁰ Moi 1985, p.156, qtd in Morton 2004, p.91

Sexual/Textual Politics (1985) to consider techniques used by Japanese women poets of this era¹¹:

“The assumption behind Moi’s identification of irony with a particular mode of woman’s writing is that concepts of masculinity and femininity are social constructs, referring to ‘no real essence’ in the world. Thus, when feminine stereotypes are constructed, they deconstruct themselves, and such deconstruction—the feminine mode of irony employed by [poets]—is an integral part of a general ‘rhetorical enterprise’ favored by feminist writers. In other words, a deliberate stylistic strategy demonstrates the ‘insidious effects of thinking by sexual analogy.’”¹²

For Morton, this irony is “made more powerful by the plainness of [the] language,” which demonstrated a new trend in Japanese poetry, which before the war had “tended more to the ornate.”¹³

In the landscape of postwar Japanese poetry, the *Kai* poets were known for “inaugurating a new, contemporary poetry in postwar Japan (one noted for its cheerfulness).”¹⁴ And yet their work was still concerned with and rife with images of the war — not in the same way as the *Arechi* and *Retto* poets, who had lived through it as adults, but as a new generation coming of age against the war’s results. Of Tanikawa in particular and the *Kai* poets more generally, Iwata Hiroshi writes:

“the junior high school students, who were too young to be desperately intoxicated with the war cause, but too mature to overlook the war reality, were opening their keen adolescent eyes in the vague freedom that was allowed only for noncombatants. In an over-strained period, to be wise one must always be on the alert, and also be abnormally sensitive.”¹⁵

This generation felt the effects of war largely without the patriotism that for many had preceded it. As her poems show, the war for Ibaragi was analogous with its tragic aftermath; with “the

¹¹ Morton’s analysis focuses on Ishigaki Rin, a poet who was Ibaragi’s contemporary and close friend, but he cites Ibaragi as another women writing “in a similar vein.” (2004: 96)

¹² Morton 2004, p.91-2

¹³ Morton 2004, p.96

¹⁴ Vanderbilt 2011, p.2

¹⁵ Iwata Hiroshi qtd in Kijima, Hajime, ed. *The Poetry of Postwar Japan*. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1975, p. xxi

destruction of the earth.”¹⁶ She concerned herself with the problems of her country, and with the role of poetry in making sense of senseless things: “coinciding with her country’s defeat in war, her own youth had been ‘awash in contradictions,’ but she expressed the desire to be involved in, and to put into words, her times as they unfolded.”¹⁷ Her best known poem, “watashi ga ichiban kirei datta toki” (“when I was prettiest in my life”) considers the war from a survivor’s distance, with a hint of disdain as well as mourning for the emptiness it fostered. She frames the fighting against frivolity, lamenting how she “lost the chance to dress up like a girl should” while lots of people around her were killed.¹⁸ Quite a few versions of this poem circulate in English translation; I include a few stanzas from one here:

When I was prettiest in my life,
my head was empty,
my heart was obstinate,
and only my limbs had the bright color of chestnuts.

When I was prettiest in my life,
my country lost the war.
‘How can it be true?’ I asked,
striding, with my sleeves rolled up, through the prideless town.

When I was prettiest in my life,
jazz music streamed from the radio.
Feeling dizzy, as if I’d broken a resolve to quit smoking,
I devoured the sweet music of a foreign land.¹⁹

The poem, which resonated strongly and widely enough to be translated and anthologized in numerous places as well as set to music and turned into a popular song by American folk singer-songwriter Pete Seeger, has been noted for showcasing a postwar perspective which is specifically that of a young woman:

¹⁶Ibaragi Noriko, “mienai haitatsufu” (“invisible deliverymen”), 1958. Translation mine. (See page 24)

¹⁷ Vanderbilt 2011, p.3

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibaragi Noriko, “When I Was Prettiest in My Life,” translated by Naoshi Kōriyama and Edward Lueders, in Kōriyama, Naoshi, and Edward Lueders, eds. *Like Underground Water: Poetry of Mid-Twentieth Century Japan*. Port Townsend, WA: Copper Canyon Press, 1995, p.125

“the poem re-establishes a feminine self who laments having suffered the futility of the war, tacitly admitting having escaped its destruction and depravation, but at the same time having had to forfeit the possibility of the joys of youth and love due to ideologies which left the young men around her capable only of saluting and marching off to war and her own young self empty-headed and unfeeling.”²⁰

In this lament, too, there seems to be a kind of “feminist irony,” undermining the narrator’s position by contrasting it against crumbling cities and numerous deaths. In this setting, her beauty becomes a kind of unexpected joke. Ibaragi was predecessor to a younger generation of poets and feminists who disagreed with the war and with Japanese imperialism in Asia, and expressed in their work a politics of peace²¹. Later in life she learned Korean, and began translating poetry by her Korean contemporaries, whose work would have offered a different perspective on the Pacific War and its resulting atrocities.

Ibaragi’s poems balance heavy images with light tones; dense constructs with sparse language. They provide challenges for a translator because they leave gaps between ideas for the reader to fill in. Japanese poetry often tends towards ambiguity, embracing the multiple meanings of a given ideogram kanji, and eschews a singular clear reading. These poems are very visual in nature, and do not easily conform to the “look” of an English poem; I have tried instead to display them as closely as I could to the original. The Japanese does not have capital letters; for this reason I have translated Ibaragi’s poems all in lowercase (with rare exceptions for proper nouns and the first-person singular subject in English, though I have translator’s doubts about even these). In some places I have added commas, particularly where I felt they were implied by the Japanese particles, but for the most part I have tried to avoid adding conventional grammar to the poems in English or turned her lines, fragments, and phrases into proper sentences as other translators have done. Perhaps this is too foreignizing — the resulting poems probably read as

²⁰ Vanderbilt 2011, p.3

²¹ Buckley, Sandra, ed. *Broken Silence: Voices of Japanese Feminism*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997.

more obviously sparse and disjointed than the originals would to a Japanese — but it reflects the way that I experience her work. I have also maintained her emphatic spaces, which, though not so uncommon in Japanese poetry, add a visual effect to the poems on the page and convey the sort of emptiness that Ibaragi, in my view, is trying to illustrate. These spaces also evoke for the English reader a relationship to certain modernist poetics: the American poet Mina Loy was known for a similar technique in her work; and while it is unlikely that these two poets would have been very familiar with one another, I want to suggest that they might have shared a similar consciousness that allows for some parallels between their work. Miranda Hickman's analysis of Loy's poetic spaces can also shine light on Ibaragi's techniques: "the staged interruptions, fostering readerly pauses, also contribute to the interrogative impact of her work: they invite readers to question statements advanced just before the spatially induced caesurae."²² Ibaragi's spaces invite pauses for consideration; they also invite silence — "an intense silence," "a strange aura" that evokes a lack, a hollowness, the missing and the dead.²³ She and her fellow postwar poets "produced works in which their own existence and past experience are presented as an absence, as a flaring void beyond the limits of the language."²⁴ This absence is reflected visually, in the white space between the dense logographic characters on the page.

Ibaragi certainly worked under the shadow of her Japanese predecessors and contemporaries, "creating a lineage for her poetry in profiles of four modern poets 'who lived in the heart of the poem' — Yosano Akiko, Takamura Kōtarō, Yamanokuchi Baku, and, most importantly, Kaneko Mitsuharu, whose own struggle against the ideological tides became an

²² Hickman, Miranda. "Modernist women poets and the problem of form." Linett, Maren Tova, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Modernist Women Writers*. Cambridge, UK : New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010, p.36.

²³ Sakai, Naoki. *Translation and Subjectivity: On "Japan" and Cultural Nationalism*. University of Minnesota Press, 1997, p.180

²⁴ Sakai 1997, p.189

example to her.”²⁵ At the same time, influences from the West were prominent in Japan, and many Japanese poets felt “a strong affinity with the West” and were said to have shared “the same artistic consciousness as the Western avant-gardists.”²⁶ Ibaragi seemed to find a kind of solidarity in ideological struggles as well with these foreign poets, most notably the French existentialists, including Jean-Paul Sartre, to whom she addresses a poem in this collection, which has been previously translated:

M. Sartre,
I do not know you well
nor are the attitudes and feelings of the Jewish people familiar to me.
I have gained another horror in humanity,
but also a pure joy in the present!

