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The AALITRA Review

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Translating Metaphor in Yōko Tawada's *Yōgisha no yakōressha* (Suspects on a Night Train)

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Abstract

The translation of metaphorical expressions across languages and cultures is challenging because it involves shifting between different linguistic, cultural and conceptual frames of reference. Moreover, in literature, metaphor is usually an important element of style giving rise to a range of cognitive effects that often vary according to each reader's interpretation. This paper explores the key considerations for translators when formulating strategies to render metaphorical expressions, drawing on ideas from conceptual metaphor theory and translation studies. Arguing for an approach that focusses on the function of metaphor and the stylistic effects, I apply this to my own translation of Yōko Tawada's award-winning Japanese novel, *Yōgisha no yakōressha* [Suspects on a Night Train]. I present examples from the translation, identifying the reasons for my strategies based on the foregoing theoretical discussion, my analysis of Tawada's style and her own views about translation.

Introduction

Metaphor is a key way in which writers express their style, build their themes and create emotive effect. Translating metaphor poses difficulties because of its sensitivity to the communicative context, often relying on the author and reader having shared linguistic and cultural frames of reference (Dobrzynska 1995). Translators therefore need to exercise creativity in formulating strategies that focus on replicating the function of metaphor rather than lexical meaning, and allow various possible interpretations of metaphorical effects. After reviewing the key literature on the nature of metaphor and metaphor translation, I will elucidate several important considerations for translators to refer to when developing their approach to metaphor translation and apply these to my own practice when translating a Japanese literary text into English. This text is *Yōgisha no yakōressha* (Suspects on a Night Train) by Japanese-German writer Yōko Tawada and has been chosen because of the thematic and stylistic importance of metaphor.

Theory of metaphor

The following section outlines some aspects of metaphor theory, not to provide a comprehensive overview of developments in this field, but to enable me to highlight some implications for the translation, particularly those deriving from the cognitive view of metaphor.

The nature of metaphor has been extensively theorised since Aristotle's *Poetics*, the traditional perspective being that metaphor was purely a matter of language; words representing one concept were used outside their ordinary meaning to express another concept, which was in some way "similar". Metaphor was mainly studied by linguists and literary critics within the discipline of rhetoric, together with other linguistic tropes. In Abrams and Harpham's *A Glossary of Literary Terms* (2015), metaphor is grouped

with other figurative uses such as simile, metonymy, synecdoche, personification, hyperbole, irony, etc. and provides that “in a metaphor, a word or expression that in literal usage denotes one kind of thing is applied to a distinctly different kind of thing, without asserting comparison” (133). This perspective assumes that the metaphor can be reworded as a statement of literal similarity without losing any of the information it conveys. In his influential 1956 paper entitled “The Metaphoric and Metonymic Poles”, Roman Jakobson claimed that metaphor is based on similarity, whereas metonym is based on contiguity, and that these are fundamental poles represented in language, literature, art and other facets of human behaviour.

Since the 1980s, the most prominent theory of metaphor has been the cognitive view. In their seminal work, *Metaphors We Live By*, George Lakoff and Mark Johnson (1980) argued that metaphor is essentially not a linguistic phenomenon at all, but a conceptual one: a means of understanding one domain of experience in terms of another. This set of cross-domain mappings is termed a “conceptual metaphor” (4), and the linguistic manifestations are termed “metaphorical expressions” (7). Conceptual metaphors can be stated as TARGET DOMAIN IS SOURCE DOMAIN¹, for example, AN ARGUMENT IS WAR, and the individual metaphorical expressions that this conceptual mapping gives rise to in English are, for example: “your claims are *indefensible*”; “he *attacked every weak point* of my argument”, and so on.

The cognitive view also maintains that we tend to use concrete source domains to understand more abstract target domains, and that the relationship between source and target has an embodied experience at its core, for example AFFECTION IS WARMTH is based on the fact that the areas of the brain corresponding to affection and warmth are activated at the same time. The manifestations of metaphor may be based on the essential correspondences between source and target domains, such as in LOVE IS A JOURNEY, where the travellers are the lovers, the vehicle is the love relationship, the destination is the purpose of the relationship and so on. Further, they may be based on entailments of these elements (such as the breakdown of a vehicle signifying the breakdown of a relationship) (Kövecses, *Metaphor in Culture*).

Kövecses (“Recent Developments in Metaphor Theory”) discusses recent trends in how the theory has been developed and extended. He proposes the idea of “main meaning focus” to explain why, when we encounter the sentence “that surgeon is a butcher”, we map the feature of sloppiness or carelessness onto the surgeon, despite the fact that this is not an inherent characteristic of butchers (17). The meaning focus can emerge “from the contrast of two concepts that are in a metaphorical relationship” (17).

Because of the experiential basis of conceptual metaphor, clearly it is affected by our physical and social-cultural environment. Furthermore, due to the patterns of mapping abstract (concrete, generic) specific, linguistic metaphorical expressions often embody analogies relevant for the particular cultural community. Thus, the degree of cross-cultural commonality in metaphor may depend on the extent to which the conceptual metaphor derives from universal human experience or physiology and also the level of metaphor analysis (conceptual or linguistic). For example, in a study of eight unrelated languages, expressions consistent with ANGER IS HEAT or ANGER IS A PRESSURIZED GAS/LIQUID IN A CONTAINER could be found in varying forms in all languages (Kövecses, *Metaphor*). This is likely a result of common human bodily sensations when becoming angry. Thus, in English we say “he makes my blood

¹ Lakoff and Johnson use capitalized font to distinguish conceptual metaphors from metaphorical expressions.

boil” and in Japanese a similar expression *harawata ga niekurikaeru* (my intestines are boiling) is used. But this also shows that at the specific level, conceptual metaphors and linguistic expressions are likely to be affected by the broader cultural context (Japanese tends to regard emotions as located in the stomach (*hara*), for example).

Ibarretxe-Antuñano (324) believes that metaphorical understanding combines both physical and cultural elements. In other words, there is a “cultural sieve” of beliefs, knowledge and worldviews which is an active mediating device through which physical experience is passed. Cultural factors make it easy to see why metaphorical concepts and uses change over time as a culture develops and comes into contact with other cultures, which has clear ramifications for translation.

Metaphorical expressions can be considered according to their degree of conventionality, from lexicalised “dead” metaphors or well-worn “stock” metaphors at the one end, to highly unconventional, “novel” metaphors at the other, and the latter are commonly seen in creative literary works. While the expressions used may be “novel”, however, they are frequently still a manifestation of a conventional metaphor at the conceptual level. In accordance with the view of literary language as “defamiliarizing”, poets extend, elaborate, question, or combine conceptual metaphors in a creative way that foregrounds the language used (Lakoff and Turner). By doing so, literary metaphor can have a powerful cognitive effect on readers, generating an emotive response or a flash of insight.

However, Steen (1994) points out that readers may not in fact access conceptual metaphors in their mind when interpreting metaphorical expressions. In other words, highly conventionalized metaphorical expressions are often understood “directly”, without drawing on their conceptual basis, whereas novel metaphorical expressions usually require an active process of analogical reasoning by the reader, but this produces a new metaphorical mapping by the individual, without necessarily drawing on the knowledge structures of conceptual metaphor (17). The important point (for a discussion of translation as well) is that the cognitive effect on readers of the existence of conceptual metaphors is likely to vary.

Although in general, metaphor commonly expresses an abstract concept as something concrete, Oshima shows that some literary metaphors actually do the opposite. This may be done intentionally to create ambiguity and leave various interpretations open. Another example is that of implicit metaphor, in which the source domain that is being referred to by the target domain is unclear. Such cases, where the cognitive burden on readers is high, will pose issues for translators as well.

Translating metaphor

I have alluded to the potential cross-cultural challenges in translating metaphor, and noted that in literature, metaphorical expressions may be employed precisely for their element of surprise or ability to engender varying interpretations. Thus, the translator’s interpretation is only one possible interpretation, which he/she attempts to inscribe into the target language (TL).

Lawrence Venuti’s 2013 hermeneutic model of translation (*Translation Changes Everything*) enlightens us as to the nature of translation as interpretation. He overturns the commonly-held assumption that translation is about transferring an “invariant” (whether form, meaning or effect) from source to target, maintaining that any and all correspondences between source and target are shaped by the interpretation of the translator at every stage – from the choice of source text (ST) to every verbal choice (179). Furthermore, he argues that “because translation performs an

interpretation, it can never be literal, only figurative, or more precisely inscriptive of effects that work only in the translating language and culture” (179-80). In other words, translation decontextualizes by removing the text from its original intratextual, intertextual and receptive contexts, and recontextualizes it in a different environment, with inevitably different effects on the readers. Therefore, it is important to consider the agency of the translator and the bases for their linguistic and cultural choices, which Venuti calls the “interpretants” (181). So-called “formal interpretants” may include the translator’s concept of equivalence and their concept of style, while “thematic interpretants” may be values and beliefs associated with specific social groups, a certain discourse, or existing commentaries on the text. Moreover, interpretants “are always already implicated in the hierarchies of value that structure the receiving culture at a particular historical moment” (183), in other words, the prevalent translation “norms” (Toury). Recognising that each translation is provisional, Venuti argues that it is important for translators to be self-reflexive and able to give an account of their translation process, what interpretants they applied and why (246).

Turning now to the specific issue of metaphor translation, the literature up until 20 years ago is informed by linguistic approaches to metaphor and to translation equivalence and tends to be prescriptive. For example, Newmark (1980) provides seven translation strategies in order of preference as follows: (1) reproducing the same metaphorical image in the TL, provided the image has comparable frequency and currency in the appropriate register; (2) replacing the source-language (SL) image with a standard TL image that does not clash with the TC; (3) translating a metaphor using a simile, retaining the image; (4) translating a metaphor (or simile) using a simile plus sense (or occasionally a metaphor plus sense); (5) converting metaphor to sense (paraphrasing); (6) deletion; and (7) using the same metaphor combined with sense (Newmark 95-97). Samaniego-Fernández, writing in 2013, (268-9) criticises this list as not based on real data and simply showing how the author would like metaphors to be translated, ignoring other possibilities such as those mentioned by Toury (25): translation of a non-metaphorical expression in the ST into a metaphor, and creation of a metaphor that does not exist in the ST. These latter strategies are important, particularly because they may be employed as a form of compensation for instances where ST metaphors could not be retained in the target text (TT), or a means of achieving a stylistic effect in cases of extended metaphor or a network of metaphor within the text. Nevertheless, Newmark makes some important points about the potential effects of each strategy, for example, that replacement of a SL metaphor with a different TL metaphor may produce different connotations and different registers; use of a simile in place of a metaphor may soften its “shock” or poetic effect, as will paraphrasing, which also inevitably restricts interpretation of the sense. Conversely, literal translation of a conventional metaphor may result in over-translation (96-99).

Unlike Newmark, Van den Broeck (1981) adopts a descriptive approach whereby translatability is said to hinge on the relevance of the metaphor to the communicative function of the text. Functional relevance does not necessarily depend on the type of metaphor, as a lexicalized metaphor may be made relevant such as when ambiguity between literal and figurative levels of signification is exploited for effect. Such cases are seen as less translatable especially when the functionally relevant feature is a formal part of the language itself, as in wordplay. Van den Broeck also notes that a “private” (novel) metaphor might operate as a violation of rules governing the SL linguistic system, but that does not mean that such a metaphor can always be translated easily by violating the TL rules in the same way. For example, if the expression depends

not only on the metaphoric possibilities but also on morphological characteristics or grammatical peculiarities of the SL, it might be difficult to translate into a TL with different characteristics. Differing cultural connotations as well as literary/aesthetic traditions in the respective cultures may also decrease translatability. Van den Broeck recognizes that the translatability of metaphor in individual texts is not an isolated issue, and will depend on its interaction and relationship with other textual elements as well as the literary and sociocultural context (86).

The cognitive approach to metaphor has been applied to translation only relatively recently. An important study was carried out in 2004 by Christina Schäffner who identified a range of translation strategies in her data (political texts) whereby the same basic conceptual metaphor was maintained across languages, even though the actual metaphorical expression was altered. For example, some translations portrayed a different aspect of the conceptual metaphor, expressed it more elaborately, or illustrated its entailments rather than its structural components (1265-7). Such strategies may successfully convey the desired cognitive effects that arise as a result of the underlying conceptual metaphor, while adjusting the surface level expression to cater for linguistic or cultural differences. Of course, to apply this in practice, translators need an awareness of the conceptual nature of metaphor and the ability to compare conceptual as well as linguistic metaphor across cultures, and should also be mindful of Steen's caution about the variable nature of effects deriving from conceptual metaphor.

When considering the cognitive effects of literary metaphor in the context of translation, Jean Boase-Beier's cognitive stylistics approach (2006) is a useful framework. Boase-Beier sees literary style (including metaphor) as a cognitive entity, not simply a linguistic one. Style consists of a "set of weak implicatures" (aspects of textual meaning which are suggested to a greater or lesser degree and are left fairly open to interpretation) (*A Critical Introduction* 9). Through its style, a literary text gives rise to cognitive effects on the reader such as the immediate feelings they experience and attribute to a character in the text, mental effects that arise from the search for meaning, and sometimes changes to knowledge or behaviour (108). Thus, "to translate style is to translate poetic effect, implicature, state of mind, attitude, and so on" (81). Importantly, this model does not assume that there is a fixed authorial intention that can be accessed by the reader/translator, but that the reader/translator will always construct their own interpretation of stylistic effects based on their individual cognitive context (including their beliefs, knowledge, and attitudes) (Boase-Beier, *Stylistic Approaches* 63). In this respect, her theory is compatible with Venuti's hermeneutic model discussed above. Boase-Beier sees a literary translation as a 'blend' of the ST with an imaginary text in the target language (TL):

The translation does not displace or replace the original text, but the effects created by the translation are added to it, and result from the increased engagement with the text that its blended nature gives rise to. The voices in the original text are multiplied as the translator's voice is added, and the possibilities for interpretation may be enhanced by the translator's interpretation.

(Boase-Beier, *A Critical Introduction* 169)

Translator and scholar Chantal Wright, who published an experimental translation into English of a German prose text by Yōko Tawada, states in her introduction that she

adopted Boase-Beier's cognitive stylistics framework, concentrating not on transferring the formal features of the text but on translating the range of cognitive effects generated by the weak implicatures. She writes, "there is no guarantee that the range of effects I intend and the range of effects the reader finds in the translation will coincide, but I can nonetheless attempt to create a text in which a plurality of effects are in play" (Wright 29). Such an approach would encourage ST and TT readers to go through similar cognitive processes, such as exploring multiple meanings in response to an ambiguity (Boase-Beier, *Stylistic Approaches* 63) or performing cognitive mapping to interpret a novel metaphorical expression.

Case study: translating metaphor in *Yōgisha no yakōressha*

I will now apply the above considerations to the task of translating metaphorical expressions in Yōko Tawada's Japanese novel, *Yōgisha no yakōressha* (Suspects on a Night Train) (2002).²

Yōko Tawada

Born in Japan in 1960, Yōko Tawada moved to Germany when she was 22 and has since published prolifically in both Japanese and German including novels, collections of short stories and poetry, plays and essays. She has won multiple literary awards in both countries.

As a bilingual and exophonic writer (someone who writes in their non-native language),³ she frequently writes about living in more than one language and cultural tradition, and resists essentialist notions of identity and the link between language and national identity. Many of the characters in her fictional works are travellers, and lack a sense of national identity or "native" language despite the pressure from bureaucracies and those around them to assert their identifications.

Tawada's works in both Japanese and German are polyphonic, containing strands of multiple languages, images and intertextual references. In particular, she uses defamiliarizing techniques, such as wordplay that extends idioms in unique ways or taking grammatical concepts, such as German grammatical gender, literally. She also finds ways to make the Roman script and Japanese scripts interact with each other. In so doing she makes us question the "naturalness" of our native language and of the relation between word and referent. She says that she seeks to "find the poetic ravine (*shiteki na kyōkoku*) separating language A and language B and fall into it" (Tawada, *Ekusofonii* 32).

As her English translator, Margaret Mitsutani maintains, translators commonly find themselves caught between languages (Mitsutani, *Facing the Bridge* 35). But if we take Tawada's perspective, this "poetic ravine" is in fact an ideal space for translators, as well as writers to inhabit.

Tawada herself has written a number of essays and literary works on the theme of translation, notably her 1999 novella *Moji ishoku* (literally: "Transplanting Letters", translated by Margaret Mitsutani as *Saint George and the Translator*). She challenges the traditional distinction between translation and literary creation: if we consider that the existence of a true, authoritative and stable "original" is fundamentally an illusion, translation, just like writing is an interpretive and creative act. Tawada also highlights the process of translation as transformation; it brings about "displacement, distortion,

² I translated two chapters from the novel as part of my 2010 doctoral dissertation.

³ Tawada first used the term 'exophony' in her 2003 collection of essays: *Ekusofonii – bogo no soto e deru tabi* (Exophony: Traveling outside the mother tongue) 3-7.

hesitation, fluctuation, etc. Nothing is more stimulating than this for literature. Literature in translation plays a role of transforming” the target language (quoted in Suga 30). This also implies that no translation is final; any translation is simply one of any number of possible interpretations that gives a new life to the ST. Tawada (*Katakoto* 23) sees much potential in Walter Benjamin’s notion of fragments of multiple languages coming together through translation (Benjamin, “The Translator’s Task” 81). This may make translation visible, but it is exactly this defamiliarization of language through translation that is interesting and translators should be interventionist in their exploration of unique interpretations. Tawada believes that is only by shining light on the poetic ravine between languages rather than trying to bridge that gap that the heteroglossia inherent in any text and its translation can emerge. Thus, she defies the conventional conceptualisation of translation into source vs target binaries and encourages us to pay more attention to the “in-between space” of translation. These are important considerations informing my approach to translating Tawada.

Yōgisha no yakōressha

Yōgisha no yakōressha (Suspects on a Night Train) was published in 2002, earning Tawada two Japanese literary awards⁴. It has been translated into French and Russian, but only one of the thirteen largely self-contained “chapters” has been translated into English⁵, so all quotes that follow are my translation. In each chapter the main protagonist is “you” (*anata*); that is, the whole novel is written in the second person. The only other area of consistency among the chapters is that “you” are characterised as some kind of performing artist and “you” are travelling somewhere, usually on a night train. The destination is given as the name of the chapter. Most of the episodes describe the incidents and unusual things that happen to you on the trains and at stations, and the various people you encounter. Your travel plans are frequently interrupted, making you frustrated and bewildered. Where is your next destination? Will you ever reach it? And who are “you” anyway? This theme of shifting, uncertain identities is played out throughout the novel.

There is an ongoing conflict between your existence “in the second person” without a fixed identity and the systems and expectations that require you to belong somewhere. This conflict is brought to a climax in “To Bombay” when you realise, once already on the train, that the passport you are carrying is not your own.

The presence of *yōgisha* (suspect or suspects) and the feeling of suspicion is a feature of many of the stories, represented by Tawada through the strategic use of surrealism, and through the defamiliarization of language, as described below. Through the surrogate experience of being “you”, travelling from place to place on a night train, the reader begins to feel unsure of their own identity, the “naturalness” of the language they commonly speak and their own norms and beliefs.

Translation approach and examples

Drawing on the foregoing theoretical discussion, the following points influence my approach to translating the metaphorical expressions in *Yōgisha no yakōressha*:

- 1) Metaphor is a cognitive phenomenon and is influenced by both physical and cultural experience.

⁴ The Tanizaki Prize and Ito Prize in 2002.

⁵ “To Zagreb” (translated by Margaret Mitsutani in *Granta* 131: The Map is not the Territory, Spring 2015 <https://granta.com/issues/granta-131-the-map-is-not-the-territory/>)

- 2) There may be more commonalities across cultures between basic conceptual metaphors than individual metaphorical expressions.
- 3) Metaphorical expressions in literature are an important feature of style, and give rise to cognitive effects on the reader. They are more likely to be novel creations and open to reader interpretation.
- 4) For translators, identifying cases where there is a clear underlying conceptual metaphor that is common to both cultures may enable translation strategies that retain the basic conceptual metaphor while altering the particular expression if necessary.
- 5) Translators need to consider the intratextual, intertextual and extratextual factors that give rise to the cognitive stylistic effects (weak implicatures) conveyed by metaphor. In particular, these would include the functional relevance of metaphorical expressions in the text, how they are linked with other metaphors, and how metaphor is used to convey themes, setting, characterisation, and other features of the work.
- 6) Focussing on the effects rather than strict adherence to form or content may encourage translators to be more experimental and creative in their strategies. At all times it is recognised that the act of translation is one of interpretation and of transformation: effects can never be “equivalent” between source and target. Nevertheless, translators can strive to keep a range of effects in play by choosing strategies that keep various interpretations open, sensitising readers to aspects of both their own language and culture and that of the ST, which they might not have considered.

The examples below are from my translation of the first chapter, “To Paris”. On many occasions in this work, Tawada uses Japanese idioms and proverbs in defamiliarizing ways to make readers think about the literal meaning behind the metaphorical expressions they use on a daily basis. She also frequently exploits the fact that kanji (Chinese ideograms) usually have more than one meaning to create puns. She makes us realise that language is not something innate and stable but very much conditional and malleable. As noted earlier, when faced with a common idiom (lexicalised metaphor) or kanji compound, most readers understand its meaning directly, but Tawada forces the reader to perform the conceptual mapping and consider the levels of signification. Lexicalized metaphors that have been made functionally relevant through wordplay are, as Van den Broeck argues, the hardest to translate (82-3). This was the case especially since proverbs and idioms have historical, intertextual and cultural origins which vary significantly between Japanese and English and the way double meanings and puns are achieved is inevitably different. Thus, a range of strategies were required, sometimes allowing the Japanese expression to influence the English, introducing readers to new linguistic forms and making them notice the language that way, and other times exploiting the English language and metaphorical concepts applicable to the target readership. However, because of the often-intricate nature of Tawada’s double meanings and the way they are woven into the story, sometimes it was necessary to prioritise either the literal or figurative meaning. Hence, a certain translation “loss” was sometimes unavoidable regarding a particular expression, but often this could be made up for with compensatory strategies such as introducing wordplay or a metaphor elsewhere to achieve the overall purpose of defamiliarizing language.

Example 1 (To Paris, p.18⁶)

Context: After your travel is disrupted by a railway strike and your performance cancelled, you are taking a bus back home, looking out of the window at a herd of cows.

ST: 夜行で行って、美味しいギャラをもらって、夜行で帰るつもりが、とんだ旅行になってしまった。野心の野原は焼け野原、牛の群れに混ざって、のんびり草でも噛んでいた方がましだった。

Back-translation: You had planned to go by the night train, earn a tasty fee and return by the night train, but the trip had turned out dreadfully. The fields of ambition are a burnt-out wasteland, it would have been better to mix with the cattle herd and lazily chew grass.

TT: You had planned to travel by the night train, earn a juicy fee, and return by the night train. But what a nightmare it had become! The land of ambition is a burnt-out wasteland; you would have been better off staying with the cows, lazily chewing the cud.

First of all, although the Japanese does not use the word “nightmare” to describe the trip, I chose this idiomatic expression because of the pun and rhythm that could be effected by the three repetitions of “night”, which also compensates for the inevitable weakening of the wordplay in the second sentence. In the Japanese, there is a kanji-based pun since the first character of the word for ambition (野心) and the word for fields or plains (野原) is the same (although it is pronounced differently), so saying “fields/plains of ambition” in Japanese achieves a visual pun as well as an interesting metaphor. Then this is coupled with the expression 焼け野原 which is again formed from the word 野原 (fields) and the word for burnt, meaning burnt-out ruins or devastated land. I decided to retain the “place” conceptual metaphor by using the image “land of ambition” (instead of “fields”) and then repeating the “land” sound through the expression “wasteland”. The next phrase I interpreted as a subtle link to the Japanese idiom 道草を食う (literal translation: eat roadside grass) which means to loiter while on one’s way somewhere. I chose the expression “chewing the cud” because in English the expression has an idiomatic meaning of meditating or pondering something for a long time, so while the sense is slightly different, it still fits well with the notion of not rushing from place to place as well as the literal meaning of chewing grass with the cows, therefore achieving a similar effect of exploiting the literal and figurative meanings of a metaphorical expression. “Chewing the cud” also retains the link with the food metaphor implied by the “juicy/tasty” performance fee.

⁶ Page numbers refer to the Japanese ST.

Example 2 (To Paris, p. 7)

Context: You are waiting at the station, ready to board a night train to Paris.

ST: その日の夕方から夜にかけて、あなたはハンブルグのダムトア駅の近くにある小さなホールで踊った。竹の裂けるような、石橋を叩くような、時雨が降るような現代音楽の音の群れがまだ耳の奥で響き続けている。

Back-translation: From that evening until night, you had danced at a small hall near Dammtor station in Hamburg. A collection of sounds of contemporary music, like bamboo splitting, like tapping a stone bridge, like drizzle falling, continued to reverberate deep in your ears.

TT: That evening you had danced at a small hall near Dammtor station in Hamburg. The diverse multitudes of sounds – bamboo-splitting, stone-tapping, falling raindrops of contemporary music still reverberated deep in your ears.

The three similes relating to the contemporary music may be interpreted as having multiple meanings – firstly they have literal meanings as adjectival clauses describing the sounds and secondly, through wordplay, they conjure up particular Japanese proverbs or idioms in the reader’s mind. Thus, the first expression (竹の裂ける) means the sound of splitting bamboo, but if you replaced the verb with a different verb meaning ‘to split’ (割る), you would have the idiom 竹を割ったような, which means straightforward or honest. Additionally, an alternative wordplay may be seen if you substitute “ears” for “bamboo”; the expression becomes 耳が裂ける, which means ear-shattering (noise). As I was unable to capture both possible puns in my translation, I chose to hint at the latter interpretation by using “bamboo-splitting” as an adjective, which subtly links to the idiom “ear-splitting” in English. I used this syntactic form to make the pun clearer instead of keeping the simile which would have been awkward (‘like bamboo splitting’), and therefore changed all three expressions into metaphors for consistency. Unfortunately, the double meaning of 石橋を叩く could not be carried through in translation. Apart from the literal meaning of “tapping a stone bridge”, the reference is to the proverb 石橋を叩いて渡る (lit. tapping a stone bridge before you cross it), which implies acting with the utmost caution. However, the translation, in the first place, must employ an expression that describes sound, and since I was unable to come up with a phrase that did both, I chose to render only the literal rather than metaphorical meaning. I decided on “stone-tapping” because it retains the sound described by the Japanese expression and appropriately brings to mind “toe-tapping”, given that the protagonist is a dancer. The next expression (時雨が降る) literally means “drizzling”, but I interpreted it also as a subtle reference to the figurative use of the noun 時雨 and verb しぐれる, meaning to cry (teardrops falling) or as in 時雨心地 (to feel like crying). Since “drizzle” in English does not also have this metaphorical sense, I decided on “raindrops”, which may bring to mind “teardrops”, although it is undoubtedly a stretch. It is certainly relevant that Tawada uses three images that bring to mind old Japan (bamboo, stone bridges and drizzling rain) to describe something as far removed as contemporary music in a German setting. This can be seen as a deliberate technique to create a dislocating effect on readers, that is to confuse their

expectations of what is German and what is Japanese, and build the aura of uncertainty that permeates the whole novel relating to the identity of the protagonist and the fluid nature of identity in general.

The text also contains many instances of novel, imaginative metaphorical expressions that do not involve literal/figurative exploitation or wordplay but provide a vivid image and also require active interpretation by the reader. I generally preferred to retain the same unique images in the TT and avoid strategies such as substitution or paraphrasing just for the purpose of making the text more “readable”, because of the potential to destroy the effect of the image’s novelty and eliminate possible interpretations of the metaphor.

Example 3 (To Paris, p.9)

Context: ‘You’ are asleep on a night train when you are suddenly woken by the conductor who orders you to get off the train at the next station, due to a railway strike.

ST: 眠りのかなたで、鉄と鉄が擦れる音が続いている。浅いような深いような眠りだった。だから車掌に突然起こされた時には、びっくりして記憶袋を床に落としてしまい、一瞬、自分がどこにいるのかさえ分からなかった。

(My translation below is a close rendering of the ST, so no back-translation is needed)

TT: Far away, on the other side of sleep, the sound of metal scraping against metal continued. It was a shallow sleep, yet deep somehow. So when you were suddenly awoken by the conductor, you dropped your bag of memories on the floor in surprise and for an instant you even forgot where you were.

かなた means beyond/over/on the other side/in the distance, so here Tawada is using a metaphor that conceptualises ‘sleep’ in spatial terms. In particular, かなた is often used together with words that imply very large distances, such as ‘the world’, and ‘the universe’. Therefore, sleep is imagined as a wide expanse of unknown territory. I chose to add ‘far away’ in order to convey the idea of distance.

The next sentence makes use of the repetitive structure (word) ような (antonym) ような, saying that sleep is both kind of deep and kind of shallow. While this oxymoron is a matter for reader interpretation, it resembles the expression 分かる ような 分からない ような which could be translated as: I sort of understand but sort of don’t. It thus makes the reader feel uncertain about their own understanding, and although I used different syntax in the English, this was the effect that I was aiming for. The conceptual metaphor SLEEP IS A PLACE/SLEEP IS A WELL is not specific to Japanese culture and easily accessible for Anglophone readers, so my translation took advantage of this common conceptualization to retain the images in the above two cases.

Likewise, in the last sentence, “dropped your bag of memories on the floor” is a literal translation of the Japanese expression. This image implies that your memories are contained in a bag, and dropping the bag entails temporarily losing your memory. The “bag of memories” image is found in English as well, and although it is employed in a novel way in this context, I believe that the TT reader will obtain a similar effect,

since the conceptual metaphors of THE MIND IS A CONTAINER and THOUGHTS/FEELINGS ARE THINGS are common to both languages and cultures.

Metaphorical expressions might be novel and creative but if they have a physical or sensory basis such as visual or auditory images, they may be easier to picture, less culture-specific, and therefore more conducive to translation by retention of the ST image.

Example 4 (To Paris, p.18)

Context: You are trying to control your frustration at having to buy a bus ticket out of Paris, as the trains have been cancelled.

ST: あなたはふつつつ噴き出してくる文句を噛み殺して

Back-translation: you suppressed your complaints that were bubbling, about to burst out [although the verb “to suppress” actually has the literal meaning of “bite to death”]

TT: Putting a lid on your complaints before they bubbled over,

This is an example of ANGER IS A HOT LIQUID, which as discussed earlier, is a common conceptual metaphor in English and Japanese. Since “complaints” has a metonymic relationship with “anger”, it was possible to retain the same image by using “bubbled over”. However, instead of a verb such as “suppress” or “stop”, I chose to adopt a Tawada-style tactic of extending an idiomatic expression to play on its literal and figurative meaning, here the English phrase “put a lid on it” (i.e. stop complaining), combining this with the metaphor of a pot containing boiling water. This is therefore an example of compensation; while there were cases elsewhere in the text (e.g. Example 2) where the play on the metaphorical expression could not be effectively translated, I could sometimes add a double meaning where English allowed me to do so, thus contributing to the defamiliarizing effects of the work as a whole.

Concluding remarks

As this case study has shown, authors can use metaphor to achieve a variety of literary effects or “weak implicatures”, giving rise to an interpretative process on the part of readers and translators. Rendering these stylistic effects in the target language is a creative endeavour that may require a range of translation strategies. The translator needs to decide upon strategies in light of the contexts in which metaphor is used and the function of metaphor in the artistic structure of the text, its relevance to themes, characterisation and the like. In so doing, it is often helpful to consider the underlying conceptual metaphor that an expression is based on to determine whether or not an image could be perceived in a similar way or whether certain adjustments may be necessary. Through my examples I have demonstrated the effects of a variety of strategies including defamiliarizing the target language by directly transferring a Japanese metaphorical expression, in effect foreignizing the text. I have examined how the converse strategy of substituting an English metaphor can also be effective in exploiting the literal and figurative meanings of the text, when this stylistic purpose is deemed more important than the sense of the metaphor. I have further noted that where a translation “loss” is unavoidable, it may be possible to use compensatory strategies elsewhere in the text to contribute to the overall metaphorical style.

Although the translator's interpretation is only one interpretation, and therefore "equivalence" of effects is never completely possible, this may also be seen as something positive. In other words, in the "poetic ravine" between source and target a translation can be a site of hybridity and rejuvenation, combining voices from both sides, and challenging our preconceived notions through new metaphors and an additional range of literary effects.

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James Holmes and Burton Raffel on Four Ways of Translating Poetry

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Abstract

The prominent translators and critics, James Holmes and Burton Raffel, have both proposed a fourfold scheme for considering poetry translations. In general terms, these four are: (1) formal and source-text oriented, (2) formal and target-culture oriented, (3) free, and (4) “deviant”, scarcely translation at all. This article suggests that the similarity between the two schemes is not coincidence but may be explained by Holmes’ and Raffel’s friendship based on a common interest in Indonesian literature during the 1950s. The previously unnoticed relationship adds to Francis Jones’ exploration of Holmes’ literary translation networks.

Introduction

This brief paper explores similar categorisations of the types of poetry translation developed by Burton Raffel (1928-2015) and James S Holmes (1924-1986). In seeking an explanation for this similarity, it argues that the schemata has its origins in a brief working relationship between the two that was concerned with the translation of Indonesian and Dutch poetry during the late 1950s and early 1960s. Both men separately had extensive and distinguished careers translating poetry and writing about translation. Yet the connection between them has not been noticed, largely, perhaps, because their personalities and areas of expertise were so very different.

James Stratton Holmes was born in 1924, the youngest of six siblings. He was raised on a farm in Collins, Iowa and studied at the Quaker College of Oskaloosa, Iowa, before serving a two years middle school teaching internship in Barnesville, Ohio. After refusing to volunteer for military service or undertake civil service, he was sentenced to a six-month jail sentence. He then returned to study in 1945, firstly at William Penn College, then Haverford College in Pennsylvania, and finally, in 1948, at Brown University. Holmes went to the Netherlands in 1950 and taught at the Quaker school at Ommen. After a year, he moved to Amsterdam, where he remained for the rest of his life. Holmes wrote poetry in English, using the pen names Jim Holmes and Jacob Lowlands. Crucially, he began publishing poetry translations from Dutch into English after 1954, and focused on that one language pair for the rest of his life. Holmes received the Martinus Nijhoff Award in 1956 and the Flemish Community Translation Award in 1984. He also taught Translation Studies and Gay Studies in the Literary Science Faculty of the University of Amsterdam and wrote the definitive paper on “The Name and Nature of Translation Studies” (1972).

Burton Nathan Raffel was famed for his translations into English from a great many languages, including Miguel de Cervantes’ *Don Quixote* (2011), *Beowulf* (1963), the poems of Horace (1996) and *Gargantua and Pantagruel* (2011). Born in Brooklyn of immigrant Russian Jewish parents in 1928, he was educated at Brooklyn College (BA 1948) and Ohio State University (MA 1949). Apart from taking time out for legal studies (JD, Yale Law School 1958), including a few years spent working in a law firm in New York, Raffel subsequently taught at various universities in the United States

(Brooklyn College, 1950-1951; Stony Brook University, 1964-1965; University at Buffalo, 1966-68; University of Texas at Austin, 1969-70; University of Denver, 1975-89), Canada (Ontario College of Art, 1971-72; York University, 1972-75) and Israel (University of Haifa, 1968-69), before settling at the University of Louisiana, Lafayette in 1989, where he remained until his death in 2015.

James Holmes

In his essay on “Forms of Verse Translation and the Translation of Verse Forms” (1968/2005), James Holmes presented an analysis of four categories of poetic translations, based on the forms used by the translators. His definition of “form” is precise. Form is “the outward or mechanical form of rhyme, metre (and/or rhythm), verse length, stanzaic patterning and division, and the like” (Holmes 31, fn. 10). He proposed four categories for the literary translation of poetry, which he called “mimetic”, “analogical”, “organic”, and “extraneous”. A fifth way of translating poetry, as prose, is dismissed as “sidestepping” the problem, 25.

In Holmes’ scheme, the first approach to translating poetry, the mimetic, seeks to retain the form of the original. The translator constructs “German hexameters for Greek, or English *terza rima* for Italian” (26). Nevertheless, Holmes suggests, this attempt at conforming to the source text (ST) patterns is actually impossible, because verse forms in one language can never be completely identical to those in another language (26).