Surely this is good
even if no actual hairs stand on end.

That is what reaches me
from what you were writing in Paris in 1947
Reflexions sur la Question Juive
as I make my life in 1956,
hanging out the washing each and every morning
like the flags of all nations.²⁷

Her ode to Sartre is telling, not only in that it suggests she read widely and was influenced by writers and intellectuals outside of Japan, but more significantly in that it shows her efforts to make personal connections to them; to find a common ground across cultures. She feels that what Sartre writes “reaches [her],” despite her lack of understanding of the context he writes it in. “In her poetry she was seeking to understand and to engage in dialogue,” writes Vanderbilt.²⁸ It seems fitting, therefore, to put her poetry into a kind of dialogue here.

²⁵ Vanderbilt 2011, p.4

²⁶ Kijima 1975, p. xv

²⁷ Ibaragi Noriko, “Jyan Pōru Sarutoru ni,” *Koto-no-ha*, vol. 1, pp. 66-70, translated by Greg Vanderbilt in Vanderbilt 2011, p.4

²⁸ Vanderbilt 2011, p.3

Luciana Frezza: An Introduction

Luciana Frezza was born in Rome in 1926, and lived in Rome, Sicily, and Milan in her lifetime. Her impressions of, experiences in, and emotional ties to each of these places can be found throughout her poetry. Frezza might be seen to follow in a line of Italian women writers of the 20th century who are often characterized by their strong use of sensory and place-based memoir in their work: in a 1964 anthology of Italian poetry (which contained only 13 women, out of 140 poets²⁹), the literary critic Enrico Falqui wrote that “today’s female poets, or at least those among them who feel their solitude most strongly, wander among their memories as though walking through the ruins of a lost lunar landscape.”³⁰ Yet while this ethereal image of the poet certainly has some resonance through her poems, replete with ruins and landscapes of moments passed, to define them only as such would be too narrow. In Frezza’s verse, a strong sense of solitude blends together with a strong sense of familial commitment and community, narrated in “*quell’inconfondibile voce dai toni a tratti ironici, a tratti fanciulleschi, si riprova la stessa emozione*” [that unmistakable voice, a tone at times ironic, at times child-like, but always finding the same emotion].³¹

Frezza was an intellectual, very well-read in Western literatures, and known for having “*una sensibilità acuta e pericolosa*” [an acute and dangerous sensibility].³² She earned a degree in Contemporary Italian Literature from the University of Rome, where she wrote a thesis on Eugenio Montale and studied alongside Giuseppe Ungaretti — both of whom can be seen as influences in her work. Her poetic style shows traces of the earlier 20th century Italian poetic traditions of *frammentismo*, categorized as “a poetry made up of fragments of life, fleeting

²⁹ Frabotta, Biancamaria, and Corrado Federici, eds. *Italian Women Poets*. Toronto: Guernica, 200, p.218.

³⁰ Falqui 1964, qtd in Frabotta, 18.

³¹ Sicari, Giovanna, “Ricordo di Luciana Frezza,” *Gradiva* Vol.23-24, 2003, p.68. Translation mine.

³² Bux, Antonio. “Anteprime editoriali: la poesie ‘pop’ di Luciana Frezza,” *Foggia Città Aperta*, 2015. <http://www.foggiacittaaperta.it/blog/read/anteprime-editoriali--la--poesia-pop--di-luciana-frezza-> Translation mine.

moments drawn from the general flow,” which shared with the Expressionists “a tendency toward the autobiographical, with all of its existential tensions”³³; new lyricism, including the works of Montale, which privileged “a diary of interior life and a spare, essential use of language”³⁴; hermeticism, which “rose out of the influence of Ungaretti and the French symbolists,”³⁵ and often featured “ellipsis, fractured syntax, and obscure and allusive analogies”³⁶; and neorealism, known for addressing socio-historical issues and exemplified for many through Pasolini’s “autobiographical confessionism.”³⁷

She was also drawn to and influenced by the works of French writers, particularly those of the 18th and 19th centuries, and translated the poetry and prose of quite a few notable names in French literature into Italian — including Stephane Mallarmé, Jules Laforgue, Paul Verlaine, Charles Baudelaire, Albert Girard, and Marcel Proust. The flowing, stream-of-memory narrative style of many of her longer poems might be attributed to these influences, as well as to modernist movements in American literature that some of her later poems make reference to. Her husband Agostino Lombardo was also a well-read and well-known intellectual, considered “*uno dei più grandi anglisti e americanisti italiani, forse il più grande traduttore e critico dell’opera shakesperiana*” [one of the greatest Italian Anglicists and Americanists, perhaps the greatest translator and critic of the works of Shakespeare].³⁸ In a piece dedicated to Frezza’s memory, the writer Giovanna Sicarci describes the poet as having embodied “l’equilibrismo della donna intellettuale, della donna che scrive, quando deve acrobaticamente tenere uniti tanti tasselli della

³³ Picchione, John and Lawrence R. Smith, eds. *Twentieth-century Italian poetry : an anthology*. Toronto ; Buffalo : University of Toronto Press, 1993, p.9.

³⁴ Ibid, p.10

³⁵ Ibid, 12.

³⁶ Ibid, 12.

³⁷ Ibid, 13.

³⁸ Bux, Antonio. “Anteprime editoriali: la poesie ‘pop’ di Luciana Frezza,” Foggia Città Aperta, 2015. <http://www.foggiacittaaperta.it/blog/read/anteprime-editoriali--la--poesia-pop--di-luciana-frezza-> Translation mine.

quotidianità” [the balancing act of the intellectual woman, the woman who writes, while having to acrobatically keep together many pieces of everyday life].³⁹

Frequently Frezza is noted for the intensity with which she takes in so much around her, carries it through her life, and reproduces it as poetry. Inside *Cefalù*’s cover, the editor of the small volume introduces the work as follows:

“Poesie di una donna: di una donna che consuma, nell’intensità degli avvenimenti e degli affetti familiari, nelle trepidazioni e negli slanci di fanciulla e poi di donna e di madre, tutta quella violenta sensibilità e passione che, in altre poesie di donne, abbiamo visto distorcere verso esperienze, sensuali e intellettuali, diverse e spesso disperate.”

[Poetry by a woman: by a woman who consumes, in the intensity of circumstances and of family ties, in the trepidation and in the outbursts of a young girl and then of a woman and of a mother, all of those violent sensitivities and passions that, in other poetry by women, we’ve seen distort towards experiences, sensual and intellectual, different and often desperate.]⁴⁰

Cefalù and its titular poem refer to a city by that name on the northern coast of Sicily. A notable tourist destination in the province of Palermo, located on the Tyrrhenian Sea, Cefalù for Frezza was her family’s vacation home, a harbor for childhood memories and images of Italy after the war. The poem “Cefalù” closes out the collection in a long and beautiful stream of memory, where sensory images and surreal metaphors flow together to reconstruct place and construct from it meaning. Her language invokes at times a kind of synesthesia (a long alley “silver-plated by a thousand sounds”⁴¹), which helps to paint Cefalù as a kind of distant fantasy, though by the end we know it is a place she still regularly returns to. Frezza’s emphasis on particulars, names of neighbors and streets, family customs, and memories of minute details, all of which seem to tumble out in run-on sentences and enjambed lines, conveys a search for significance that is

³⁹ Sicari 2003, p.68. Translation mine.

⁴⁰ Sciascia, Salvatore, Introduction to Frezza, Lucianna. *Cefalù e altre poesie*. Caltanissetta: S. Sciascia, 1958. Translation mine.

⁴¹ Frezza, “Cefalù,” *Cefalù e altre poesie*, 1958. Translation mine (see page 50).

almost Proustian — an exploration of the subjective self undoubtedly informed by her modernist predecessors.

The Sicilian backdrop is significant to these poems as it is to the poet's life. The island for Frezza has dual significance; has two sides, as she explains:

“c'è quella originaria, la montagna, dove è nata mia madre, e c'è quella costiera, di adozione, ossia Cefalù, che, scelta giusto all'epoca della mia nascita da mio padre, romano, come posto di villeggiatura, è divenuta per noi una specie di seconda patria”

[there is the original one, the mountain, where my mother was born, and there is the coast, the adopted one, namely Cefalù, which, chosen right when I was born by my father, a Roman, as a place to vacation, became for us a kind of second homeland.]⁴²

The sense of place, the attachment to landscapes from her childhood which pervades this first collection continues to haunt her through her later work. I offer here, in another's translation, the opening stanzas of her poem “Luoghi” [“Places”], anthologized in *Contemporary Italian Women Poets*, which first appeared in her collection *Un tempo di speranza* (poesie 1961—1970) [*A time of hope*], in a section of the same name—“Luoghi”—where many of the landscapes of Luciana's life are gathered.

Places

Here the green vein of life
does not disappear
in the foams of dawn, memory is no
sinuous fairy tale — not the dream
of the river that carries me to the infinite
always to the same dawn, to the warm milk
and the goat anchored in the brush:

but it is shortened in perspective,
in time:
here the birth, the crucial
point: tracing one thousand lazy streams to their source,
finding the error
in the design, discerning
the dark seeds of evil

⁴² Frezza qtd in Sicari 2003, p. 69 Translation mine.

mixed with the figures of innocence,
the labor of making myself
whole is the life sentence
of my city.⁴³

Such a labor weighs on her, and entrenches her in the landscape of her city. She grows weary of the places of origin that call to her; feels the burden of the obligations and attachments she has to them. She writes, in a note to the final collection she published⁴⁴, *Parabola sud*:

“a Milano ho vissuto dal ’60 al ’66, ho creduto e spesso desiderato di rimanere per sempre, lontana dal luogo e dalle famiglie di origine e sciolta, illusoriamente, da ogni debito o scotto karmico ad essi dovuto.”

[I lived in Milan from ’60 to ’66, I believed and often wished I would stay forever, far from the place and the families I came from and dissolved, deceptively, from every karmic debt or reckoning owed to them.]⁴⁵

In Frezza’s poetry geographic and human landscapes are intertwined. It takes *pazienza* (patience), in the words of Gianana Sicari, to follow the poet into “*paesaggi fisici e dell’anima, nascondigli fittizi, luoghi reali*” [landscapes both physical and of the soul; artificial hiding spots, real places].⁴⁶ Human lives and emotions in her poems seem to parallel the landscapes that surround them, and often are blended together through the grammatical structures of her lines and sentences. Leaves, gardens, and rivers are personified not only in themselves but in the way the speaker or the people and objects the speaker observes interact with them. In the poem “treno sull’alba,” for example, a conflation of the movement of a train, the speaker, and the sun results from unusual prepositional play:

*Un treno sull'alba riparte
senza di me, là
forse dov'ero buona
ai tramonti*

⁴³Blum, Cinzia Sartini, and Lara Trubowitz, eds. *Contemporary Italian Women Poets: A Bilingual Anthology*. New York: Italica Press, 2001, p. 61

⁴⁴ Excepting posthumous publications of *Agenda*, per *All'insegna del pesce d'oro* (Scheiwiller, 1994) and *Comunione col Fuoco. Tutte le poesie* (Editori Internazionali Riuniti, 2013).

⁴⁵ Quoted in Sicari, Giovanna, “Ricordo di Luciana Frezza,” *Gradiva* Vol.23-24, 2003, p.69. Translation mine.

⁴⁶ Sicari 2003, p.69. Translation mine.

A train on the sunrise leaves again,
without me, there
maybe where I once was good
at sunsets⁴⁷

The irregular use of prepositions seen here, as in “*sull'alba*” (literally, “on the sunrise,” though it could also be translated as “about the sunrise,” which in this context would be no less strange), is characteristic of her poetry, and creates a disorienting view of an otherwise simple image. Paired with the idea of being “buona ai tramonti” (literally, “good at sunsets”), when *tramonti* are not typically thought of as something a person might be good or bad at, these opening lines are given a subtle air of surrealism, where they might, if constructed with just a slightly different grammar, seem entirely ordinary. The critic Carlo Bordini sees in her writing “*un barocco femminile, come una scrittura ovale, non rettilinea né ellittica, un rapporto strano con la realtà*” [a feminine baroque, like an oval writing, not straight or elliptical, a strange relationship with reality].⁴⁸ Often in her poems conventions of grammar are disregarded for the sake of an analogy or metaphor—prepositions are substituted or left out entirely; articles are often missing; adjectives function as adverbs; nouns are sometimes used as if they’re verbs. Frezza’s poems prompt a particular problem for the translator because of these grammatical oddities, and because they are so deeply interior; so imbued with personal meanings that it can be impossible for an outsider to entirely understand them, let alone render them in another language. She writes the way she feels the world; she does not clarify.

While her early works provide more direct portraits of her own and her family’s lives, the later poems which helped shape her career allude to things bigger and farther away, such as the growing feminist movement in Italy (“To The New Feminists”) and to literary movements and figures in America (“To Allen Ginsberg & Co.” and “Requiem for Sylvia Plath”), all of which

⁴⁷ Frezza, “Treno sull'alba” *Cefalù e altre poesie*, 1958. Translation mine (see page 26).

⁴⁸ Quoted in Bux, 2015. Translation mine.

proved to influence and to haunt her just as her own attachments did. Towards the beats she expresses jealousy, but positions herself opposite them, and nonetheless entwined, coexisting in a poetic world:

To Allen Ginsberg & Co.

Dear dear dear beat
I envy your drifting
aboard electric typewriters,
your storms of obscenities,
the ocean of light
in the overly clear lulls,
colors like lavish fruits
ripened in the sun of drugs
or from seeds of madness
grown like lianas in jungles of rooms;
...

And I think of my stream of patience
of your rivers of lava,
mixed nonetheless together! in the livid cauldron
of a sempiternal envy of God.⁴⁹

She envies the beats, with whom she seems to share certain influences, and grapples with her relationship to them. But the American poet she finds can relate to, whom she admires with less questioning, is modernist foremother Sylvia Plath. Frezza's "Requiem" to Plath remains one of her better-known and most-anthologized poems of the handful that circulate in English translation—perhaps because of this likeness, which helps to situate the Italian poet for an American audience.

Requiem for Sylvia Plath

A requiem for you
each time I bent down
to remove the spaghetti strand stuck
to the green stoneware
battlefield of the kitchen, a sharp
piercing pain
over a leaf of parsley.

⁴⁹ Blum, Cinzia Sartini, and Lara Trubowitz, eds. *Contemporary Italian Women Poets: A Bilingual Anthology*. New York: Italica Press, 2001, p.59 Translated by Cinzia Sartini Blum and Lara Trubowitz.

A requiem for you as I punish myself
with the anguishing enclose
of strength, poor wooden slats,
contained within the other larger one
of being, at the edge of the humid forest of sleep
where something bathes us.
Is the escape route there? In the dark
for you at least. Kneeling,
I remove with my nail a small scab
as I say a requiem for you.⁵⁰

Remembrances have often painted Frezza as a kind of tragic (female) genius—a woman too aware and attuned to the world to live happily in it; too sensitive for her own smarts. In this, as well, we might see her likened to Plath. From Sicari's tribute:

"Luciana Frezza era un'intellettuale che vedeva molto più cose degli altri, sapeva ad esempio che la vita pubblica è quella quotidiana, che questa è già politica ed è di questa che si muore. Fuori di quell'esperienza, di quel, seppur ripetuto gesto quotidiano, si apre il teatro dell'inautenticità, della morte."

[Luciana Frezza was an intellectual who could see a lot more things than others, she knew, for example, that the public life is that of the everyday; that this is already political, and she died of this. Out of that experience — out of that, albeit repeated daily, action — opens the theater of inauthenticity, of death.]⁵¹

Frezza's ultimate suicide furthers this reading of her — a poet suffering from over-engagement with the world. Her poetry, in Sicari's view, made her more vulnerable to this: "Frezza sa più di ogni altro che la poesia è qualcosa che scotta e quasi a volte se ne schermisce, con un abile pazientissimo gioco di specchi e di autoironia, cerca di difendersene" [Frezza knew above all that poetry is something that sears, and sometimes she almost shields herself from it, with a patiently skillful game of mirrors and self-irony, she tries to defend against it].⁵² In some ways, this might ring familiar with Vanderbilt's characterization of Ibaragi Noriko as "a poet

⁵⁰ Frabotta, Biancamaria, and Corrado Federici, eds. *Italian Women Poets*. Toronto: Guernica, 2002, p.51 Translated by Corrado Federici.