A second approach, the analogical, considers the function of the original form within its own poetic tradition and looks for a form that fills a parallel function in the tradition of the target language. According to this argument, an epic poem should be translated into a form that fulfils a parallel function in the receiving literature: the *Iliad*, for example, should be rendered in English blank verse or heroic couplets (26). This naturalises the poem and, in the process as a consequence, Pope’s *Iliad* “in rhymed couplets becomes something very much like an English poem about English gentlemen, for all the Greek trappings of the fable” (27).

Both “mimetic” and “analogical” approaches are “form-derivative”: that is, they are determined by the principle of “seeking some kind of equivalence in the target language for the outward form of the original poem” (26). The mimetic form is most common during those times when genre concepts are weak, literary norms are being questioned, and the target culture is open to outside influences - such as occurred in nineteenth century between England and the Netherlands, where the translation of the English Romantics permanently enriched Dutch literature (28). The analogical form brings the original poem into the receptor tradition when its own norms are strong and the culture is inward looking (the neo-classical English eighteenth century, for example), and “naturalizes” it. In Lawrence Venuti’s later terms, the mimetic approach is “foreignizing”, the analogical is “domesticating” (Venuti 1995).

A third, contemporary (twentieth-century), approach is to use a form that is “content-derivative”. It is “organic” in as far as it allows “a new intrinsic form to develop from the inward workings of the text itself” (28). Such an approach occurs when there are no obviously predetermined extrinsic forms in which the poem can be expressed and a new intrinsic form must be found (27).

Holmes concludes with a fourth type of form, the “extraneous form”, which does not derive from the original poem at all. It “casts the metapoem into a form that is in no way implicit in either the form or the content of the original” (27). The translator conforms to the formal requirements of the new poetic culture, but has greater

flexibility to transfer the “meaning” of the original poem in any way that seems appropriate. Holmes condemns this as a “devious” or “extraneous” translation, “where the form adopted is in no way implicit in either the form or the content of the original” (27).

Burton Raffel

In his essay, “The Subjective Element in Translation” (1981/1998), Raffel shifts the focus from four types of form to four types of audiences – with four different types of translations that suit them (110-128). The key word in his title is, perhaps, “subjective”; he has strong opinions on a range of authors and poems and is not afraid to present them. Fortunately he is also eager to present extensive examples of each of his categories, which Holmes is reluctant to do.

The first type of translation is “formal translation”. Its audience is the scholars and their students. They require a literal, “formal”, even “faithful” translation that will take them back to the original poem – or as close to it as possible. Formal translations are pedantic, because they aim to show the social, philosophical and historical dimensions of the original work, so they are often wooden as a result. Content matters and not literary quality (1998 112). The first example Raffel quotes is Alan Press’ *Anthology of Troubadour Lyric Poetry* (1978) and Raffel immediately skewers Press with his own words: “Elegance and grace have been – not without some regret – sacrificed to literal accuracy” (Raffel 112, Press 2).

The second type of translation is “interpretive”. Its audience consists of a general set of readers, who are interested in literature for its own sake but do not have access to the original poem. (He also insists that no translation “*is, was, or ever will be the original which it translates*” 118, italics by Raffel.) In this situation, it is also possible that the translator may not always be in full control of the original but s/he knows enough about poetry to recognise the literary qualities of the text and bring them into the best English possible. His examples are Ezra Pound, “translating” from Chinese. Although Pound is “obviously not in full control of the original”, he is “very firmly in charge of the translation as an independent poem” (117). Overall the hope is “to re-create something roughly equivalent in the new language, something that is itself good poetry and that at the same time carries a reasonable measure of the force and flavor of the original” (Raffel 1998: 121).

Then there are those who seek a “free” or “expansive” translation, which seeks to allow its audience, to read “something, anything, new rather than something old” (Raffel 1998: 110). The approach, which is based on the hope that one may be able to translate a first-rate poem in one language into a first-rate poem in the target language, is “arrogant”, but some “poet-translators”, who are not scholars, may occasionally pull it off (Raffel 1981: 31). On the whole, Raffel disapproves of this approach. He comments, with reference to Frederick Rebsamen’s work *Beowulf is My Name* (1971): “The entire line of argument, that the translator can do anything he likes with his original so long as he feels, as Rebsamen explicitly does, ‘that it worked better [my] way’ rather than the original poet’s way, seems to me to destroy what I take to be the basic purpose of translation” (125).

Finally, there are readers of “imitative translations”, who want to see the translator’s own poetry when it is shaped by foreign texts. Raffel quotes Robert Lowell’s preface to his book *Imitations*: “This book is separate from its sources, and should be read as a sequence, one voice running through many personalities, contrasts and repetitions ... I have been reckless with literal meaning and labored hard to get the

tone ... I have dropped lines, moved lines, moved stanzas, changed images and altered metre and intent.” (Lowell 1962: xi-xiii). In a previous article, Raffel distinguished between Lowell’s work as a poet and that of the true translator, who is “basically concerned with the re-creation of that text in the new language”. Lowell, on the other hand, “tried to establish for himself what relationship that non-English writer had to *him*: he tried, bluntly, to use the non-English writer as a kind of quarry for his own poetry” (1980: 20).

Two friends

The use of four categories for analysing poetry translation is quite distinctive. Translation scholars are used to two categories, literal or free, beginning with Cicero (55BCE, Montgomery 33). They also recognise John Dryden’s tripartite division (1680/ in Venuti 2000), The first is “metaphrase” (“turning an Author word by word, and line by line, from one Language into another” 38). The second is “paraphrase” (“Translation with Latitude, where the Author is kept in view by the Translator so as never to be lost, but his words are not so strictly follow’d as his sense, and that too is admitted to be amplified, but not alter’d” 38). And the third is “imitation” (“where the Translator (if now he has not lost that name) assumes the liberty not only to vary from the words and sense, but to forsake them both as he sees occasion: and taking up some general hints from the Original, to run division on the ground-work as he pleases” 38).

Holmes’ essay recognises Dryden in a footnote (fn 8 31). It might argued that Holmes achieves four categories by dividing Dryden’s metaphrase into two categories: one, source text oriented and two, target text and receiving literary culture oriented. Nevertheless, Holmes and Raffel’s categories both follow these four divisions and others do not. The four categories can be summarised as follows:

- (1) a formal approach, oriented towards the strict expression of the source text in its own terms;
- (2) a roughly formal approach oriented towards target language readers and expressed in their own terms;
- (3) a free approach that grows out of the ST in a fairly personal way in the target rewriting; and
- (4) an approach that has apparently little respect for the integrity of the ST but uses it as the basis for the translator’s own writing, and scarcely counts as “translation” at all.

These four categories are important for readers of poetry translations. Knowing what sort of a translation we are dealing with helps us to correctly predict its strengths and its weaknesses. Just as we would not condemn *Hamlet* (a tragedy) for not being funny (a comedy), so too it is difficult to criticise an academic translation for being literal and aesthetically unsatisfying. Or a freel translation as not being absolutely accurate. Each translation of a poem “can never be more than a single interpretation out of many of the original whose image it darkly mirrors” (Holmes 30). It is crucial to know what sort of an interpretation we are confronted with if we are to judge it correctly – and critics often do not. “I do not think many people know how to read a translated poem, or know what is a good and a bad translation” Raffel writes in *The Forked Tongue*. “Worse still. I think too many people who believe they do know how to read and evaluate translations – and are in a position, as critics and reviewers, to proclaim their beliefs publicly – are incredibly mistaken” (103).

If we accept that there is a close similarity between the two approaches, can we account for it in some way? Is it purely a coincidence? It would seem that Holmes and

Raffel were completely unrelated figures. Certainly, Francis Jones' detailed and groundbreaking article, "Biography as Network Building: James S. Holmes and Dutch-English Poetry Translation" (2018), makes no reference to Raffel as being part of Holmes' network of co-translators or other agents. Instead he suggests that Holmes had no co-translating network yet during the 1950s, because Holmes either worked solo or his co-translators could not be identified (320).

Nevertheless, despite the profusion of different places and languages in their biographies, there was indeed a point at which Holmes and Raffel worked together – for a few years at least. Surprisingly, the major point of contact for these two scholars and poets would appear to be their common reading of Indonesian literature. Holmes had another network – of co-translators, scholars, editors and publishers in the field of Indonesian Studies.

The initial interest in Indonesia for Holmes came through his life-long partner Hans van Marle (1922-2001), whom he first met in Amsterdam in October 1950. Van Marle's interest in Indonesia was very deep, going back to when one of his uncles had visited the family in 1933, presenting them with many cultural objects from the Dutch East Indies. In 1946, Van Marle himself travelled to Indonesia as a seaman on the steamship *Johan van Olden*, staying only for a period of ten days. The Indonesian Revolution for independence from the Netherlands had begun the previous year. Van Marle apparently sided with the newly emerging Republic, and Dr R.M. Soebandrio, Indonesian Ambassador to the Court of St James, urged him to transfer from the Faculty of Law to the Faculty for Political and Social Sciences in order to prepare himself to serve Indonesia from Europe. He did this through editing work in the first instance. Through contact with the eminent Indonesianist, Ruth McVey (who was also a Quaker), in Amsterdam in 1953, Hans was hired as a Research Associate for the Southeast Asian Program at Cornell University. In 1955, van Marle became Managing Editor for the series "Selected Studies on Indonesia by Dutch Scholars", published by the Royal Tropical Institute in Amsterdam and funded with a grant by the Netherlands Organisation for Pure Research. Together, Van Marle and Holmes translated eight volumes in the series, the last in 1969. Van Marle eventually became a leading authority on the author Joseph Conrad, much of whose work is set in the Malay Archipelago (Boesan 2005).

Raffel spent two years on a Ford Foundation Fellowship teaching English in Indonesia, 1953 to 1955. He subsequently produced, with Nurdin Salam, an Indonesian colleague, a small volume of translation of selected poems by the great, bohemian Indonesian poet Chairil Anwar (1922-1949), published by New Directions, San Francisco in 1963. He also published *An Anthology of Modern Indonesian Poetry* in 1964 and a study of *The Development of Indonesian Poetry* in 1967.

It is not certain where, or if, the two met. Raffel was a prolific letter writer and may well have initiated contact that way, knowing of Holmes' interest in Indonesian literature and his growing prominence in the translation of Dutch poetry. The contact is recognised in the words that Holmes "responded most generously" to Raffel's requests to him for help with the translations of the Dutch poetry included in *The Development of Indonesian Poetry* (Raffel 1967: viii). Much earlier, Holmes had also written the Preface to Raffel's translation of Chairil Anwar's *Selected Poems*, published in 1962, and is described on the back cover as "one of the leading authorities on Indonesian literature". (The Dutch scholar, A Teeuw, considers Holmes' Preface as "able" and "greatly enhances the book" 146.) Raffel's assessment of Holmes' knowledge may have been largely based upon the small number of articles on Indonesian literature by

Holmes, including “*Angkatan Muda: A Checklist of Writings in Western Language Translation*” (1951-2), “Modern Indonesian Prose: A total revolution” (1954) and “A Quarter Century of Indonesian Literature” (1955). In the *Development of Indonesian Poetry*, Raffel generously described these articles as “[p]erceptive, intelligent criticism” (Raffel 1967: 265). Clearly Holmes was exploring Indonesian literature during the 1950s but subsequently lost interest in it as he became completely committed to Dutch literature.

Jones’ article, based on Dutch archives, dates Holmes’ translation productivity from Dutch after 1954 and makes no place for the earlier work in Indonesian (2018: 310). The article thus further mistakes the reason for Holmes’ low output from Dutch during the late fifties and mid-1960s (2018: 316). This gap in Holmes’ productivity may have been due, in part at least, to this being the period when Holmes most had ongoing contact with Dutch and indigenous scholarship on Indonesia, as well as with Raffel and through him with Indonesian poetry. The connection between Holmes and Raffel is so out of key with Jones’ focus on “Dutch-English Poetry Translation” that it was overlooked in the description of Holmes’ biography and Raffel was excluded from Holmes’ network – and vica versa, of course. The connection is naturally much more important for scholars of Indonesian literature.

If the fourfold schema was a shared intellectual discovery, there is no acknowledgement by either Holmes or Raffel of who was the earlier theorist. It does seem likely that Holmes’ categories (published in 1970) came earlier than Raffel’s (1981), and that as the four ways became common to both their ways of thinking, they assumed these slightly different forms over time, emphasising form and audience respectively. Holmes seems to have been a more rigorous thinker than Raffel, as his essay “The Name and Nature of Translation Studies” (1972/ 2005) showed: it would be appropriate for him to focus on the abstract quality of form. Raffel was more passionately committed to his own poetry and this too shows in his emphasis on audience responses to writing.

If this similarity of understanding is admitted, we may remember what Dryden wrote of Sir John Denham and Mr Cowley, “As they were friends, they communicated their thoughts on this subject to each other; and therefore their reasons for it are little different, though the practice of one was more moderate” (Preface to *Ovid’s Epistles*, Robinson 173). Ultimately, which one was the more moderate in his life, translation and scholarship, is difficult to decide.

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**Review of Marcel Proust's *Un amour de Swann*
(trans. Brian Nelson)**

JULIE ROSE

Proust, Marcel. *Swann in Love*. Translated by Brian Nelson, with an Introduction and Notes by Adam Watt. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017.

One of the most accomplished translations I've read in recent years is Brian Nelson's translation of *Un amour de Swann*, Proust's famous novella-within-a-novel about a man tangled up in jealousy. Nelson's translation flows beautifully, commandingly, with rippling nervous energy. He succeeds wonderfully in capturing Proust's signature style.

And so I noted with surprise and bemusement that not a word of praise for Nelson's skill is to be found in James Grieve's review of the book in *The AALITRA Review* 13, December 2018. Grieve seems doggedly determined to focus on what are arguably imperceptible blemishes in an otherwise flawless piece of work. This produces a peculiar, carping trivialisation – of Proust, of Nelson's translation, of translation itself – that reflects badly on Grieve, not on Nelson. The same urge to carp about trivialities informs Grieve's comments on the volume's explanatory notes; strangely, he gives the impression that Nelson is responsible for these notes, though in fact they are by Adam Watt (rightly praised by Grieve for his introduction).

My concern here, though, is not with the nits Grieve picks, but with larger issues. Grieve's review has the incidental merit of inciting us to think about a number of important questions concerning translation, and the translation of Proust in particular. In a paragraph on syntax ("On the matter of syntax [...]") Grieve begins to raise these issues (64). Yet he does so in an oddly confused (and confusing) manner. He writes that Nelson "doubts the wisdom" of Lydia Davis's "retention of the precise order of elements in a sentence" (64). But at this point he seems to lose his way. I can't tell whether he is attacking Davis, or Nelson, or both. In any case, he gives a distorted impression of what Nelson says in his Translator's Note, viz.: "Davis's [...] determination to stay as close as possible to the original, not only in terms of diction but also in the retention of the precise order of elements in a sentence, runs the risk of compromising her ability to write idiomatic English" (Proust 2017, xxx). Nelson is not criticising Davis's general aim of capturing Proust's style in terms of its syntax, but drawing attention to the relative rigidity of her translation, which he contrasts with that of Scott Moncrieff (a point Grieve ignores, preferring to lump "Nelson's predecessors" together in an undifferentiated manner).

The argument may be illuminated by comparing Davis's translation of a paragraph with Nelson's. Here is Davis:

He ran his other hand up along Odette's cheek; she gazed at him steadily, with the grave and languid look of the women by the Florentine master whom he had discovered she resembled; protruding to the edges of her lids, her shining eyes, wide and thin, like theirs, seemed about to well out like two tears. She bent her neck as you see them all do, in the pagan scenes as well as in the religious pictures. And in a position that was no doubt habitual for her, which she knew was appropriate to moments like this and which

she took care not to forget to adopt, she seemed to require all her strength to hold her face back, as though an invisible force were drawing it towards Swann. And it was Swann who, before she let it fall, as though despite herself, on his lips, held it back for an instant, at a certain distance, between his two hands. He had wanted to give his mind time to catch up, to recognize the dream that it had caressed for so long and to be present at its realization, like a relative summoned to witness the success of a child she has loved very much. Perhaps Swann was also fastening upon this face of an Odette he had not yet possessed, an Odette he had not yet even kissed, this face he was seeing for the last time, the gaze with which, on a day of departure, we hope to carry away with us a landscape we are about to leave for ever.

(Proust 2002, 236)

Here is Nelson:

He ran his other hand up Odette's cheek; she gazed at him without blinking, with the grave and languid look of the women of the Florentine master in whose faces he had found a resemblance with hers; her shining eyes, wide and slender like theirs, seemed to brim at the edge of her lids and to be on the point of welling out like two tears. She tilted her head to one side, as Botticelli's women all do, in the pagan scenes as well as in the religious paintings. And in an attitude that was no doubt habitual, which she knew was appropriate to moments like this and which she made sure she would not forget to adopt, she seemed to need all her strength to hold her face back, as if some invisible force was drawing it to Swann's. And it was Swann who, for a moment, held her face away from his in his hands, before she let it fall, as though in spite of herself, onto his lips. He had wanted to give his mind time to catch up with him, to recognize the dream it had cherished for so long and to be present at its realization, like a relative invited to share in the success of a child of whom she has always been very fond. Perhaps, too, Swann was also gazing at Odette's face with the eyes of a man who looks intensely at a landscape he is about to leave forever, as if to carry it away with him, for it was a face he was seeing for the last time: Odette as she was before he slept with her, or even kissed her.

(Proust 2017, 44-45)

It's often instructive to compare translations. Anyone who'd like to examine Grieve's treatment of syntax (and register) in his own translation of *Du côté de chez Swann* (Canberra, 1982), and gauge the extent of his success in re-creating Proust, in catching the flavour, rhythm and precision of his prose, can do so: his translation, long out of print, may now be read at <http://hdl.handle.net/1885/143006>.

Grieve asks: "where is the advantage" (64) in attempting to capture Proust's syntax? The answer to this question is surely embodied in Nelson's very fine translation; it is also eloquently formulated in his Note, in which he describes Proust's style as being:

[...] largely identified with his famously long sentences, with their ‘coiling elaboration’. As they uncoil, the sentences express the rhythms of a sensibility, the directions and indirections of desire, the complications and conflicts of a mind—Swann’s—in the grip of doubts and uncertainties, obsessions and fantasies. I have tried to capture the intricate harmonies of those sentences, which combine syntactic complexity with complete clarity.

(Proust 2017, xxx)

Nelson’s success in this endeavour is everywhere apparent, so very satisfyingly, giving us a Proust that is both demandingly intricate and perfectly intelligible. Rather than acknowledge and examine this, Grieve simply plunges on to suggest, unhelpfully, that there is some kind of equation between the aim of capturing Proust’s style in terms of his syntax and “foreignization” (an attempt to make the translation “feel aptly French”) (64). He thus throws one red herring (foreignization) after another (questioning the advantage of trying to capture Proust’s style) after yet another (misrepresentation). It’s odd that Grieve invokes the bogey of foreignization, since it’s clear from Nelson’s note, and even clearer from his translation, that he is more closely aligned with Scott Moncrieff, with Moncrieff’s “exquisite ear for the cadences of Proust’s prose”, than with Davis, with her dogged “exactitude” (Proust 2017, xxx). Nelson’s “runs the risk” (referring to Davis) is obviously a diplomatic euphemism, while the passages juxtaposed above speak for themselves. Yet it’s worth dwelling briefly on the concept of foreignization, as it is problematic in various ways.

First, what does foreignization mean, and how useful is it to translators? Some of those who’ve been schooled in the art claim it’s a translation “strategy”; but when they say they’ve used it they seem to mean little more than that they write “monsieur” instead of “Mister” and keep proper names, place names and culture-specific terms or phrases in the original. Who on earth wouldn’t? When I say, in my translation of *Les Misérables*, that Jean Valjean sits down and eats a *fromage blanc*, it’s a contextual detail, from the original, that gives you his setting and status in the rural France of the day, where eating a *fromage blanc* (a small round individual cheese) was the province of peasants and paupers; we would lose this if I’d opted for “cheese”, but the precision doesn’t need to do more than it does. Similarly, an extreme literalist “strategy” would be really painful. To take two ludicrous examples: would you write “Will you be one of ours?” (French) instead of “Would you like to join us?” Or “I saw the Helmut yesterday” (German) instead of “I saw Helmut [...]”? I don’t think so. Furthermore, to some extent foreignizing relies for its effects on the reader’s knowledge of the language in question. Where does this leave the reader who has no such knowledge?

Second, the whole notion of foreignization is surely foreign, so to speak, to today’s world, especially in multilingual cities like Sydney and Melbourne. The concept worked well for Friedrich Schleiermacher, when he was writing about contemporary German translations of ancient Greek (Schleiermacher 1813), but the idea that it’s possible in this day and age to talk about “the foreign” in any sort of abstract way – particularly with respect to the translation of contemporary texts – is absurd. Look around you, in the classroom or the supermarket, on the train or the tram, and it becomes clear that each individual has a different sense of what is foreign and what is domestic or familiar.

Third, foreignization is more an ideological position than a fruitful approach to the art of translation. For Lawrence Venuti, the translator academic most closely

associated with this ideology, translation is a political practice with ethical dimensions. The task of the translator, Venuti says, is not to produce texts that appear to be originally written or effortlessly fluent in the language into which he/she translates. He advocates, rather, an approach that seeks not so much to make a text in one culture available for appreciation in another as to heighten our awareness of language itself and its uses; he also feels that such an approach to translation has the potential to involve greater respect for linguistic and cultural difference. I agree entirely with the reservations about Venuti's views expressed by Tim Parks in a lucid and sane article entitled "Mysteries of the Meta-Task":

If we assume that Venuti is proposing that a translated text offer a series of surprises and novelties in our language unlike those of an original text, how are those surprises generated, and how are they linked together to form a coherent whole? How do they stand in relation to the content and style (if we can ever separate the two) of the original text? ... When Venuti's aware and progressive "new" translator chooses solutions that are provocative and non-standard in his own language, [...] heightening awareness and alerting the reader to the translated status of the text, is he doing so in response to the pattern of effects and impressions he believes he has found in the original? Or is he imposing a predetermined strategy that could perfectly well lead to similar effects being generated in translations of quite different originals [...].

(Parks 2012: n.p.)

These are highly pertinent questions which Venuti fails to answer. To my mind, to make a translation sound like a translation does a disservice to both readers and writers. Indeed, it reflects a deep lack of respect. Real respect, if we can for a moment reduce its scope, lies in convincingly recreating the text as though it were originally written in the language of the translation and thereby producing in the new reader something as close as possible to the emotional and aesthetic impact of the original on its first readers. In other words, the pact between writer, translator and reader is paramount. If Proust sounded strange to his original audience, that would have been because of the striking particularity of his voice, a fresh new voice given shape in his native language – not because he was Greek, say, or Lithuanian, writing incompletely mastered French.

In these terms, Nelson could not have shown greater respect. The success of his translation has nothing to do with making the translation "feel French". It has everything to do with capturing Proust's style and voice and rhythms, the entire pattern of textual effects embodied in his writing, in a manner that also makes the translation feel felicitously English.

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Wu Ming's "Momodou" in English Translation

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The short crime story *Momodou* was written by the group of authors known as Wu Ming for the 2008 anthology *Crimini italiani* (Italian Crime Stories) edited by Giancarlo De Cataldo. The story narrates the fictional murder of the eponymous protagonist at the hand of a *carabiniere*, an officer of the Italian paramilitary police who primarily carries out domestic policing duties. It does so in thirteen chapters that follow a reverse timeline, in a number of different styles and "voices". These voices belong to the various characters narrating past and present events from their point of view.

The piece opens with a short newspaper article on a crime. This was the part that needed the greatest intervention as journalistic writing styles in Italian and English differ greatly. Changes to the formal matrix (graphic level, sentential level, syntax) were extensive. The article is followed by the discovery of the news by Kati, a young migrant girl whose linguistic register was particularly important ("Che posto sarebbe la "Gamibia"? Un incrocio tra Gambia e Namibia" became "What exactly do they think "Gamibia" is? A cross between Gambia and Namibia"). The cultural borrowings and in some instances the calque expressions present in the text had to be maintained to keep the "flavour" of the story and the girl's point of view.

In fact, particular attention was paid throughout the translation to avoid inserting external culture-specific references that were foreign to the original text, so as not to lose the Italian location and the author's commentary on the treatment of foreigners in Italy (Savic and Cutura). At the same time, it was important to replicate other features such as alliteration, anaphora, repetition and echoes. A particular challenge was dealing with a passage characterized by the repetition of the word "amen", that exists in both languages but that is coupled with different expressions so "è successo tutto 'in un amen'" became "it all happened 'before you could say amen'", and the wordplay with the above expression had to be kept throughout. In this passage, there is also heavy use of alliteration, particularly with the letters b and t; this was replicated as much as possible and culminated in the unmissable "nobody has the time to think about blinks and winks" in translation.

Exegetic translations have been kept to a minimum, and at times are only a word long, but, given the importance of the original setting, have been preferred to any form of adaptation (Mattioli 191-194). A particular challenge came from a minor moment in the story, coffee time: "Ecco un cappuccino fatto ad arte. Come quello che beveva a Roma, prima che lo trasferissero in provincia, a Città del Buco di Culo". The first issue here is with "provincia"; this can be translated in many different ways (such as "province", "region", "area", "district", "territory", "suburbs") that denote particular territorial jurisdictions which differ in English-speaking countries, so a periphrasis was preferred instead. It is followed by "città", that in Italy is commonly used for both towns and cities but, given that Campanise, the fictional setting of the story, is a locality in the South of Italy, "city" was preferred because of the implied substantial population. Lastly "Buco di Culo" translates to "asshole", yet the expletive in English invites unwanted sexual connotations when in Italian it implies distance from places of interest, and a provincial location inhabited by an uneducated retrograde populace. The final

translation omitted the reference to “provincia” and reflected the underlying meaning of the original: “Here is a well-crafted cappuccino. Like the one he used to drink in Rome, before he got reassigned out of the capital, to Fuckwit City”.

The greatest difficulty in translating this piece was identifying the individuality, language variety and register of the various characters in terms of style, age, education and tone, and consistently reproducing it in English (Hervey et al. 104-110). This proved particularly tricky as the piece moves quickly from being descriptive to stream of consciousness, and then to dialogue – all with very different rhythms. The tempo of the story changes radically when the *carabinieri* appear in the story. The stream of consciousness of the anxious, confused and emotional Yama, Momodou’s sister, needed particular care, as did her language. The woman works from home and her Italian is stilted but comprehensible, even though the mistakes become more numerous as her emotional state heightens. The challenge here was to avoid disrespecting the character by making her sound ridiculous, while at the same time conveying her emotions.

The challenge with the character of the *carabinieri* officer Tajani was different. He represents the “banality of evil” and how it covers its tracks. The difficulty here was to stay true to the intentions of the writers, who show his dreams as a child and how his initial good intentions turn bad, in a character imbued with self-righteousness. Particular attention was paid to social register and word choice. Terms with racist connotations, such as “nigger”, “negro”, “black”, posed a distinct challenge. Hopefully these have been used *cum grano salis* throughout, as with the line, “Se la negra si limita a fare la negra” that was translated as “If the negro woman sticks to being just that”, avoiding a stilted repetition. Furthermore, Tajani’s tone and register, though authoritarian when speaking to Corporal Ciaravolo, the voice of conscience bullied into compliance, had to be distinctly different to his superior’s, who represented military authority, unquestioning and unquestionable.

The voices of those who were helping Yama differed greatly too. Her friend Marta, who is a volunteer for an association that works with migrants, has a particularly empathic tone. The tobacconist Gianni, “the least meddling tobacconist in the whole of Italy”, who questions what is going on, is the voice of reason in the story and his common sense is translated stylistically into simple and straight-forward language: “Gianni si chiede: chi chiami in un caso come questo? I carabinieri no, ovviamente” [Gianni asks himself: who do you call for something like this? Obviously not the carabinieri, in this case]. Both of the above characters differ greatly from the emergency services operators whose voices are patronizing and impatient, as is Carabiniere Tajani’s voice during the questioning, so it was imperative to make these institutional voices sound similar, yet not quite alike. The operators are not evil per se but are the trigger(s) to everything that follows – they are the voice of the annoyed, Kafkaesque bureaucracy that do not try to help or take responsibility, even though it is clearly their job.

Finally, Momodou’s voice, that throughout the piece is always reported by others as if he were without agency, appears at the very end. It is the voice of his youth, unspoiled by the harsh reality of migration, depression and a crime he did not commit – it is the voice of a much loved, intelligent, street-smart yet bullied child. The contrast between his voice at the end of the story and what has led to his end is what cuts the deepest on an emotional level and much attention was dedicated to maintaining this in translation.

Reading, understanding and translating this short crime story was a pleasure, a challenge, and a further eye-opener of just how far we are from where we should be if we still need to write this kind of fiction. Because it does feel like a need, and so does translating it.

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Momodou
By Wu Ming

13.
«La Gazzetta della Provincia»
8 febbraio 2008

CARABINIERE SI DIFENDE: MUORE UN
IMMIGRATO

Era intervenuto per sedare una rissa

Il militare prima di sparare aggredito e pugnalato

di Mimmo Lupetto

Tragica fatalità ieri mattina a Campanise. In un condominio del quartiere Sanbenedetto, un carabiniere ha ucciso con un colpo di pistola un immigrato della Gambia che l'aveva ferito con un coltello da cucina. La vittima si era scagliata contro il militare intervenuto per sedare una rissa. Accade tutto all'improvviso, verso le nove, in via Ragucci 7. In un appartamento al secondo piano, preso in fitto da alcuni extracomunitari, scoppia un violento alterco. Il ventisettenne Momodou Jammeh ha cercato di infilarsi, armato di coltello, nel letto di una donna con la quale divideva insieme con altri l'alloggio. Questa, chiaramente impaurita, ancorché ignara delle reali intenzioni del connazionale, comincia a gridare a squarciagola. Due extracomunitari accorrono in suo aiuto e, resisi subito conto di quanto sta accadendo cercano di convincere Momodou ad abbandonare i suoi propositi bellicosi. Tutto vano. Nel frattempo, però, qualcuno attirato dalle urla avverte con una telefonata i carabinieri. Una gazzetta della locale tenenza, comandata dal sottufficiale Pasquale Tajani, interviene subito. I militari fanno irruzione nell'appartamento cercando, con molta precauzione, di riportare la calma. Ma Momodou ormai è una furia indomabile. Non vuole sentire ragioni. E brandendo il coltello si scaglia contro uno dei due carabinieri ferendolo per fortuna in maniera non grave. Dall'arma di ordinanza impugnata precauzionalmente dal militare, quasi contemporaneamente, a questo punto, parte un proiettile che centra l'aggressore. Il gambiano muore sul colpo. Bisognerà chiarire qual è stata la scintilla che ha scatenato l'aggressione di Jammeh nei confronti della donna: se si è trattato di un tentativo di violenza a scopo sessuale o se alla base c'erano altri motivi. Momodou Jammeh risulta disoccupato. Nel condominio del Sanbenedetto, alcuni vicini dicono di averlo visto più volte in atteggiamenti sospetti. «Non ti guardava mai in faccia, – dice la signora Antonia

Momodou
By Wu Ming
Translated by Luciana d'Arcangeli

13.
From the local newspaper “La Gazzetta
della Provincia”

8 February 2008

A CARABINIERE DEFENDS HIMSELF: A
MIGRANT DIES

The policeman was attacked and stabbed before
firing his gun

He had intervened to stop a brawl

by Mimmo Lupetto

Campanise (Italy) – An immigrant from Gambia was shot dead yesterday morning by a carabinieri in a condo of the Sanbenedetto area. The victim had pounced on the policeman, wounding him with a kitchen knife after he had intervened to stop a brawl.

Everything happened quickly after a quarrel turned into a violent altercation at approximately 9a.m., on the second floor at number 7 via Ragucci, in an apartment rented by some non-European immigrants. The 27-year-old man Momodou Jammeh armed with a knife tried to sneak into the bed of a woman living in the shared accommodation. The woman was clearly scared, though at the time unaware of the real intentions of her compatriot, and started to scream in alarm. Two other immigrants came to her aid and, immediately cognizant of the situation, tried to convince Momodou to drop his violent intent. It proved a vain effort.

In the meantime, someone had heard the screaming and called the emergency services. A local police car arrived immediately at the scene. NCO Pasquale Tajani and a junior officer burst into the apartment to try to calmly bring back the peace. Unfortunately, Momodou's fury was by this time uncontrollable and there was no reasoning with him.

Brandishing a knife, the man threw himself onto one of the two carabinieri, thankfully only lightly wounding him. The police weapon the NCO was wielding as a precautionary measure at almost the same time fired a bullet that hit the assailant. The Gambian man died on impact. It has yet to be understood what sparked Jammeh's aggression toward the woman, if it was a case of sexual violence or if there were other hidden motives at the bottom of it all.

Momodou Jammeh was unemployed. Neighbours in the Sanbenedetto apartment building say they had spotted him numerous times behaving suspiciously. “He never looked

Ceglia, 64 anni, – e spesso volte pareva in stato d'ebbrezza». I Ceglia sono una delle poche famiglie italiane rimaste a vivere in via Ragucci, dove gli abitanti sono ormai in prevalenza dell'Africa nera

Gli italiani sono così ignoranti, pensa Kati. Che posto sarebbe la «Gamibia»? Un incrocio tra Gambia e Namibia, probabilmente. Come confondere Veneto e Venezuela. No, peggio: come confondere Guinea e Nuova Guinea. Gli italiani sono così ignoranti e provinciali. Però, a parte gli errori e i nomi storpiati, la notizia è di quelle grosse, chissà se Sulayman l'ha già letta, più tardi lo chiamo, pensa Kati. Momodou Jammeh voleva violentare sua sorella! Sì, perché la donna che viveva con lui era sua sorella, chissà perché il giornalista non lo scrive.

Allora è vero che in quella famiglia c'è qualcosa di strano. Kati lo sente dire da quand'era bambina, quando stava ancora a Banjul, prima che tutti partisero. Prima che Campanise diventasse *Gambianise*. Sulayman gliel'aveva detto più di una volta, che secondo lui Momodou aveva il singhiozzo in testa. Voleva sempre stare da solo. Se gli facevi una domanda, due volte su tre rispondeva: «*Ase ke*», «forse», con quell'aria da uccello sospettoso, la pappagorgia, i soliti due o tre peli non rasati. Aveva la pappagorgia anche da piccolo, magro e col doppio mento, emica per niente lo chiamavano «il Pellicano», *Kabookoo*.

Ousman, lo zoppo di Sukuta che fa le pulizie all'ospedale, una volta ha visto il Pellicano nella sala d'attesa degli psichiatri. Non lo ha salutato.

Kati lo conosceva poco. Un ciao, qualche frase di circostanza, niente di più. E poi, Momodou non era sempre a Campanise. Aveva lavorato al Nord, o almeno *dicevano* che avesse lavorato. Era tornato da meno di un anno, per vivere

you right in the eye, and more often than not he looked inebriated,” said the 64-year-old Ms. Antonia Ceglia, whose Italian family is one of the few left in via Ragucci, where most people now hail from sub-Saharan Africa.

Italians are so ignorant, thought Kati. What exactly do they think “Gamibia” is? A cross between Gambia and Namibia, probably. It's like mixing up the Veneto region and Venezuela. No, it's worse. It's like mixing up Guinea and New Guinea. Italians are so ignorant and provincial. Though aside from the mistakes and the mangled names, this is big news, I wonder if Sulayman has already read it. I'll call him later, thought Kati. Momodou Jammeh wanted to rape his sister! That's right, because the woman who lived with him was his sister, I wonder why the journalist didn't write that.

So, it's true that there was something strange about that family. It had been hearsay from when Kati was a child, when she was still in Banjul, before everybody had left. Before the Italian town of Campanise had become *Gambianise*. Sulayman had told her more than once that in his opinion Momodou had what he called “a hiccup in his head”. He always wanted to be on his own. If you asked him a question more often than not he would answer “*Ase ke*”, or “maybe”, with that suspicious bird look of his, that double chin and the usual two or three unshaven chin hairs. He had had a double chin even when he had been young and thin, thin and with a pendulous mass of skin that earned him the nickname of “Pelican”, *Kabookoo*.

Ousman, the lame man who cleaned the hospital in Sukuta saw him once in the psychiatrists' waiting room. He didn't say hi to him.

Kati barely knew him. A couple of hellos, a phrase here and there. Nothing more. What's more Momodou was hardly ever in Campanise. He had worked up North, or at least they said he had “worked”. After less than a year he

con sua sorella e il cognato, che però lavora a Surmano e non c'è mai. E infatti. Che brutta, brutta storia. Anche la sorella, però. Yama. Possibile sia stata sulla nuvola del cucù per tutto questo tempo? Non se n'era accorta che suo fratello voleva... Chissà, forse non era nemmeno la prima volta. Adesso chiamo Sulayman, pensa Kati, gli chiedo se ha già sentito cos'ha fatto il Pellicano.

Anche se a quest'ora lo avranno sentito tutti, a Gambianise.

12.

8 febbraio 2008, ore 10:51

Apri gli occhi in un letto che non è il suo. Dalla penombra spunta il profilo di mobili e oggetti sconosciuti. C'è silenzio, non il solito rumore di traffico che sale dalla strada.

Yama prova a credere che l'incubo sia finito, ma non ci riesce. Da piccola le succedeva spesso di svegliarsi a casa di sua zia, senza ricordare come c'era finita. Allora immaginava di essere un'altra bambina e di aver sognato la vita precedente, per un tempo che le era parso lungo e invece era durato una notte soltanto. Restava sdraiata a raccontarsi quella storia, e man mano che andava avanti si rendeva conto che nulla poteva dimostrare il contrario, nulla poteva impedirle di credere quel che voleva. Poi arrivava sua zia, scostava la tenda e le diceva con una carezza che era ora di alzarsi.

Yama pensa che una carezza le servirebbe anche adesso, per trovare la forza di uscire dal letto. Qualcuno che le dica che è ora, che il treno non aspetterà. Qualcuno come suo fratello, che un tempo, prima di andare al lavoro, si sporgeva in camera per salutarla e lasciava la colazione pronta sul tavolo in

had come back to live with his sister and his brother-in-law, who worked in Surmano and was never there. That would do it... What a terrible, terrible thing to happen. Well, what about the sister though? Yama. Could she have been living in the cuckoo clouds for all this time? Had she not realized her brother wanted to... Who knows, it may not have been the first time either. I'll call Sulayman right away, thought Kati, and I'll ask him if he's already heard about what the Pelican did.

Even though by now everyone will have heard about it, in Gambianise.

12.

8 February 2008, 10:51 a.m.

She awakens in a bed that is not her own. The contours of furniture and objects she does not recognize jut out of the dim light. There's silence, not the usual hum of traffic coming up from the street.

Yama tries to believe that her nightmare is over, but she can't. When she was a little girl she often woke up in her aunt's house, without knowing how she got there. So she imagined she was another little girl who had dreamt up her previous life that had lasted what had seemed like a long time but had only been a single night. She would stay there, lying on the bed, telling herself that story, and as she went along with it she would realize that there was nothing to demonstrate the contrary, nothing could stop her from believing what she wanted to believe. Then her auntie would come in, open the curtain, and tell her with a caress that it was time to get up.

Yama thinks she needs that caress right now, to find the strength to leave the bed. Someone to tell her what time it is, that the train will not wait for her. Someone like her brother who, a while back, used to make her breakfast and leave it on the table before peeking into

cucina.

Yama si gira sulla schiena e piange, come quando era bambina e voleva farsi sentire dai grandi. Come se le lacrime potessero purgare gli occhi da quel che hanno visto, svuotare il corpo e farla sentire leggera.

La luce che filtra dagli scuri dice che la giornata è iniziata da un pezzo. Marta deve essere già uscita, avrà pensato che lasciarla dormire fosse la cosa migliore. Marta è una buona amica. Se non ci fosse stata lei, chissà come avrebbe passato la notte, chissà quanti fantasmi avrebbe visto.

Però adesso Yama deve mettersi in piedi. Affrontare da sola una casa sconosciuta.

Mentre cerca il coraggio per farlo, un rumore di stoviglie le dà speranza. Butta la coperta di lato e si dirige in cucina.

Marta è seduta al tavolo, ancora in camicia da notte, le mani strette su un foglio. Yama le toglie l'imbarazzo del primo saluto.

- Ciao, non sei a lavorare?
- Oggi no.

Marta si alza e le va incontro a piccoli passi, quasi dovesse avvicinare un daino senza spaventarlo. Allarga le braccia e la stringe forte, poi la fa sedere.

Yama sbircia il foglio appoggiato sul tavolo e lo gira verso di sé.

– L'avevi lasciato sulla credenza, – si scusa subito Marta. – L'avvocato mi ha chiesto di leggerglielo e non ti volevo svegliare.

– Quale avvocato?
– Un vecchio amico, uno che ti può aiutare. Gli ho telefonato ieri sera e stamattina mi ha richiamato perché sul giornale c'era la notizia.

her room to say goodbye and going to work.

Yama turns onto her back and cries, like when she was a child and wanted the grown-ups to hear her. As if tears could purge her eyes of what they had seen, empty her body and make her feel light.

The light that filters from the shutters lets her know the day started a while ago. Marta must have already left, she must have thought that letting her sleep was the best thing to do. Marta is a good friend. Had she not been there who knows where she would have spent the night, how many ghosts she would have seen.

But now Yama must get up. Face an unknown house on her own.

Whilst she's gathering up the courage to do so the clattering of dishes from the kitchen gives her hope. She throws off the blanket and starts towards the kitchen.

Marta is sitting at the table, still wearing her nightgown, hands clamped on a piece of paper. Yama breaks the silence by greeting her first.

“Ciao, are you not at work today?”

“Not today, no.”

Marta gets up and goes towards her in tiny steps, as if she were nearing a deer trying not to scare it off. She opens her arms and holds her close, then gets her to sit down.

Yama casts a sidelong glance to the piece of paper left on the table and turns it towards her.

“You had left it on the dresser,” apologized Marta right away. “The lawyer asked me to read it and I didn't want to wake you up.”

“Which lawyer?”

“An old friend, someone that can help you. I phoned him last night and this morning he called back because he'd read the news in the papers.”

– Sul giornale? E cosa dice?
– È una cosa assurda, tutto diverso da quel che mi hai raccontato. Dice che Momodou aveva un coltello e che...

– Io a carabinieri ho detto che niente coltello.

– Sei sicura?

– Sicura, sì.

– Te l'hanno letto bene, prima di fartelo firmare?

– Sì, penso che sì, ma io non capito bene. Volevo solo andare via.

– Ecco, vedi? Qui dice: «Non posso escludere che mio fratello non nascondesse nei pressi del letto un'arma da taglio, dal momento che non ne ho mai verificata l'assenza e diversi coltelli conservati in cucina erano a sua completa disposizione, nonostante egli avesse più volte espresso propositi suicidi».

Yama guarda il foglio sbalordita, poi alza gli occhi su Marta. – Che cosa ho detto?

11.

7 febbraio 2008, ore 13:16

Sono in tre. Uno scrive, l'altro fa le domande, col tono di voce scandito e troppo alto di chi deve spiegare le cose a uno stupido. Il terzo ogni tanto entra nella stanza, ascolta un paio di battute, parla all'orecchio del collega ed esce di nuovo. Yama si mangia le unghie e singhiozza.

– Allora, senti, ricominciamo da capo, occhei? Qui, a noi risulta che tu hai fatto una chiamata al 112, intorno alle dieci di stamattina, giusto?

– Io... non mi ricordo che ora.

– Va bene. E il motivo di questa chiamata era che...

Yama apre appena la bocca, ma rimane zitta, lo sguardo smarrito.

– Il motivo, il motivo della chiamata. – L'uomo che fa le domande, spazientito, le punta un indice addosso. –

“In the papers? What do they say?”

“It's absurd, it's totally different from what you've told me. It says that Momodou had a knife and that...”

“I told the carabinieri that no knife.”

“Are you sure?”

“Sure, yes.”

“Did they read it back to you properly before asking you to sign it?”

“Yes, I think yes, but I did not understand well. I wanted only to leave.”

“Here, see? Here it says: ‘I cannot rule out that my brother could have been hiding near the bed a bladed weapon since I had not verified if any of the various knives had gone missing. They were unsecured and available to him, even though he had expressed suicidal thoughts a number of times.’”

Yama looks at the piece of paper in astonishment, then looks up at Marta. “What did I say?”

11.

7 February 2008, 1:16 p.m.

There are three of them. One types, the other one asks questions, his voice unnaturally high and overly articulating words like someone who has to explain things to an idiot. The third one walking in and out of the room, stays for a couple of phrases, whispers into the ear of his colleague and walks out again. Yama is biting her nails and sobbing.

“So, listen, let's start again from the top, ok? Here it says that you called the emergency number 112 around 10 o'clock this morning, correct?”

“I don't remember what time.”

“All right. And the reason for this call was...”

Yama barely opens her mouth but stays silent, her gaze lost.

“The reason, the reason for the call!” The man who asks questions, annoyed, points his index finger towards

Perché tu, – porta all'orecchio una cornetta telefonica fatta di dita, – hai *chiamato*, – si pugnala il petto con il pollice, – i *carabinieri*?

– Perché avevo paura, mio fratello si moriva.

– Ecco, bene. – Un respiro di sollievo, come davanti alla risposta giusta di un allievo ignorante. – Quindi è vero che si voleva ammazzare, è così?

– No ammazzare, lui stava male, molto male, non voleva mangiare.

– Ho capito. Però questa cosa che si voleva ammazzare da qualche parte sarà venuta fuori, o no?

– Io non so, non ricordo bene cosa detto.

– D'accordo. Se non ti ricordi, ci sono le registrazioni e le andiamo a sentire, però se ce lo dici tu adesso è meglio, capiamo prima quello che è successo.

Yama annuisce.

– Ecco, brava. Allora adesso mi devi spiegare una cosa. Se lui non si voleva ammazzare, cosa ci hai chiamati a fare, noi carabinieri? È chiaro che se ci hai chiamati vuol dire che c'era un pericolo, altrimenti ti arrangiavi da sola, no?

– Sì, sì, io avevo paura, lui dice che voleva morire.

– Bene –. Si rivolge al collega dietro lo schermo del computer. – Hai scritto, sì? «Mio fratello aveva manifestato più volte propositi suicidi», eccetera. Possiamo andare avanti? Va bene, senti, lui diceva di voler morire, però così, per fare scena, giusto? Non c'era tutto questo pericolo. Uno non chiama i carabinieri solo perché un parente dice che si vuole ammazzare, uno li chiama perché ha qualche sospetto. Quindi tu lo sapevi di questo coltello sotto il cuscino, magari l'aveva pure detto: «Mi ammazzo, prendo un coltello e mi ammazzo», una cosa del genere?

her. “Why did *you*,” then mimicking a phone handset with the fingers of his hand, “*phone*,” now he stabs his chest with his thumb, “the *carabinieri*?”

“Because I scared, my brother killing self.”

“There. Good.” A sigh of relief followed, like when an ignorant student manages to come up with the right answer. “So it is true that he wanted to kill himself, right?”

“Not to kill, he was not well, very not well, he did not want to eat.”

“I understand. But this idea that he wanted to kill himself must have come out at some stage or not?”

“I don't know, I don't remember well what I said.”

“All right. If you do not remember we have the recordings and we will go listen to them, but if you tell us right now it would be better, we will understand what happened sooner.”

Yama nodded.

“There, good. Now you need to explain this: if he did not want to kill himself why did you call us, the carabinieri? It is clear that if you called us there was a danger of some kind, otherwise you would have dealt with things on your own, right?”

“Yes, yes, I was scared, he say he wanted to die.”

“Good.” Then addressing his colleague working behind the computer screen, “did you get that? ‘My brother had manifested suicidal thoughts a number of times,’ and so on. Can we move on? Ok, listen, he said he wanted to die but it was just to draw attention to himself, right? There wasn't any real danger. One does not call the carabinieri only because a family member says they want to kill themselves, one calls them because they are concerned. So you knew about this knife he kept under the pillow, perhaps he had even mentioned it: ‘I will kill myself. I will take the knife and kill myself,’ or something similar?”

– No, io questo non sapevo, non c'è nessun coltello.

– Ah, davvero? In casa vostra non tenete coltelli?

– No, niente.

L'uomo si sporge sulla scrivania
– Nemmeno in cucina?

– Sì, in cucina sì, però...

– Però cosa? T'ho chiesto se avete dei coltelli. – Si picchia la fronte con due dita. – Bisogna che ci pensi bene a quello che dici, capito? – Si lascia andare sulla sedia e sbuffa, come per buttar fuori il disappunto. – Ascoltami bene, adesso: era chiusa a chiave, la cucina?

– No, io...

– Tu sapevi che tuo fratello si voleva ammazzare, però lasciavi i coltelli alla sua portata, cioè che lui li poteva prendere quando voleva?

– Lui non ha preso nessun coltello.

– Forse non lo hai visto, quando lo ha nascosto. – L'uomo che fa le domande si lascia sfuggire un ghigno di sarcasmo. – Mica stavi tutto il giorno in camera con lui. Ogni tanto andavi fuori, no? Lui poteva andare in cucina come e quando voleva.

– Io non posso stare con lui tutto il giorno, io deve fare spesa, pagare bollette.

– Quindi se tuo fratello voleva prendere un coltello, sapeva dove trovarlo, poteva nasconderselo.

– Sì, certo, ma io...

– Buona, aspetta. Hai scritto? «Ritengo ipotizzabile che un'arma da taglio potesse essere a disposizione di mio fratello», eccetera. Bene. Stavi dicendo?

– Io non chiamato perché lui ha un coltello. Lui si moriva, non mangiava, cadeva per terra, ma quelli dell'ospedale, loro mi ha detto di chiamare voi, e io ho chiamato.

“No, I did not know this, there is no knife.”

“Ah, really? You do not have knives in your house?”

“No, nothing.”

The man leans across his desk.
“Not even in the kitchen?”

“Yes, in the kitchen yes, but...”

“But what? I've asked you if you had knives.” He proceeds to hit his forehead with two fingers. “You need to think carefully about what you say. Do you understand?” Then he flops back into his chair and snorts, as if to force out his disappointment. “Now listen carefully: was the kitchen locked?”

“No, I...”

“You knew that your brother wanted to kill himself and you left the knives out where he could get a hold on them, that is where he could take one whenever he wanted?”

“He did not take any knife.”

“Maybe you did not see him when he hid it.” A bitter sneer escaped the man asking questions. “You did not spend your entire day in the room with him, you must have left the house at times, right? He could go into the kitchen whenever he wanted.”

“I cannot spend all day with him, I have to do shopping, pay bills.”

“So if your brother wanted to take a knife he knew where to find one and hide it.”

“Yes, of course, but I...”

“Hold on, wait! Did you write this? ‘I believe that, hypothetically, my brother could have access to a bladed weapon,’ etcetera. Right. You were saying?”

“I did not call because he had knife. He killing self, he was not eating, he was falling to the floor, but the hospital people they told me to call you, and I called.”

10.

7 febbraio 2008, ore 12.00

Eccola, la campana di mezzodì, pensa Tajani. Ha sentito il rintocco mentre entrava in caserma. Quella era la parola usata da suo nonno: «mezzodì» al posto di «mezzogiorno». Chissà perché gli è tornata in mente. Tra l'altro è sbagliata, pensa, e segue un altro ricordo, la maestra delle elementari che gli dice: «Il giorno dura ventiquattr'ore ed è diviso in due parti, il dì e la notte». Il dì comincia all'alba e finisce al tramonto. Quindi le ore dodici antimeridiane non segnano la metà del dì, ma la metà del giorno di ventiquattr'ore. Il giorno che comprende anche la notte. E allora come la mettiamo con «mezzanotte?» Le ore zero (o ventiquattro) non segnano la metà della notte, ma l'inizio del giorno di ventiquattr'ore.

Quand'era piccolo, Tajani si torturava pensando a puttanate del genere. Fatto sta che ha sentito il rintocco e ora pensa: siamo a metà del giorno più importante della mia vita. Se gioco bene le mie carte, se il ragazzo non mi crolla, se la negra si limita a fare la negra, è il giorno più importante della mia vita.

Buffo. A volte ti accorgi che pensavi una cosa solo dopo che l'hai detta. Il pensiero non trova filtri e diventa discorso, e all'inizio ti senti in imbarazzo ma dura poco, perché dopo ti senti libero. E a volte ti accorgi che volevi fare una cosa solo dopo che l'hai fatta. Il corpo ha deciso per te, ha raccolto un desiderio e lo ha realizzato. Tajani non aveva in mente un piano, non aveva deciso niente, non sapeva di voler agire finché non ha agito, e solo dopo si è reso conto. E adesso siamo in ballo, pensa, e dobbiamo ballare.

10.

7 February 2008, 12:00 p.m.

There goes the twelve-midday bell, thought Tajani. He'd heard the knell when he was going back to the station. That was what his grandfather said: "twelve midday" instead of "noon". He wondered why it had surfaced. After all it was wrong, he thought, following another memory, this time from his early school years when his teacher explained to him "A day lasts twenty-four hours and is divided into two parts: day and night". The day starts at sunrise and ends at sundown, so twelve noon does not actually mark the middle of the day, but half of a twenty-four-hour period. A day is made up of the night as well. So where does that leave us with "midnight"? Zero hours (or twenty-four) do not mark the middle of the night, but the start of the twenty-four-hour day.

When he was a little boy, Tajani tortured himself thinking about stupid things like that. The fact now is that he's heard that knell and now he's thinking: we are half way through the most important day of my life. If I play my cards well, if the young man does not crumble under the weight of things, if that negro woman sticks to being just that, it's the most important day of my life.

Strange. Sometimes you realize you were thinking something only after you've said it out loud. The thought finds no barriers and turns into an argument, even if at the start you may be embarrassed, but it doesn't last long, because after a short while you feel free to say it. And at times you realize that you wanted to do something only after you've actually done it. Your body has decided for you, it's picked up on your wish and fulfilled it. Tajani hadn't had a plan in mind, he hadn't decided anything, he didn't know he wanted to act until he had done so, only afterwards he had realized

La cosa più importante è che il ragazzo non mi crolli. È tanto pallido da confondersi col muro del corridoio. Tra un po' dovrà testimoniare, raccontare tutto per la prima volta, la prima di tante.

Una mano sulla spalla, Tajani si volta, è il maresciallo.

– Animo, brigadiere. Tutto andrà bene. – Parole dette a labbra socchiuse. Escono da un angolo della bocca, macinate dai molari come grani di pepe. Tajani traduce: tutto deve andare bene. Non è un incoraggiamento, ma un ordine. – Lo dica anche al ragazzo, – prosegue il maresciallo. Traduzione: è suo dovere tenere Ciaravolo sotto controllo. – Non potevate fare altrimenti. E si ricordi: meglio un brutto processo che un bel funerale.

Mentre l'ufficiale si allontana, Tajani pensa: non me lo fanno nemmeno, il «brutto processo», se tutto va bene.

Se il ragazzo non mi crolla.

Se la negra si limita a fare la negra.

Bella frase, però, questa del funerale. Non nuova, ma piena di verità.

Tajani si siede sulla sedia accanto a quella di Ciaravolo. Gli parla sottovoce: – Come va? Non ti fa male, vero?

Farfuglia a voce bassa, tartagliando, frasi quasi prive di vocali: – No...

In realtà dice: *n-nh*.

– Mi hanno dato solo due punti.

Mndat... sl dup'nt. Con la «t» che è un piccolo scatto, uno scatto d'interruttore.

– Lo vedi che avevo ragione? Roba da niente. E poi ricordati: meglio

what he'd done. And since we're in the game, we have to keep playing.

The most important thing is that the young man holds up. He has blanched to the point of being the same colour as the walls in the corridor. Shortly he will have to testify, say everything that happened for the first time, the first of many.

A hand materializes on his shoulder, Tajani turns to find the marshal.

“Courage, brigadier! All will be well.” The words spoken from a barely moving mouth. Spoken from the corner of his mouth, ground by his molars as if they were peppercorn. Tajani translates them as: everything *must* go well. They are not words of encouragement, they are an order. “Do tell the young man,” continued the marshal. Translation: it is your duty to keep Ciaravolo under control. “You could not do otherwise. And remember, better an ugly trial than a lovely funeral.”

As the officer moves away Tajani is thinking: they are not even going to put me through the “ugly trial”, if all goes well.

If the young man does not crumble.

If the negro woman sticks to being just that.

Nice sentence though, the one on the funeral. Not particularly new, but truthful.

Tajani sits on the chair next to Ciaravolo's. Talks to him quietly: “How's it going? It's not painful, is it?”

He stutters quietly, mumbling phrases that seem to hold no vowels: “No...”

In reality it's more like: “*n-nh*.”

“Only two stitches, to be honest.”

Nll.. tw st'tchs. With the “t” sounding more like a click, like turning a switch.

“See? I was right. Nothing to it. And remember: better a wound than a

una ferita che una condanna. – Poi si china verso il ragazzo, fin quasi a toccargli l'orecchio con le labbra. – Mi raccomando, appuntato. Mi raccomando.

9.
7 febbraio 2008, ore 10.59

Gianni è sempre stato una persona razionale e sicura di sé, mai avuto un attacco d'ansia in vita sua. È uno che vaglia e scarta le ipotesi a una a una, con metodo. L'ultima che rimane è la linea da seguire, e Gianni la segue, senza tentennamenti, senza arrovellarsi. Se farà un errore, ne valuterà il peso, passerà in rassegna i pro e i contro, e in base a quelli deciderà se proseguire o cambiare rotta.

Gianni guarda l'orologio. È passato un quarto d'ora da quando è uscito dalla tabaccheria per mettere il cartello «Torno subito» e chiudere a chiave. L'ufficio postale rimane aperto fino a mezzogiorno e lui deve spedire una raccomandata. È passato un quarto d'ora da quando ha visto Yama, la ragazza africana, chiusa nell'auto dei carabinieri. Da sola. È passato un quarto d'ora da quando il carabiniere gli ha urlato di smammare.

Gianni è tornato sulla soglia, ha messo il cartello, ha chiuso e si è allontanato, via, col pilota automatico, verso l'ufficio postale, a piedi anche se è distante. Prendere la macchina, non gli è nemmeno venuto in mente.

Mentre camminava, Gianni ha vagliato le ipotesi. È capitato qualcosa di grave. È una cosa normale chiudere qualcuno in una macchina di pattuglia, incustodito? Lo ha già visto succedere? No, non lo ha mai visto succedere. E Yama non è una delinquente. Cosa sta accadendo? La ragazza ha detto qualcosa, ma Gianni non è riuscito a capire. Cosa ci fanno i carabinieri in quell'appartamento? Riguarda il fratello di Yama? Di certo non può riguardare il

conviction.” Then he leans over the young man, almost touching his lips to the other's ear. “Now behave, corporal. Behave.”

9.
7 February 2008, 10:59 a.m.

Gianni had always been a rational and confident person, he'd never had an anxiety attack in his whole life. He would examine and reject his options one by one, methodically. The last one left would be the one to follow, and Gianni follows it without hesitation, without overthinking it. If he makes a mistake he will evaluate it, look at the pros and cons, and on the basis of the outcome of this process he will decide whether to change direction or not.

Gianni looks at his watch. A quarter of an hour has passed since he hung the “Be back soon” sign on the door of his tobacco shop, locked up and left. The Post Office is open until midday and he needs to send a letter via registered mail. A quarter of an hour has passed since he saw Yama, the African girl, locked up in the police car. All alone. A quarter of an hour had passed since the carabiniere had called out to him to get away from there.

Gianni had retreated to the doorstep, put the sign on the door, closed shop and moved right away, on automatic pilot, towards the Post Office. On foot even if it was quite far. Taking the car had not even crossed his mind.

As he was walking Gianni had examined his options. Something serious had happened. Was it normal to lock someone in a police car and leave them unattended? Had he already seen that happen? No, he had never seen it happen. And Yama was no delinquent. What was happening? The girl had said something to him, but Gianni hadn't understood her. What were the carabinieri doing in that apartment? Did it regard Yama's brother? It certainly did not regard her

marito, quello in casa non c'è mai, lavora fuori città. Gianni sa che il fratello di Yama è malato, ha sentito dire qualcosa, ma non ha mai ficcato il naso. Gianni è il tabaccaio meno curioso d'Italia. Se la gente vuole dirgli le cose, bene, lui sta ad ascoltare. Ma se non vuole, Gianni non chiede mai niente.

Una cosa è certa: la raccomandata può aspettare. Gianni rallenta fino a fermarsi. Si guarda intorno ed è di fronte al giardino pubblico, distesa di cacche di cane e foglie secche che nessuno porta via. Siediti, perché sennò ti gira la testa. Siediti su una panchina e pensa.

Gianni si chiede: chi chiami in un caso come questo? I carabinieri no, ovviamente. Poi si ricorda: Marta, quella del volontariato. Quella dell'associazione che lavora con gli immigrati. Marta è amica di Yama. Sì, chiamare lei, farlo al più presto.

Ma per trovare il numero deve tornare in negozio.

Guarda l'orologio: da quando ha messo il cartello sono passati venti minuti.

Quando arriva alla tabaccheria, la strada è piena di gente e veicoli. Nastro bianco e rosso, divise dappertutto, un'ambulanza e una troupe della Tv locale.

Ma l'auto con Yama dentro non c'è più.

8.

7 febbraio 2008, ore 10.41

La portiera dell'auto si chiude, la serratura scatta, ma invece di salire alla guida, l'uomo che l'ha accompagnata attraversa il marciapiede e scompare di nuovo oltre il portone del palazzo.

Yama pensa che abbia dimenticato qualcosa e, mentre aspetta di vederlo tornare, si lascia andare sfinita sul sedile posteriore. Prende un lungo respiro, il cuore rallenta i colpi, ma le

husband, the man was never home, he worked away. Gianni knows that Yama's brother is ill, he had heard someone say something about it but had never poked his nose into their business. Gianni was the least meddling tobacconist in the whole of Italy. If people wanted to tell him things fine, he would listen. But if they don't want him to know he'd never ask.

One thing was certain: the registered letter could wait. Gianni slowed down to a halt. He looked around and found himself standing in front of the park full of dog poo and dead leaves that nobody removes. Sit down or your head will spin. Sit on a bench and think.

Gianni asks himself: who do you call for something like this? Obviously not the carabinieri, in this case. Then he remembers Marta, the volunteer. The one from the association, who works with migrants. Marta is friends with Yama. Yes, call her, do it right away.

But in order to get the number he needs to go back to his shop.

He looks at his watch: it's been twenty minutes since he's hung up the sign.

When he gets back to the tobacco shop the road is full of vehicles and people. Red and white do not cross tape, uniforms everywhere, an ambulance, and a local TV troupe.

But the car holding Yama is gone.

8.

7 February 2008, 10:41 a.m.

The car door closes, the lock clicks into place, but instead of getting behind the wheel the man who guided her crosses the sidewalk again and disappears again into the main door.

Yama thinks he may have forgotten something and, while she waits for him to come back, she sinks into the back seat, exhausted. She takes a deep breath, her heart slows down, but the

voci dentro la testa ballano su un altro tempo, al ritmo di angoscia e sospetto, si intralciano l'una con l'altra e non c'è verso di metterle in riga.

Sì, chiamare aiuto è stata la scelta giusta, presto arriverà anche l'ambulanza e tutto sarà finito. Ma lo sparo? Quelli hanno sparato a suo fratello, altrimenti perché non farla entrare nella stanza? Ma lei ha visto lo stesso, prima che la spingessero fuori. Lo ha visto, il sangue sulle coperte. Però uno sparo, le sembra davvero impossibile, è talmente agitata che deve esserselo immaginato, una specie di allucinazione, per via di tutta l'ansia degli ultimi giorni. Che bisogno c'è di sparare? Momodou è a letto, non si muove di là, se lo tengono fermo in due possono caricarlo sull'ambulanza senza problemi, è così debole. Però va bene l'agitazione, va bene la stanchezza, ma uno sparo non te lo puoi sognare. Un comodino che cade fa un altro rumore. E poi lo ha visto il sangue, o no?

Forse gli hanno sparato per errore, l'hanno scambiato per un altro, magari un criminale, o un clandestino. È colpa sua, maledetta stupida, che non ha preparato subito i documenti, o forse lui li ha insultati, loro hanno reagito e adesso mentre lei aspetta come una scema dentro un'auto parcheggiata suo fratello sta morendo, o è già morto.

Sì, chiamare i carabinieri è stato uno sbaglio. Tutta colpa sua.

Invece no, meglio così, se Momodou vedeva subito quelli dell'ambulanza di sicuro si metteva a fare il matto, diceva che stava bene, che in ospedale non ci voleva andare. Con i carabinieri non si permette, quelli mettono paura, hanno la divisa, il mitra, la pistola.

voices in her head are dancing to a different beat, a rhythm dictated by anxiety and suspicion that trip over one another, and there's no way to get them to sync.

Yes, calling for help had been the right choice, soon the ambulance will arrive and all will be over. But the shot? They had shot her brother, otherwise why keep her from entering the room? But she had seen anyway, before they pushed her out. She had seen it, the blood on the covers. But a shot, a shot seemed implausible. She was so agitated that she must have imagined it, some kind of hallucination due to the heightened anxiety of the past few days. There was no need to shoot. Momodou was in bed, he doesn't move from there, and if two of them keep him down they can get him into an ambulance in no time, he's so weak. But even given the anxiety, and even given the tiredness, can you really dream a gunshot? A bedside table falling over makes a different sound. And the blood was there, wasn't it?

Maybe they had shot him by mistake. They had mixed him up with someone else, maybe a criminal, or an illegal immigrant. It was her fault, she felt like a damned stupid woman for not having prepared the documents right away, or maybe he had insulted them. They had reacted and now, while she was waiting like an idiot in a parked car, her brother may be dying, or may be already dead.

Yes, calling the carabinieri had been a mistake. It was all her fault.

Or maybe not. Maybe it was better this way, if Momodou had seen the ambulance men right away he would have acted crazy, he would have said he was fine, that he didn't want to go to hospital. With the carabinieri he would not have dared, they are scary with their uniforms, their sub-machine-guns, their pistols.

Lui ha fatto il matto lo stesso e quelli gli hanno sparato.

Ma se lui è già morto, perché l'hanno messa in macchina? Perché hanno parlato di andare a firmare le carte per il ricovero?

Sì, sì, lo sparo se l'è immaginato, adesso arriva l'ambulanza e porta in ospedale Momodou, mentre lei va in caserma a firmare quelle carte.

Però intanto il tempo passa, dell'ambulanza nemmeno l'ombra e il carabiniere che l'ha accompagnata non si fa più vedere.

Lungo la via, venti metri più avanti, Gianni il tabaccaio spunta dalla soglia del negozio. Ha in mano qualcosa, un foglio o un cartello. È forse l'unico italiano che tiene ancora bottega a Gambianise. È una persona gentile e nel quartiere si trova bene.

Yama tira a vuoto la maniglia dello sportello, batte una mano contro il finestrino, schiaccia più volte il pulsante dell'alzacristalli, già sapendo che non funzionerà.

Picchia sul vetro con i pugni, sente scendere le lacrime, grida da spaccarsi la gola, finché il tabaccaio non si volta verso di lei, la riconosce e le lancia un'occhiata interrogativa, come per dire: che succede?

Yama gli fa segno di avvicinarsi, ma lui resta là, sembra non capire. O forse capisce fin troppo bene che una donna in lacrime dentro un'auto dei carabinieri può significare soltanto guai. Alla fine si muove, va verso di lei, e solo allora Yama si domanda perché lo ha chiamato, cosa pensava di chiedergli, che aiuto può mai darle.

Oltre il vetro, Gianni ripete la domanda che ha già fatto con gli occhi.

– Che succede?

Yama indica il portone del suo palazzo, la finestra di casa: – Vai su. Vai

He must have acted crazy all the same, and they shot him.

But if he's already dead, why did they put her in the car? Why did they talk about having to go and sign the papers for his hospital admission?

Yes, yes, she must have imagined the shot. Now the ambulance will come to take Momodou to the hospital while she goes to the police station to sign those papers.

In the meantime time passes, there's no sign of the ambulance, and there's no sign of the carabinieri that had accompanied her.

On the road, about twenty meters away, Gianni the tobacconist appears on the doorstep of his shop. He is holding something in his hands, a piece of paper or a sign. He's maybe the last Italian that still runs a shop in Gambianise. He's a kind and courteous person and is at home in the area.

Yama tugs in vain on the door handle, bangs a hand against the car window, presses repeatedly on the power window button, already aware it will not work.

She hits the glass with her fists, feels the tears start to stream, screams 'til her throat runs dry, 'til the tobacconist turns to look, recognizes her, and gives her a quizzical look, as if to ask what's happening?

Yama beckons him to come closer, but he does not move, perhaps he does not understand. Or perhaps he understands all too well that a sobbing woman in a police car can only mean trouble. In the end he moves, inching towards her, and only then Yama asks herself why she called him, what did she think she was going to ask, how would he ever be able to help her.

Through the glass Gianni repeats the question his eyes had already asked.

“What is happening?”

Yama points to the main door of her apartment building, to her windows:

in casa mia, c'è Momodou che sta male.

L'altro si volta, alza lo sguardo.

Un carabiniere si affaccia al davanzale. Yama riconosce l'uomo che l'ha chiusa nell'auto.

L'uomo grida qualcosa, spazza l'aria con un braccio.

Yama picchia ancora sul vetro, un attimo prima che Gianni le volti le spalle.

7.

7 febbraio 2008, ore 10:30

Il ragazzo cammina in tondo e impreca. Non ha ancora perso la testa, si sforza di non gridare, ma tra non molto scoppierà e lo sentiranno fino in strada.

– Me lo vuoi dire adesso che minchia facciamo, eh? Che ci facciamo con questo qui? Con tutto questo sangue?

– Ciaravolo, ti devi calmare.

L'appuntato Ciaravolo si preme le guance con entrambe le mani, pollici in giù, i mignoli toccano le orecchie. Gira intorno al suo superiore, barcolla.

– Che cazzo facciamo adesso? Come gliela raccontiamo a...

– Ti ho detto di stare calmo, hai sentito? CALMO e MUTO per un momento, altrimenti di qua non ne usciamo fuori.

Ma l'appuntato continua a berciare, e a voce sempre più alta.

Lo schiocco dello schiaffo ferma tutto, la giostra ammutolisce, il mondo tira il fiato. Il brigadiere Tajani afferra il collega per le spalle, lo scuote, parla piano: – Ciaravolo, ascoltami. Ne usciamo. Ne usciamo bene. C'è solo da ragionare. Tutto si spiega. Tutto si spiega, se siamo bravi.

“Go up. Go to my place. Momodou is sick.”

He turns around, looks up.

A carabiniere appears and looks out the window. Yama recognizes the man that has locked her in the car.

The man yells something, motioning him away with his arm.

Yama hits against the glass, a split second before Gianni turns his back on her.

7.

7 February 2008, 10:30 a.m.

The young man is walking in circles, swearing. He has not lost it yet, he is trying his hardest not to scream, but he's about to break, and they will hear him all the way from the street.

“Are you going to tell me what the fuck we are going to do about this, eh? What do we do with this guy? With all this blood?”

“Ciaravolo, you have to calm down.”

Corporal Ciaravolo is grabbing hold of his face with full hands. He paces around his superior, faltering.

“What the fuck do we do now? How are we going to break this to...”

“I told you to keep calm. Do you hear? CALM DOWN and KEEP QUIET for a moment, or we won't be getting out of this.”

But the corporal keeps on bleating, ever louder.

The crack of the blow across his face stills everything, the wheel stops turning, the world draws its breath. Brigadier Tajani clamps his hands down on the corporal's shoulders, shakes him, and speaks softly: “Listen to me, Ciaravolo, listen. We will get out of this. Come out clean. We just need to think this through. Everything can be accounted for. Everything can be accounted for if we do this right.”

Il ragazzo annaspa, singhiozza, gocce sottili scendono dagli occhi chiusi. – Guardami, Ciaravolo.

Un secondo, due, tre. Il ragazzo alza lo sguardo. Si sta sforzando. – Perché, Tajani, perché hai sparato? Cosa t'è preso?

Un secondo, soltanto uno.

Durante quel secondo, Tajani cerca la risposta. La cerca sul pelo dell'acqua di un fiume in piena, in equilibrio su una zattera che fugge. La cerca con un rastrello, di quelli col pettine a triangolo che ci spazzi le foglie, ma tra i denti non rimane niente, tutto passa oltre, e la zattera fugge. Un secondo, soltanto uno.