⁵¹ Sicari 2003, p.69. Translation mine.

⁵² Ibid.

continuing to guard and cultivate her own sensitivity but withdrawing from the world.”⁵³ Both women are conscious of the way that their poems speak, sensitive to the way that their words move in the world. With this in mind, I bring them to try to speak to each other.

⁵³ Vanderbilt 2011, p.6

POEMS

from

Mienai Haitatsufu (Invisible Deliverymen) by Ibaragi Noriko, 1958

and

Cefalù ed altre poesie (Cefalù and other poems) by Luciana Frezza, 1958

INVISIBLE DELIVERYMEN

I.

March peach blossoms open
May wisteria flowers riot all at once
September grapes grow heavy on the trellis
November pale satsuma begin to ripen

beneath the earth, silly little deliverymen
tread over petals with their caps pushed back on their heads
they communicate from root to root
the transient spirit of the season

to peach trees around the world to lemon trees around the world
to the root of all plants
bundles of letters bundles of orders
they get flustered especially in spring and autumn

when the sweet pea flowers bloom
when the fruit of the acorn falls
at slightly different times in the north and south
it must be their doing

as autumn mornings gradually deepen
and I'm plucking figs from their trees
I hear the senior deliverymen scolding
part-timers for these signs of clumsiness

II.

March rice cakes are cut up for the doll's festival
May songs of springtime celebrations flow to the street
September wary eyes squint at rice fields and typhoons
November young men and girls exchange wedding sake

above the ground there's a stateless post office
the invisible deliverymen dutifully make their rounds

見えない配達夫

I

三月 桃の花はひらき
五月 藤の花々はいつせいに乱れ
九月 葡萄の棚に葡萄は重く
十一月 青い蜜批は熟れはじめる

地の下には少しまぬけな配達夫がいて
帽子をあみだにペタルをふんでいるのだろう
かれらは伝える 根から根へ
逝きやすい季節のこころを

世界中の桃の木に 世界中のレモンの木に
すべての植物たちのもとへ
どつさりの手紙 どつさりの指令
かれらもまごつく とりわけ春と秋には

怨 どんどうの花の咲くときや

どんぐりの実の落ちるときや
北と南で少しづつずれたりするの
もきつとそのせいにちがいない

秋のしだいに深まつてゆく、
いちぢくをもちでいると

古参の配達夫に叱られている
へまなアルパイト達の気配があつた

II

三月 雛のあられを切り
五月 メーデーのうた巷にながれ
九月 稲と台風とをやぶにらみ
十月 あまたの若者があま

地の上にも国籍不明の郵便局があつて
見えない配達夫がとても律儀に走っている

they communicate to everyone
the transient spirit of the season

to windows around the world to doors around the world
to the morning and night of all nations
bundles of suggestions bundles of warnings
they get flustered after the war and the devastation of the earth

when the renaissance flowers bloom
when the fruits of revolution ripen
at slightly different times in the north and south
it must be their doing

in the morning as a new year arrives
with closed eyes
human flowers, feeding on emptiness
begin to bloom

かれらは伝える ひとびとへ
逝きやすい時代のころを
世界中の窓々に 世界中の扉々に
すべての民族の朝と夜とに
どつさりの暗示 どつさりの警告
かれらもまごつく 大戦のや 荒廃の地では
ルネッサンスの花咲くときや
革命の实のみのるときが
北と南で少しづつずれたりするの
きつとそのせいにちがいない

禾知の年があける朝
じつとまぶたをあわせると
虚無を肥料に咲き出ようとする
人間たちの花々もあつた

Notes

On March 3rd the Japanese celebrate the Doll's Festival or "Little Girl's Day"
by setting out carpeted platforms with dolls representing the Emperor and Empress,
ladies-in-waiting, and court musicians and attendants in traditional Heian dress.

Early September is typhoon season in Japan.

At Shinto wedding ceremonies the bride and groom exchange ritual cups of sake.

TRENO SULL'ALBA

Un treno sull'alba riparte
senza di me, là
forse dov'ero buona
ai tramonti
che andavo sui cigli sopiti dei campi
cogliendo coi diti striati di steli
una messe di chiuse farfalle
appese nel sonno sui neri sambuchi.

TRAIN ON THE SUNRISE

A train on the sunrise leaves again
without me, there
maybe where I once was good
at sunsets
when I went along the dormant edges of the fields
grasping at stalks with stained fingers
a harvest of unopened butterflies
hung in sleep on the black elderberries.

ALLA POESIA

Docile ti seguirò
sussurrante ruscello
che porti la mia immagine fonda
nei cieli più rari
dove il vento appena sparte vapori
di canapa bionda
o quando l'acqua flagella
nei luoghi ove cose morte
marmi sepolti da foglie
contorte da una gelida lava
vivono vita che scorre
col fragore d'una celeste cascata;
o fra stagioni sorelle
che chiamano le più lontane
Aprile — ti dissi — è quello
dei lunedì di Pasqua
quando si saltano i fossi,
le vecchie nodose pei monti
si chinano a raccogliere erbe
e infiorano i bastoni,
e quelle che andarono spose
cantavano canzoni che non ricordano,
con le mani sanguinanti
a fatica s'aprivano il passo fra gli aromi.

Se mai mi discosterò
dal tuo corso che mi porta
limpido amico
che forse t'interri a una svolta
se mai mi discosterò
errando a fatica
in mezzo ad ogni cosa morta
andrò ricercando la mia immagine vuota
maschera persa nell'oscurità delle Ceneri.

TO POETRY

Docile I'll follow you,
whispering stream,
that brings my deepest image
into rarer skies
where the wind only scatters vapors
of blond hemp
or when the water whips
into places where dead things,
stones buried by leaves,
twisted by icy lava
live life as it flows
with the frenzy of a celestial cascade;
or between sister seasons
they call the most distant
April – I told you – is that of
Easter Mondays
when people jump over ditches,
the gnarled old women of the mountains
bend down to pick herbs
and flower their canes
and those who went off to marry
would sing songs they don't remember,
with bleeding hands
they'd struggle to open the gap between scents.

If ever I stray
from your current that leads me
crystalline friend
a bend might bury you
if ever I stray
wandering with trouble
amid every dead thing
I'll go searching for my image, an empty
mask lost in the obscurity of the Ashes.

生きているもの　死んでいるもの

生きている林檎　死んでいる林檎

それをどうして区別しよう

籠を下げて　明るい店さきに立つて

生きている料理　死んでいる料理

それをどうして味わけよう

ろばたで　峠で　レストランで

生きている心　死んでいる心

それをどうして聴きわけよう

はばたく気配や　深い沈黙　ひびかぬ暗さを

生きている心　死んでいる心

それをどうしてつきとめよう

二人が仲よく酔いどれ　もつれて行くのを

生きている国　死んでいる国

それをどうして見破ろう

似たりよつたりの虐殺の今日から

生きているもの　死んでいるもの

ふたつは寄り添い　一緒に並ぶ

いつでも　どこでも　姿をくらし

姿をくらし

LIVING THINGS • DEAD THINGS

a living apple　a dead apple
how can you tell them apart
set down in a basket　set up in a bright storefront

a living meal　a dead meal
how can you distinguish their taste
in the hearth　in the mountain pass　in the restaurant

a living heart　a dead heart
how can you distinguish their sound
fluttering presence　profound silence　resounding darkness

a living mind　a dead mind
how can you identify them
two drunk friends　leaning into each other

a living country　a dead country
how can you fathom it
every day the same massacre

a living thing　a dead thing
the two nestle close together　lined up on one string
any time　any place　the shape is concealed

the shape is concealed

Notes

The kanji “心” in stanzas three and four can be read as “heart” and “mind” interchangeably.

In Japanese, the first line of stanza five is an exact repetition of the title (生きているもの 死んでいるもの).

“もの” can be read as singular or plural (thing or things).

L'ALTALENA

Il frullo dell'altalena
mi riporta al tuo riso
raddolcito
dalla stanchezza scesa
sull'orto ammutolito.

Come il disegno della scala
appoggiata al ciliegio
il giro del tuo braccio
attorno alle mie spalle
ha la grazia incompiuta d'un abbozzo
forse d'altro destino.

THE SWING

The rattling of the swing
brings me back to your laughter
softened
by the weariness fallen
on the speechless vegetable garden.