– Dobbiamo guardare avanti, non indietro. – Il tono è fermo ma privo di spigoli, il fare è paterno. Con il dorso della mano, Tajani asciuga le lacrime dal viso del ragazzo.

Vicebrigadiere e appuntato hanno solo sei anni di differenza. Intorno, la stanza, le pareti giallastre, il letto senza testiera, la macchia scura. Il corpo è inarcato sul bordo, mezzo su e mezzo giù, talloni a sfiorare il pavimento. Lo stavano spostando quando Ciaravolo ha avuto la crisi.

– Ma come facciamo... a... c'è la donna...

– La donna non ha visto niente. E poi, Ciaravolo, quella è una negra, a stento parla l'italiano. E anche *lui*, – Ciaravolo indica il corpo, – è un negro. Ce la giriamo come pare a noi, questa storia. Vedrai, se fai come ti dico diventiamo pure...

– ...eroi, sì, come no –. Il ragazzo chiude gli occhi, abbassa il capo. – Non voglio essere un eroe. Voglio solo non dovermi vergognare.

Tajani si liscia il pizzetto e pensa. Uso legittimo delle armi. C'è poco tempo. Oltre alla negra, nessun altro ha sentito lo sparo, altrimenti a quest'ora... Un momento, la negra. La negra in macchina, vediamo se va tutto bene.

The young man gulps down air, sobs, a snail trail of tears drips from his closed eyes. "Look at me, Ciaravolo."

One, two, three seconds. The young man forces himself to look up. "Why, Tajani, why did you shoot? What came over you?"

One second. Just one.

In that second Tajani looks for an answer. He looks for it surfacing on the torrential waters of a flooded river while balancing on a moving raft. He looks for it with a rake, one of those triangular ones used to gather leaves, but nothing stops in its teeth, everything sifts through, and the raft slips away. One second, just one.

"We need to look ahead, not behind us." His tone is firm but not biting, paternal. With the back of his hand Tajani dries the tears from the young man's face.

There is only a six-year difference between the brigadier and the corporal. Around them the room, the jaundiced walls, the bed without a headboard, the dark stain. The body is arched over the side of the bed, half on, half off, the heels lightly touching the floor. They were moving him when Ciaravolo had lost it.

"But how do we do this... to... there's the woman..."

"The woman did not see anything. Besides, Ciaravolo, she's a nigger, she barely speaks Italian. And *he* too," he says as Ciaravolo points to the body, "is a nigger. We can spin this story as we please. You'll see, if you do as I say we'll turn into..."

"...heroes, yeah, right." The young man closes his eyes, bows his head. "I don't want to be a hero. I simply don't want to be ashamed of myself."

Tajani strokes his goatee and thinks. Lawful use of weapons. There's very little time. Other than the black woman nobody else has heard the gun shot, otherwise by now... Hold on a second. The black woman. The black

La finestra dà in strada, Tajani si affaccia. Ehi, ma chi... Di fianco alla macchina c'è un uomo. La negra sta parlando. Tajani apre la finestra: – Ehi, tu, che vuoi? Quella donna è in stato di fermo, smammare! Via dall'auto, se non vuoi che ti arrestiamo pure a te!

L'uomo si allontana in fretta. Tajani non si ferma a guardare la negra, chiude la finestra. E adesso... Il ragazzo si è seduto sul bordo del letto, gomiti sulle cosce, faccia nascosta nelle mani. Singhiozza piano. – Ciaravolo, che cazzo fai? Via da quel letto!

Ciaravolo si alza. Il tempo è poco, qui bisogna darsi una mossa.

Il brigadiere mette in tasca la mano destra, estrae il portafoglio, cerca tra documenti e biglietti di banca, trova un foglietto colorato. Lo sventola in faccia al ragazzo. – Lo conosci questo?

Gli occhi sono rossi e velati, la voce è appena un soffio.

– Ti pare che non lo conosco?

– Se lo conosci di' il suo nome.

– Padre Pio.

– San Pio da Pietrelcina. Ti giuro su di lui che ne usciamo, tutti e due, e ne usciamo pure bene.

Tajani si liscia il pizzetto e pensa.

Uso legittimo delle armi.

Articolo 53 del codice penale.

Non è punibile il pubblico ufficiale che, al fine di adempiere un dovere del proprio ufficio, fa uso ovvero ordina di far uso delle armi o di un altro mezzo di coazione fisica...

Il buco umido accanto al cuore.

... quando vi è costretto dalla necessità di respingere una violenza o di vincere una resistenza all'Autorità e comunque di impedire...

C'è pochissimo tempo.

woman in the car. Let me check everything is all right.

The window overlooks the street, Tajani looks down. Hey, who is... There's a man standing next to the car. The black woman is talking. Tajani opens the window: "Hey, you, what do you want? That woman is in custody, move along! Get away from that car, if you don't want us to arrest you too!"

The man moves away quickly. Tajani does not stop to look at the black woman, he closes the window. And now... The young man is sitting on the side of the bed leaning forwards, his elbows resting on his thighs, his face hiding in his hands. He is sobbing lightly. "Ciaravolo, what the fuck are you doing? Get away from that bed!"

Ciaravolo gets up. There's little time, we need to get a move on.

The brigadier puts his right hand in his pocket, pulls out his wallet, looks through his documents and paper money, finds a brightly coloured piece of paper. He waves it in front of the young man's face. "Do you know him?"

His eyes are red and clouded, his voice a whisper.

"How can I not know him?"

"If you know him say his name."

"Padre Pio."

"Saint Pio of Pietralcina. I swear on his grave that we'll get out of this, the both of us, and we'll come out clean."

Tajani strokes his goatee and thinks.

Lawful use of weapons.

Article 53 of the criminal code.

An officer who uses or orders the use of firearms or other means of force to subdue in order to carry out his duties is not punishable by law...

The damp hole close to the heart.

...when he has been forced to do so in order to prevent the use violence or overcome any force used in resisting arrest and to prevent...

There's very little time.

Tajani apre la porta, due passi ed è in cucina. Il lavello. Il ripiano. Il cassetto delle posate.

Senza tornare nella stanza, senza girarsi, senza nemmeno alzare la voce: – Appuntato, tu hai una ferita al braccio.

La voce di Ciaravolo arriva un po' in ritardo, come succede in Tv, durante quei collegamenti via satellite: – Eh?

Tajani torna in camera. Ciaravolo ha borse rosse sotto gli occhi, la faccia lunga e la bocca aperta. È come se la mascella, cadendo, trascinasse tutto giù.

Ciaravolo vede che Tajani ha in mano qualcosa.

È un coltello lungo, dal manico grosso in legno scuro.

Il brigadiere fa un passo indietro e si figura la scena.

– Noi ci siamo avvicinati al letto, l'africano aveva un coltello sotto il cuscino.

Con un movimento rapido, afferra il braccio destro dell'appuntato. La lama lacera la manica e tocca la pelle. – Ahi! Che...

– Buono, appuntato, è roba da niente. Non potremmo venirci fuori meglio di così. Ma devi fare come dico io, capito?

Tajani si scosta e raggiunge il negro morto.

– Aveva un coltello sotto il cuscino, è scattato su, ha ferito l'appuntato Ciaravolo...

Tajani afferra la mano del cadavere, la stringe sul manico del coltello.

Alle sue spalle, il ragazzo barcolla, fissa il taglio sulla manica. Tajani torna da lui, gli prende il mento, gli solleva il capo. – Guardami. Tu devi fare come dico io.

Si riavvicina al letto, riapre la mano del negro e lascia cadere il coltello.

Tajani opens the door, steps into the kitchen. The sink. The countertop. The cutlery drawer.

Without going back into the room, without turning around, without even raising his voice: “Corporal, your arm has been wounded.”

Ciaravolo's answer is slightly delayed, like on television, when there's a delayed satellite connection: “Uh?”

Tajani goes back to the room. Ciaravolo has a long face, red bags under his eyes and his mouth is open. It's as if the jaw, when his mouth fell open, had taken everything else with it.

Ciaravolo sees Tajani holding something in his hand.

It's a long knife with a large dark wooden handle.

The brigadier takes a step back and pictures the scene in his head.

“We approached the bed, the African guy had a knife under his pillow.”

With a rapid move he grabs the corporal by the right arm. The blade tears into the sleeve and touches the skin. “Ouch! What...”

“Be good, corporal, it's nothing. We couldn't get out of this any better. But you need to do as I say, understood?”

Tajani moves away and reaches the dead negro.

“He had a knife under the pillow, he jumped up, and wounded Corporal Ciaravolo...”

Tajani grabs hold of the deceased's hand, curls it around the knife handle.

Behind him the young man sways, staring at the cut on his sleeve. Tajani goes back to him, grabs his chin, lifts his head up. “Look at me. You need to do as I say.”

He goes back to the bed, opens the negro's hand again and lets the knife drop.

– Ha ferito l'appuntato Ciaravolo, io mi sono trovato l'arma in pugno e ho sparato *nella necessità di respingere una violenza*.

6.

7 febbraio 2008, ore 10:21:51

Yama inciampa, lo spigolo del tavolo le pugnala un fianco, trattiene il dolore col braccio e si precipita in corridoio. Qualcuno ha sparato.

– Cosa succede?

Mette piede nella stanza e subito un carabiniere le viene incontro, braccia e spalle allargate, come per non farle vedere qualcosa. Yama fa un passo avanti, si alza sulle punte, sposta la testa di lato e vede Momodou, a letto, e una macchia scura sopra le coperte. Qualcuno ha sparato.

L'uomo la spinge fuori, con il petto e una mano, mentre con l'altra si tira la porta alle spalle. Yama prova a puntare i piedi, ma si accorge di avere le gambe molli, senza ossa dentro.

– Cosa gli avete fatto?

– Fuori di qui, – le grida in faccia, – vai fuori!

– Cos'era quello sparo?

Vede ancora la macchia scura sulle coperte. Qualcuno ha sparato, c'è odore di bruciato e di sangue. Poi la porta si chiude.

– Macché sparo, è il mio collega che ha rovesciato il comodino. Cercava di prendere tuo fratello, ma quello s'è agitato.

– Io ho visto sangue, voglio entrare.

L'uomo afferra la maniglia della porta prima che Yama riesca a raggiungerla.

– Ti dico che non è successo niente, lasciaci lavorare.

– Fatemelo vedere! – Yama grida per soffocare i singhiozzi. – Lo avete ammazzato!

“He wounded Corporal Ciaravolo, I had my weapon in my hand and I fired *been forced to do so in order to prevent the use of violence*.”

6.

7 February 2008, 10:21:51 a.m.

Yama stumbles, the sharp corner of the table stabs her hip, she holds the pain back with her arm and rushes into the corridor. Someone has fired a gun.

“What’s happening?”

She steps into the room and a carabiniere immediately moves to block her, broadening his shoulders and widening his arms, as if to stop her from seeing something. Yama takes a step forward, raises her heels off the ground, moves her head to one side and sees Momodou in bed and a dark stain on the covers. Someone has fired a gun.

The man pushes her out with his chest and one of his hands, while with the other he pulls the door to. Yama tries to root herself to the ground, but realizes she has gone weak at the knees, nothing to hold her up.

“What you do to him?”

“Out of here!” He spits in her face. “Get out!”

“What’s that? A shot?”

She can still see that dark stain on the covers. Someone has fired a gun, she can smell burning and blood. Then the door shuts.

“What shot? It’s my partner, he knocked over the bedside table. He was trying to get your brother, but he started to become aggressive.”

“I saw blood. I want inside!”

The man takes hold of the door handle before Yama can get to it.

“I’m telling you nothing happened. Let us work.”

“Let me see him!” Yama shrieks to hold back her tears. “You killed him!”

“Killed him? He’s sleeping. Stop screaming.”

– Ammazzato? Quello dorme. Smettila di urlare.

– Come dorme? Avete detto che lui agitato.

– Sì, esatto, ma se vede te, se sente che urli, si agita ancora peggio. Lasciaci fare il nostro lavoro, adesso. Li hai portati i documenti?

– No.

– Ma ce li hai, sì? Non è che siete clandestini?

– No, no, è che ho sentito lo sparo.

– E basta con 'sto sparo. Adesso tu vai di là, prendi i documenti che ti abbiamo chiesto e poi ti metti la giacca e vieni in caserma, ché dobbiamo firmare le carte per ricoverare tuo fratello.

Yama rimane immobile.

– Parlo con te, hai capito?

Qualcuno ha sparato.

5.

7 febbraio 2008, ore 10:21:46

Ci sono diverse parole, attimo, istante, momento, amen, è successo tutto «in un amen», e ci sono le immagini, un battito di ciglia, un baleno, addirittura un battibaleno, ma la volta che succede, la volta che *davvero* succede qualcosa «in un amen», be', a nessuno viene in mente la parola *amen*, nessuno ha il tempo di pensare a baleni e battibaleni, perché quel che succede in un amen succede «in men che non si dica», ovvero: le parole sono lente, le parole arrivano dopo.

E infatti. Nessuno dei due uomini ha in mente la parola. Non subito. Sarà un cliché, ma la stanza sembra ruotare intorno alla stronzata che hanno fatto. Che *uno* di loro ha fatto. Sarà un cliché, ma nell'aria c'è ancora l'eco. L'eco dello sparo. Sarà un cliché, ma nessuno respira. I due carabinieri sono immemori dei propri polmoni. Il negro, lui, è morto. La stanza rallenta, ha compiuto cento giri in un secondo. In senso orario, perché il

“Sleeping? You said he aggressive...”

“Exactly, but if he sees you, and hears you screaming, it's going to get worse. Let us do our work now. Did you bring the documents?”

“No.”

“You do have the documents, right? Are you sure you are not illegal migrants?”

“No, no, I just heard shot.”

“Drop this shot business. Now you go to the other room, take the documents we've asked for, and then you put on your jacket and come to the station to sign the hospital admission papers for your brother.”

Yama doesn't move.

“I'm talking to you. Do you understand me?”

Someone fired a gun.

5.

7 February 2008, 10:21:46 a.m.

There are a number of words: instant, moment, breath, wink, it all happened “before you could say amen”, and there are images, a blink of an eye, in a flash, even in a fraction of a second, but when something happens, the time when something *really* happens “before you can say amen”, well, *amen* isn't the first word that comes to mind, nobody has the time to think about blinks and winks, because what really happens before you can say amen happens “in zero seconds flat”, truth is: words are slow, words come later.

Indeed. Sure enough neither man has come up with the word. Not immediately. It might be a cliché but the room seems to revolve around their fuckup. It might be a cliché but they can still hear it. The echo of the gunshot. It might be a cliché but the air has been sucked out of the room. The carabinieri have forgotten how to use their lungs. The nigger, him, he's dead. The room seems to slow down, it had been going at

tempo non torna indietro. E solo allora eccola, la parola, sulle labbra del più giovane dei due: – Amen.

Come per dire: dàgli e ridàgli, alla fine è successo.

A furia di imprecare contro i negri, ne hai accoppato uno. Dovevi proprio farla, Tajani, ci tenevi a farla, la cazzata della tua vita.

Solo che è anche la *mia* vita.

Amen. Come per dire: è la fine.

La messa è finita, e *col cazzo* che ve ne andate in pace.

E nel momento in cui la stanza si ferma, per forza d'inerzia, Ciaravolo vacilla.

– Tajani... che cazzo hai fatto? Lo hai... ammazzato.

4.

7 febbraio 2008, ore 10:17

La porta della stanza non è mai chiusa. Dall'interno sembra che lo sia e invece tra l'anta e lo stipite c'è sempre uno spiraglio, sottile quanto una pupilla.

Giorni prima, con la scusa delle pulizie, Yama ha spostato il letto di suo fratello, lo ha spinto verso la parete, in modo che la fessura offra all'occhio un ritaglio sfocato di coperta e cuscino. Largo abbastanza per vedere Momodou e abbastanza stretto per non farsi vedere.

Dopo la telefonata, Yama non ha fatto altro che aggirarsi per casa senza uno scopo e controllare il fratello, ogni volta che passava davanti alla sua porta. Forse teme che abbia intuito qualcosa, che non si faccia trovare, che tenti una fuga impossibile dalla finestra del quinto piano, o magari un possibile suicidio. Vorrebbe leggergli la faccia, capire cosa c'è scritto, ma lo spiraglio è troppo stretto e la visuale poco nitida.

Vorrebbe bussare, chiedere permesso, andare dentro con una scusa,

a hundred Ks a second. Clockwise, because time never comes back. It's then, and only then, that the word, here it is, appears on the lips of the younger of the two: "Amen".

As if to say: try and try again, and in the end shit happens.

In your haste to cuss out another nigger, you've only gone and shot one dead. You really had to go and do it, Tajani, you really wanted to go ahead and do it, the major fuckup in your life.

Only that it's *my* life too.

Amen. As if to say: it's the end.

The mass is ended, but you *sure as hell* aren't going in peace.

And in the moment in which the room grinds to a halt, stops dead, Ciaravolo falters. "Tajani... what the fuck did you do? You've... killed him."

4.

7 February 2008, 10:17 a.m.

The door to the room is never closed. From the inside it looks like it is but between the door and the frame there's always a slit, a thin eyehole.

Days earlier, using her cleaning as an excuse, Yama had moved her brother's bed, pushed it against the wall, so as to see a vague snippet of his pillow and blankets through the gap. Wide enough to see Momodou, but thin enough not to be seen.

After the phone call, Yama can do nothing but pace around the house aimlessly, and check on her brother, every time she walks past his door. Maybe she fears her brother has caught on, that he might vanish, that he might try an impossible escape from the fifth-floor window, or maybe even take his own life. She would like to be able to read him, his face, understand what's written there, but the crack is too thin and the angle unclear.

She wants to knock, ask permission, go in with an excuse, but she

ma ha paura che la sua, di faccia, possa tradirla.

Non è nemmeno sicura di poter trattenere le lacrime, tanto è stanca e fragile e colma di tristezza.

Glielo hanno consigliato in tanti. Suo marito non fa altro che ripeterlo, ogni volta che si sentono al telefono e lei gli dice che Momodou non mangia, non si alza, non parla più. Bisogna convincerlo a farsi ricoverare. E se non si può convincerlo, bisogna ricoverarlo comunque. Di fronte ai suoi dubbi, le hanno detto che portarlo in ospedale non è un tradimento, significa rispettare davvero la volontà di suo fratello. Lui non vuole morire. Se lo volesse, si sarebbe già ammazzato. Ci sono tanti modi per farlo. Momodou non vuole farsi curare perché non capisce, non può più capire, che non curarsi, ridotto com'è, significa morire.

Così Yama lo sbircia da uno spiraglio di porta, per paura che faccia e lacrime tradiscano il suo tradimento.

Il suono del campanello la fa sobbalzare, per poco non si sbilancia e cade nella stanza.

La voce nel citofono dice: – Carabinieri!

Le scale rimbombano di passi. Yama si domanda quanti siano, sembrano un esercito intero.

Sono due. Uno le punta contro la mitraglietta, o forse la tiene solo in mano, ma lei fa lo stesso due passi indietro.

L'altro dice: – Dov'è?

Yama sente cigolare il letto nella stanza di Momodou. Li ha sentiti.

– È di là, – risponde. – Ma non vi preoccupa, lui è molto debole, sempre a letto. Lui vi vede e viene, quella non importa.

Indica la mitraglietta e il carabiniere che la imbraccia le fa segno di avanzare agitando la canna.

worries her expression, her face might betray her.

She is not even sure she would be able to hold back the tears, as weary and shaken and heartbroken as she is.

Everyone had given her the same advice. Her husband does nothing but repeat it, every time they speak on the phone and she tells him that Momodou won't eat, won't get up, won't speak anymore. He needs to be talked into being hospitalized. And if he can't be talked into it, then he needs to be hospitalized regardless. Faced by her doubts, everyone reassured her that taking him to hospital was not a betrayal, it actually meant respecting her brother's wishes. He does not want to die. Had he wanted to he'd already be dead. There are so many ways to do it. Momodou doesn't want to be treated because he doesn't understand, he is no longer able to understand that to forego treatment, at this stage, means certain death.

So Yama watches him from the slit in the door, fearing her face and tears will betray her betrayal.

The sound of the buzzer makes her jump, she almost loses her balance and falls into the room.

The voice from the intercom says: “Carabinieri!”

The stairwell echoes with their footsteps. Yama asks herself how many are coming, it sounds like an army.

Two. One points his sub-machine-gun at her, or maybe he's only holding it, but she takes two steps back regardless.

The other one says: “Where is he?”

Yama hears the bed creak in Momodou's room. He has heard them.

“He's in,” she answers. “But no worry, he is very weak, always in bed. He see you and come, that no need.”

She points to the gun. The carabiniere wielding it motions with the muzzle for her to move forwards.

Yama bussa due volte.

– Momodou, sono io, – dice nella sua lingua. – Ti ho portato dell’acqua.

Sopra la sua testa, una mano spinge la porta mentre un’altra le afferra un fianco e la sposta di lato.

L’uomo con la mitraglietta la punta contro suo fratello.

– Non muoverti. Tira fuori le mani e appoggiale sulla coperta.

Momodou fa come dicono, lo sguardo terrorizzato.

– Preparo i vestiti, – dice Yama sulla soglia, sforzandosi di apparire calma. Entra nella stanza e apre l’armadio. Momodou le chiede cosa vogliono gli uomini in divisa.

– Lascia stare i vestiti, – dice il carabiniere. – Meglio che vai a prendere i documenti di tutti e due, così intanto vediamo se siete in regola.

– Sì, certo, in regola, tutti e due.

– Tu intanto valli a prendere, occhei?

Yama annuisce e corre nell’altra stanza.

Trova subito le sue carte, ma quelle di Momodou dove le ha messe? Strano che non siano lì, tutte insieme, con le sue e quelle di suo marito. Estrae il cassetto per appoggiarlo sul materasso e controllare meglio.

Qualcosa esplode, vicinissimo.

Il cassetto le cade dalle mani, Yama scivola sui fogli sparsi sul pavimento.

Qualcuno ha sparato.

3.

7 febbraio 2008, ore 10:03

– Sentito che roba? Riesumano la salma di padre Pio. – Il barista mette il bricco sotto il tubo del vapore, in un istante il getto fa montare il latte.

– Ah, sì? E perché? – risponde il carabiniere in divisa, appoggiato al bancone con entrambi i gomiti.

Yama knocks twice.

“Momodou, it’s me,” she says in her own tongue. “I’ve brought you some water.”

From above her head a hand pushes the door while another shoves her aside from the hip.

The man with the gun turns his weapon on her brother.

“Don’t move. Hands out and on the bed.”

Momodou does as they say, terror in his eyes.

“I’ll get the clothes ready,” says Yama on the doorstep, trying hard to look calm. She walks in, opens the wardrobe. Momodou asks her why the men in uniform are there.

“Leave the clothes,” says the carabiniere.” Better if you go and get the documents for the both of you, so we can check if your papers are in order.

“Yes, of course, both in order.”

“You just go and get them, ok?”

Yama nods and runs to the other room.

She finds her papers straight away, but where did she put Momodou’s? It’s strange that they are not there, together with hers and her husband’s. She pulls the drawer out to set it on the mattress to check thoroughly.

Something explodes, really close.

The drawer falls from her hands, Yama slips on the pieces of paper strewn across the floor.

Someone has fired a gun.

3.

7 February 2008, 10:03 a.m.

“Did you hear this? They are exhuming the body of Padre Pio.” The barista puts the frothing jug under the steam wand, in an instant the gush makes the milk froth up.

“Oh, are they? Why?” answers the carabiniere, leaning forwards against the counter with both elbows.

– Boh, dice che devono fare dei controlli... – Il barista versa latte e crema nella tazza, muovendo il polso con lentezza, avanti e indietro. La schiuma pastosa incorona la bevanda, bianca al centro e intorno screziata da un anello marrone. Pasquale Tajani pensa al Grande raccordo anulare, come faceva quella canzone di Venditti? «Vieni con me, amore | sul Grande raccordo anulare | che circonda la capitale | e nelle soste faremo l'amore».

Ecco un cappuccino fatto ad arte. Come quello che beveva a Roma, prima che lo trasferissero in provincia, a Città del Buco di Culo. Secondo cappuccino della mattinata, l'auto di pattuglia è davanti al bar, con una ruota sul marciapiede. Portiera e porta del bar sono aperte, è un inverno tiepido, l'aria non morde e il sole splende.

Un altro giorno di gloria, pensa Tajani.

Un altro giorno di merda. Come fai a distinguerti, in un posto così? Quali imprese puoi sognare?

– Dei controlli? E che ci può mai essere da controllare? – interviene il carabiniere più giovane. Fernando Ciaravolo, classe '86. Bravo, ma troppo buono. Troppo buono con tutti. Persino coi negri.

– C'è un professore che ha scritto un libro, – s'infila l'Esperto. Tutti i bar hanno un Esperto di cose del mondo. Lo trovi lì a qualunque ora, non è ben chiaro come sbarchi il lunario e a nessuno frega di saperlo, vivi e lascia vivacchiare.

L'Esperto di questo bar si chiama Ciccio Mondovì, detto «Superquark». A Superquark domandagli qualunque cosa e lui ti risponde. Ha sempre letto il giornale giusto, visto la trasmissione giusta, parlato proprio con la persona giusta, e sempre «giusto ieri», «proprio stamattina», «pensa che coincidenza».

“Don't know really, says they have to run some tests or something...” The barista pours the milk and creamy coffee into the cup, moving his wrist slowly, backwards and forwards. The thick foam crowns the hot drink, white in the centre with a marbled brown ring around the edge. Pasquale Tajani associates it with the ring road around Rome, the Grande Raccordo Anulare. How did that Venditti song go? Something about making love on the ring road: “Vieni con me, amore | sul Grande raccordo anulare | che circonda la capitale | e nelle soste faremo l'amore”.

Here is a well-crafted cappuccino. Like the one he used to drink in Rome, before he got reassigned out of the capital, to Fuckwit City. Second cappuccino of the day, the squad car parked outside the café, one tyre on the sidewalk. Both the car door and the door to the café are open, it's a warm winter day, no bite to the air, the sun's out.

Another day full of glory, thinks Tajani.

Another day full of shit. How can you stand out in a place like this? What challenges can you dream of?

“Tests? What on earth is there to test?” asks the younger carabiniere. Fernando Ciaravolo, born in '86. Good, but too soft. Too soft with everyone. Even with niggers.

“There's a professor who has written a book on this,” cuts in the Expert. Every café has an Expert who knows everything there is to know. You will find him there at all hours, it's unclear how he gets by and nobody really wants to know. Live and let live, I guess.

The Expert of this café goes by the name of Ciccio Mondovì, aka “Superquark”, from the title of the TV show for know-it-alls. You can ask Superquark anything and he will answer. He has always read the right newspaper, watched the right program, spoken with

– 'Sto professore, un ebreo, dice che padre Pio si faceva le piaghe da solo, con l'acido. L'ho visto parlare in televisione, da Mentana.

In realtà non c'è nemmeno bisogno di fare la domanda: basta toccare un argomento, ed è come far cadere la moneta nel juke-box. Il juke-box? E che cos'è? Niente, roba di quand'ero bimbo. Mettevi i soldi e suonava una canzone. Ce n'era uno in ogni bar, ho fatto in tempo a vederne uno anch'io.

– E siccome il libro di 'sto professore, che mi pare pure che è comunista, ha alzato un polverone, adesso riesumano la salma per vedere questa storia delle piaghe.

– È una bestemmia! – dice Tajani. La notizia gli ha rovinato il rito del cappuccino. – Padre Pio è un santo, non si può profanare la sua tomba solo perché un comunista si è svegliato una mattina e si è inventato...

– La radio, – dice Ciaravolo. Non vuol dire che il comunista si è inventato la radio, ma che li stanno chiamando. L'appuntato indica fuori, l'auto in sosta con la ruota sul marciapiede.

– Vai a vedere che vogliono, – dice Tajani.

Ciaravolo esce, gli altri rimangono in silenzio, nessuno riprende l'argomento di prima, perché Tajani ha la faccia di chi potrebbe morderti il naso se solo lo guardi.

Ciaravolo torna. – Al Sanbenedetto. Ha chiamato una donna, in casa sua c'è un extracomunitario, malato di mente. Forse sta dando in escandescenze, la donna non parlava bene l'italiano.

– Con questi negri uno non sa più cosa aspettarsi, – dice il barista.

the exact right person, and done so “this very morning”, “just yesterday”, “what a coincidence”.

“This professor, a Jew, says that Padre Pio made his stigmata on his own, with acid. I saw 'im speak on TV, on Mentana's talk show.”

In reality there's actually no need to even ask a question: all you need do is touch on a topic, and it's like dropping a coin into a jukebox. A jukebox. What's a jukebox? Well, something from when I was a boy. You would put in a coin and it would play a song for you. There was one in each café, I managed to see one too, before they went out of fashion.

“And since the book written by this professor, believe he's a commie too, has caused a kerfuffle, now they are going to exhume the body to check out this story about his wounds.”

“Heresy!” Says Tajani. The news has spoiled his cappuccino ritual. “Padre Pio is a saint, they can't desecrate his tomb just because a communist got out of the wrong side of bed one morning and came up...”

“The radio,” says Ciaravolo. He doesn't mean that the communist invented the radio, but that the radio is calling them. The corporal is pointing outside, to the car parked with the tyre on the sidewalk.

“Go check what they want,” says Tajani.

Ciaravolo goes out, the others wait silently, nobody picks up on the previous conversation because Tajani looks like he could bite your nose off if only you dare look his way.

Ciaravolo comes back in. “Sanbenedetto. A woman has called, there's a non-European immigrant, with a psychiatric disorder. Maybe he's on a rampage, the woman doesn't speak much Italian.”

“You never know what to expect with these niggers,” says the barista.

Tajani fa il gesto di pagare il cappuccino (e l’Ace di Ciaravolo), ma l’uomo dietro il bancone gli fa un cenno, *lascia perdere e vai subito, hai cose più importanti a cui pensare.*

E Tajani saluta e va, seguito dal ragazzo.

Sono ancora sulla soglia quando sentono la voce di Superquark: – Pensa che proprio ieri alla radio dicevano che...

2.

7 febbraio, ore 09.39

È il giorno delle decisioni senza appello.

Nell’ultima, lunghissima telefonata, Yama ha promesso a suo marito che sabato, tornando a casa, non troverà Momodou. Sta male da troppo tempo, non tocca cibo da troppi giorni, si alza dal letto solo per andare in bagno e inginocchiarsi sul pavimento rivolto alla Mecca. È sicura, lo convincerà a farsi curare, e se non ci riuscirà seguirà il consiglio di Marta: chiamare un’ambulanza che lo porti in ospedale, anche se non vuole.

Ha provato a parlargli per l’ennesima volta, ma le frasi gli cascavano addosso come frutta in un filare abbandonato.

– Se stasera non mangi chiamo l’ospedale.

Lui ha gettato in terra il piatto di riso e s’è girato dall’altra parte. Lei ha raccolto un cocciuccio sporco di salsa e se l’è appoggiato sul polso, decisa a minacciarlo.

Ma poi s’è accorta di non avere più parole nemmeno per quello e ha gettato la scheggia insieme alle altre. È andata nella sua stanza, è persino riuscita ad addormentarsi, dopo un paio d’ore di lotta con le coperte.

Adesso è il giorno delle decisioni senza appello. Yama accende il cellulare e compone il 118, cercando di non

Tajani makes as if to pay for the cappuccino (and Ciaravolo’s fruit juice), but the man behind the counter waves him away, *don’t worry, go now, you have more important things to take care of.*

Tajani takes his leave and goes, followed by the young man.

They are still in the doorway when they hear Superquark: “Incredible, just yesterday on the radio they were saying that...”

2.

7 February 2008, 9:39 a.m.

Today is the day for binding decisions.

During the last very, very long phone call Yama has promised her husband that Saturday, when he comes home he will not find Momodou. He’s been unwell for too long, hasn’t eaten anything for too many days, gets out of bed only to go to the bathroom and kneel on the floor facing Mecca. She is sure she will convince him to get treatment, and if she doesn’t manage she’ll follow Marta’s advice: call an ambulance to take him to hospital, even if he doesn’t want to go.

She tried to talk to him for the ⁿth time, but her words fell like mature fruits to the ground in an abandoned orchard.

“If tonight you won’t eat, I’ll call the hospital.”

He threw the plate of rice on the floor and turned his back on her. She picked up a shard with some sauce on it and placed it on her wrist, ready to threaten him.

Then she realized she had no words left for that either and threw the shard out with the rest of the dish. She had gone to her room, even managed to fall asleep, after a couple of hours of rolling around and fighting with the covers.

Now. Today is the day for binding decisions. Yama turns on her phone and calls 118, the ambulance and

pensare.

Le chiedono nome, indirizzo, motivo della chiamata.

Dice che suo fratello sta male, sta morendo.

Le chiedono di essere più precisa.

– Non mangia da tanti giorni, sta sempre nel letto.

Le chiedono se è privo di coscienza.

Yama non capisce.

– Se lo scuote risponde? Respira?

Yama risponde di sì.

Le chiedono se è in grado di muoversi in maniera autonoma.

– Solo va in bagno.

– Senta, – sbuffa l'operatore, – mi spiega cosa le fa pensare che sia necessaria un'ambulanza?

– Lui non vuole ospedale, non vuole medicine, non vuole mangiare. Lui muore.

Le chiedono se suo fratello ha un'infermità mentale certificata.

Yama non capisce.

– Voglio dire: ragiona, capisce quello che fa, quello che gli succede?

– Io penso che no. Lui molto triste. Non capisce più.

– Ascolti, lei allora deve chiamare il medico curante, ha capito? Il dottore, e fargli visitare suo fratello. Se lui pensa che è necessario, allora fa un foglio di trattamento sanitario obbligatorio, dove dice che bisogna ricoverarlo, anche contro la sua volontà. Senza quel foglio, noi non possiamo intervenire.

– Il dottore è già venuto, – dice Yama. – Ha scritto le medicine, ma lui non le prende. Lui muore.

– Senta, a me dispiace, questa per noi non è un'emergenza, capisce? Però se suo fratello è pericoloso, per sé o per gli altri, se minaccia di uccidersi, allora può chiamare i carabinieri. Loro sì che sono

emergency service, trying not to think too much.

They ask for her name, address, reason for the call.

She tells them her brother is unwell, dying.

They ask her to be more precise.

“He has not eaten for many days, he's always in the bed.”

“They ask if he has lost consciousness.”

Yama does not understand.

“If you shake him does he respond? Is he breathing?”

Yama answers that he does.

They ask her if he can move autonomously.

“Only goes to toilet.”

“Listen,” the operator huffs, “can you please explain why you think an ambulance is necessary?”

“He does not want hospital, he does not want medicines, he does not want to eat. He dies.”

They ask if her brother has a certified mental illness.

Yama does not understand.

“What I mean is: is he in his right mind? Does he understand what he's doing? What is going on around him?”

“I think not. He very sad. He does not understand now.”

“Listen, you need to call your doctor. Do you understand? The doctor. Get him to visit your brother. If he thinks it's necessary then he'll write out on a piece of paper an Involuntary Treatment Order, where it says that he needs to be hospitalized, even without his consent. Without that piece of paper, we cannot intervene and dispatch an ambulance.

“The doctor already came,” said Yama. “He wrote the medicines, but he does not take them. He dies.”

“Listen, I am sorry, but this is not an emergency. Do you understand? But if your brother is dangerous, for himself or others, if he is threatening to kill himself,

tenuti a intervenire.

Yama si fa dare il numero e lo compone sulla tastiera cercando di non pensare.

Le chiedono nome, indirizzo, motivo della chiamata.

Dice che suo fratello sta male, sta morendo.

– Ha sbagliato numero, – dice l'operatore. – Deve chiamare l'ambulanza, il 118.

– Lui sta molto male, vuole morire.

– Se sta male ci vuole l'ambulanza. Am-bu-lan-za. Numero: 118. Capito?

– Lui non vuole ambulanza. Lui vuole morire, dice che vuole morire.

– Mi scusi, ma allora non è che sta solo male, vuole ammazzarsi, è così?

Yama pensa a come rispondere, ma arrivano ancora altre domande.

– Lei ha provato a tranquillizzarlo? È sicura che c'è pericolo?

– Se voi non venite lui muore, – dice Yama con l'ultima voce.

– Ho capito, – sbuffa l'operatore, – le mando una pattuglia. Mi dica il suo numero di telefono e il nome sul campanello.

1.