Like the image of the ladder
propped up on the cherry tree
the outline of your arm
around my shoulders
has the incomplete grace of a sketch
perhaps of a different destiny.

JUNE

isn't there a beautiful town somewhere
where there's a mug full of dark beer at the end of a day's work
leaning against a gardening hoe putting down a basket
both men and women drink down tall ones

isn't there a beautiful town somewhere
where roadside trees bear edible fruit
continuing to the ends of the earth the violet twilight
is filled with the soft noise of young people

isn't there a beautiful union somewhere
where together in the same era live
intimacy and humor and anger alike
growing with fierce energy it manifests

六月

どこかに美しい村はないか
一日の仕事の終りには一杯の黒麦酒
鍬を立てかけ 籠を置き
男も女も大きなジョッキをかたむける

どこかに美しい村はないか
食べられる実をつけた街路樹が
どこまでも続き すみれいろした夕暮は
若者のやさしいさざめきで満ち満ちる

どこかに美しい人と人との力はないか
同じ時代をともに生きる
したしさとおかしさとそうして怒りが
鋭い力となつて たちあらわれる

RITRATTO DI MIA MADRE AL CASALE

Ti vedo seduta sotto l'ulivo
sull'erba grama ai piedi di tuo padre:
il chimono fiorisce sotto i ramoscelli tesi
intorno al tuo viso chiuso che sorride
dietro una ragnatela d'argento.
Sin qui si sente il crepitare della vallata
spinosa e dolce, lo squittio del coniglio
nel crepuscolo caldo come un lungo meriggiare;
il silenzio del torrente candido
sopra i cespi di margherite e le pozze
avvelenate con l'erba per le anguille,
le rare voci nelle vigne sugli argini.

Il Casale è vicino, con le porte
alte sui ballatoi, le donne sulle porte:
col frantoio e la chiesa, le lucerne
nelle cucine e i romanzi sugli stipi.

Là crebbero nell'odore delle conserve
fanciulle che aiutavano a pulire il grano,
mettevano per giuoco un'oliva
nel cestello, e sedevano la sera
sotto il salice piangente
col mazzolino di vainiglia sul petto.

Poi quelle col viso più bianco i capelli più neri
sedute di fianco sul mulo, ad una ad una
valicarono le montagne verso sposi forestieri.

PORTRAIT OF MY MOTHER AT THE FARMHOUSE

I see you sitting under the olive tree
on the shabby grass at your father's feet:
your kimono blooming under nervous twigs
around your smiling face shut
behind a cobweb of silver.
From here you can hear the crackling of the valley
prickly and sweet, the squeak of the rabbit
in a twilight hot as a long afternoon;
the silence of the pure white stream
above the clumps of daisies and the pools
poisoned with grass for the eels,
the rare voices in the vines on the banks.

The Farmhouse is nearby, with the doors
high on the landings, the women against the doors:
with the oil mill and the church, the lanterns
in the kitchens and the novels on top of the cupboards.

They grew up there, inside the scent of preserves,
young girls who helped clean the grain,
made a game of getting an olive
into a basket, and would sit in the evenings
under the weeping willow
with a bouquet of vanilla on their breast.

Then the ones with whiter faces and blacker hair
lined up for a seat on the mule, and one by one
they went over mountains to be married to foreigners.

REGARDING THE ENEMY

where is my enemy?

that is your enemy
there is your enemy
this is without a doubt your enemy
our enemy is also your enemy

ah the eloquence of this answer the clarity

don't you know yet
you're not yet truly a citizen
you're the sort who looks but doesn't see

is it also possible that the enemy is unseen....

in the old days the enemy was an armored horseman
nothing comes jumping out
nowadays these things are calculated
using slide rules and higher math and data

but somehow that enemy
doesn't rouse me
wrestling with another decoy
probably an ally.....that anxiety

lazy
lazy
lazy
in all your life you'll never meet the enemy
in all your life you'll never live

no I'm searching for my enemy

the enemy isn't something you search for
sharply it surrounds us, taking things

no I'm waiting for my enemy

敵について

私の敵はどこにいるの？

君の敵はそれです
君の敵はあれです
君の敵はまちがいになくこれです
ぼくら皆の敵はあなたの敵でもあるのです

ああその答のさわやかさ 明解さ

あなたはまだわからないのですか
あなたはまだ本当の生活者じゃない
あなたは見れども見えずの口ですよ

あるいはそうかもしれない敵は……

敵は昔のように鎧かぶとで一騎
おどろ出てくるものじゃない
現代では計算尺や高等数学やデータを
駆使して算出されるものなのです

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でもなんだかその敵は
私をふるいたたせない
組みついたらまたただのオトリだったりして
味方だったりして……そんな心配が

なまけもの
なまけもの
なまけもの
君は生涯敵に会えない
君は生涯生きることがない

いいえ私は探しているの 私の敵を

敵は探すものじゃない
ひしひしとぼくらを取りかこんでいるもの

いいえ私は待っているの 私の敵を

the enemy isn't something you wait for
every day it invades our property

no there will be a moment of encounter!
my nails and teeth and ears and hands and feet and hair turned upside down
enemy! I'll be able to shout
my enemy! I'll be able to shout
I know this encounter will happen

敵は待つものじゃない
日々にぼくらを侵すもの

いいえ邂逅の瞬間がある！
私の爪も歯も耳も手足も髪も逆だつて
敵！ と叫ぶことのできる
私の敵！ と叫ぶことのできる
ひとつの出会いがきつと ある

Notes

Because Japanese doesn't require a designation of singular or plural for most nouns,
the kanji “敵” in the title and throughout the poem could be read as “enemy” or “enemies.”

S'APRONO L'UMIDE FOGLIE

S'aprono l'umide foglie delle persiane
a un cielo striato da ciminiere e lamenti.
Ai vetri l'estate non è che un velo di polvere.
Un vento solleva ai filobus bruni drappelli.

Cenere d'amore odora d'incendiate stoppie
che rapida prima di sera spegne la pioggia.
Già s'incorona di foglie la triste radice
stringendosi attorno il suo collare di terra.

THE DAMP LEAVES OPEN

The damp leaves open their shutters
to a sky streaked by smokestacks and lamentations.
To the windows summer is but a veil of dust.
A gust of wind stirs up brown tails behind trolleys.

Ashes of love smell of scorched remains
that quickly before nightfall the rain puts out.
Already the sad root crowns itself with leaves
holding itself close to its collar of earth.

MALINCONIA

Nelle case sbiancate di calcina
le spose che il silenzio raccoglie
sul mistero che mette le foglie
s'affacciano con la mano sugli occhi,
restano come mele acerbe
nel verde delle persiane.

Le zitelle che s'assottigliano
fra gingilli e ritratti
e ogni sera scaldano il latte
caricano gli orologi rochi
si fermano interdette in mezzo ai loro giuochi.

MELANCHOLIA

In homes whitened by mortar
the brides that collect in silence
on the mystery that sets the leaves in place
peek out with a hand over their eyes,
hanging like unripe apples
in the green of the shutters.

The spinsters that wear themselves thin
among trinkets and portraits
every evening warm the milk
and wind up the raspy clocks
pausing speechless in the middle of their games.

THE WIFE WHO FINISHED UNIVERSITY

the daughter who finished university
went as a bride to an old family's country home
the eldest son was too attractive
in the end she gave up on the study abroad examination
peep, peep

the wife who finished university
had intellect shiny and sharp as stainless steel
while changing the baby's diaper
she talks about Genet uses the technical name for a little pot of salt
peep, peep

the auntie who finished university
cries over herself at new year's
the whole village gets together the vermillion-painted ozen
the ceramic bottle the warmed sake the small plates
peep, peep

the mother who finished university
rode on her bicycle to the middle of the wheat field
she had grown larger and dignified
how might she be as a village councilwoman not so bad
peep, peep

Notes

The word “あねさま” in the third stanza actually translates to “older sister,” but functions in Japanese as a way to address an older woman.

An “ozen” is a small Japanese tray table.