6 novembre 2007, ore 19:00

Mezz'ora fa Yama ha chiuso la macchina da cucire, ha vestito e messo nello scatolone l'ultimo bambolotto, ha telefonato al laboratorio per dire che ha finito ed è finita anche la stoffa. Passeranno domattina e ne porteranno dell'altra.

Ora sta cucinando, riso e carne per due persone. Il tchaclack della chiave nella toppa perfora il ronzio basso della televisione. Yama sente i passi del fratello in corridoio, passi stanchi e goffi, e i soliti rumori: Momodou si toglie il giaccone e lo appende, si leva gli

then you can call the carabinieri. They must intervene.”

Yama asks for their number and types it into her phone, trying not to think.

They ask for her name, address, reason for the call.

She tells them her brother is unwell, dying.

“You have dialled the wrong number,” says the operator. “You need to call an ambulance, on 118.

“He is very not well, he want to die.”

“If he is ill you need an ambulance. Am-bu-lan-ce. Number: 118. Understand?”

“He does not want ambulance. He wants to die, he says he wants to die.”

“I'm sorry, so he's not just unwell, he wants to kill himself, is that right?”

Yama thinks how to answer but more questions follow.

“Have you tried to calm him down? Are you sure there's a real danger?”

“If you don't come, he dies,” says Yama with what voice she has left.

“Understood,” huffs the operator, “I'll send in a patrol. What is your phone number and the name on the buzzer?”

1.

6 November 2007, 7:00 p.m.

Half an hour ago Yama had put away her sewing machine, put the dress on the last doll and put it away in the cardboard box, phoned the lab to let them know she has finished the job and the material. They will come by tomorrow morning to bring more.

Now she is cooking, rice and meat for two. The *click-clack* of the door key turning in the lock breaks the low humming of the television. Yama hears her brother's paces in the corridor, tired and clumsy paces, and the other usual noises: Momodou takes off his jacket and

scarponi stando in piedi, appoggia le mani al calorifero tiepido ed espira dal naso, non dice una parola, non entra in cucina. Yama gli fa: – Ciao, – e ancora non lo vede ma sa, conosce quel piccolo rituale. In quel momento suo fratello ha gli occhi chiusi e la testa bassa, Yama capisce, la giornata è andata male. Momodou si vergogna e non trova le parole.

Quando Momodou era un uomo sereno, i suoi ritorni riempivano la casa. Nei primi tempi a Campanise, a volte passava da Gianni il tabaccaio, comprava bolle di sapone e rincasava soffiando, le bolle profumate entravano in cucina prima ancora che lui si togliesse il giaccone. Momodou rideva, scherzava, comprava piccoli doni per la sorella, sua sorella che lavorava in casa ed era sola tutto il giorno, perché suo marito Joseph lavorava a Surmano e tornava solo il sabato. Era l'estate che Momodou lavorava in campagna, a legare gli innesti con quegli elastici a forma di orologio, si infilavano dappertutto, Yama li trovava nei vestiti sporchi.

Poi Momodou è andato al Nord, a lavorare in una fabbrica di occhiali, e Yama è rimasta ancora più sola. Le prime telefonate erano belle e piene di storie, la voce era stanca ma allegra. Il lavoro è ben pagato, diceva. La gente è un po' chiusa e diffidente, ma nessuno mi tratta male.

Poi la voce si è fatta più stanca e meno allegra, col tempo anche sforzata. Dopo il primo anno, a chiamare è sempre stata Yama. Gli chiedeva come stava, e lui rispondeva: «Come al solito», e poi si lamentava: il freddo, la nebbia, giornate sempre uguali. E la solitudine, soprattutto quella. Ho poche occasioni di parlare con qualcuno, diceva. La sera sono esausto. In città c'è un circolo islamico, ma sono pakistani, e poi la città è a venti

hangs it up, he takes off his work boots standing up, places his hands on the warm heater and exhales through his nose, not saying a word, not coming into the kitchen. Yama says to him: “Ciao”, she still can't see him but she has learned, she knows the small ritual well. At that very moment her brother's eyes are closed, his head hangs low, Yama understands, the day has not gone well. Momodou is ashamed, he has no words.

When Momodou had been untroubled his return home had lit up the house. When he had first come to Campanise sometimes he would go by Gianni's at the tobacco shop to buy a bubbles maker and would get home blowing them, the scented bubbles would float into the kitchen before he even took his jacket off. Momodou laughed, joked, bought little gifts for his sister, his sister who worked at home, alone all day because her husband Joseph worked at Surmano and only came home on Saturdays. That was the summer that Momodou worked in the countryside, tying up grafts with those elastics shaped like watches, they managed to get everywhere, Yama often found them in the dirty laundry.

Then Momodou had gone up North, to work in a factory that made glasses frames, and Yama was left even more alone. The first phone calls had been lovely and full of stories, his voice tired but happy. The work is well paid, he would say. The people are a little closed and distrustful, but nobody treats me bad.

Then his voice became more tired and less happy, and over time even duty-bound. After the first year it had been Yama to make the calls. She would ask him how he was faring, and he would answer “As usual”, and then he would complain: the cold, the fog, the never-changing days. And the loneliness, especially the loneliness. I have few occasions to talk to people, he'd say. In the evening I'm exhausted. In the city

chilometri da dove sto, di giorno c'è la corriera ma l'ultima torna poco dopo cena, poi basta, o hai la macchina o ti arrangi. Una volta ho fatto tardi e mi è toccato tornare a piedi, sono arrivato a notte fonda e alle sei ero già in fabbrica. Chiedere un passaggio, inutile provarci: se sei nero, l'unica auto che accosta ha il lampeggiante sul tettuccio. Qualche volta vado nei pub in paese, bevo un'aranciata o un succo di frutta seduto al bancone, ma nessuno mi rivolge la parola.

«E in fabbrica?» chiedeva Yama. I colleghi sono brava gente, rispondeva lui, almeno quasi tutti, ma quando escono di là si chiudono nelle loro casette, con moglie e figli. Piccoli mondi coi cancelli chiusi, e poi in fabbrica sei un collega, ma fuori sei solo un negro.

«Vengo a trovarti», diceva Yama. Ma lui ha sempre detto: «Questo è un posto che mette tristezza, e io sono già triste per tutti e due. Tanto tra poco vengo giù per le ferie».

E quando è venuto stava meglio, era contento di stare con lei e con Joseph, ma il giorno prima di ritornare gli cambiavano gli occhi, col passare delle ore si incurvava, e quando saliva sul treno era come portasse sulla schiena un baule. Un baule pieno di sassi.

Yama pensa che un po' è anche un problema suo, Momodou è sempre stato timido, ma poi prova a immaginarsi come sia vivere su al Nord. Lei non c'è mai stata, ma in Tv ha visto cortei contro gli stranieri, e quel signore grasso e brutto, con gli occhiali spessi e il cappottone sformato, che urla sempre cose terribili. Cose che la fanno rabbrivire.

La cena è pronta. Riso e carne per due persone, ma suo fratello si è chiuso in camera.

there's an Islamic association, but they are Pakistani, and anyway the city is twenty kilometres away from where I am, during the day there's a bus but the last run is just after dinnertime, then that's it, either you have a car or you're done for. Once I was late and I had to walk back, I got here in the middle of the night and at six o'clock I was already at work. Ask for a ride? Not even worth trying: if you are black the only car that will pull over has lights on the roof. Sometimes I go to the pubs in town, I drink an orange juice or another fruit juice sitting at the bar, but nobody has a word to spare for me.

“And at the factory?” Yama would ask. The workers are good people, he would answer, at least most of them, but when they leave they shut themselves in their little homes, with wife and kids. Little worlds behind locked gates, and then at the factory you are a work-mate but outside you are just a nigger.

“I'll come over”, Yama would say. But he always said: “This is a very unhappy place, and I'm already unhappy enough for the both of us. Besides, I'll be coming down on leave soon enough.”

When he did come he felt better, he was happy to be with her and Joseph, but the day before leaving his eyes would change, as the hours went by he would slowly hunch over, and when he got onto the train it was as though he were carrying a trunk on his back. A trunk full of stones.

Yama thinks it's partly her problem too, Momodou has always been a bit of an introvert, but then she tries to think what it's like to live up North. She's never been there, but on TV she has seen marches against foreigners, and that fat ugly man, with thick glasses and misshapen overcoat, who always shouts horrible things. Things that make her cringe.

Dinner is ready. Rice and meat for two, but her brother has shut himself in his room.

A marzo la fabbrica di occhiali ha chiuso e Momodou ha perso il posto. Non ha cercato lavoro al Nord, era stanco di stare da solo. Ha deciso di tornare a Campanise. Voleva lavorare qui, ma è stato male, ha avuto la depressione, è così che l'hanno chiamata i dottori. Gli hanno dato delle gocce, ma Yama pensa abbia smesso di prenderle. Parla sempre meno, mangia sempre meno, ma deve trovare un lavoro, altrimenti scade il permesso, e di tornare in Gambia non se ne parla nemmeno, laggiù non si vive. Ma dove le trovi le forze per cercare lavoro, se mangi come un uccellino? Con quale aspetto ti presenti al padrone, all'agenzia, all'uomo che arriva in piazza Crispi col furgone? Chi te lo dà un lavoro, se sembri un morto?

Yama sente Momodou uscire dalla stanza e andare in bagno. Povero fratello mio, cosa posso fare per farti stare meglio?

0.

14 agosto 1990, ore 9:00

Aprire le orecchie in un letto che non è il suo. Dietro la porta, le voci soffuse di Momodou e della zia Baba. Lui è già in piedi da un pezzo, e come al solito vorrebbe svegliare anche Yama, perché da solo si annoia, i bambini del quartiere non gli stanno molto simpatici, ma la zia gli ripete che è venerdì, che la scuola è chiusa e se sua sorella ha ancora sonno, ha tutto il diritto di continuare a dormire.

Le voci si allontanano, Momodou fa finta di essersi convinto ed esce a giocare in strada. C'è ancora tempo per un paio di dettagli, la vera vita di quell'altra bambina che sogna di essere Yama e quando si sveglia le sembra di essere in un letto che non è il suo.

Poi Momodou, come ogni venerdì, si arrampica sul davanzale della finestra, allarga le tende e inizia a

The factory closed in March and Momodou had lost his job. He didn't look for work in the North, he had had enough of being alone. He had decided to come back to Campanise. He wanted to work here, but he got sick, with depression, that's how the doctors called it. They told him to take some drops, but Yama thinks he's stopped taking them. He talks less and less, he eats less and less, but he needs to find a job, or his work permit will run out, and there's no way he can go back to Gambia, there's no way to survive there. But where are you going to find the strength to go out and look for a job if you peck at your food? How are you going to appeal to the boss, the agency, the man that drives the truck to piazza Crispi to find workers? Who's going to give you a job if you look like a corpse?

Yama hears Momodou leave the room to go to the bathroom. Poor brother of mine, what can I do to make you feel better?

0.

14 August 1990, 9:00 a.m.

Her ears awake in a bed that is not her own. Behind the door, voices, Momodou and auntie Baba whispering. He's already been up for a while, and as per usual he would like to wake Yama up, because he gets bored on his own, he doesn't get on well with the kids in the neighbourhood, but his aunt keeps telling him that it's Friday, that school is off and that if his sister wants to sleep in she has every right to do so.

The voices fade out, Momodou pretends to go along with it, and goes out to play. There's still time for a few more details, the real life of that other girl that dreams of being Yama and that when she awakes feels like she's in a bed that is not her own.

Then Momodou, like every Friday morning, climbs onto the

cantare.

Finita la strofa salta giù e va a sedersi sull'orlo del letto.

– Ho preso una rana gialla, la vuoi vedere?

– Dopo. – Yama si gira dall'altra parte, come se davvero volesse dormire ancora.

– Perché dopo? Ce l'ho qui in mano, magari dopo mi scappa.

– Se ti scappa nel mio letto chiamo la zia e le dico che mi hai svegliato

– Eddài, Yama, è bellissima. Voglio dieci *bututs*, per farla vedere, ma per te è gratis.

– Dieci *bututs*? – Yama si volta di nuovo e tira su la testa. – Non è vero.

– La zia me ne voleva dare venti se la ributtavo nel fosso. Ma io le ho detto di no. Con una bestia così ne guadagno almeno il doppio.

Allunga la gabbia di mani sotto il mento della sorella e lascia che la rana infili il muso tra le dita. Sembra un anello d'oro con due pietre nere montate sopra.

– Bella, – dice Yama con meraviglia. – Ma chi è che te li dà, dieci *bututs*? Sulayman? Sua cugina Kati? Daud?

– No, a loro non la faccio vedere, – Momodu ritira le mani e le stringe contro il petto. – Mi chiamano sempre Pellicano, mi hanno stufato.

– E allora a chi? A George? A Mary?

– Anche loro mi chiamano così.

– E tu digli di piantarla, no?

– Gliel'ho detto: «Non mi chiamo Pellicano». Ma loro sentono solo l'ultima parola e mi fanno il verso: «Pellicano! Pellicano!», sbattono le braccia, gonfiano il collo, e si mettono a cantare quella storia del gabbiano stupido che diventò un pellicano.

windowsill, draws open the curtains and starts to sing.

Once he's finished the verse he jumps down and goes to sit at the foot of her bed.

“I've caught a yellow frog. Do you want to see it?”

“Later.” Yama rolls over, as if she actually wants to sleep some more.

“Why later? I got it now, right here in my hands, it might run away later.”

“If it runs away in my bed I will call auntie and tell her you woke me up.”

“Go on, Yama, she's really amazing. I want ten *bututs* for a peek, but it's free for you.”

“Ten *bututs*?” Yama turns around again and pulls up her head. “It can't be true.”

“Auntie wanted to give me twenty to put it back in the ditch. But I said no. With something like this I can get at least double that.”

He reaches over to her face, his hands locked together, and lets the frog poke its head through his wrapped fingers. It looks like a gold ring with two black gems set on top.

“Wow...” Yama murmurs in awe. “But who's going to give you ten *bututs*? Sulayman? His cousin Kati? Daud?”

“No, I'm not going to show it to them,” Momodu pulls his hands back towards his chest. “They always call me Pelican, I'm sick and tired of them.”

“Who then? To George? To Mary?”

“They call me that too.”

“So tell them to stop it, then!”

“I told them: ‘My name is not Pelican’. But they only seem to hear the last word and the copycats go ‘Pelican! Pelican!’, they flap their wings, puff out their cheeks, and start to sing that story about the stupid seagull that became a pelican.”

Yama strisciò sulle coperte e andò a sedersi di fianco al fratello.

– Allora devi cambiare la canzone.

– E come la cambio? La storia è quella, la canzone fa così e basta.

– Davvero? – Yama prende tempo. – Sei proprio sicuro? – Poi salta giù dal letto e inizia a correre per la stanza sbattendo le braccia. – La conosci quella del gabbiano intelligente? Quello che si fece fare una sacca sotto il becco per portare più pesci?

– Ecco, la senti? – dice il nonno. – È la campana di mezzodì. Andiamo, ché tra un po' la nonna apparecchia.

Non si sono accorti del passare del tempo, il nonno e Pasquale. Da quanto stavano in silenzio in cima alla collina? Mezz'ora, forse. Uno accanto all'altro, a guardare la distesa di alberi, il saliscendi del bosco, il verde che si allontana e man mano si fa più chiaro, e l'azzurro intenso del cielo. A Pasquale piace, quel triangolo di Appennino, e gli piace passare l'agosto coi nonni, tutti gli anni, com'è sempre stato dall'inizio del suo mondo. Gli piace, e questa è un'estate speciale, perché a settembre cominciano le scuole medie.

Il nonno è tanto vecchio, ha quasi ottant'anni e si aiuta col bastone ma cammina veloce, anche in discesa, anche col sole a picco un giorno prima di ferragosto, anche col cappello di paglia che è logoro e ha un foro sul cocuzzolo ma lui non lo vuole cambiare perché ce l'ha da tanti anni. È veloce, nonno Amedeo, ma non come un ragazzino, e Pasquale potrebbe superarlo ma gli sta dietro perché lo vuole guardare. Gli piace vederlo affrontare la collina col suo piglio marziale, come fosse ogni volta una spedizione, un raid, una missione di soccorso. Sì, Pasquale vede tutto in quel modo, ha la testa piena di sogni e

Yama crawled over the covers and went to sit next to her brother.

“Then you have to change the song!”

“And how do I do that? That's the story, that's how the song goes, and that's it.”

“Really?” Yama tries to buy time. “Are you really sure?” Then she jumps off the bed and starts to flap her arms. “Do you know the story of the smart seagull? The one that made himself a pouch under his beak to carry more fish?”

“There, can you hear it?” Says Granpa. “It's the twelve-midday bell. Let's go, Grandma is going to set the table soon.”

They hadn't realized how much time had passed, Granpa and Pasquale. How long had they been in silence at the top of the hill? Half an hour, maybe. Next to each other, looking at the trees, the rolling woodlands, the green that becomes lighter the further away you look, and the intense blue of the sky. Pasquale loves it, that small triangle of the Apennines, and he likes spending the month of August with his grandparents, every year, like it's always been since his world begun. He likes it, and this is a special summer, because in September he will start Middle School.

Granpa is so old, he's almost eighty, he has a walking stick but walks quickly, even downhill, even under the blazing mid-August sun, even with his threadbare straw hat that has a hole on the top of it but he won't change it because he's had it for so many years. He's fast, Granpa Amedeo is, but not as fast as a kid, and Pasquale could overtake him, but he walks behind him because he wants to observe him. He likes watching him take on the hill with his martial step, as if every time were a new expedition, a raid, a rescue mission. Yes, Pasquale imagines everything in this light, his head is full of dreams and adventures, war

avventure, film di guerra e «giornalini» (è la parola che usa il nonno), storie di detective e criminali, e le immagini coloratissime dei *Conoscere* che nonno comprò a papà quando era piccolo.

E i ricordi di famiglia, soprattutto quelli. Il nonno ha fatto la guerra in Africa, anzi, ne ha fatte due, prima contro il negus e poi contro gli inglesi. Durante l'estate, Pasquale passa interi pomeriggi ad ascoltare i racconti africani di Amedeo Tajani, sottotenente degli alpini ed eroe del battaglione Uork Amba. Nella testa di Pasquale, l'Appennino molisano si trasmuta, diventa Africa, monte Agher Bacac, la Cima Forcuta, il Dologorodoc.

Il nonno compra tanti giornali. Alcune testate, l'edicolante del paese le ordina solo per lui.

Su quelle pagine, da qualche giorno Pasquale segue un caso di cronaca, una ragazza ammazzata a Roma, nella città svuotata dalle vacanze. Si chiamava Simonetta, era bella, i giornali pubblicano tutti la stessa foto, Simonetta in costume da bagno sulla spiaggia. Pasquale a Roma non c'è ancora stato, anche se è a un tiro di schioppo (un'altra parola del nonno: «schioppo»), dall'altra parte delle montagne. Lo appassionano le indagini sul delitto, vorrebbe andare a Roma e investigare pure lui, scoprire chi ha ucciso Simonetta, vendicarla. Vorrebbe diventare un eroe, bruciare le tappe che ha davanti. Ma non è un ragazzo stupido, lo sa che è troppo presto e occorre dare tempo al tempo. L'importante, adesso, è cominciare le medie.

– Pasqualino, ma che fai lì fermo?
– gli chiede il nonno, che nel frattempo è arrivato giù e si è accorto che il ragazzo non lo seguiva – Ti sei imbambolato? Forza, si va a pranzare.

films and “funnies” (that's the word Granpa uses for his comics), detective and crime stories, and the colourful images of the *Conoscere* encyclopaedia that Granpa bought dad when he was a young boy.

And Granpa's old stories, especially those. Granpa fought the war in Africa, actually it was two of them, first against the Negus, and then against the British. During the summer, Pasquale spends whole afternoons listening to the African stories of the heroic Uork Amba battalion's second lieutenant alpine trooper Amedeo Tajani. In Pasquale's head the Apennines of Molise morph, they become Africa, Mount Agher Bacac, the massif of Mount Zeban and Mount Falestoh, Fort Dologorodoc.

Granpa buys many newspapers. The newsagent orders some of them in especially for him.

On those pages Pasquale has lately been following a crime story, a girl killed in Rome, in the city emptied by the summer holidays. Her name was Simonetta, she was beautiful, the same photo is in all the newspapers, Simonetta in her swimsuit on the beach. Pasquale has never been to Rome yet, even if it's only a stone's throw away (another favourite expression of Granpa's “a stone's throw”), on the other side of the mountains. He loves following the investigation of the murder, he'd like to go to Rome to investigate himself, find out who killed Simonetta, avenge her. He wants to become a hero, and do so quickly. But he's not a stupid boy, he knows that it's too early, that he needs to let nature take its course. The important thing now is to start Middle School.

“Pasquale, boy, what are you doing there, standing still?” asks his Granpa, who in the meantime had got to the bottom of the hill and realized the boy hadn't followed him. “What are you looking at? Come on, let's go eat.”

E Pasquale si scuote, dà un'ultima
occhiata alle colline intorno, infine si
rimette in marcia.

A Mohamed Cisse

And Pasquale snaps out of it,
looks one last time at the hills around
him, and sets off again.

To Mohamed Cisse

The Translation of *Perfect Chinese Children* by Vanessa Woods

WENHUI HE
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Perfect Chinese Children by Vanessa Woods is an autobiographical short story published in the *Growing Up Asian in Australia* (Pung, 2008), a collection of prose, poetry and comics by Asian-Australian authors, edited by the award-winning author Alice Pung. The book was published by independent Australian publisher Black Inc., and has been very popular among young adult readers, largely through its inclusion on the Victorian high school reading list. As the title suggests, the book is about childhood and memory, but more importantly, Asian-Australian life, as written by Asian-Australian authors. Through this book, Pung wanted to present and promote Asian-Australian culture to readers, in order to show that “not only what it is like to grow up Asian in Australia, but also what it means to be Asian Australian” (4).

Woods’ short story reflects a particular Chinese-Australian narrative. The author has a Chinese mother and Australian father, and grew up with her Chinese relatives, but as an “Australian child” (Pung 105). Inevitably, Woods experienced cultural differences and conflicts, as well as cultural interactions and conciliations. As a second-generation migrant, Woods tried to fit into mainstream Australian culture, whilst struggling to understand her own Chinese heritage. Like many other authors represented in this collection (such as Benjamin Law, Michelle Law and Tony Ayres, amongst others), Woods may be viewed as a “cultural translator”, who exists in-between cultures, identities and languages.

The concept of cultural translation was discussed by postcolonial theorist Homi K. Bhabha in *The Location of Culture* (1994); he argues that migrants translate their own culture and language into the host community and the receiving culture. Consequently, the receiving culture is intervened, transformed and hybridized, and the host language (in this case, English) becomes more diverse and hybrid (Young 2012). As the Indian-born British writer Salman Rushdie (1992) famously describes wrote: “Having been borne across the world, we are translated men” (16).

Bhabha also connected the notion of cultural translation with hybridity. He views hybridity as a result of cultural interactions and the notion of being “in-between” cultures. Migrant writing, including by Chinese-Australian authors, may be viewed as extremely hybrid and complex (Ang, 2001). Writers such as Woods and Rushdie often speak of their hybrid identities and cultures, which can be fluid and complex (Ang 2001). So-called “hybridity features” therefore become one of the most distinguishing characteristics of migrant stories. Hybridity features in the text create a sense of foreignness and unfamiliarity to the reader, which are often used by writers in order to highlight their position of in-betweenness (Simon 2001).

In Woods’ *Perfect Chinese Children*, hybridity features can be found on both cultural and linguistic levels. Cultural hybridity takes place when different cultures come into contact, reflecting cultural conflicts and differences. Linguistic hybridity, on the other hand, occurs when different languages exist in one text – this is often found in literature written by migrants (Bhabha, 1994). On a cultural level, Woods found herself in between two cultures and identities. She grew up with her Chinese mother and relatives, eating “dun tahts” and Peking duck, and going to Yum Cha every Saturday. But she does not look Chinese nor behave like a Chinese person, so she never

quite fit in with her Chinese cousins. Moreover, she was not a perfect Chinese child to her mother. Woods was teetering in between her Chinese heritage and Australian culture, stating “Australians are dog shit” (Pung 107) but then telling her mother she wanted “erasers with Snow White on them” (Pung 110). She also witnessed the conflicts between two cultures and races – her Aunty viewed white people as barbarians, while her cousins were bullied because they were Asian. On a linguistic level, she admitted that she could only speak three Cantonese phrases, but Chinese words and references are still predominant through the text. Whether the author can speak or write Chinese, Chinese culture and language are deeply embedded in her English writing.

Hybridity features in both linguistic and cultural forms can, however, pose difficulties in translation, therefore the translation process and strategies are worth examining. Additionally, as the Chinese heritage or the “Chineseness” of the author thrives through the text, it leads to the translation issue of “back translation”. Back translation takes place when translating the Chinese words, concepts, names and culture from the source text (ST) into the Chinese target text (TT). Different strategies have been adopted in order to translate and back translate the hybridity features in the text. However, some hybridity features found in the ST are lost in the TT, while others, interestingly, have emerged during the translation process. For example, “cha siu bao” and “dun tahts” might be unfamiliar to some Australian readers, but it would be familiar to Chinese audiences. On the other hand, “Jesus Christ” is used as a common swearing word in English, but it can create a strange effect in Chinese.

The overall strategy employed relies on Antoine Berman’s theory of “deformation” (2000), which is used to highlight the unfamiliarity and foreignness in the TT, and to reflect the foreignness and hybridity features in the ST. I have also used Nida’s (1964) equivalence theory, as this translation has attempted to create “equivalent hybridity” in the TT. There are several translation methods/procedures identified by Vinay and Darbelnet (1995), including the notion of borrowing, which has been adopted in the translation to reflect the hybridity features and hybrid nature of the ST. Through borrowing or “zero translation” (Qiu, 2001) strategy, some words and phrases of the ST are left untranslated and kept in the source language. Examples are provided below to demonstrate some of these translation challenges and strategies.

As already mentioned, Cantonese words and Chinese cultural concepts are heavily employed in the ST; these foreign words are used to highlight the author’s hybrid identity. In my translation, I have adopted the strategy of borrowing or “zero translation” for most of the Cantonese phrases such as: “Kung Hei Fat Choi” “lycee” and “gno sat neyko say yun tow”. They were not presented in the ST using standardized Cantonese spelling, as Woods has limited knowledge of Cantonese. Therefore, to retain the effect and meaning of the original terms in the TT, borrowing was deemed the best approach. It will not create confusions for the reader as explanations are already provided in the text; for example, the author explained what “lycee” is: “red envelopes stuffed with cash” (Pung 103). Keeping the term “lycee” untranslated will retain the foreignness of the ST. However, for other terms like “Aunty Yee Mah”, I cannot use the same strategy. As “Yee Mah” means “aunty” in Cantonese, translating directly or borrowing completely would make it redundant or meaningless in Chinese. Therefore, I have translated it as “Aunty” (yi ma) which has a similar pronunciation as “Yee Mah”.

In the story, Woods describes the challenges and conflicts between culture, family and inter-racial marriage. When her father’s family meet her mother for the first time, the reaction was “Jesus Christ – a chongalewy-chow Sheila!” (Pung 105). This

sentence contains a swear word, a made-up (hybrid English/Cantonese) term, a racial reference and Australian slang. This hybrid combination created a huge challenge for translation. The sentence might seem strange or unfamiliar to English readers, but the purpose and effect, and I wanted to create a similar level of strangeness in the TT. Therefore, I adopted an equally hybrid and creative approach, using the equivalence Chinese term for “Jesus Christ” and “Sheila”, while for “chongalewy-chow”, I chose “清嘎啦虫” (Ching Ga La Chong) for the meaning and sound.

Perfect Chinese Children is a beautiful and touching story, but is, at the same time, complicated and meaningful. Woods, as a Chinese-Australian writer and “cultural translator”, honestly reflects what is like to grow up in Australia as a Chinese-Australian child, and as a person in between cultures and identities. It is a personal and unique story, which also imparts many universal feelings and experiences. The text is worth translating into Chinese for Chinese readers who do not understand what it means to be Chinese-Australian, but also for readers who may share similar experiences.

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Perfect Chinese Children

By
Vanessa Woods

If there was ever anyone I wanted to stab in the heart with a chopstick, it was my cousin David.

‘What happened to the four per cent?’ my mother says, looking at my maths exam.

‘I got ninety-six. What else do you want?’

‘Don’t talk back,’ my mother snaps. ‘Ninety-six isn’t 100. If you want to do well you have to try harder. David just got 99.9 on his HSC.’

I dig my nails into my chair and wait for the punchline.

‘He asked me to ring up the school board and contest the score. Ha! Imagine that. The lady on the phone laughed.’

My mother shakes her head in wonder, as though David is the god of a new religion she’s following.

‘It really was 100,’ she says confidentially. ‘They had to scale it down for the school.’

Usually Chinese par-ents don’t have bragging rights over other people’s children, but my mother tutored David through high school, so his HSC score is her crowning victory.

My maths exam, with the scrawled red ‘96’ that I was so proud of, begins to look ratty. Untidy figures rush across the

完美的中国孩子

瓦妮莎·伍兹 著

何文慧 译

Translated by Wenhui He

有一个人我想用筷子戳进他的心脏，那个人就是表哥戴维。

“少的那四分去哪了？”妈妈看着我的数学考试成绩问道。

“我得了96分。你还想怎么样？”

“少顶嘴。”妈妈发火了。“96不是满分。如果你想有出息，那就要更努力。戴维在高中毕业考试得了99.9。”

我把指甲戳进椅子里，等着她的“点睛之笔”。

“他让我打电话给学校董事会去提出质疑。哈！前所未有的事。接电话的女人都笑了。”

妈妈不可思议地摇了摇头，仿佛戴维是她的新偶像。

“实际成绩是100分。”她自信地说。“但因为学校政策，他们不能给满分。”

通常情况下，中国父母不能吹嘘别人家的孩子，但妈妈辅导了戴维的整个高中学业，因此他的毕业考试成绩就是她的辉煌胜利。

我的数学试卷上，潦草的“96”本来让我感到骄傲，现在却看起来

page as if they're about to make a run for it. David's handwriting is famous for looking like it came out of a typewriter.

'He's going to medical school,' she sighs. 'He's going to be a heart surgeon, just like Victor Chang.'

The reason my mother harps on about David so much is probably that her own two children don't warrant much praising over the mahjong table. My sister Bronnie has been expelled from piano lessons twice, and me, well, I am trouble on all fronts. I'm the child who talks back and gives viperous looks to her elders. In all my life I've only learnt two Cantonese phrases: *Kung Hei Fat Choi*, Happy New Year (saying this at the right time earned you *lycee*, red envelopes stuffed with cash), and *gno sat neyko say yun tow*, a phrase I hear often from my Auntie Yee Mah that roughly translates to 'I will chop off your dead man's head.'

'Jasmine just bought her mother a \$600,000 apartment in Hong Kong,' mother says wistfully before going for the touchdown. '*In cash.*'

Jasmine is David's perfect sibling. She is a stockbroker in New York, married to an investment banker. The photographer at her Sydney wedding cost \$12,000.

'Jasmine only got 80 per cent on her HSC.' My mother looks hopeful, as though retards like me might have a chance after all. Then she shakes herself out of it. 'But no one paid any attention to her until she started making money.'

很糟糕。卷子上歪歪扭扭的数字就像要逃跑一般。而戴维的字出了名的工整，像打字机打出来似的。

“他要去上医学院，”她叹口气。“他要当心脏外科医生，就像张任谦一样。”

妈妈不停地夸赞戴维，可能是因为她没法在麻将桌上炫耀自己的两个孩子。我妹妹布露妮已经两次被钢琴教室开除了，还有我，而我的问题就多了。我会跟长辈顶嘴，目光凶狠地瞪着人。我一辈子就学了两句广东话：一句是“Kung Hei Fat Choi”（在正确的时间点说就能拿到“lycee”，装满钞票的红包）；另一句是“gno sat neyko say yun tow”，这是我经常听见姨妈说的，意思是“我要砍下你的死人头”。

“杰丝敏刚给她妈妈在香港买了价值60万澳元的房子”，妈妈的语气充满渴望，又压低声音说：“用现金。”

杰丝敏和戴维这对姐弟堪称完美。杰丝敏在纽约做证券经纪人，嫁给了一个投资银行家。她在悉尼举办的婚礼上，仅摄影师的费用就是1万两千澳元。

“杰丝敏的高中毕业考试只得了80分。”妈妈似乎充满了希望，仿佛像我这样的智障或许也有一线生机。然后她又摇了摇头“但她开始赚钱之前，也没人看好她。”

My mother looks around our tiny two-bedroom apartment. The kitchen is fine if you're a troll and enjoy dim, cramped spaces. The carpet is grey and curling around the edges. The furnishings are the type you pick up by the side of the road. There are occasional glimpses of the life we had before. A Ming vase. A black lacquered screen with flourishes of gold. But the priceless antiques give the apartment the ambience of a refugee camp, as though we managed to save a few precious things before catastrophe threw us into squalor.

When I visit my cousins in their two-storey palaces, their kitchens as big as our apartment and their lucky trees with lifesized peaches of jade in the foyer, my secret pleasure is to creep upstairs and press my face into the pale, plush carpet.

*

We are poor because my mother's financial history has been overshadowed by unlucky four – *sie*, which sounds uncomfortably close to *sei*, death. She was the fourth child born in the fourth decade of the century. Her father gave all his money to Chiang Kai-shek, the Chinese leader of the Nationalist Party who lost China to the Communists in 1949. My mother's brothers and sister were also left destitute, but they all married suitable Chinese spouses who helped them earn back the family fortune.

My mother, with her silken black hair and face like a doll, could have done better than anyone. But instead, she married my father, a *gweilo*, a ghost person, a white man. In our world, interracial marriages are unheard of. We don't know any other Chinese who married Australians.

妈妈环顾我们狭小的两居室公寓。或许对于喜欢阴暗逼仄环境的小矮人来说，我们的厨房还算过得去。地毯发灰，边角卷起。家具像是从路边捡来的那种。偶尔也能瞥见过去生活的影子：一个明代花瓶，一面金纹黑漆屏风。但这些昂贵古董给公寓增添了一种难民营的气氛。仿佛在灾难来临流离失所之前，我们设法保住了几件值钱的东西。

表哥他们家住在如宫殿一样的两层别墅里。厨房和我们公寓一样大，门口招财树上挂着和真桃子一样大小的玉桃。我的秘密乐趣是偷偷地上楼，将脸埋进洁白的毛绒地毯里。

*

我们家很穷，是因为妈妈的财运一直被一个不吉利的数字笼罩着——四，听起来像“死”。她是本世纪家族中第四代的第四个孩子。她爸爸将所有的钱都给了国民党领袖蒋介石，1949年国民党溃败，共产党执政。妈妈的兄弟姐妹们都穷困潦倒，但他们与合适的中国人结婚，并重建了家业。

我的妈妈有着一头乌黑的秀发和洋娃娃般的脸蛋，她本该比别人都前途无量。然而，她却嫁给了我爸爸——一个“*gweilo*”，一个洋鬼子，一个白种人。在我们的世界

里，种族通婚是闻所未闻的。我们认识的中国人里，没有其他任何人和澳大利亚人结婚。

“一群蛮子，”姨妈说，“中国人用筷子吃饭，鬼佬用手抓着吃。”

我的爸爸是个有魅力的男人，也是个内心痛苦的越南老兵。他有酗酒倾向，偶尔还会精神失常。当年爸爸把妈妈带回去见家长时，爷爷对她说的第一句话是“上帝啊，一个清嘴啦虫姑娘！”

妈妈做了一切称职的中国妻子该做的事。她花3个小时烘焙蛋挞，脆脆的酥皮裹着温热的蛋浆，和康熙皇帝在满汉全席上吃的一样。她花整整两天做北京烤鸭，为了做出完美的圆形春饼而患上重复性肌肉劳损。她做满满一桌丰盛佳肴，招待爸爸的朋友们，也毫不知情地招待了他的情人。

爸爸和她离婚时，没有人感到惊讶，除了她自己。他为了一个“白人蛮子”而离开了她，当时我5岁，妹妹2岁。

妈妈羞愧得无地自容，差点割腕自杀。我们不认识任何离过婚的人。中国夫妻可以有外遇、分房睡、几乎不和对方讲话，但没有人离婚。这是面子问题。

她生活破碎、身无分文，我们成了她唯一的希望。我和妹妹本应

‘Barbarians,’ Yee Mah would say. ‘Chinese were using chopsticks while *gweilos* were eating with their hands.’

My father was a charming but troubled Vietnam vet, prone to occasional psychotic episodes and heavy drinking. When he brought my mother home to meet his family, my grandfather’s first words to her were, ‘Jesus Christ – a chongalewy-chow Sheila!’

My mother did everything required of a dutiful Chinese wife. She spent three hours baking *dun tahts*, the pastry as flaky around the warm egg custard as those served for the Kangxi Emperor at the Manchu imperial feast. She did the ritualistic two-day preparation for Peking duck and gave herself RSI from rolling perfectly circular Mandarin pancakes. She served orgasmic banquets to my father’s friends and unwittingly to his mistresses.

It wasn’t a surprise to anyone except my mother when my father divorced her and left her for a white barbarian when I was five and my sister was two.

My mother almost slit her wrists in shame. We didn’t know anyone who was divorced. Chinese spouses had affairs, slept in separate rooms and barely spoke to each other, but no one divorced. It was a matter of saving face.

Her own life in shreds and two dollars in her pocket, we became her only hope. We would be brilliant at school, earn accolades and awards until the day

when we were educated, rich and could lavish her with the money and attention she deserved.

Unfortunately, it isn't quite working out that way. As a result of the impure blood of my father, my sister and I don't even look Chinese. We both have Chinese hair, dead straight and completely resistant to the crimping tools crucial to the '80s, but my sister's hair is blonde and mine is the colour of burnt toast.

As time goes by, it becomes clear to her that we are going the way of *Australian* children. The ones who don't work as hard, are loud and uncouth and, worst of all, talk back to their parents and hold chopsticks near the pointed ends, like peasants.

Until the divorce, we had barely seen my Chinese relatives. Suddenly, from our big, comfortable house in Turrumurra, we were living in a troll cave in Kingsford near Vietnamese boat people. Instead of a mother who stayed home all day cooking delicious and exotic meals, I had a mother who worked as a secretary for fourteen hours a day. And every day after school, my sister and I get dumped with my Auntie Yee Mah and my three cousins.

It is well known among all my new relatives under the age of sixteen that you do not fuck with Yee Mah. Yee Mah isn't fat but there is a heaviness to her. The back of her hand feels like a ton of bricks. She once broke a bed just by sitting on it. Besides the famous 'I will chop off your dead man's head,' she sometimes pulls out a box of matches, holds one out close to our mouths and hisses, 'If you are lying to me, I will burn out your tongue.' In a way that convinces you she absolutely is

该成绩优异，受到老师表扬，获得各种奖项，最终学有所成，用金钱和孝心来回报她。

然而，现实往往不如人意。因为有着父亲的“不纯血统”，我和妹妹看起来根本不像中国人。我们都有中国人发质，头发又直又硬，80年代流行的卷发工具对我们完全没用。但我妹妹的发色是金色，我的是焦黄色。

随着时间流逝，妈妈意识到我们长成了“澳大利亚”孩子。不够勤奋、粗野聒噪。最可恨的是会和家长顶嘴，拿筷子拿最下端，像乡下人一样。

在父母离婚之前，我们几乎没见过中国亲戚。一夜之间，我们搬离了宽敞舒适的图拉姆拉区大房子，住进了金斯福德区的“矮人洞穴”，与越南难民为邻。妈妈从一个每天在家做美味异国佳肴的家庭主妇，成了一工作14小时的秘书。而且每天放学之后，我和妹妹就被丢给姨妈和三个表亲。

在我的新家庭里，大家都清楚一件事：16岁之前，别惹毛姨妈。姨妈不胖，但力气很大。她的手背和砖头一样厚实。有一次她坐到一张床上，就把床坐塌了。除了那句著名的“我杀你的死人头”之外，她会拿一根火柴放在我们嘴边，低声说：“如果你说谎，我就烧掉你的

not joking.

Her daughter Erica is seventeen and the high-achieving darling. Robert is number one son and therefore immune to any criticism or punishment. However, her other son, Patrick, my sister Bronnie and I, we are all under ten and therefore under her complete jurisdiction.

So every day after school, Bronnie, Patrick and I get up to mischief and then try to stop Yee Mah finding out. On the weekends there are more cousins, aunts and uncles to visit, most of whom aren't even related to us. The hope is that some of their Chineseness will rub off on us and Bronnie and I will become bright, smart vessels and alleviate some of my mother's disgrace.

Bronnie and I never quite blend in, but our new playmates are always too polite to mention it until one day, Erica storms out of the playground.

'Australians are retard-ed,' she says churlishly. Erica is seven years older than me and I worship her. She is everything a good girl should be: smart, respectful, and her boyfriends buy her large stuffed animals that I secretly covet.

There's a rhyme going around the playground. The kids pull up the corners of their eyes, then pull them down, chanting: 'Chinese, Japanese, hope your kids turn Pickanese.' On 'Pickanese,' they lift one eye up and one eye down, giving the clear impression of mental retardation. Like all bad jokes that come into fashion, this one is going around like wildfire, and Erica has apparently been

舌头。”从她说话的方式你就知道她不是开玩笑的。

姨妈的女儿艾瑞卡17岁，是个成绩优异的乖乖女。罗伯特是家中长子，因此不会受到任何责罚。她的小儿子派特里克、妹妹布鲁妮和我，当时都不到10岁，完全在姨妈的管辖之下。

每天放学之后，我们三个就会调皮捣蛋，然后想尽办法不让姨妈发现。到了周末，我们要去见更多的叔叔阿姨、哥哥姐姐，其中绝大多数跟我们没有任何血缘关系。这样做是希望我们能从这些人身上蹭些“中国味道”，于是我和妹妹就能成为聪明懂事的孩子，让妈妈不那么丢脸。

我和布鲁妮从来没能完全融入。而我们的新玩伴总是很客气，没有戳破那层窗户纸。直到有一天，艾瑞卡在操场上发泄了出来。

“澳洲人都是智障，”她狠狠地说。艾瑞卡比我大7岁，是我崇拜的对象。她是标准的完美女孩：聪明又懂事，她的男朋友会给她买令人羡慕的大毛绒玩具。

学校操场上传唱着一个顺口溜。一群小孩上下拉扯着眼角，唱着：“中国狗，日本狗，生出一群哈巴狗”。唱到“哈巴狗”的时候，他们把眼睛一只往上一只往下拉，像极了智障儿童。和所有的无聊玩笑一样，这个顺口溜像野火一般蔓

socked with it 150 times during lunch.

As we wait outside school for Yee Mah, I catch Erica giving me a sideways look, as though she is seeing me for the first time, realising that I look more like one of *them* than like her.

‘Yeah,’ I quickly say. ‘Australians are dog shit. Their babies will all eat dog shit and die.’

I have to be liberal with the faeces because the week before, my cousin Victor was bashed at the 7Eleven in Maroubra. A local gang was targeting Asians, and a couple of them beat up Victor and stole his bike. I saw him staggering down the road, bleeding from his nose with scrapes along his arms. The cheekbone beneath his eye was swollen and red, like a ripe fruit about to burst.

There is also a rumour going around that Asian-haters have been stabbing Asians with syringes full of AIDS blood in the cinemas on George Street. As a result, we don’t go to the cinema for at least a year.

Yee Mah’s car pulls up and we all climb in. Erica doesn’t speak to me for the rest of the day. Without knowing why, I am ashamed.

*

Every Saturday, about twenty of our ‘inner circle’ go to yum cha. The children are fed *cha siu bao* pork buns to fill us up so we don’t eat any of the expensive stuff, while the grown-ups brag about themselves by bragging about their children.

延开来。据说艾瑞卡在午休时就被辱骂了150次。

我们在校门口等姨妈，我看见艾瑞卡瞥我的眼神，仿佛她不认识我一样。她意识到我看起来更像“那些白人”，而不像中国人。

“对啊”我连忙说，“澳洲人都是狗屎。他们的小孩都吃狗屎，不得好死。”

我必须要说得难听些，着重强调粪便。因为上周表兄维克多在马鲁巴区的7-11便利店里被打了。当地的一个帮派专门针对亚洲人，他们打了维克多，还抢了他的自行车。我看到他一瘸一拐地走在路上，流着鼻血，手臂上有伤痕。他的颧骨红肿，像熟得要裂开的水果一样。

当时还有个流言，说那些亚洲仇恨者会在乔治街的电影院里用装着艾滋血的针筒扎亚洲人。结果我们整整一年都没去电影院。

姨妈的车开来了，我们都上了车。艾瑞卡一整天都没和我说话。不知道为什么，我感到很羞愧。

*

每周六，我们“小圈子”里的20多人会去喝早茶。小孩子嘴里被叉烧包塞得满满的，这样我们就不会吃那些贵的东西。大人们则通过夸耀自己的孩子来吹嘘自己。

‘Patrick just passed his Grade Seven piano exam,’ says Yee Mah. ‘And Erica is top of her class. Again.’

Aunty Helen talks about Jasmine’s new office in the World Trade Centre and David’s internship.

And my poor mother sits with nothing to say. No awards we have won. No praise from our teachers. No marks high enough for medical or law school. It is the ultimate aspiration for any Chinese mother to have a child who is a lawyer or a doctor. The best-case scenario would be a lawyer who defends doctors in court.

‘You would make such a good barrister,’ my mother sometimes tells me. ‘You and that slippery tongue of yours.’

Such two-faced compliments are the staple of my existence. ‘*Ho liang*,’ my relatives say. ‘How pretty.’ But I always sense another implication: at least I am pretty, because there isn’t much else going for me.

Even worse, Bronnie wants to be an actress and I want to be a writer. My mother can’t think of anything less likely to lead to one of us buying her an apartment.

‘You’ll end up penniless in an attic,’ she tells my sister. As for me, she clips out cuttings from the newspaper to prove that most writers end up dead of starvation in the gutter.

*

To twist the chopstick even deeper, I am developing an aversion to school. In class, I am miserable, churlish and awkward. I don’t have any friends, and a boy called

“派特里克刚刚过了钢琴7级，”姨妈说，“艾瑞卡呢，又是班级第一。”

海伦阿姨说着杰丝敏在世贸中心的新办公室和戴维的实习工作。

我可怜的妈妈坐在那无话可说。我们什么奖都没得，从没被老师表扬过，成绩也不够上医学院或者法学院。所有中国母亲的愿望就是有个当律师或者医生的孩子。最好的情况就是当一个在法庭上为医生辩护的律师。

“你肯定能当个好律师，”妈妈有时这么对我说，“你和你的那张快嘴。”

这种虚假的夸赞贯穿了我的人生。“好靓啊，”亲戚们说。但我总看到另外一层意思：幸好我长得好看，因为除此之外我一无是处。

不仅如此，布露尼想当个演员，而我想当个作家。妈妈想让我们俩其中一个给她买套公寓的愿望就必然要泡汤了。

“你会穷死在阁楼里的。”她告诉妹妹。而对于我，她会从报纸上收集文章向我证明大部分作家都会饿死在阴沟里。

*

“锦上添花”的是，我越来越厌恶学校。课堂让我感到痛苦、暴躁和不安。我没有任何朋友，一个叫

Owen throws rocks at me after class. There is another charming game going around the playground in which you pinch someone and say, 'Tip, you've got the germs.'

I am always the original source of the germs.

Finally, to escape being the human turd, I lock myself in the school toilets for three hours. When a teacher comes to find me, I tell her I've been vomiting. Half an hour later my mother pulls up outside school and drives me back to our apartment. She cooks me chicken soup with noodles and wraps the bed sheets around me so tight I feel like I am in an envelope, about to be posted somewhere exotic. I love the garlic and chilli smell of her hands. She takes my temperature and smooths my forehead and continually asks if I am all right.

I suffer another week through the germ game until I lock myself in the toilet again. This time, Yee Mah picks me up from school.

'What's wrong with you?' she demands.

'I threw up in the toilet.'

'You don't smell like vomit,' she says suspiciously.

'It was only a little bit.'

She looks at me slyly from the corner of her eye.

'Do you know why your mother is poor?'

I shake my head.

'Because of you. She has to pay your school fees, very expensive. You see how tired she is? You must pay her back with

欧文的男生在下课时会朝我扔石头。当时在操场上还流传着另外一个“有趣”的游戏，掐别人一下然后说“喂，你身上有细菌。”

而我总是那个细菌的源头。

最后，为了不做人类病原体，我把自己关在厕所3个小时。老师找到我时，我告诉她我吐了。半个小时之后妈妈到学校接我，开车带我回家。她给我煮了鸡汤面条，用被子把我裹得紧紧的，像个要寄到远方的包裹。我喜欢闻她手上的蒜味和辣椒味。她量了我的体温，摸着我的额头，不停地问我有没有好一点。

我又忍受了一周的细菌游戏，直到我把自己再次关在厕所里。这一次，姨妈来学校接我。

“你怎么搞的？”她质问我。

“我在厕所吐了。”

“你闻起来不像吐过。”她怀疑地说。

“只吐了一点点。”

她用余光瞄我。

“你知道为什么你妈妈这么穷吗？”

我摇摇头。

“因为你啊。她要付你的学费，可贵了。你没看到她多累吗？”

good marks. Otherwise you will make her shamed.'

The emotional terrorism continues until we get to her house. There is no chicken soup or tucking into bed. I have to sit on the couch with Bobo, her mother-in-law, for six hours, watching daytime television until my sister and Patrick come home.

*

'Mum,' I tug on my mother's arm during Saturday yum cha as she chews on a prawn dumpling, part of yet another meal she can't pay for. She looks down at me absentmindedly. 'Mum!'

'Yes, sweetheart?'

'Can you buy me that fish?'

'What?'

There are over fifty brim stuffed in the tank of the yum cha restaurant. They are squashed so tight together they can hardly move. In the middle there is a beautiful golden one, with scales that shimmer in the light of the crystal chandeliers. I want my mother to buy it so I can take it to Bondi Beach in a plastic bag and set it free in the ocean.

'Don't be stupid,' my mother says. 'They are for eating.'

The eating habits of my sister and I are yet another source of embarrassment. We are very wasteful. We don't eat chicken's feet. We don't suck the jelly out of fish eyeballs and we refuse to eat the creamy filling inside prawn heads.

'Just that one. Plee-eeeeeease.'

'No.'

'Why?'

你要好好学习报答她。不然你就会让她丢脸。"

这样的情感勒索一直持续到我们回到她家。这次没有鸡汤和被窝。我还要和她婆婆坐在一起，看了6个小时的日间电视节目，直到妹妹和派特里克放学回家。

*

"妈妈，"周六早茶上，我拉着她的手肘。她吃着我们买不起的虾饺，敷衍地低头看我。"妈妈！"

"宝贝怎么啦？"

"你能不能给我买那条鱼？"

"什么？"

早茶店的鱼缸里，50多条鳊鱼挤在一起，紧紧贴着彼此，几乎无法移动。中间有一条金色的鱼，鱼鳞在水晶灯下闪闪发光。我想让妈妈买下它，这样我就可以把它装进塑料袋里，带到邦迪海滩放生。

"别傻了，"妈妈说。"那是用来吃的。"

我和妹妹吃饭的习惯也很丢人。我们很浪费。我们不啃鸡爪，不吃鱼眼，不嗦虾头。

"就那一条。求求你了求求你了。"

"不行。"

"为什么？"

‘We can’t afford it,’ she hisses.

I let go of her hand and catch up with my sister and Patrick, who are playing in the elevators. We like to go into the elevators and push all the buttons. Go all the way up. Go all the way down. Occasionally, we get out on a floor we aren’t supposed to be on and run up and down the corridors.

It doesn’t bother me that we are poor. I’ve found a way to combat it – I steal from other children. When I get kicked out of class for misbehaving, which is often, I rifle through the school bags of all the other kids and steal their lunch money, as well as anything else I like.

When I finally get caught, I’m terrified Yee Mah will burn off my tongue like she’s always threatening. Instead, my mother sits me down at the dining-room table. She is very quiet. She puts her hand on my hand and says, ‘What do other children have that you don’t?’

If I were smarter, I would hear her heart breaking.

‘Erasers with Snow White on them,’ I say without hesitating.

‘All right,’ says my mother. ‘Go to your room.’

As I leave, I see her bow her head, as if she’s carrying a great burden. It’s shame. And she’s not ashamed of me, she’s ashamed of herself. For failing to teach me the difference between right and wrong. For failing to make me feel like I am warm and safe and don’t need to steal from other kids to make up for everything I don’t have.

“我们买不起。”她小声说。

我放开了她去找妹妹和派特里克，他们在电梯里玩闹。我们喜欢按下电梯里的所有按钮。上到顶楼，再到底楼。有时我们会去到其他楼层，在走廊里跑来跑去。

贫穷并没有影响到我。我找到了一种对抗的办法——从别的小孩那里偷。我常常因为表现不好被老师从教室赶出去，这时我就会去翻别人的书包，偷他们的午饭钱和其他一切我看中的东西。

最后被逮住的时候，我很害怕姨妈会把我的舌头烧掉，就像她一直威胁的那样。然而，妈妈却让我坐在饭桌旁。静静地，她把手放在我手上，问我：“别人有什么东西是你没有的？”

如果我懂事一点，就能听到她心碎的声音。

“上面有白雪公主的橡皮，”我脱口而出。

“好吧，”她说，“回房间去吧。”

我走开的时候，看见她深深地埋着头，仿佛背着沉重的负担。是羞耻。她不是因为我感到羞耻，而是为她自己。她没能教会我对与错。她没能让我感到安全温暖，没能告诉我并不需要从别处偷窃，来弥补自己的缺失。

The next day, the Snow White erasers are on the dining-room table. I don't even want them.

*

When I finally ring my mother to tell her my HSC score, she sounds delighted.

'You got 88.8? Very lucky number. You will be rich for sure.'

There is an odd note in her voice, one of momentary regret. That this isn't the moment when I exceed all her expectations.

'Very rich,' she says again, as if to comfort herself with an ancient Confucian wisdom: *Just think how it could have been worse.*

As for me, I've given up hoping she will tell me she is proud. I no longer begrudge my friends their mothers who overflow with constant affirmation and nurturing encouragement. When she criticises me with all the sensitivity of a Japanese scientist harpooning a whale, and I feel the slow-burning resentment building to rage, I bite my slippery tongue.

Instead, I fossick through my memory for one of my earliest recollections.

My mother is in the kitchen. Steam rises from the wok and oil spatters over her hands. There is a delicious smell of soy sauce, garlic and chicken. She tips the contents of the wok into a dish, then spoons out chicken wings onto beds of rice. Chicken wings are the cheapest part of a chicken. She has bought all her salary can afford.

On my sister's plate there are two. On mine there are two. On hers, there is

第二天，饭桌上放着一个白雪公主橡皮。但我根本不要。

*

当我终于打电话告诉妈妈我的高中毕业考试成绩时。她听起来很高兴。

“你得了88.8分？很吉利的数字。你以后肯定会发财的。”

她的声音听起来有些异样，有着一闪而过的遗憾。此刻我并没有超越她的期望值。

“发大财。”她重复道，似乎在用古老的儒家智慧来安慰自己：知足常乐。

我已经不再期待能够听见她为我感到骄傲，我不再羡慕朋友们，他们的妈妈总是怀着爱意和鼓励。而我妈妈像日本科学家捕杀鲸鱼一般，极其敏锐地批评我。我感到内心的忿恨升温至愤怒，我闭住了我的快嘴。

相反，我在记忆的最深处搜寻。

母亲在厨房里。锅里蒸汽腾腾，油星溅到了她的手上。空气里混合着酱油、大蒜和鸡肉的香味。她把炒锅里的菜倒进盘子，把鸡翅昏到饭上。鸡翅是鸡身上最便宜的部分。她用上了全部薪水，也只能买得起这些。

妹妹的盘子里有两块鸡翅，我

only one.

的盘子里也有两块。她的盘子里，
只有一块。

And in her sacrifice, I see love.

在她的牺牲里，我看到了爱。

Creative Marginal Voices as a Resource to Translate Non-Standard Linguistic Varieties – an Italian Translation of Maxine Beneba Clarke’s *David*

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David is the first short story in the book *Foreign Soil* by Maxine Beneba Clarke (2014). This collection of short stories was awarded the Victorian Premier’s Unpublished Manuscript Award in 2013 and was published the following year by Hachette Australia. This was the first prose work by the Afro-Caribbean Australian writer and slam poet to be published after two collections of poems. *Foreign Soil* narrates the stories of a series of disenfranchised people of colour spanning across time and space, from Jamaica to the United Kingdom and Australia. *David* is the story of a seven-year-old Sudanese boy in love with his patchwork bike and of the encounter of two Sudanese women in the suburb of Footscray, in western Melbourne: a young Sudanese-Australian single mother (Little Sister), and an older refugee mother (Asha) who lost her husband and son David during the war in Darfur. The two women connect over the bicycle that Little Sister has just bought for herself, which reminds Asha of her dead son’s passion for riding.

Two main voices, Little Sister’s and Asha’s, alternate in the source text (ST), narrating the encounter from their own perspectives and recounting stories about their past. A third voice, which is rendered graphically with the use of italics, is also present in the ST. The first time it appears, this voice is introduced by Little Sister uttering: “Hadn’t seen Ahmed’s mum since forever [...] I knew what she would have been saying about me, though. I could hear her voice like she was standing right next to me [...]” (2). From this and other contextual clues, we infer that this is the voice of the mother of Little Sister’s former boyfriend Ahmed, as imagined by Little Sister. More broadly, the mother-in-law’s voice represents the perspective of the Sudanese adults in the community.

All three voices show non-standard uses of English. Specifically, Little Sister uses a variety of English that we can define as Australian urban youth vernacular, characterized by a highly colloquial register, with lexical choices and syntactic constructions typical of youth language, such as phrases with implicit pronouns “felt like I was hovering above the wet tar” (Clarke 15); slang expressions “going mental” (Clarke 2) and profanities “she was fuck-off beautiful” (Clarke 1), “jealous shit” (Clarke 3) and “sure fucken thing” (Clarke 3). Asha’s and the mother-in-law’s language, on the other hand, marks them as non-native English speakers. Their language is recognizable by the non-standard use of grammar with the frequent lack of the “s” in the third person singular of verbs “she remind me” (Clarke 4), the occasional lack of the same suffix to form the plural of nouns “two year ago” (6), as well as the use of ungrammatical verb forms “I don’t even knowing” (Clarke 4) and superlatives “better more good” (Clarke 4). The English spoken by Asha and Ahmed’s mother also mirrors some characteristics of the Arabic language, the official language of Sudan since its independence in 1956 and the main language of the education system in the country since the 1960s (Musgrave and Hajek). Among these, the absence of the verb “to be” in the present tense “they so disrespectful” (Clarke 5), “where your little ones?” (Clarke 7), “you so funny” (Clarke 9) and the repetition of the subject pronoun after the grammatical subject “this young woman, she walking down Barkly Street” (Clarke 4).

Clarke's use of non-standard language represented the main challenge for the translation of this short story into Italian. In recent decades, the difficulties linked to the rendition of non-standard linguistic varieties have attracted increasing consideration in the field of translation studies (see for example Perteghella 2002, Wu and Chang 2008, Cavagnoli 2010, Federici 2011, Toury 2012, Di Biase 2015). Many studies have identified the tendency of translated texts (TTs) to standardise the language featured in the STs. Toury refers to this tendency as the "law of growing standardisation" (303). According to his model, "textual relations obtaining in the original are often modified, sometimes to the point of being totally ignored in favour of [more] habitual options offered by a target repertoire" (Toury 304). In translating this story, I was careful to avoid the tendency towards standardization and to resist "fluency" (Venuti 1995) with translation strategies aimed at preserving Clarke's creative use of non-standard language rather than making the TT smooth and unproblematic for the Italian target audience.

This decision to maintain the visibility of non-standard language was made necessary considering the author's explicit statement about her language choices, contained in the book's epigraph: "Let no one be fooled by the fact that we may write in English, for we intend to do unheard of things with it" (Achebe 50). By choosing to quote these famous words by Nigerian author Chinua Achebe, Clarke highlights her intention to reclaim the English language, to take this language and its colonial history and subvert it from within, thus metonymically doing the same to the power structures it represents. In the stories contained in *Foreign Soil*, Clarke bends the grammatical and phonetical rules of English in order to make it suitable to express the voice of those who are traditionally excluded or marginalised. The non-standard use of grammar in *David* exposes the readers to the voice of a refugee who speaks English as a second language, while another short story in the collection, *Harlem Jones*, brings to life the voice of a Jamaican woman living in England by representing the phonetics of Jamaican patois on the page: "No chile-a mine gwan threaten a woman! Ye nat readin de news? Ye wan end up like dat udda black boy dem kill?" (Clarke 20). Clarke's language allows these characters and their way of communicating to be visible and not to be conformed to the dominant standards. It was therefore necessary to find a translation strategy that could maintain a similar effect in the TT, and standardization was decidedly not an adequate one. Indeed, "the homogenous language of the TT would undermine the ST's ability to give voice to minority groups [and] to subvert linguistically the institutional imposition of common language" (Di Biase 46-47).

Italian literary translator Franca Cavagnoli's work (2010) on the translation into Italian of the hybrid languages of postcolonial literature, creole, and pidgin constituted a useful starting point to reflect on the strategy to adopt for the translation of *David*. I implemented her suggestion to deviate from the norms of written Italian by using markers of orality, such as employing the verb tense *indicativo imperfetto* to replace *congiuntivo*. For instance, I translated the sentence "I could hear her voice like she was standing right next to me" (Clarke 2), where the ST also avoids the subjunctive mood, as "Sentivo la sua voce come se stava proprio lì di fianco". I also employed syntactic dislocations typical of oral Italian, placing the predicate in thematic position like in the following example: "Erano assurdi, alcuni degli aggeggi che Ahmed e gli altri costruivano" ("They were crazy, some of the contraptions Ahmed and them built" [Clarke 1-2]).

This translation strategy alone, however, did not allow me to differentiate between the various non-standard varieties used in the ST, which was in fact necessary

because it is precisely through these differences that readers can identify the shift between the voices who alternate in Clarke's short story. Taking this into consideration, I decided to adopt a "replacement" strategy, where "geographically, socioeconomically, culturally, stereotypically, or emotionally" (Epstein 203) related non-standard varieties of the target language are used to translate the non-standard varieties in the ST (Smalley 195). This translation strategy is close to the "parallel dialect translation" identified by Perteghella as one of the five strategies for the transposition of dialect and slang (in Perteghella's case in the context of theatre translation). Perteghella defines this strategy as the translation of "a dialect or a slang into that of another specific target language, usually one that has similar connotations and occupies an analogous position in the target linguistic system" (50). Although choosing different "replacement" varieties made possible to distinguish the different voices in the ST, this strategy was still problematic, in that, as Berman pointed out,

[...] a vernacular clings tightly to its soil and completely resists any direct translating into another vernacular. *Translation can only occur between 'cultivated' languages.* An exoticization that turns the foreign from abroad into the foreign at home winds up merely ridiculing the original.

(Berman 250, italics in original)

The challenge was complex because, on the one hand, I needed to find distinct non-standard varieties to give voice to the different characters in *David*, to recreate their "voice-print" (Federici 8). On the other hand, I had to be cautious not to localise them within an Italian or regional context, and not to ridicule them. This was made even more problematic by the fact that, until recently, Italian dialects – linguistic varieties highly attached to specific localities – "played both the role of everyday language and local slang(s) for most people", and they continue to influence contemporary Italian slang (Gobetti iv).

Discussing her translation into Italian of Alice Pung's *Unpolished Gem*, Adele D'Arcangelo defines Pung's English as a "language 'on the move', able to permeate and capture other tongues' influences" (95). D'Arcangelo also identifies an element of "creative estrangement" (96) in Pung's writing. The code-switching between different varieties of English introduces a conspicuous element of foreignness in Pung's work, but this effect is intended, and it is in fact in this "estrangement" that lies the creative nature of the text. These characteristics, I argue, can also be found in Clarke's *Foreign Soil*. The need to maintain the element of "creative estrangement" persuaded me to move away from everyday orality and to look for Italian literary and artistic texts (literature and song lyrics) with similar traits, that is where marginal voices permeates the Italian language with foreign influences. These texts were to be used as a source of lexical and grammatical inspiration to prevent the characters in *David* from being standardised once they adopted Italian voices. The idea was not to produce a smooth translation ready for publication, rather to conduct an experiment to see whether non-standard languages can indeed resist standardization in Italian TTs.

In order to translate Little Sister's urban youth vernacular, I drew on the language of Italian rap lyrics as my "replacement" vernacular. This choice was informed by studies on Hip Hop culture and Hip Hop Language (HHL) proving that Hip Hop a) is rooted in African American linguistic practices but it "is adapted and transformed by various racial and ethnic groups inside and outside the United States" (Alim 3); b) "plays a decisive role in the creation and formation of multiethnolectal

urban speech styles” (Cutler and Røyneland 140); c) “has become a vehicle for global youth affiliations” (Mitchell 2). The language of Australian urban youth of migrant background like Little Sister and that of Italian rappers (most of whom can also be categorized as urban youth) is connected through their shared marginal position within society, and their will to resist hegemonic standardization. Cutler and Røyneland argue that “youth from immigrant backgrounds as well as native-born youth [...] are drawn to hip hop’s oppositional symbolism and use language in ways that challenge hegemonic language ideologies. These ideologies include bias toward an abstract, idealized homogeneous standard language” (140), which is also challenged in Clarke’s collection of stories.

The language of rap lyrics represents an incredibly useful lexical reservoir from which we can tap for the translation of urban youth vernacular in literature. Examples of terminology retrieved from Italian rap lyrics to translate youth vernacular in the ST are: *le popolari*⁷ (short for *le case popolari*, used for “commission tower”; “flats”; and “[Fitzroy] Estate”); *beccarsi*⁸ (used for “to hang with”); *i raga* (used for “the boys”)⁹; *flippare di brutto*¹⁰ (used for “to go mental”), *tipo* (used for “boyfriend” and “man”; and with the separate meaning of “kind of” and “like”), *spaccare*¹¹ (used for “to be awesome”); *andare a manetta*¹² (used for “to shoot and shine”), *fare strano*¹³ (used for “to feel awkward”), and *da paura*¹⁴ (used for “killer [suspension]”). In selecting the lyrics, I was careful to choose rappers from different Italian regions (e.g. Ensi from Turin; Sfera Ebbasta and Lazza from Milan; Joe Cassano from Bologna; TruceKlan and Flaminio Maphia from Rome; Capo Plaza from Salerno; Stokka and Madbuddy from Palermo) in order not to tie Little Sister’s language in the TT to a specific geographic location.

Before translating Asha’s voice, I strived to identify the languages that could have influenced her way of speaking English, in the attempt to replicate some of the characteristics of these languages in the TT. As discussed above, Arabic was identified as one of these languages. I therefore decided to take Italian literary texts featuring Arabic-speaking characters as reference. I found works by writers of migrant origin to be an especially valuable resource for this task because of their propensity to give voice to people with different linguistic backgrounds. In particular, I took as a model a dialogue from Amara Lakhous’s 2010 novel *Divorzio all’Islamica a Viale Marconi* (81-82), from which I borrowed the following grammatical elements used by Arabic speakers in Italian: lack of verb “to be” in the present tense; lack of auxiliary verbs in

⁷ “Mi chiamo Jari, vengo dalle *popolari*”, Ensi, “Non Rifarlo a Casa” (2015); “Siam partiti dalle *popolari*”, Sfera Ebbasta, “XNX” (2018).

⁸ “Ci vediamo qui, *ci becchiamo* lì”, Achille Lauro, “A Casa De Sandro” (2017); “Fra’ ci *becchiamo* allora”, Capo Plaza, “Nisida” (2016)

⁹ “Perché *i raga* in giro come nelle Banlieue, ooh / Fumano juen come se fosse uno sport”, Vale pain, “Banlieue” (2019). “Raga” also appears in lyrics in the alternative pronunciation “rega”: “Jonny Jab sonda l’onda della jam / E con *i rega* fionda rime quinto dan”, Joe Cassano, “Dio Lodato Per Sta Chance” (1999).

¹⁰ “Hai toppato se pensi che sto mc sia *flippato*”, Joe Cassano, “Dio Lodato Per Sta Chance” (1999); “Ci siamo già fatti sì, fatti *di brutto*”, Madman, “Il Momento” (2016).

¹¹ “Pompa su il volume di ogni suono che ti *spacca*”, Stokka & Madbuddy, “Ghettoblaster” (2004).

¹² “Ma ora faranno il giro, *a manetta*”, TruceKlan, “Già Vecchi” (2008); “Lazzino parte *a manetta* come i vecchi tempi”, Lazza, “Fresh Freestyle” (2012).

¹³ “Pure se *fa strano* / Sorrido so perché so che oggi non ti chiamerò”, Neffa, “Aspettando il Sole” (1996); “Mi *fa strano* il marcio dentro l’uomo”, Raige, “Intro” (2006).

¹⁴ “Oggi si presume che è *da paura*”, Flaminio Maphia, “Da Paura” (2005); “Sto sempre *da paura* e non mi butti giù”, Duke Montana, “A Modo Mio” (2016).

the indicative present perfect (*passato prossimo*); genitive constructions expressed through construct state with no prepositions.

The same dialogue from Lakhous's *Divorzio* was also used as a model to translate the passages in italics, where readers hear Little Sister imagining her former boyfriend's mother complaining about young people's disrespect for traditional customs and lack of family values. In order to distinguish Asha's voice from the mother-in-law's voice, I adopted a phonetic substitution that roughly mimics the Arabic accent, also inspired by the dialogue from Lakhous's *Divorzio*. In this dialogue, the Italian-Algerian author provides an example of how to transcribe the accent of Arabic speakers (Egyptians, in his case) in Italian. Lakhous replaces the letter "p" with "b", the letter "o" with "u", the letter "e" with "i" and sometimes the letter "i" with "e" (for example, the suffix "ri-" becomes "re-").

There are also instances of anaptyxis (the word *preghiera* becomes *bereghiera* with the addition of a vowel sound), and other graphic alterations to show, for example, the difficulties of non-native speakers of Italian to pronounce the consonant cluster "gl-". While orthographic representation of non-standard language is "a way of showing readers how words are pronounced, which will allow them to hear the dialect in their heads as they read" (Epstein 206), it also carries the risk of ridiculing the characters, particularly when dealing with the representation of ethnic minorities whose use of language has been racialized. For this reason, I limited phonetic substitution to the passages where Little Sister imagines Ahmed's mother speaking, and mocks her "whingeing and nagging" (5). Much like the short dialogue in *Divorzio*, these passages have a caricaturing intent, which is reinforced by the orthographic representation of the way Little Sisters imagines the woman to speak. No phonetic substitution was used for the translation of Asha's voice, where readers are exposed to Asha's traumatic memories and thoughts. This choice aimed to preserve the personal and dramatic tone of these sections.

It was difficult to determine with certainty which languages other than Arabic might have influenced the language spoken by these two characters. Ethnologue lists 134 different languages spoken in Sudan (12 modern languages are spoken in the Darfur region alone) and "the linguistic diversity of Sudan is reflected, at least in part, in the emigrant community in Melbourne" (Musgrave and Hajek 2). Borland and Mphande (2006) identified Fur, one of the languages of Darfur, among the fifteen Sudanese languages present in Melbourne. However, the linguistic situation of refugees from Darfur living in Melbourne is still to be investigated (Musgrave and Hajek). In personal communication, Sudanese Arabic specialist and principal owner of Arabic Communication Experts, Sam Berner, indicated that it is improbable that the author would have carried out in-depth research into the linguistic background of Darfur refugees in Australia before writing this short story. Some expressions she attributes to the Sudanese characters do not in fact sound plausible: 'to walk *down* the street' (4) is too idiomatic (in Arabic, one would say 'to walk *in* the street'); Ahmed's mother complains that young people "[d]o not look us in the eye" (5), but to look somebody in the eye is considered disrespectful in Sudanese culture. Ahmed's mother would have rather lamented that children no longer bow their heads in front of elders. Likewise, what Clarke (9) calls "fiori tree" (*Grewia tenax* (Forssk.) Fiori is commonly referred to as "gudeim" in Sudanese Arabic (Gebauer et al; Sati and Ahmed)¹⁵. Faced with the

¹⁵ I decided to translate "fiori tree" as "pianta di gudeim" to avoid confusion since the word 'fiori' means 'flowers' in Italian (the direct translation would have sounded like "flower tree"). The use of the

impossibility of determining exactly which other linguistic influences penetrated Asha's and Ahmed's mother's English, I decided to limit myself to characterise their voices as influenced by the Arabic language and as non-native; that is, with some of the typical errors of someone who learnt the language in their adult years. In Italian, this equates, for example, to the avoidance of more complex verb tenses (indicative replaces subjunctive and conditional); ungrammatical use of prepositions; and issues with adjective-noun agreement (for example, "qualche" is often used with plural nouns instead of singular nouns).