大学を出た奥さん

大学を出たお嬢さん

田舎の旧家にお嫁に行った

長男坊があまりすてきで

留学試験はついにあきらめ

ピーピー

大学を出た奥さん

知識はびかびかのステンレス

赤ん坊のおしめ取り替えながら

ジュネを語る 塩の小壺に学名を貼る

ピーピー

大学を出たあねさま

お正月には泣きべそをかく

村中総出でワツと来られ

とつくりだ お燗だ

朱塗のお膳だ
サカナだ
ピーピー

大学を出たかかさま

麦畑のなかを自転車で行く

だいぶ貫録ついたのう

村会議員にどうだろうか悪くないぞ

ピーピー

VECCHI DI CEFALÙ

La campana di San Pasquale
divaga sui campi di lino
del mare vuoto,
t'avverte del tremulo gregge
dei vecchi che escono al sole
dall'ospizio nuovo
accanto all'ultima chiesa.

Ma altri sfuggono, muti
camminano per la strada che sale
al cimitero, o consumano i sedili
sotto la cattedrale e la rocca
oppressi da tanto oro,
spazzati dallo scirocco
quando scrolla le grige palme.

Le vecchine nell'ora del mercato
s'arrampicano sui vicoli azzurri
come mosche lente sui vetri,
il pomeriggio chiedono il gelato
sotto i lecci del giardino pubblico.

ELDERS OF CEFALÙ

The bell of San Pasquale
rambles over the fields of linen
by the empty sea
warning you of the trembling flock
of elders spilling out into the sun
from the new hospice
beside the church at the end of the street.

But others slip out, silent
strolling along the street that ascends
to the cemetery, or taking up the benches
beneath the cathedral and *la rocca**
weighed down by all that gold,
swept up by the wind when it
shakes the gray palms.

The old women at market time
scramble about the sky-blue alleys
like dimwitted flies on windows,
in the afternoon they ask for gelato
in the public garden beneath the oaks.

Notes

Cefalù is an ancient city on the Northern coast of Sicily, whose name derives from the Greek word for "head."

"La rocca" or "the rock" of Cefalù is a giant crag that sticks out from the sea like a head, giving the city its name. "La rocca" is also used sometimes to refer to the oldest part of an ancient town, which typically is found atop a mountain, where a church or castle might be.

JUST THREE OR FOUR PIECES OF SILVER

wordless
gentle things
among the rubbish
glittering things
for me to use
the winking vase and
the stretched-out spoon and
the sulking oak chair
after seeing all those signs
I can't settle down
when I have no words
things are getting away from me
just
three or four pieces of silver
I'll at least hear them jangling
cheap and beautiful things
not to miss a modest encounter with

せめて銀貨の三枚や四枚

言葉をもたない
やさしいものたち

がらくたの中で

光っているものたち

私に使われたがって

ウインクする産や

頸をのぼす匙や

ふてくされている櫥の木の椅子

いろいろな合図を受けとると

私は落ちつかなくなる

文なしの時は

見捨ててゆかなくちやならないのだから

せめて

銀貨の三枚や四枚

いつもちやらちやらさせていよう

安くて美しいものたちとの

ささやかな邂逅を逃さないために

MIA FIGLIA NATA DA TRE GIORNI

Di dove arrivi ladruncola
di latte, hai trovato in un tronco
il favo della vita;
a quali pruni
ti sei graffiata le guance,
da quali risse celesti
mi torni gioconda e ferita?
Già solitaria dai sogni
mi fissi, già di lontano
minacci.

MY DAUGHTER BORN THREE DAYS AGO

Where do you come from little thief
of milk, have you found in a body
the honeycomb of life;
on what thorns
did you scratch your cheeks,
from what heavenly fights
do you return to me carefree and wounded?
Already lonely from dreams
you fix to me, already from far away
you threaten.

THE WORDS OF A WOMAN

for loved ones
let us give plenty of pet names
little animals Greek gods
likened to some kind of beast
at night when we love one another
tender words
secret invitations
under cover of darkness

for children
let us tell every piece of the tale
accepting any kind of fate
like catching a dodgeball

in the middle of a crowded train
if our foot is stomped on
let us cry out idiot!
who do you think you're stepping on

encroaching on a meager existence
we fire words
like Jane Russell with her double pistols
the small pleasure of always hitting a bullseye

the words
the words
the words of a woman
supple so full of fragrance

living things that move suspiciously
ah
but back home
women's words are standardized goods
frozen foods of no luster
miserable manmade lakes!
on the street you run into a married woman
she carries a shopping basket her husband's rumors her children's well-being
this about the weather this about taxes
scraps of newspaper stories
secrecy entwined with other peoples' abuse

おんなのことば

いとしい人には

沢山の仇名をつけてあげよう

小動物や ギリシヤの神々

猛獣なんかになぞらえて

愛しあう夜には

やさしい言葉を

そつと呼びにゆこう

闇にまぎれて

子供たちには

ありったけの物語を話してきかせよう

やがてどんな運命でも

ドッジボールのように受けとめられるように

満員電車のなかで

したたか足を踏まれたら

大いに叫ぼう あんぽんたん！

いったいぜんたい人の足を何だと思ってるの

生きてゆくぎりぎりの線を侵されたら

言葉を発射させるのだ

ラッセル姐御の二挺拳銃のように

百発百中の小気味よさで

ことば

ことば

おんなのことば

しなやかで 匂いに満ち

あやしく動くいきものなのだ

ああ

しかしわたくしたちのふるさとは

女の言葉は規格品

精彩のない冷凍もの

わびしい人工の湖だ！

道でばったり奥さまに出会い

買物籠をうしろ手に 夫の噂

お天気のこと 税金のこと

新聞記事のきれっぱし

密をからめた他人の悪口

喋っても

子供の安否

and chatting
and chatting
only to become lonely
two peoples' words seem to make a dam
eventually without noticing the two people
become two little koi
their mouths just opening and closing *paku paku*
chattering on about meaningless things
to a big red carp!
sooner or later the two little fish become tired
with talking with talking
slowly their spirits go off to those distant places
this is
nothing but a tragedy of broad daylight
as my fins go numb
moving slowly
I sound the whistle
become a gesture

喋っても
喋っても
さびしくなるばかり
二人の言葉のダムはなんという貧しさだろう
やがて二人はいつのまにか
二匹の鯉になつてしまう
口ばかりぱくぱくあけて
意味ないことを喋り散らす
大きな緋鯉に！
そのうち二匹は眠くなる
喋りながら 喋りながら
だんだん気が遠くなつてゆくなつて これは
ことば
まひるの惨劇でなくてなんだろう
わたしの鰭は痺れながら
ゆつくり動いて
呼子を鳴らす
しぐさになる

FANCIULLESCA DAMA

Fanciullesca dama
come un profumato limone
s'avvolge nelle foglie scure
nella tua nera seta
la tua bellezza discreta
nascondi, nell'alta
ombra d'antiche stanze.

Arguto ne sporge il tuo riso
come il ciuffo asimmetrico
dai tuoi capelli lisciati,
fenicottero in calmi agguati
con armonioso strido
fai più limpida l'onda
della quiete che ti circonda,
fresco braccio di fiume.

GIRLISH LADY

Girlish lady
like a fragrant lemon
envelops itself in dark leaves
in your black silk
your discreet beauty
you hide, in tall
shadows of ancient rooms.

Sharp your laugh sticks out
like the asymmetrical coif
of your straightened hair,
a flamingo lurking in quiet
with harmonious cry
you illuminate the wave
of stillness that surrounds you,
cool branch of the river.

LA GIOIA

Trattieni l'illusione che dilegua
come la luce fulva della sera
lascia il prato e ritorna
splendida belva al bosco della notte.

Empie la nostra quiete
appena nata un sussurro
secolare, monotono
fiottare di zampillo.
Vergognosi
entriamo nel mare ammiccante
come in un chiuso potere.
Mentre la spuma raccolta
ci muore nella mano
con l'ultimo sorriso aspettiamo
la cacciata dal paradiso.

JOY

Entertain the illusion that vanishes
like the sienna light of the evening
leaves the meadow and returns
splendid beast of the forest of the night.

Our newborn stillness
fills up with a whisper
hundreds of years old, the monotonous
gurgling of a fountain.
Bashful
we enter the sea winking
as if it were private property.
While the harvest of froth
dies there in my hand
we await with a final grin
our expulsion from paradise.