While translating, great attention was devoted to maintaining the rhythm and the alliterations that are present in the ST, an aspect that I imagine would be very important for Clarke as a slam poet, who is used to reciting her compositions. For example, for "bright red roar" (13), the repetition of the "r" sound is maintained in the translation "ruggito rosso brillante". Where it was not possible to maintain the same sound, like in "alloy Harley handlebars" (Clarke 1), I chose to repeat another sound ("manubrio curvo cromato"), even when this meant a slight change in the meaning: "cromato" is not the exact translation of "alloy", which would be "in lega", however it is more idiomatic and it maintains the alliteration. The choice of the historical present tense to translate the simple past used by Little Sister in the narration is also motivated by the need to maintain a concise rhythm in the TT. As a compound tense, *passato prossimo* slows down the narrative rhythm, especially in sentences with multiple verbs, on the other hand, *passato remoto* is not suitable for the colloquial register used by Little Sister.

The presence of local references in the text (both from Sudan and Australia) also posed challenges during the translation process. My choice was to leave the local references unaltered and unexplained. For example, I do not explain that Coles is an Australian supermarket chain nor do I describe what kind of dish "aseeda" is, although I am aware that an Italian audience will probably not be familiar with these references. This choice is aligned with my decision to avoid assimilation. My translation choices, although they may appear conspicuous and make the translator's hand "visible", aim not to domesticate the text for the reader.

The translation of Clarke's short story *David* provides the opportunity to reflect on the ongoing challenges to translate non-standard linguistic varieties into Italian. No single solution exists as each variety, and each character's idiolect, has its own peculiarities that need to be considered during the translation process. The difficulties linked to the rendition of these varieties should not lead towards standardization, as this would eliminate important differences and nuances included in the ST, resulting in a "flattened" TT (Bonaffini 279). Despite the risks that come with the replacement strategy, some studies (Wekker and Wekker; Smalley) demonstrate that "when the conditions are right, using replacement can produce TT effects comparable to those in the ST" (Smalley 195). In the case of *David*, I believe that replacing non-standard varieties of English, such as the vernacular spoken by urban youth of migrant background and the accented variety of African refugees, with non-standard varieties of Italian spoken by similarly marginalised groups allowed me to at least get closer to recreating the overall effect of the ST.

Sudanese Arabic term avoids the risk of domestication, allowing to situate the flora in the story within an African context.

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David
By
Maxine Beneba Clarke

David
Maxine Beneba Clarke
Traduzione di
Margherita Angelucci

SHE HAD A SHINY CHERRY-RED FRAME, SCOOPED ALLOY HARLEY handlebars and sleek metal pedals. Her wire basket-carrier was fitted with a double-handled cane lift-out. If I'd learned anything from Ahmed before we split (and Lord knew there wasn't much I'd got from him over the few years we were together), it was how to spot a good set of wheels. And this pushbike, she was fuck-off beautiful. The jumble of wheels, frames, spokes and assorted handlebars crowded around her in the window display at Ted's Cycles made me think of the bike dump round back of the Fitzzy commission tower.

Before we had Nile, Ahmed and I used to hang at the bike dump with the boys. I'd watch them all piecing together patchwork bikes from throw-outs we'd scabbed off kerbs or pulled out of skips. They were crazy, some of those contraptions Ahmed and them built: tiny little frames attached to oversized backward-mounted handlebars and gigantic heavy-tread wheels. Insanity in motion. Ahmed's mum was always going mental about him getting chain grease over his school clothes.

Hadn't seen Ahmed's mum since forever. Not since I fucked off with Nile and got my own council place. I knew what she would have been saying about me, though. I could hear her voice like she was standing right next to me outside the bike-shop window. *These children, born in this country, they think they can behave like the Australian children. They have no idea about the tradition and respect. In Sudan, a good wife knew how to keep her husband, and a good mother would not leave. My son and my*

ERA ROSSO CILIEGIA FIAMMANTE, CON UN MANUBRIO CURVO CROMATO COME UN'HARLEY e pedali di metallo lucidi. Aveva un cestino con i manici in vimini che si tirava fuori da un porta-cestino in ferro. Se Ahmed mi aveva insegnato qualcosa prima di mollarci (e Dio sa che non c'ho guadagnato un granché dagli anni in cui siamo stati insieme) era stato come riconoscere una bella bici. E questa bicicletta, cazzo se era bella. L'accozzaglia di ruote, telai, raggi e manubri vari ammassata intorno a lei nella vetrina di Ted's Cycles mi faceva venire in mente la discarica di biciclette dietro alle popolari di Fitzzy.

Prima di avere Nile, io e Ahmed ci beccavamo sempre con i raga alla discarica di biciclette. Li guardavo mettere insieme bici improvvisate dai pezzi che raccattavamo sui marciapiedi o tiravamo fuori dai cassoni dei rifiuti. Erano assurdi, alcuni degli aggeggi che Ahmed e gli altri costruivano: telai minuscoli attaccati a mega manubri montati al contrario e ruote giganti da fuoristrada. Follia su due ruote. La mamma di Ahmed flippava sempre di brutto per il grasso della catena sulla divisa di scuola.

Era da un secolo che non vedevo la mamma di Ahmed. Da quando mi ero levata dalle palle con Nile e mi ero beccata una casa popolare tutta mia. Però immaginavo quello che diceva su di me. Sentivo la sua voce come se stava proprio lì di fianco davanti alla vetrina del negozio di biciclette. *Questi ragazzi, nati in questo baise, binsano che loro bossano cumbortare come ragazzi australiani. Non hanno idia cosa vuole dire tradizione e risbitto. In Sudan, brava molie sapeva come tenere suo marito e brava madre*

grandson's mother – did you know they did not even get marry? Not even marry!

I shifted my backpack on my shoulders, leaned in for a closer look. *Barkly Star*, read the shiny bronze sticker across her body. Strapped to the bike's back rack was an orange and blue baby seat: reality, barging right on fucking in.

Black clouds were on the move as I wheeled her out of the shop and onto Barkly Street – the fuck-awful Melbourne rain about to come through. I pulled up the hood of my jumper, the one I nicked from Footscray Coles after they fired me, the winter before Nile was due. Snot-coloured, Ahmed had reckoned when I got back to the flats with it. Jealous shit. I was always better at swiping stuff than him.

I'd had no car ever since Ahmed and me split, and Nile rode too fast on his trike for me to keep up walking beside him. I'd end up running along behind, yelling at him to wait up. Community Services were on my back then too, about weekly check-ins. Those wheels were gonna change my life, I knew it. Sure fucken thing. I spent most of my dole money buying that beauty, but the rent was already way behind. It was gonna be a fortnight of porridge and potatoes, but half the time I cooked other stuff Nile wouldn't look at it anyway.

These children, born in this country, do you think they feed their babies the aseeda for breakfast? Do they drop it on the little one's tongue to show them where is it they come from? Do you think they have learned to cook shorba soup? I tell you: no! They feeding them all kinds of rubbish. McDonald's, even. They spit on their grandmothers' ways. They spit in our bowls, in our kitchens.

non andava via. Mio filio e madre mio nibote... sabite che non si hanno nimmemo sbusati? Nimmemo sbusati!

Mi sistemo lo zaino sulle spalle e mi avvicino per vedere meglio. Sulla canna della bici c'è un adesivo luccicante color bronzo con scritto *Barkly Star*. Montato sul portapacchi, un seggiolino blu e arancione: la realtà, che fa il cazzo di capolino.

Nuvoloni neri si avvicinano mentre spingo la bicicletta fuori dal negozio e su per Barkly Street – la solita pioggia di merda di Melbourne sta per arrivare. Mi tiro su il cappuccio della felpa, quella che avevo fregato da Coles a Footscray quando mi avevano licenziata l'inverno prima che era nato Nile. Color moccio, aveva detto Ahmed quando ero tornata alle popolari. Invidioso di merda. Ero sempre stata meglio di lui a fottere la roba.

Da quando io e Ahmed ci eravamo mollati, non avevo più avuto una macchina e Nile pedalava troppo in fretta sul triciclo per riuscire a stargli dietro a piedi. Finivo per corrergli appresso, urlandogli di aspettare. Anche i servizi sociali mi stavano addosso in quel periodo, con controlli tutte le settimane. Quella bici mi avrebbe svoltato la vita, me lo sentivo. Di sicuro, cazzo. Avevo speso quasi tutti i soldi del sussidio per comprare quella figata, tanto con l'affitto ero già in ritardo di brutto. Sarebbero state due settimane a porridge e patate, ma comunque metà delle volte che cucinavo altra roba Nile manco la toccava.

Questi ragazzi, nati in questo baise, binsate che danno mangiare asida a loro fili bir colazione? La mettono su lingua bambini bir fare cabire da dove loro vengono? Binsate che loro imbarato fare shorba? Io dico voi: no! Li danno mangiare tutti tipi schifizze. Birfino Mc Donald. Sbutano su usanze loro nonne. Sbutano su nostri biatti, su nostre cucine.

Wheeling the new bike up Barkly Street I noticed a woman, standing on the footpath, gawking. She was the colour of roasted coffee beans, a shade darker than me, wearing black from headscarf to shoes, carrying a string grocery bag. She cleared her throat, started on me. 'Little Sister, is that your bike?'

This young woman, she walking down Barkly Street with that red bike, brand new and for herself even though she look like she Sudanese and a grown mother too. Straight away, she remind me back of David. She remembering David to me.

Way back when things were better more good, before the trouble in my Sudan, a man in the village, Masud, who used to being a mechanical engineer, he make my boys a bike. With own two hands, he builds it. I don't even knowing how he make it from scrap of metal around that place, tin cans even, but he did. And my little David, seven then, he look at that bike like he never saw a more beautiful thing. His brothers were too small to ride without adult helping, but David always on that bike. He riding it from one end of village to other one, poking his little-boy nose in about everything that going on.

Little David riding that bike so much that Masud tell him about country call France, where is very long bike race which will make you famous if you win. Long bike ride is call the Tour de France because it goes all over that country. After the day Masud told David about the famous bike race, every time David passes him on that bike Masud calls out to him. 'Here come David, on his Tour of Sudan!' he call.

My David, he would grow the biggest smile ever you saw when Masud say that.

Mentre cammino con la bicicletta nuova su per Barkly Street, noto una donna, in piedi sul marciapiedi, che mi fissa. È del colore dei chicchi di caffè tostati, una tonalità più scura di me, vestita di nero dal velo in testa alle scarpe ai piedi, con una borsa della spesa di corda attaccata al braccio. Si schiarisce la voce e mi fa: "Sorellina, è tua bici quella?"

Questa ragazza, cammina per Barkly Street con quella bicicletta rossa, tutta nuova e tutta per lei, anche se lei sembra sudanese e pure madre famiglia. Subito subito, lei fa pensare David. Lei ricorda David a me.

Tanto tempo fa, quando le cose andavano più meglio, prima di guai in mio Sudan, un uomo in villaggio, Masud, che faceva ingegnere meccanico, fa bicicletta a miei figli. La costruisce con sue mani. Non so neanche come lui fatta da pezzi metallo trovati in giro, perfino lattine, ma lui fatta. E mio piccolo David, sette anni, guarda quella bici come se mai visto cosa più bella. Suoi fratelli erano troppo piccoli per pedalare senza aiuto di adulti, ma David sempre su quella bici. Pedala da parte all'altra di villaggio, ficcando suo piccolo naso in tutto che succede.

Piccolo David va così tanto su quella bici che Masud racconta lui di paese che si chiama Francia, dove lunga corsa biciclette che diventi famoso se vinci. Lunga corsa biciclette si chiama Tour de France perché va in giro dappertutto in quel paese. Da giorno che Masud detto a David di famosa corsa biciclette, tutte volte che David passa davanti lui in bici, Masud dice a lui: "Ecco David in suo Giro di Sudan", dice.

Mio David faceva il sorriso più grande mai visto quando Masud dice così.

‘One day, David,’ Masud say, carrying on to David to make him all proud and smiling. ‘One day you will be so famous because of bike riding that they will name after you a beautiful bike.’

David so dreamy he believe that might come true.

‘Little Sister, is that your bike?’ the woman said again. She was my mother’s age and looked like a Sudanese too, so I knew nothing I said was gonna be the right thing. Anyway, it wasn’t really a question, just a kind of judgement, like when Mum found out I was knocked up; she never even looked up from her maize porridge. Mum never liked Ahmed. Liked him less than his mum liked me. Probably that was the reason we were ever together. To piss them the fuck off with all their whingeing and nagging.

I ignored the woman, made myself busy fitting my backpack into the bike basket, looked down at the weed-filled cracks in the pavement, at the shiny silver bike stand – anywhere but at her.

These children that born here in this country, they so disrespectful. They not even address us elders properly. Do not look us in the eye. Back in Sudan, you remember, we used to say Auntie and Uncle. We knew how to speak to one another with proper dignity. We would never ignore Auntie on the street.

‘It is my bike, Auntie. Yes.’

The woman touched the back of the baby seat, looked me up and down. ‘What will your husband think, when he sees?’

I wanted to laugh and say, ‘What husband? Who even cares? My boyfriend was no good, so I left him. Now he’s off with some slag down the Fitzroy Estate. But seriously, she can

“Un giorno”, dice ancora Masud a David per vedere lui tutto orgoglioso e sorridente, “Un giorno sarai ciclista così famoso che faranno bellissima bici con tuo nome”.

David così sognatore che crede si avvera.

“Sorellina, è tua bici quella?” mi fa ancora la donna. Aveva l’età di mia madre e sembrava anche lei sudanese, quindi sapevo che potevo dire qualsiasi cosa e non sarebbe stata la cosa giusta. La sua non era nemmeno una domanda, era più tipo un giudizio, come quando mamma aveva scoperto che ero incinta, non aveva nemmeno alzato gli occhi dal porridge di mais. A mamma non era mai piaciuto Ahmed. Gli piaceva meno di quanto a sua mamma piacevo io. Forse era proprio quello il motivo per cui ci eravamo messi insieme. Per rompergli il cazzo con tutte le loro lagne e rotture di coglioni.

Ignoro la donna e mi metto a sistemare lo zaino nel cestino della bicicletta, fisso le crepe piene di erbacce sul marciapiede, la rastrelliera di metallo argentato – guardo dappertutto tranne che verso di lei.

Questi ragazzi, nati in questo baise, non hanno risbitto. Non parlano con risbitto a noi anziani. Non guardano noi in occhi. Quando eravamo in Sudan, voi ricordate, semble dicevamo Zia e Zio. Sabivamo come parlare con li altri con dignità che ci vuole. Mai ignoravamo una Zia bir strada.

“Sì, Zia. È la mia bici”.

La donna tocca il seggiolino e mi squadra dalla testa ai piedi: “Cosa dice tuo marito quando lui vede?”

Volevo mettermi a ridere e dire: “Quale marito? Chi se ne frega? Il mio tipo era uno sfigato e l’ho mollato. Adesso sta con qualche troietta giù alle popolari di Fitzroy. Ma può tenerse lo, davvero, quella povera disperata! È da

have him, bless the desperate thing! I've wanted a bike like this ever since I was six. So please, lady, hands off and back away from my childhood dream.'

You children, you have no respect, no manners. When you have lived long as we have, you will realise everything we said, it is for your own good. You should be show us respect, like real African children. You may have been born in this country, but do not forget where is it you came from.

I smiled sweetly. 'Oh, my husband won't mind, Auntie. After all, for better or worse, he has vowed to love me.'

The woman sucked her yellowing teeth, adjusted her headscarf, did that one-eyebrow raised thing at me. 'You don't have a husband. Do you?'

We had been thinking about the army would come and destroy the village, since they took my husband Daud e his friend Samuel two years ago. But somehow, they leave us alone. Before, when we thought the Janjaweed must be about to come and burn our houses like they did to many others, we were always ready with bundles of food and clothes, but after years pass, we were thinking they don't care about us anymore – maybe they busy in Khartoum or near the border where there are more things to steal.

One day Amina, my friend and the daughter of Masud who build David his bike, she come running, tripping through the village screaming. 'Army! The army coming near! They just now burn the whole of Haskanita to the ground. It is the Janjaweed! We got to run!'

Everybody around us terrified, packing all what they can.

'Quickly, Asha, where your little ones?' Amina say to me. 'Where your boys are? No time to gather, you just bringing water and the boys!'

quando ho sei anni che volevo una bici come questa. Quindi per favore, signora, giù le mani dal mio sogno di infanzia."

Voi ragazzi, voi non avite risbitto, niente buone maniere. Un giorno, quando avite vissuto lungo come noi, vi accorgirite che tutto quello che diciamo è bir vostro bene. Imbarate trattare noi con risbitto, come veri fili africani. Siete nati in questo baise, ma non diminticate da dov'è che vinite.

Le faccio un sorriso: "Oh, a mio marito non dispiacerà, Zia. Dopotutto, ha promesso di amarmi nella buona e nella cattiva sorte."

La donna si succhia i denti giallastri, si sistema il velo e mi fa quella faccia con un sopracciglio alzato: "Tu non ce l'hai un marito, vero?"

Aspettavamo che esercito veniva a distruggere il villaggio da quando loro preso mio marito Daud e suo amico Samuel due anni prima. Ma per qualche motivi, loro lasciato in pace. Prima, quando credevamo i Janjawid stavano per venire dare fuoco a nostre case come loro fatto con tante altre, eravamo sempre pronti con pacchi di roba da mangiare e vestiti, ma anni passati e noi pensato che non importava più di noi – forse loro impegnati a Khartum o vicino a confine dove c'è più cose da rubare.

Un giorno, mia amica Amina, figlia di Masud che fatto bicicletta per David, lei arrivata di corsa, inciampava per villaggio e gridava: "Esercito! Arriva esercito! Loro appena bruciato tutta Haskanita. Sono i Janjawid! Dobbiamo scappare!"

Tutti intorno noi terrorizzati, impacchettano tutto che possono.

"Presto, Asha, dove tuoi figli?" dice Amina. "Dove tuoi bambini? Non c'è tempo fare valigie, porta solo acqua e bambini!"

I am standing very still because is like when they come for my husband and Amina's husband and put them in the jail in Khartoum, like when last I saw my Daud.

Amina grab hold of me and put her hands on my face and hold my face to look at her face. 'Asha, already we lost Daud and Samuel – already we lose our husbands, but that is past now. Where they boys, Asha? Where your children? Or are you also wanting to losing the not-yet-men you give birth to, as well as the man you make them with?'

'Yes, I do have a husband.' Fuck her, for making a judgement on me.

These children, born in this country, they doing the sex and having babies and then not even wanting get marry. Oooh, if we did that back in Sudan, we would be cast out. The government would not give us money to raise our babies. Can you imagine us asking?

Rain was starting to fall now, and the peak-hour traffic along Barkly Street was bumper to bumper. I wheeled my bike quicker along the pavement, but Auntie kept in step with me.

'What does your mother think about the cutting of your hair off like that? Is not like a woman. So short afro. Is she alright about you wearing the jeans and riding around on the street? And where is your baby, Little Sister? The baby who going go on that bike seat? Baby will be missing you!'

They put the babies in the childcare and they let them looked after by strangers. Strangers! When the babies are not even yet out of nappies. Did you ever hear of such thing? Why they having the babies if they do not want to look after?'

'It's okay, Auntie, I can handle myself. Bikes are awesome, though. If you want to, we could go up a side street where no-one will see. I'll hold the back

Io sto ferma immobile perché è come quando loro venuti prendere mio marito e marito Amina e messo loro in prigione a Khartoum, come quando visto per ultima volta mio Daud.

Amina mi prende e mette sue mani su mia faccia e tiene mia faccia di fronte a sua faccia. "Asha, noi già perso Daud e Samuel, già perdiamo nostri mariti, ma quello passato ormai. Dove i ragazzi, Asha? Dove tuoi bambini? O vuoi perdere anche le creature che tu partorito, dopo uomo che fatte loro con te?

"Sì che ce l'ho un marito". Che si fotta, come si permette di giudicarmi?

Questi ragazzi, nati in questo baise, fanno il sesso e fanno i bambini e boi non voliono neanche sbusarsi. Oooh, se noi fatto così in Sudan, cacciavano via. Il governo non dava soldi bir crescere bambini. Immagini noi chiedere soldi?

La pioggia adesso stava iniziando a cadere e le macchine erano incolonnate nel traffico dell'ora di punta su Barkly Street. Allungo il passo spingendo la bici sul marciapiede ma la Zia mi sta dietro.

"Che cosa pensa tua madre di tagliare capelli così? Non è per donna. Afro così corto. Per lei va bene tu metti il jeans e vai bicicletta per strada? E dove tuo bambino, Sorellina? Il bambino seduto su quel seggiolino? Bambino sente mancanza!"

Mettono bambini in asilo e fanno guardare loro da sconosciuti. Sconosciuti! Quando bambini ancora bortano bannolino. Voi mai sentito cosa di genere? Perché fanno bambini se non voliono guardare?

"Tranquilla, Zia, so badare a me stessa. Andare in bici spacca. Se vuoi, possiamo infilarci in una stradina laterale dove non ci vede nessuno, ti tengo da

while you have a ride. Then you can have a proper turn.’ It came out of my mouth before I had the time to rethink.

‘You are wicked,’ Auntie chocked, like she was trying to stop herself from laughing. ‘You so funny, Sister. You Muslim girl?’

‘No.’

She waited for my explanation.

‘What religion you are, Little Sister?’ she nosed again, scratching the outside elbow of her robe, shifting to one side of the footpath so and old Chinese man with a trolley could pass by us.

‘None.’ I shrugged, kept wheeling.

The woman’s eyes opened wide. The whole of Barkly Street seemed to go quiet.

Everything around me silent. I suck the air into my mouth but I cannot talk. Amina, she push into the house and I turn around, following her. Clement and Djoni playing in the house with David.

‘Boys, like I tell you would happen, the time is here, we must leave quietly, quietly,’ I say. I get the water container and quickly roll up some bread and put some blanket in the bag. When we get out of the house, Masud and Amina are waiting, but David, he say he going get his bike, he not leaving without it. Before we can catch him, he run. David run so fast towards the middle of the village where all the children play in the big fiori tree. That is where he left his bike. So fast he run away, his little legs kicking up the dirt.

‘Get Asha and the boys to the edge of village. I will go back to get David,’ Masud tell Amina, and he walk quickly after my boy. Masud was not young man anymore, and he did not run, but fast, fast we walk.

dietro mentre ti fai un giro. Poi puoi provare da sola”. Mi esce così dalla bocca, prima di avere il tempo di ripensarci.

“Sei terribile”, tossicchia la Zia, tipo cercando di trattenersi dal ridere. “Proprio simpatica, Sorella. Tu musulmana?”

“No.”

La Zia rimane in attesa di una spiegazione e poi continua a farsi gli affari miei: “Quale tua religione, Sorellina?” mi chiede, grattandosi il gomito da sopra la manica del vestito e facendosi da parte sul marciapiede per far passare un vecchio cinese con un carrello.

“Nessuna”, le dico con un’alzata di spalle, continuando a spingere la bicicletta.

La donna spalanca gli occhi. Tutta Barkly Street si ammutolisce.

Tutto intorno a me silenzio. Prendo aria in bocca ma non riesco parlare. Amina entra dentro casa e io mi giro, seguo lei. Clement e Djoni giocano in casa con David.

“Bambini, come io spiegato, il momento arrivato, dobbiamo andare zitti zitti”, dico. Prendo tanica acqua, arrotolo velocemente il pane e infilo qualche coperte in borsa. Quando usciamo di casa, Masud e Amina aspettano, ma David dice che va a prendere sua bicicletta, non va via senza quella. Prima che riusciamo a fermare, lui corre via. Corre velocissimo verso centro villaggio dove tutti bambini giocano su grande pianta di gudeim. Lui lasciato sua bici qui. Velocissimo lui corre, sue gambette calciano in aria la terra.

“Porta Asha e i ragazzi in fondo a villaggio, io torno indietro prendere David”, Masud dice Amina, e cammina veloce dietro mio figlio. Masud non era più giovane e non corre, ma veloce, veloce cammina.

Amina pulling my arm. ‘Don’t be stupid, Asha, you got two boys with you and David safe with my father.’

The others in the village are running past quickly, quickly. Amina is pulling me to come away. Clement and Djoni, they crying. Masud disappear into the village and it swallow him up the way two minute ago it swallow little David.

One of the boys is on my back, the other on Amina’s. Nothing else about that walk I am remembering, even now. When we get to edge of the village, we hide in the spot where we can see back a little bit. In the bushes. Some other people from the village there already, quiet, quiet. When we look back, the soldiers are not coming after us. The village is smoking and the soldiers busy smashing, burning. We hear a woman voice then, and she is screaming, screaming. Amina and me put our hands over Djoni and Clement ears.

After some hours, the boys fall asleep in the bushes. Amina hold her hand over my mouth while I crying.

‘Don’t worry. My father keeping your David safe.’

She crying too, and we both know she is not talking about safe in our village, safe in Sudan, safe from militia, safe alive. The village is burning, and David and Masud are gone. I am praying then. Amina praying also because her husband and now her father she has lost. Because of his love for my boy, her father is also gone.

Auntie walked along next to me, talking to herself. ‘This girl! She has baby but no husband. Tsssk. She ride bike and she doesn’t care even who see. She even going take the baby on it. Tsssk. No religion. No God. She cut her hair short and wear the jeans. Tssssssk.’

The rain was getting heavier. I wanted to cut across the rail line and head up Geelong Road to Nile’s

Amina tira me per braccio: “Non fare stupida, Asha, hai due bambini con te e David al sicuro con mio padre”.

Altra gente da villaggio corre veloce, veloce vicino noi. Amina tira me per venire via. Clement e Djoni piangono. Masud sparisce in villaggio che ingoia lui come due minuti prima ingoiato piccolo David.

Tengo uno dei bambini su mia schiena, Amina l’altro. Di quel cammino non ricordo altro, anche adesso: quando arriviamo in fondo a villaggio, nascondiamo in posto dove riusciamo a vedere un po’ indietro, tra la boscaglia. Altre persone da villaggio già lì, zitte zitte. Quando guardiamo indietro, i soldati non rincorrono noi. Il villaggio fuma e i soldati impegnati distruggere e incendiare. Poi sentiamo voce di donna e lei grida, grida. Io e Amina copriamo le orecchie di Djoni e Clement con nostre mani.

Dopo qualche ore, i bambini dormono tra la boscaglia. Amina tiene sua mano sopra mia bocca mentre piango.

“Non ti preoccupare, mio padre tiene tuo David sicuro”.

Anche lei piange e tutte e due sappiamo che non intende sicuro in villaggio, sicuro in Sudan, sicuro da milizie, sicuro vivo. Il villaggio brucia e David e Masud non ci sono più. Allora io prego. Amina anche prega perché lei perso suo marito e ora suo padre. Per suo amore per mio figlio, anche suo padre non c’è più.

La Zia camminava di fianco a me, parlando da sola. “Questa ragazza! Con bambino ma niente marito. Ohi ohi. Va in bicicletta e lei non importa neanche chi vede. Porta anche bambino in bicicletta. Ohi ohi. Niente religione. Niente Dio. Taglia capelli corti e porta il jeans. Ohi ohi ohi ohi.”

La pioggia si stava facendo più intensa. Volevo attraversare la ferrovia e

occasional care, test out if this Barkly Star really did know how to shoot and shine.

‘Auntie, nice meeting you,’ I lied, flicking the halfway-down bike stand right up.

Auntie turned the corner beside me, grabbed my wrist tightly and whispered loudly into my ear, ‘I have a second husband. I very lucky. My first husband, he die back in my country. I have five children now. My husband, he is good man, but he would not like me riding. Here, nobody is watching. Quick. I can try and have a turn just this one time. You hold the bag.’

Hours, hours must be passing. We waiting for dawn light so can creep away from the bushes to another place without walking into dangerous thing. Sudden in the darkness, we hear a rattling. It is coming out of the smoke, louder, louder. Rattling, rattling. The boys still asleep but Amina and me, we are looking, looking through tree to see.

I laughed, sure that she was joking, but Auntie handed me her string grocery bag. She pulled her skirts tight around her legs to stop them getting caught in the chain, eased herself onto the bike and held on to the handlebars.

‘Um... Auntie, have you ever ridden a bike before?’

Auntie shook her head no. The man who’d just passed us with his shopping turned curiously, stopped to watch.

‘I’ll hold the back for you. Are you sure you want to have a go?’

‘Yes. I want to ride it, Little Sister. Thank you. I will have a try.’

It is David. Somebody hear my prayer because that noise, that rattling, rattling, it is David. He riding that bike to me fast, fast. He is pedalling, pedalling.

andare su per Geelong Road fino all’asilo di Nile, vedere se questa Barkly Star avrebbe retto se la sparavo a manetta.

“È stato un piacere conoscerti, Zia” mento, togliendo il cavalletto alla bici che era mezzo giù.

La Zia gira l’angolo standomi accanto, mi afferra per un polso e mi sussurra con forza nell’orecchio: “Ho secondo marito, io molto fortunata. Mio primo marito, lui morto in mio paese. Adesso ho cinque figli. Mio marito bravo uomo ma non piacerebbe vedere me su bicicletta. Qui non vede nessuno. Presto. Posso provare solo per questa volta. Tieni mia borsa.”

Ore, forse passano ore. Aspettiamo l’alba così possiamo spostare da boscaglia ad altro posto senza sbattere contro qualcosa pericoloso. All’improvviso, nel buio sentiamo rumore ferro che sbatte. Viene fuori da fumo, sempre più forte, più forte. Il ferro sbatte e sbatte. I ragazzi dormono ancora ma io e Amina guardiamo, guardiamo tra gli alberi per vedere.

Mi metto a ridere, sicura che stava scherzando, ma la Zia mi passa la borsa della spesa, si tira su la gonna per non farla impigliare nella catena, si accomoda sul sellino e stringe il manubrio.

“Ehm... Zia, sei mai andata in bicicletta?”

La Zia fa cenno di no con la testa. Il tipo che era appena passato con la spesa si gira e si ferma incuriosito a guardare.

“Ti tengo da dietro, sei sicura che vuoi provarci?”

“Sì, vorrei fare giro, Sorellina. Grazie, faccio prova.”

È David. Qualcuno ascolta mie preghiere perché quel rumore, quel ferro che sbatte e sbatte, è David. Pedala verso di me su sua bicicletta, veloce, veloce.

Three men chasing a little bit after him, but he is soon leaving them in the distance. Some small piece of metal fall down off the pedal but that bike with my David on it is going faster, faster. David is almost to where we are hiding, and he is laughing. My David is riding to me, smiling. The metal on that bike, it glinting, glinting in the darkness, like star or something.

Auntie was heavy – not overweight, but it was hard for me to hold her steady on the seat.

‘Hold the handlebars straight,’ I said. ‘Move the front wheel where you want to go, and push the pedals.’

Auntie was zigzagging all over the place, as if she’d never steered anything in her life. It was a struggle to keep her on the bike.

‘Steer it like a shopping trolley,’ I suggested.

The bike straightened up then, and Auntie started pushing the pedals. I ran along behind, her grocery bag heavy over my shoulder.

‘Slow down. Hey. *Shit*. Slow down!’

My foot caught on a crack in the pavement, and my fingers lost their grip on the bike seat. Auntie kept riding, pedalling faster, more furiously, until she was a few hundred metres away from me.

Then out David’s laughing mouth come roar like a lion. Bright red roar like fire, like sunset, tomato-red roaring. David, he stop pedalling but the bike still rolling, rolling straight towards us. The roar spilling out behind the bike now, the red roar spraying from David’s mouth out onto the bike, splashing onto the dirt and leaving dark patches where the dry ground drinking it in. David, he falling. The bike is falling. The men in the distance have stopped chasing, stopped coming towards us. The men in

Pedala, pedala. Tre uomini inseguono lui per un po’, ma presto loro lontani. Qualche pezzetto metallo si stacca da pedale ma quella bicicletta con sopra mio David va sempre più veloce, più veloce. David quasi arrivato dove noi nascondiamo e ride. Mio David pedala verso di me, sorridendo. Il metallo su quella bici luccica, luccica nel buio, come stella.

La Zia pesava – non era sovrappeso, ma era difficile per me mantenerla in equilibrio sul sellino.

“Tieni il manubrio dritto”, dico. “Muovi la ruota davanti verso dove vuoi andare e spingi sui pedali”.

La Zia zigzagava a destra e a sinistra come se non aveva mai guidato niente in vita sua. Era un casino tenerla su.

“Guidala come se fosse un carrello della spesa”, provo a consigliare.

A questo punto la bici si raddrizza e la Zia inizia a spingere sui pedali. Io le corro dietro, con la sua borsa della spesa che mi pesa sulla spalla.

“Ehi rallenta. *Cazzo*. Rallenta!”

Inciampo su una crepa nell’asfalto e perdo la presa sul sellino della bicicletta. La Zia continua ad andare, pedalando più velocemente, più ostinatamente, finché non arriva a qualche centinaio di metri da me.

Poi da bocca di David che ride esce ruggito come leone. Ruggito rosso brillante come fuoco, come tramonto, ruggito rosso pomodoro. David smette pedalare ma la bicicletta va ancora, ancora dritta verso di noi. Il ruggito ora arriva da dietro la bicicletta, il ruggito rosso spruzza fuori da bocca di David su bicicletta, schizza per terra e lascia macchie scure dove il terreno asciutto lo beve. David, cade. La bicicletta cade. Gli uomini lontani hanno smesso correre, smesso venire verso di noi. Gli uomini

the distance look now very small. They are not men. Like David, they are boys. Two of the soldier boys are cheering and another one he is smiling and holding over his head a gun. Up and down, the boy with the gun jumping. I understand then, the Janjaweed soldier boys were racing my David, for the fun.

The bike swerved suddenly, skidded sideways. Auntie's skirt became caught up in the pedals. The bike toppled, and Auntie with it. Fuck. *Fuck*. When I reached her, she was untangling herself, shaking, crying, the scarf beneath her chin wet with tears. But the oddest thing was, with those big tears running down her face, Auntie was laughing.

'My David. He used to have the bike, back in Sudan. One day I saw him ride, ride that bike, so fast like he was flying.'

'Oh.'

'Thank you, Little Sister. Thanking you. When I ride that bike I remembering my boy, riding towards me, laughing, how he laughing...'

I felt awkward, had no idea what she was talking about, but felt like I was somehow supposed to. Auntie took up her grocery bag from the ground, smoothed some dirt from her skirt, walked away slowly, down towards West Footscray Station.

I stood there for a minute, staring after her. The rain had stopped. A small puddle of water had settled in the baby seat. Nile would be getting testy. It was half an hour past when I usually collected him. I threw my leg over the bike, started pedalling down the street. The Barkly Star was a dream to manoeuvre – smooth gliding, killer suspension, sharp brakes. Felt like I was hovering above the wet tar, flying. Like there was nothing else in the world, except me and my wheels. David. I

lontani adesso sembrano piccolissimi. Non sono uomini. Loro bambini, come David. Due bambini soldato festeggiano e un altro sorride e tiene fucile sopra sua testa. Su e giù, il bambino con fucile saltella. Allora capisco, bambini soldato di Janjawid facevano gara con mio David, per gioco.

All'improvviso, la bici sterza e sbanda di lato, la gonna della Zia si impiglia tra i pedali. Poi la bici cade e la Zia con lei. *Cazzo. Cazzo*. Quando la raggiungo, sta cercando di districarsi, trema e piange, il velo sotto il mento bagnato di lacrime. Ma la cosa più strana è che, mentre quei lacrimoni le colano sulle guance, la Zia ride.

"Mio David. Aveva bicicletta in Sudan. Un giorno visto lui pedalare, pedalare su quella bici, velocissimo come se volava."

"Oh."

"Grazie, Sorellina. Dico grazie te. Quando vado su quella bicicletta ricordo mio figlio che pedala verso di me, rideva, come rideva..."