REGARDING BEHAVIOR

it comes along unsteadily
comes along like a thief
comes along like the May winds
comes along like a fickle seed
comes along like a fickle seed

after a while people take notice
the door to a heavy heart opens
traces of some alien thing
force their way in

I like the soil inside of people
what sprout is this?
loving thoughts longings ambitions hints of revolution
murderous intent infidelity seeds of robbery
and so many things I can't name

one of these is driven out
one keeps growing
one can no longer be ignored
hold onto the connection the question the answer
the long and private battle begins
the sprout grows full of leaves grows restless
becomes a tree

one day the tree will break through the crown of their head
in the end it has to break through
ah it seems to rejoice!
once this happens
there's no going back
once this happens
there's no going back
remorse is a distant place
constructed from lifeless records in a distant place
can't we see such beautiful behavior
surrounding us

行動について

それはふらふらとやつてくる
こそ泥のようにやつてくる
五月の風のようにやつてくる
きまぐれな種子のようにやつてくる
きまぐれな種子のようにやつてくる

しばらくしてひとは気づく
重い心の扉をあけて
なにか異質のもの
はいりこんでしまった形跡に

ひとの内部の土壌をこのむ
これはなんの芽?

恋や思想 憧憬 野望
殺意 姦淫 強盗の双葉
それから名づけられない多くのものら
革命のきざし

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どれがどれを追いぬいてか
ひとつが大きく成長する
ひとはもう無視することができない
かわりを持ち問い答え
秘密な長い格闘がはじまる
芽は葉を上げらせわさわさ伸びて
樹木になる

樹木はある日ひとの脳天をつきやぶる
それはとうとうつきやぶってしまったのだ
ああその歡喜を思え!
この事件はもう
いかなる批評も受けつけぬ
この事件はもう
いかなる判決も受けつけぬ
懺悔とは遠いところ
だらけた手記とも遠いところに成立する
かかる美しい行動をわたしたちは見るか
わたしたちの周囲に

UN'ALTRA INFANZIA

Un'altra infanzia mi perdo
un'altra vena s'asciuga.
Ho perduto
il filo dei sentieri
e gemo, animale fermato
dalla tagliola, nel caldo
dei crepuscoli abbandonato.

Vivrò come i saggi gufi
che chiudono gli occhi alla luce?
Per sempre ho perduto la chiave
che apriva la porta ai granai
dell'ozio cesellato?

A DIFFERENT CHILDHOOD

A different childhood gets lost
a different vein dries up.
I've lost
the thread of the trails
and I moan, animal caught
in a trap, in the heat
of abandoned twilight.

Will I live like the wise owls
that close their eyes to the light?
Have I lost forever the key
that opens the door to the silos
engraved by idleness?

LA BIMBA TRISTE

La bimba triste
chiusa nel bianco grembiule
nel bozzolo duro di goffi pensieri
sfogliava i libri dei Martiri
un giorno sparì dalla casa,
ma non è morta
è rimasta sola
si sente il suo sospiro
quando tutti dormono
e non si sa cosa voglia.

THE SAD LITTLE GIRL

The sad little girl
closed up in her white smock
in a thick cocoon of clumsy thoughts
skimming the books of Martyrs
vanished from home one day
but she didn't die
she remained alone
people hear her breath
while everyone sleeps
and don't know what she wants.

A TOWN I'VE NEVER BEEN TO

when entering a town I've never been to
my heart palpitates faintly
there's a soba shop
there's a sushi shop
jeans dangling from clotheslines
there's a cloud of dust
abandoned bicycles
nothing special about this town
nevertheless I palpitate plenty

an unfamiliar mountain looms
an unfamiliar river flows
all kinds of folklore lays dormant
I could soon discover
the town's blemishes
the town's secrets
the town's screams

when entering a town I've never been to
I put my hands in my pockets
walk like a vagabond
even if I came on business

if the weather that day allows
in such a town's sky
light, pretty balloons hang in the air
although the townspeople don't notice
I see them when I first come
why they must be
those born in the town who grew up in the town but
had to die far away
their spirits

はじめての町

はじめての町に入つてゆくとき
わたしの心はかすかにときめく
そば屋があつて
寿司屋があつて
デニムのズボンがぶらさがり
砂ぼこりがあつて
自転車のがりすてられてあつて
変りばえのしない町
それでもわたしは十分ときめく
見なれぬ山が迫つていて
見なれぬ川が流れていて
いくつかの伝説が眠っている
わたしはすぐに見つけてしまう
その町のほくろを

その町の秘密を
その町の悲鳴を

はじめての町に入つてゆくとき
わたしはポケットに手を入れて
風来坊のように歩く
たとえ用事でやつてきてもさ
お天気の日なら
町の空には
きれいないろの淡い風船が漂う
その町の人たちは気づかないけれど
はじめてやつてきたわたしにはよく見える
なぜって あれは
その町に生れ その町に育ち けれど
遠くで死ななければならなかった者たち
魂なのだ

the one floating away in a hurry
went far away from here to marry
she yearns so much for her hometown
she came to play
only as a soul carelessly

for that I like
the modest towns of Japan
towns with clean water small towns
towns with tasty yam soup stubborn towns
snowy towns towns surrounded by canola flowers
towns with raised eyes towns facing the sea
towns full of arrogant men towns full of eager women

そそくさと流れていったのは
遠くに嫁いだ女のひとりが
ふるさとをなつかしむあまり
遊びにやってきたのだ
魂だけで うかうかと
そうしてわたしは好きに
日本のささやかな町たち
水のきれいな町 ちやちな町
とろろ汁のおいしい町 がんこな町
雪深い町 菜の花にかこまれた町
目をつりあげた町 海のみえる町
男どものいばる町 女たちのはりきる町

CEFALÙ

In fasce vi fui portata, in una nobile casa di streghe
che nella notte spargevano a terra gusci di gamberi
o mi rubavano dal letto dove dormivo fra mio padre e mia madre.
Mio padre trafficava con la rete, aveva scoperto la Punta
e di notte la sfregava come una pietra focaia
perchè dal paese vedessero scintille verdi e violette
scendere a pioggia nel mare, accendersi le grotte
come al passaggio di banchi di sardine.
A detta di Livia che ora ha figli alti e strambi
mia madre era bella con le trecce arrotolate sulle orecchie,
io avevo fame e piangevo alla luna mascherata.

L'anno seguente il nonno stava male. Sedeva accasciato
al suo tavolo d'esattore con la felpa macchiata d'inchiostro,
davanti alle fucsie e al basilico del balcone a nord
dove mia madre guardava il mare prima di accasarsi.
Era luglio e mia madre perdette l'anello nuziale
fra gli scogli piatti e lascivi dove l'acqua si scalda
e nelle pozze slittano i gamberi e si torcono le attinie.
Per sempre ci sposò con quel mare e aveva incubi la notte,
diceva di salire al paese, finché trovammo il nonno morente.

La prima cosa che ricordo sono le palline nere
dei conigli fra i verdi scheletri delle ginestre
dov'era la tana di Purpa minacciata dagli scorpioni:
Purpa declamava la notte questioni di danaro
ora è morto da anni.
Ricordo o li ho sognati, i capelli di Livia
simili a un fascio d'alghe, che lei asciugava
accoccolata sulla sabbia nella lunga veste.

Otto anni dopo ci eravamo avvicinati al paese,
abitavamo una casa bianca con una terrazza di catrame
in mezzo a banani, con due vasche solcate dai girini.
Giuocavo da sola ai naufraghi o danzavo nell'acqua
con veli di perline attaccati alle dita

CEFALÙ

In blankets I was carried to you, in a noble house of witches
who in the night scattered shells of shrimp along the ground
or stole me from the bed where I slept between my father and my mother.
My father tinkered with the net, he discovered *la Punta**
and at night rubbed her like a flintrock
so that they might have seen from the village green and violet sparks
raining down into the sea, lighting up the grottos
like sardines crossing the shoals.
According to Livia who now has children tall and strange
my mother was beautiful with braids coiled around her ears,
I was hungry and I cried to the masked moon.

The following year grandfather got sick. He sat dejected
at his collections table in his ink-stained sweatshirt,
in front of the fuchsias and the basil on the north balcony
where my mother watched the sea before setting up house.
It was July and my mother lost her wedding ring
between the flat and voluptuous cliffs where the water warms up
and the shrimp slide and the anemones writhe in the puddles.
She married us to that sea forever, and had nightmares,
talked of going up to the village, until we found grandfather dying.

The first thing I remember is the black pellets
of the rabbits between the green skeletons of the spanish brooms
where Purpa's den was threatened by scorpions:
Purpa who groaned at night about money
now's been dead for years.
I remember or I dreamt it once, Livia's hair
like a bundle of algae, that she used to dry
nestled on the sand in a long dress.

Eight years later there we were near the village,
we lived in a white house with a terrace of asphalt
between banana trees, with two pools furrowed by tadpoles.
I played shipwreck by myself or danced in the water
with veils of beads attached to my fingers

finché fui scoperta e lodata e non danzai più.
La vita era piena, mia sorella e mia cugina bisticciavano
per un nastro celeste o una retina da capelli;
le mamme il pomeriggio indossavano camicette sgargianti
i padri tiravano la rete
ma solo una volta passarono grandi cefali
nell'acqua bassa e li presero quasi tutti.

Un giorno mi portarono a vedere la Cattedrale,
la testa della lumaca con le antenne sempre ritte,
traversammo il paese in carrozza, Corso Ruggero
era un lungo budello rischiarato appena
da una luce verdina argentata da mille rumori,
non rividi mai più quella luce negli anni che vennero,
ma quel giorno guardavo disgustata le teste lanose
dei ragazzi, le loro facce verdi
le strade che scendevano lastricate a spina di pesce.
Pensavo ai miei giuochi africani, ai balli nell'acqua
al tinello colorato d'azzurro dalle basse finestre
coi rametti di basilico sulla tovaglia.
Non mi dispiacque di tornare, a piedi, di notte,
le stelle erano minute come il rumore
che fa la pioggia, con qualche goccia più grande.

Rividi Cefalù che la guerra era passata
e nell'aria c'era l'odore che segue i temporali.
Da una terrazza guardavamo accendersi le barche
nella sera il cielo aveva lampi d'arancio e di verde.
Quell'anno fu turbinoso. Abitavamo in paese
in una casa di zitelle dagli specchi troppo piccoli.
L'inverno era caldo, una stalla nel fiato dei venti
che di giorno e di notte aravano il mare.
Mangiavamo fave e arance, andavamo ai balli
vestite di lana grezza. Un giovane in nero
era fermo sull'angolo dirimpetto al nostro balcone.
A mia sorella stringevano i vecchi golf
rosa e marrone, si fidanzarono in segreto.

until I was discovered and praised and I didn't dance anymore.
Life was full, my sister and cousin bickered
over a blue ribbon or a hairnet;
in the afternoons the mothers dressed in garish blouses
the fathers threw the net
but only once big cefali passed by
in the shallow water and they caught them all.

One day they brought me to see the Cathedral
the head of the snail with antennae always upright,
we traversed the village by carriage, Corso Ruggero
was a long alley illuminated just
by one pale-green light silver-plated by a thousand sounds,
I never saw light again in the coming years,
but that day I watched disgusted the wooly heads
of the kids, their green faces
the streets that descended cobbled in herringbone.
I thought of my African games, of water dances
of the dinette colored in light blue by the low windows
with sprigs of basil on the cloth.
I wasn't sorry to return, on foot, at night,
the stars were as tiny as the noise
the rain makes, with a few bigger drops.

I saw Cefalù again when the war was over
and in the air there was the smell that follows storms.
From a terrace we watched the boats light up
in the evening the sky with flashes of orange and green.
That year was turbulent. We lived in the village
in a house of spinsters with too-small mirrors.
The winter was warm, a stall in the breath of winds
that by day and by night ploughed the sea.
We ate fava beans and oranges, we went to dances
dressed in coarse wool. A young man in black
stood in the corner facing our balcony.
On my sister tightened old sweaters
pink and brown, they became lovers in secret.

Il lunedì di Pasqua andammo a saltare i fossi
e dalla via di Gibilmanna si vedeva Cefalù
stendere le sue case logore sui fili delle strade.
Il sole cresceva e gli aranci si colmavano di succo
il tramonto si spostava in mezzo al mare
come una festa che si avvicinasse con archi di rose.
Quell'anno Livia perse il suo ultimo nato,
due giovani morirono. Seguimmo i loro funerali
portando corone di bianchi fiori per Cettina
che era perfettamente bella e aveva quindici anni.
Ma il corpo d'Achille passò nella macchina nera
inseguito da rosse corone
rasentò il casello ferroviario in mezzo ai campi di grano
dove sua madre e le sorelle gridavano tra le persiane.
Lo scirocco smorzava quei gridi con lingue di fuoco
attizzava le spighe, seminava manciate di terra
e al paese mandava in polvere la Cattedrale
arroventava la rocca. Durò tre giorni.

Vennero gli anni disattenti, le giornate di festa
quando la processione si guardava dai vetri del caffè
e la piazza con le bande sul palco che si davano il cambio
in Gazza Ladra e Pescatori di Perle
piena di famiglie che s'erano portata la sedia
era disertata per i muretti dei ponti
o il buio del molo, estraneo, esitante di stelle.
Gli anni delle sieste in mezzo ai fiori spinosi:
tenevamo gli occhi socchiusi nella calura
o balzavamo per tenderci agguati fra gli alberi.
O nelle ville irrigate, distesi sui prati
coperti di palme e d'oleandri giuocavamo ai morti.

È tardi. Come ogni anno siamo riuniti sulla spiaggia
e mia figlia si muove sull'orlo, cauta tocca il mare
coi teneri piedi. Cefalù si ritrae
sotto il guscio a spirale in una membrana d'argento.
Mia madre ha il viso rivolto ai monti, si ripara dal sole
con un grande cappello di paglia. Partirò domani,

On Easter Monday we'd go jump over the ditches
and from Gibilmanna Street you could see Cefalù
rolling out its shabby houses on the lines of the streets.
The sun rose and the oranges filled themselves with juice
the sunset shifted in the middle of the sea
as if a celebration drew near with arches of roses.
That year Livia lost her last born,
two adolescents departed. We followed their funerals
bearing wreaths of white flowers for Cettina
who was perfectly beautiful and fifteen years old.
But the body of Achilles went by in a black car
trailed by red wreaths
it grazed the railway plaza in the middle of the wheat fields
where his mother and sisters cried between the shutters.
The wind muffled those cries with its fiery tongues
it stoked ears of corn, scattered handfuls of earth
and in the village made into dust the Cathedral
made red-hot *la rocca**. It lasted three days.

The indifferent years came, the days of celebration
when people watched the procession from the café windows
and the plaza with the bands taking turns on the stage
in Gazza Ladra and Pescatori di Perle
full of families bringing a chair
that was deserted for the stone walls of the bridges
or the darkness of the pier, foreign, hesitant of stars.
The years of napping among the thorny flowers:
we kept our eyes half-closed in the heat
or leaped out to surprise each other between the trees.
Or in the irrigated villas, stretched out on the lawns
we played dead covered in palms and in oleanders.

It's late. Like every year we are reunited on the beach
and my daughter moves along the shore, cautiously touching the sea
with tender feet. Cefalù withdraws herself
under her spiral shell in a membrane of silver.
My mother has her face turned to the mountains, sheltering it from the sun
with a big straw hat. I will leave tomorrow,

tornerò in città con mio marito e mia figlia.
Mia sorella attende un bimbo, la sua casa è qui
una delle tante sulle strade lastricate a losanga.

Il treno precipiterà nel buio, correrà nella rocca
quando uscirà saranno passati un giorno e una notte,
la rocca ci volgerà impassibile l'omero dorato
e nella rada ove fu presa Diana
i pettini frantumati della dea mulineranno nel mare
come le ore vicine, fatte pietra nel ricordo.

will return to the city with my husband and my daughter.
My sister is expecting a baby, her home is here
one of the many on the rhombus-cobbled streets.

The train will plummet into darkness, will run into *la rocca*
when it comes out a day and a night will have passed
la rocca will turn to show us that impassive golden humerus
and in the harbor where Diana was taken
the scattered combs of the goddess will whirl in the sea
made stone in memory, like the hours nearby.

Notes

“la Punta” in the fourth line likely refers to a point or promontory, in this case likely of la rocca di Cefalù. The pronoun “la” in the sixth line which refers back to it is feminine, but functions like the English pronoun “it” as well as “her.” My English version personifies “la Punta” more obviously than the Italian does.

See note to “Elders of Cefalù on “la rocca.”

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