Mi faceva strano, non avevo idea di che cosa stava parlando ma era come se per qualche motivo dovevo saperlo. La Zia raccoglie la borsa della spesa da terra, si ripulisce la gonna dalla polvere e si incammina lentamente verso la stazione di West Footscray.

Io rimango lì per un minuto a fissarla. Aveva smesso di piovere. Una pozzetta d'acqua si era formata sul seggiolino. Sicuramente Nile stava diventando una peste. Ero mezz'ora in ritardo rispetto a quando andavo a prenderlo di solito. Salgo in sella e inizio a pedalare per la strada. La Barkly Star era un sogno da manovrare – movimenti fluidi, sospensioni da paura, freni decisi. Era tipo librarsi sopra l'asfalto bagnato, tipo volare, nient'altro al mondo tranne me e la mia bici. David. Lentamente, mi

slowly rolled her brand new name rigiro in bocca il suo nome nuovo di
around my mouth. zecca.

Fief and the Fortress of Youth Slang in Translation

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The genesis of this translation lies in my doctoral thesis, defended in November 2018, which seeks to make a case for the translation of youth slang appearing in fictional texts through a style that I tentatively termed “Global Youth Speak” (GYS). Through an exploration of issues related to the “real-life” production, fictional reproduction, and interlingual translation of this non-standard form of language, I proposed that sufficient similarities can be identified between the different varieties of English-language youth slang across the globe to warrant their use in the translation of fictional texts. Three years after testing this hypothesis by translating the contemporary French novel *Moi non* (Patrick Goujon, Gallimard 2003), translating an extract of David Lopez’s *Fief* for this paper has allowed me to test the use of GYS on another extended piece of literature.

Written by David Lopez and published by Seuil in 2017, *Fief* was met with wide critical acclaim. It was praised by Leila Slimani, who chaired the jury that awarded the novel the Prix Inter in 2018, and shortlisted for the prestigious Medecis and Renaudot prizes. The novel’s title can be translated as “kingdom” or “fortress”, and it presents the story of Jonas and his friends, a group of young men living between the city and the countryside. This hybrid space, their own peri-urban fortress, transcends the geographical to permeate the language of the text. Raw and immediate, the fictional recreation of their voice daringly and deliberately deviates from the norms of standard language of the “beau parler français” for which the French are so known. In this extract, taken from the middle of the novel, we see how the nature of the young men’s occupations, or games, shifts from creative and mischievous to idle and soporific.

Lopez presents his novel as “an attempt to answer the question of what we do when we do nothing”, and is eager to assert that the lives and lifestyles he chronicles should not be interpreted as a representation of a particular group of French youth (*France Inter* 2018)¹⁶. Rather, he believes that the questions raised in his book “have more to do with youth in general than with youth from these areas in particular” and that his novel could be written from almost anywhere, providing that we realize that “you don’t need to be from a peri-urban town to be 20 years old and feel lost” (*France Inter* 2018). This idea of universality, or at least of relatability and transferability, runs also through Patrick Goujon’s *Moi non*: both authors seemed to sense a need to write *from* a specific space rather than *about* that space, and both avoided including explicit markers of time or place in their novel that would anchor the story in one context. Their choices might be interpreted as a desire not to act as the spokespeople for a particular group of people and bolstered my own desire to develop an alternative approach to the translation of youth slang. This particularity of the two novels should not, however, restrict the applicability of GYS for the translation of other texts featuring youth slang.

Before further investigating the parameters of this global, or globalized, form of youth language that can be used in translation, it is helpful to define the concept of slang. For the sake of brevity, we can refer to the definition of slang proposed collectively in the 2014 book *Global English Slang: Methodologies and Perspectives*

¹⁶ Originally in French – all translations my own.

in which a number of specialists explore the traits and usage of different slangs from around the world. These scholars state that “slang is informal, non-technical language that often seems novel to the user and/or listener, and that challenges a social or linguistic norm” (Coleman 30). They go on to assert that it can “also imply complicity in value judgements and thus play a performative role in defining personal or group identity” (Coleman 30). Their attempt to reach consensus invites a reflection on the extent to which certain features of slang, in this case informality and novelty, allow speakers to address directly or indirectly ideas of alterity, belonging, and identity.

Since slang might be considered a non-standard variety of language (cf. Gadet 1996), we might refer to the words of Anthony Pym when reflecting on an appropriate method of translation. He states that “in order to say anything remotely intelligent about the translation of variety, we would have to know what varieties are doing in cultural products in the first place” (69). To know what these varieties “are doing”, we can seek clarification from Eric Partridge who proposes that slang is a means of expression serving a number of functions. In particular, he underlines that the use of slang can constitute an effort to increase the vivacity and wit of a speaker’s expression and to establish complicity between speakers who have the codes and keys to the language while excluding those who do not (4-5). It is also worthwhile to note that slang tends to deploy words in an unusual and often unexpected manner: although new slang words and expressions are often coined, they are usually variations of old words, either in terms of a change in form, or of a change in meaning (Eble 25). As such, slang might be seen as an inventive manipulation of existing language, and my approach to translating it follows this same logic since I seek to exploit in a creative manner the rhythmic and lively potential of the shared features that permeate the foundations of youth language.

GYS is articulated primarily through non-lexical means because it exploits colloquial constructions to form its skeleton. This tactic boils down to the quite simple explanation that colloquial speech is generally inclusive and therefore not limited to one place within the broader linguistic community. On a lexical level, I strove to avoid as far as possible words or expressions that are restricted to usage in one area of the Anglosphere or that have already dated or might date quickly, dipping instead into the well of global youth lexis by using words that may have originated in one place but that are now used by young people all over the world. In this way, I employ lexis common to most young people around the world, instead of sporadically selecting words from different slangs spoken in different sections of the Anglosphere. Additionally, GYS is inspired by the distinct rhythm and sound-based wordplay of rap lyrics (homophones, rhymes, assonance, consonance, alliteration etc.) (see in particular Bradley and DuBois 2010) which help to avoid attenuating the playful nature of slang.

To heighten the immediacy of the writing style in English, the supple sentences that I have crafted for the translation of *Fief* are peppered with markers of orality, including informal and sometimes vulgar lexical constructions (e.g. “pretty fucking heavy”, “ride like hell”), casual demonstrative adjectives or adverbial phrases (e.g. “this one time”, “some kid”), and compound words and general extenders that add emphasis or contribute to intensifying orality (e.g. “it was nice and everything”, “one hell of a”, “the whole ball-in-the-water thing”). These linguistic additions are complemented by omissions, since I also systematically dropped (subject) pronouns and auxiliary verbs where appropriate and made liberal use of contractions to create connected speech indicative of the speed of the characters’ speech. In terms of rhythm, I tended to digress from the punctuation trends present in the French text to instill in the English text a

stronger sense of orality and of “flow”, to adopt the term used to describe the combination of rhythm and rhyme used in rap lyrics. Such a flow seems to be communicated more convincingly in English when the abundance of commas and full stops used to emphasize accumulation and to set out a beat in the French structures is discarded in favour of the use of more “ands” and dashes in run-on sentences which express a sense of spontaneous speech. Elsewhere, I harnessed other features of rap lyrics by relying on sound to enhance the liveliness of the narration (e.g. “learned to loiter”, “slipping and sliding”, “high-rise guys”).

These choices made in the translation of *Fief* demonstrate the impossibility of translating orality without taking structural liberties: I aimed to establish techniques that would create a voice in English for the characters which was inherently casual in tone. This does not mean, however, that I departed considerably from the style or meaning of each word in each sentence. On the contrary, I sought as much harmony between the two texts as possible for each unit, but I kept in mind the ultimate goal of bringing the English text to life in such a way that the casual style of the source text could thrive in translation. My translation of *Fief*, much like my translation of *Moi non*, seeks to bring to the fore the importance of a creative and thoughtful approach to translating slang. Rather than resorting to equivalence or another of the strategies commonly employed to translate slang which bear the risk of flattening, displacing, and/or exoticizing the text, I believe that the translator of texts featuring slang is able to exploit aspects of the formation of this type of playful language common to all forms of youth slang. By adopting this approach, an engaging and appealing style of writing can be established in the translated text which is able to appear credible to audiences as the voice of (foreign) young people in a work of fiction. This is, at least, my goal, and I invite readers to consider the success of its execution in the translated lines that follow.

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Fief
By
David Lopez

Quand j'étais petit, le meilleur moment de l'année c'était les vacances de Noël. Parce qu'en hiver, pas tous les ans mais presque, la mare gelait, et il y avait de la neige. Et puis il y avait tout le monde au quartier, il n'y en avait pas qui portaient au ski ou je ne sais quoi. Du coup, on était tout le temps dehors.

On avait ce petit bosquet, mais pour nous c'était une forêt, avec son terrain de basket en ciment au milieu, sa table de ping-pong en pierre, sa poussière et ses arbres, tous espacés de quelques mètres. Il y avait aussi cette mare, avec ses roseaux, ses canards, ses grenouilles et ses perches arc-en-ciel.

Dans la forêt on jouait à tout. Foot, basket, vélo, roller, circuits de billes, bagarre. Chez nous, c'était tous les jours les jeux Olympiques. Moi j'étais là la plupart du temps, et souvent avec Untel et Lahuiss. Du côté de la mare il y avait les pouilleux, ceux qui rentraient chez eux le soir avec les ongles noirs et le pantalon sale. Ixe et Sucré traînaient tout le temps là, et ils emmenaient Poto avec eux, qui était plus petit. On les appelait les maîtres de la mare, et ce n'était pas forcément pour leur rendre hommage. Ils ont passé leur enfance à pêcher et à fabriquer des arcs pour se défendre. Ils faisaient de rares incursions de notre côté, et souvent c'était pour nous glisser une grenouille dans le short. Ixe, surtout, faisait ça. Nous, on les dérangeait quand le ballon tombait dans l'eau. Ça nous obligeait à jeter des cailloux pour que les remous poussent la balle et la dirigent vers la rive.

Le terrain de basket avait ceci de particulier qu'il était disposé de manière à ce que l'un des deux paniers

Fortress
By
David Lopez
Translated by Tiffane Levick

When I was a kid, the best time of year was the Christmas break. Because in winter, not every year but pretty much, the pond would freeze over and it would snow. And plus everyone was home, nobody went on skiing trips or anything like that. So we were always outside.

We had this little grove, but for us it may as well've been a forest, with a cement basketball court in the middle and a stone ping-pong table, and dust and trees, all a few metres apart. There was a pond as well, with reeds and ducks and frogs and sunfish.

We played all kinds of games in that forest. Soccer, basketball, bike-riding, rollerblading, marbles, fighting. It was the Olympics every day for us. I spent most of my time there, usually with Untel and Lahuiss. The slum kids spent their days over at the pond and went home every night with black fingernails and soiled jeans. Ixe and Sucré were always hanging around there and they'd take Poto with them – he was younger. We called them the Pond Kings, but not necessarily out of respect. They spent their childhood fishing and making bow and arrows to defend themselves with. The rare times they ventured over to our side it was usually to slip a frog down our shorts. Ixe especially used to do that. And we'd go over to their side to annoy them whenever our ball landed in the pond. When that happened we'd have to throw stones so that the water pushed the ball towards the shore.

The basketball court was set out in this weird way with one of the two hoops at the edge of the pond. If anyone

soit au bord de la mare. Le moindre tir raté finissait à la flotte. Pour pallier ce défaut, et pour contenter tout le monde, car nous étions parfois une vingtaine de gamins entre six et seize ans à traîner là, on jouait au creeks. On fait une file indienne devant le panier, et les deux premiers de la file ont un ballon. Celui qui est tout devant tire, et s'il réussit il donne le ballon à celui qui est en troisième, puis rejoint le bout de la file, et ça coulisse comme ça. On élimine celui qui nous précède si on marque avant lui. Ça fait pas mal courir, d'autant plus qu'on a le droit à autant de tirs qu'on veut, tant que celui de derrière ne nous a pas éliminé. Moi ça m'arrivait de shooter le ballon de celui qui me suivait pour l'empêcher de marquer avant moi, et même si ça a souvent donné lieu à des embrouilles on n'a jamais disqualifié personne pour ça.

Quand on jouait au foot, outre le ballon dans l'eau, le principal obstacle c'était les arbres. Alors oui, grâce à eux on avait des buts naturels, et l'un des deux avait son propre défenseur, immuable. Presque tous les arbres étaient des chênes, et celui-ci on l'appelait Maldini. Parfois, en jouant, on dribblait un, deux joueurs, avant de se faire tacler par un arbre. Le plus rageant, pour moi qui n'étais pas un dribbleur, c'était de délivrer une ouverture millimétrée vers l'attaquant que Maldini interceptait sans sourciller. Je l'ai beaucoup insulté, cet arbre.

Nos parents ont acheté ces maisons alors qu'elles n'étaient pas encore construites. De jeunes couples, avec des enfants en bas âge, et d'autres à venir. On s'est tous vus grandir. Moi j'ai tout été dans ce quartier : petit, moyen, grand. Quand j'étais petit, les

ever missed, even by a little, the ball ended up in the water. Sometimes there were around twenty of us kids hanging out there, all aged between six and sixteen, so we tried to make up for the shitty court design and make everyone happy by playing knockout. We'd line ourselves up in single file in front of the hoop, with the two kids at the front holding a ball. The very first one shoots and if he gets it in he gives the ball to the third kid, then runs to the back of the line, and so on and so forth. If you get the ball in before the kid in front of you does, he's out. All this makes you run a fair bit, especially since you can shoot as many times as you like so long as the kid behind you hasn't knocked you out of the game. Sometimes I'd shoot the ball instead of the kid after me to stop him from scoring a point and even though this led to trouble a few times no one ever got disqualified over it.

When we played soccer, apart from the whole ball-in-the-water thing, our biggest problem was the trees. Though they did give us natural goals, and one of them came with its own defender, solid as a rock. They were pretty much all oak trees and we called that one Maldini. Sometimes we'd dribble the ball around one or two of the guys we were playing with and then get tackled by the tree. I wasn't a dribbler so the thing that made me maddest was when I'd send an inch-perfect pass to the attacker and Maldini intercepted it without even batting an eyelid. I gave that tree its fair share of abuse.

Our parents bought these houses before they'd been built. Young couples with small kids and others to come. We all saw each other grow up. And I've been everything in this neighbourhood – little, big, in-between. When I was little the big kids had us for their games and we were

grands, pour jouer, ils nous avaient nous. On voulait à tout prix les impressionner et obtenir leurs faveurs. Je me souviens de ce jour où ils ont demandé à Ixe de foncer vers la mare avec son vélo et de freiner le plus près possible de l'eau. Je le revois freiner si fort qu'il en est éjecté par-dessus la bicyclette, la gueule la première dans la mare, vaseuse, et cette odeur quand il est sorti sous les rires de l'assistance, et plus particulièrement des grands, pliés, allongés par terre de rire. Et tous ces coups qu'on a pris, combien de balayettes, de claques sur la nuque, de coups de bâton. Et ces questions quand on approchait la puberté, pour savoir si on avait des poils, et si on avait déjà embrassé une fille, si on avait mis la langue. J'entends encore Coupole, le grand avec sa boule à Z qui nous mettait la misère au foot, me demander hey Jonas tu te branles le zizi la nuit ?, et tous les autres partir dans un grand fou rire, et moi tout honteux, parce que pas de poils, la langue ouais, une fois, mais pas de poils...

Là où c'était un peu moins drôle, c'était quand ils se mettaient en tête d'organiser un combat. Ils savaient trop bien qu'on était prêts à tout pour qu'ils nous respectent. On devait avoir dix, onze ans. Untel, Lahuiss et moi on se faisait un petit creeks avec d'autres gamins du quartier dont les frères Astaire. Amandine ma voisine et Kelly la grande sœur de Sucré faisaient des tours du lotissement en vélo avec les tout-petits, dont le petit frère d'Untel, qui lui n'avait pas de vélo et suivait les autres en leur courant après. Celui-là on l'imaginait marathonien jusqu'à ce qu'il soit en âge de fumer des gros spliffs. Il faisait beau. Les grands étaient assis sur le banc en bois près du terrain de basket, et commentaient la partie. De l'autre côté de la mare, Sucré et Ixe, torse nu short claquettes,

dead-set on impressing them, on winning their approval. I remember the day they told Ixe to ride like hell towards the pond and to brake as close as he could to the edge. I can picture him braking so hard he went flying forwards over the top of the handlebars and landed face-first in the muddy water, and what he smelt like when he came back out while everyone else stood around laughing, especially the big kids – they were doubled-over or lying on the ground laughing. And boy did we take a lot of blows – they'd trip us over, again and again, and slap us on the neck, hit us with sticks. And all their questions just before we hit puberty – if we'd grown hairs yet, if we'd kissed any girls, if we'd used tongue. I can still hear Coupole, the tall guy with his shaved head, who used to beat us mercilessly at soccer, asking me Hey Jonas do you play with your wee-wee at night? and everyone else bursting out laughing and me feeling all embarrassed because, no, there wasn't any hair down there – tongue, yeah, once, but no hair...

It was a little less fun when they got it in their heads to organize a fight. They knew all too well that we'd do anything to get them to respect us. We must've been about ten or eleven – Untel, Lahuiss and me, we were playing a little game of knockout with some of the other local kids, including the Astaire brothers. My neighbour Amandine and Sucré's big sister Kelly were giving the really little kids bike-rides around the residence, including Untel's little brother who didn't have a bike of his own and followed the others around, running behind them. Everyone thought that kid was going to be a marathon runner – until he started smoking joints, that is. The weather was nice. The big kids were sitting on the wooden bench near the basketball court, commentating the game. On the

mettaient à l'eau un petit bateau de leur confection, à base de polystyrène, dans le but de tester le lance-pierre qu'ils venaient de fabriquer. Suite à une partie endiablée j'avais battu Untel en finale, mais comme j'avais légèrement dévié son ballon du pied et que ça lui avait fait perdre du temps il contestait ma victoire. Il était un peu énervé, mais sans plus, en tout cas pas au point de vouloir se battre, même si on s'est dit des ferme ta gueule et des quoi qu'est-ce qu'y a. Coupole nous a demandé qui gagnerait si on se battait, et on s'est regardés, et moi je le sentais venir en vrai, mais Untel, vu qu'il venait de perdre au creeks, il n'était pas enclin à me céder le moindre pouce de terrain. Il a répondu que ce serait lui qui gagnerait, et puis Coupole s'est mis à me pousser, à me dire oh là là c'qu'il a dit ! Oh ça m'aurait pas plu !, et il continuait à me pousser pour m'énervé, et en fait c'est à lui que j'aurais dû balancer le ballon dans la gueule, sauf que c'est Untel qui se l'est pris, à bout portant, lancé fort, les deux mains par-dessus la tête, comme une touche au football, et bam. Et c'est lourd putain, un ballon de basket, personne ne veut se manger ça dans la face. Il a saigné du nez sur son polo Lacoste beaucoup trop grand qui avait appartenu à son frère, et il m'est rentré dedans direct. Ce jour-là il y a eu une ronde autour de nous et on a dû se battre pendant, je ne sais pas, au moins quinze minutes. Ça n'en finissait pas. Il y avait des pauses parfois, et on avait chacun un grand qui faisait office d'homme de coin. Lui il avait Max, le grand qui avait toujours une nouvelle paire de baskets, avec les bulles d'air et tout. Moi j'avais Coupole, et je me rappelle qu'il m'avait conseillé de le mordre. Le polo Lacoste ne servirait plus jamais, et ma lèvre inférieure ne reprendrait son apparence normale qu'une semaine plus tard. C'est le père de Sucré,

other side of the pond, Sucré and Ixe were bare-chested in shorts and sandals and putting a little boat they'd built out of polystyrene in the water because they wanted to test out the slingshot they'd just made. I'd beaten Untel in the final after a pretty wild game but since I'd knocked his ball out of the way a bit and made him lose time he was contesting my victory. He was kind of pissed off but not seriously or in any case not enough to want to fight me, even if we did exchange a few Shut ups and What's up what's your problems. Coupole asked us who'd win if we fought and I felt like it was really going to happen but not Untel – he'd just lost at knockout and so wasn't too keen on giving me any ground. He said he would, it'd be him, he'd win, and then Coupole started pushing me, started saying Oh oh oh did you hear that? Oh I wouldn't be happy with that! and kept pushing me trying to make me mad, and actually he's the one I should've thrown the ball at, right in his face, except that it was Untel who got hit with it point blank when I threw it, hard, with both hands above my head like a soccer throw-in, and Bam. And a basketball is pretty fucking heavy, nobody wants to take one of those to the face. His nose bled all over his hand-me-down Lacoste polo that was way too big for him and he wasted no time in letting me have it. That day there was a circle around us and we must've fought for, I don't know, fifteen minutes at least. It was never-ending. There were a few breaks and we each had a big kid to shadow us. His was Max, the tall kid who always had a new pair of fancy shoes with air bubbles. I had Coupole and I remember him telling me I should bite him. No one would ever be wearing that Lacoste polo again, and my lower lip wouldn't look normal again for a week. It ended up being Sucré's dad who broke it up –

interpellé par la clameur, qui avait pénétré l'arène pour séparer les combattants avant qu'il y en ait un qui tombe. On s'est tous fait crier dessus, très fort, il était pas content le père à Sucré. Les grands avaient détalé en le voyant sortir de son pavillon. Untel et moi, quelque part, on était frustrés que ça s'arrête. On aurait pu continuer des heures, jusqu'à ce que l'un d'entre nous y reste. Ça a spéculé les jours suivants. Les uns disaient qu'Untel avait gagné, les autres ne partageaient pas ce point de vue. Les grands voulaient monter une revanche, prendre des paris. On avait une semaine pour s'entraîner, avec chacun notre coach personnel, Max et Coupole s'étaient proposés spontanément. Le combat aurait lieu sur le terrain de basket à telle date. On ne l'a pas fait. Ça suffisait. On ne pouvait plus se battre, parce qu'on venait de devenir de vrais amis.

Quand j'étais petit, le meilleur moment de l'année c'était les vacances de la Toussaint. Parce qu'en automne il ne faisait pas trop froid, et puis il y avait tout le monde, il n'y en avait pas qui partaient chez une tante ou je ne sais quoi. Du coup, on était tout le temps dehors.

Les chênes avaient perdu leurs feuilles, et nous les avions là à disposition, jonchant le sol, dans l'attente qu'on invente quelque chose avec. Le premier réflexe qu'on avait, c'était d'en faire le plus gros tas possible et de se jeter dedans, parfois depuis une branche d'arbre. Et puis on avait de l'imagination. Le jour où on en a fait un circuit pour vélos, ça nous a coûté une journée et demie de travail. Chacun était allé chercher le balai de sa mère et se ferait engueuler en rentrant, mais on était parvenus à couvrir la quasi-totalité de la surface de la forêt, avec slaloms entre les arbres, chicanes et virages en u. C'est Lahuiss, avec son BMX, qui nous avait mis la branlée à

he came out into the arena after hearing all the clamour and split up the fighters before someone got hurt. Sucré's dad yelled at all of us, and it was loud – he really wasn't happy. The big kids took off when they saw him come out his front door. Untel and me were kind of frustrated that it stopped. We could've kept going for hours, until only one of us was left. There was a fair bit of speculation for a few days after. Some said Untel had won and others didn't think so. The big kids wanted to organize a rematch, take bets. We had a week to train for it, each of us with our own coach – Max and Coupole offered their services straight away. The fight would take place on the basketball court on a set date. We didn't go through with it. That was enough. We couldn't fight each other now – we'd just become real friends.

When I was a kid, the best time of year was the autumn break. Because it wasn't too cold yet and plus everyone was home – nobody had gone off to stay with their aunt or anything like that. So we were always outside.

The leaves had fallen off the oak trees and were scattered all over the ground, at our disposal, waiting for us to do something creative with them. Our first reflex was to make a huge pile and jump into it, sometimes from a tree branch. And we were pretty imaginative. The time we used them to make a circuit for our bikes cost us a day and a half's work. We all went to get our mother's broom, and got told off for it when we went home, but we managed to cover almost the entire forest floor with zig-zags between the trees and double bends and u-shaped turns. Lahuiss ripped us all to shreds with his BMX. He'd finished the circuit in less than a minute and a half – it was insane. I have to admit he was one hell

tous. Il avait bouclé le tour en moins d'une minute trente, c'était insensé. Faut dire que c'était un sacré pilote. Moi, je préférais les circuits de billes. Une partie de la forêt avait un sol de terre sablonneuse, on pouvait y tracer ce qu'on voulait. On se mettait à l'indienne et le premier de la file dessinait le circuit avec son pied, avançant comme s'il traînait la patte, et en le suivant les autres consolidaient le parcours. Chacun y allait de sa suggestion, tiens passe autour de cet arbre-là, non celui-là, voilà, et prends le virage sur la bosse là, il va être technique ce virage. Une fois le tracé terminé, on se dispersait chacun à un endroit du circuit pour monter un piège. Outre l'éternel trou recouvert par des brindilles par-dessus lesquelles on pose des feuilles de chêne séchées, moi j'aimais bien creuser un trou en dehors du circuit et fabriquer une bosse avec la terre récoltée, posée sur le tracé, juste avant un virage. C'était déjà difficile de passer la bosse, mais alors garder la bille dans le circuit après y être parvenu, c'était presque impossible. Et si on sortait du circuit on revenait où on était. L'art de faire du surplace et s'en amuser. On avait fini par caler un bout de bois en sortie de virage pour augmenter les chances de réussite, et même ça ce n'était pas évident, fallait bien doser son tir. Je me faisais souvent insulter à cause de ça. Mais une course de billes ça nous prenait la journée, facile. Et c'était tout ce qui comptait.

Toutes ces occupations, c'était bien joli, mais une fois qu'on avait assez d'effectifs, on passait aux choses sérieuses. Avec les feuilles était tombée des arbres durant l'automne une quantité astronomique de glands. Certains étaient craquelés, d'autres durs comme de la pierre. C'était ceux-là qu'on ramassait en priorité, après avoir déterminé les équipes. Un jour, et un peu contre mon gré, je me retrouvais

of a cyclist. I personally liked marble runs better. Part of the forest floor was sandy so we could draw whatever we wanted in it. We'd line up in single file and the first kid would start drawing the line with his foot, dragging it forwards, and the others walked behind him to tighten up the course. Everyone did what he suggested – Hey go around that tree, no, that one, yeah, that's it, and put a turn on that bump over there, it'll be a tricky one. Once we'd finished tracing it out, everyone went to a specific spot on the track to set up a trap. Aside from the perpetual hole covered with a layer of twigs and dried-out oak leaves, I liked digging holes outside of the track and using the dirt to build a little hill right on the track, just before the turn. It was already hard enough to get the marble over the bump but keeping it in the run afterwards was practically impossible. And if your marble left the run you had to go back to where you were before. It was an art: not getting anywhere and having fun doing it. We ended up wedging a bit of wood in the ground after the turn to increase our chances of success, and even with that it wasn't easy – you had to plan your throw carefully. I got a fair bit of abuse for that. But a marble run took us the whole day, easy. And that was all that mattered.

It was nice and everything to have all these things to keep us busy, but once there were enough troops we got into the serious stuff. A huge number of acorns had fallen out of the trees at the same time as all the leaves in autumn. Some of them were all cracked, others as hard as rock. Those were the ones we picked up first, after working out the teams. One day, a little

avec Sucré et Ixe tandis qu'Untel avait recruté Lahuiss plutôt que moi dans l'équipe qu'il formait avec les frères Astaire. Très vite, Ixe m'a emmené au pied d'arbres où les glands étaient particulièrement gros et durs. On va leur faire mal avec ça, que je l'entends encore me dire. On avait mis nos vêtements avec le plus de poches pour en stocker un maximum. J'ai constaté ce jour-là que Ixe avait toutes les qualités requises pour devenir un sniper. La précision de ses lancers, c'était diabolique. J'étais heureux d'être de son côté, les autres prenaient cher. Sucré, c'était le combattant, celui qui charge l'ennemi pour s'approcher au plus près et lui faire le plus mal possible, quitte à se prendre des glands en retour. Moi je restais le plus souvent caché derrière un arbre, essayant de privilégier l'attaque surprise. Je n'étais ni précis ni courageux, plutôt sournois. Mon plan c'était d'abord de ne pas me faire toucher. Déjà.

Quand on faisait une bataille de glands, je pensais toujours à nos parents qui, s'ils jetaient une oreille par la fenêtre, entendraient ces rires entremêlés de cris de douleur, qui se succédaient sans jamais prendre le pas sur l'autre, et dans lesquels tout résonnait d'une joie de passer sa colère sur des victimes consentantes.

Quand j'étais petit, le meilleur moment de l'année c'était les vacances de Noël. Parce qu'en hiver, pas tous les ans mais presque, la mare gelait, et il y avait de la neige. Et puis il y avait tout le monde au quartier, il n'y en avait pas qui partaient au ski ou je ne sais quoi. Du coup, on était tout le temps dehors.

Quand la mare gelait suffisamment pour qu'on puisse marcher dessus, on le vivait comme une extension de notre terrain de jeu, et l'occasion d'en inventer des nouveaux. Pratiquer la glissade, c'est une chose, mais se lancer des défis, ça rend le jeu

unwillingly, I ended up in a team with Sucré and Ixe – Untel had chosen Lahuiss over me for the team he'd made with the Astaire brothers. Ixe took me straight over to the trees with the biggest and hardest acorns at the bottom. These'll hurt, I can still hear him saying. We'd put on our clothes with the most pockets to be able to carry as many as possible. I realized that day that Ixe had all the necessary qualities to be a sniper. His shots were murderously accurate. I was happy to be on his side – the other kids paid dearly. Sucré was the fighter, the one who runs at the enemy to get as close as possible and hurt them as much as possible, even if it meant being hit by acorns thrown back at him. I mostly stayed hiding behind a tree, trying to focus on surprise attacks. I wasn't very accurate, or very brave either – more sneaky than anything else. Mostly my plan involved avoiding getting hit. For a start.

Whenever we had an acorn fight, I'd always think of our parents – if they listened out the window, they'd hear shrieks of laughter mixed with screams of pain. The sounds alternated without ever cancelling each other out and it all resonated with the joy of inflicting our anger onto willing victims.

When I was a kid, the best time of year was the Christmas break. Because in winter, not every year but pretty much, the pond would freeze over and it snowed. And plus everyone was home, nobody went away on any skiing trips or anything like that. So we were always outside.

When the pond froze enough for us to be able to walk on it, we'd treat it like another place to play games and an opportunity to invent new ones. Slipping and sliding was one thing but giving each other challenges made the game exciting. The most basic thing we

excitant. Le plus basique c'était de parvenir à s'élancer depuis le terrain de basket puis de glisser sur le dos jusqu'à l'autre rive. Ce n'était pas facile, il fallait prendre beaucoup d'élan, et surtout, mettre un sacré coup de rein au moment d'arriver sur la glace, pour espérer avoir assez de vitesse et atteindre l'autre côté. On en a entendu des crânes se fracasser contre la glace, des coccyx, des omoplates. Et on en a vu des mecs faire croire qu'ils n'avaient pas mal. On l'a tous fait, parce qu'on s'est tous fait mal. Lorsqu'il y avait de la neige en plus de la glace, on s'amusait à canarder le mec en train de glisser. J'ai dû lancer dans les trois cents boules de neige à chacun de mes potes. On riait donc on n'avait pas froid. Bien souvent j'ai eu l'impression que si je donnais un coup de poing à quelqu'un ma main tomberait en miettes, tellement elle était gelée. Mettre des gants c'était passer à côté du truc.

Nos petits à nous ils étaient trop petits, à l'exception de Poto, qui était seul dans sa tranche d'âge. Quand on avait dans les quatorze quinze ans, lui il en avait dix, et en dessous de lui c'était du cinq six sept ans. Si ç'avait été une baltringue il aurait fait l'attardé à traîner avec les petits. Mais lui non, il venait toujours vers nous, il voulait traîner avec les grands, pourtant il en a pris des balayettes, des claques derrière la tête, des manchettes-coups de tête. Exactement comme nos grands l'ont fait avec nous. Sauf que nous on était une ribambelle, alors que lui il était tout seul. Il a pris pour tout le monde. Cible privilégiée parce que unique. Il était bien pratique pour nous. Au moment de tester l'épaisseur de la glace sur la mare, on l'envoyait. Quitte à lui demander de sauter pour être sûr. Il l'a percée plus d'une fois. Et nous on rigolait.

did was try to throw ourselves forward from the basketball court then slide on our backs to the other side of the pond. It wasn't easy, you needed a running start and you really had to give a hell of a push when you landed on the ice – hopefully building up enough speed to get to the other side. So many guys smashed their heads or their tailbones or their shoulder blades against the ice. And so many of them acted as if it didn't hurt. All of us did, because all of us hurt ourselves. When there was snow as well as ice, we'd entertain ourselves by slinging snowballs at the sliding kid. I must've thrown around three hundred of them at each and every one of my buddies. We'd be laughing so much we didn't feel the cold. My hand was so freezing that I often got the impression that if I punched someone it might break into little bits. Wearing gloves would be missing out on all the fun.

Our little kids were too little, except for Poto, the only one in his age group. When we were about fourteen or fifteen, he was ten, and the rest of the younger kids were five or six or seven. If he'd wanted to take the easy option, he could've played the retard and stayed with the little kids. But not him, he always came to us, always wanted to hang out with the big kids – and yet he paid for it, got belted and battered and beaten for it. Exactly like what the big kids had done to us. Except that there was a full flock of us and only one of him. He took blows for everyone – was our number one target because he was our only target, which was quite handy for us. Whenever we wanted to see how thick the ice on the pond was, we'd send him out. Sometimes we'd get him to jump up and down on it just to be sure. He cracked the ice more than once. And we all laughed.

Adolescents, Ixe, Sucré et moi on était tout le temps fourrés ensemble. On ne se lâchait pas. En hiver on sortait le soir et on restait là, sur le banc près du terrain de basket, à fumer des joints et improviser du rap sur un vieux beatbox tout pourri. Bouger la tête et un peu les bras ça va deux minutes mais ça ne réchauffe pas son homme. On avait déjà commencé la boxe à l'époque, alors quelquefois dans la soirée on se faisait un petit shadow, un petit touche-épaules, comme ça histoire de se réchauffer. Et puis, forcément, il y a un moment où ça part en couilles et on s'empoigne par la doudoune, et je me suis même vu par terre, sur la route, avec Ixe qui veut me soumettre par étranglement, et moi qui lui dis que si je nique mon manteau mon père va me tuer. On n'avait plus froid après ça. J'ai déjà dû essuyer ma sueur avec mon bonnet.

Quand j'étais petit, le meilleur moment de l'année c'était les vacances d'été. Parce qu'il y avait les grenouilles qui chantaient, le soir, et parce qu'on n'était pas tous au quartier, il y en avait toujours qui partaient à la plage ou une connerie dans le genre. Pas moi. Vu qu'on était en sous-effectif, c'était là qu'on se rapprochait, qu'on passait plus de temps à deux, à trois, même si on galérait la plupart du temps. Mais quoi qu'il arrive, quelle que soit l'équipe, on était tout le temps dehors.

C'est l'été que j'ai appris à traîner le soir. Une fois, Ixe est arrivé en disant hey les gars, vous savez quoi, j'ai du shit. Il avait pris ça dans une boîte qu'il y avait dans la chambre de son grand frère, et ça nous faisait un peu flipper, parce que son grand-frère c'était un mec pas très commode. Il ne traînait pas chez nous, on le connaissait à peine, il était surtout fourré avec les mecs des Tours. On avait peur qu'il se fasse griller Ixe, mais très vite on avait

When we were teenagers, Ixe, Sucré, and me were always hanging out together. We never let each other out of our sight. In winter we'd go out at night and stay out, sitting on the bench next to the basketball court smoking joints and improvising rap lyrics with a shitty old beatbox. Moving your head and your arms around a bit is OK for a while but it doesn't do much to keep you warm. We'd start boxing by then so sometimes at some point in the evening we'd dabble in a little shadow-boxing, a little sparring, just a bit, trying to get warm. But then we always reach a point where things get messy and we grab each other by our winter jackets. I've even ended up on the ground, on the road, with Ixe trying to strangle me so he'd beat me and me telling him that if I fuck up my coat my dad'll kill me. After that we weren't cold anymore. I had to wipe the sweat of my face with my hat more than once.

When I was a kid, the best time of year was the summer break. Because there were frogs croaking at night and because not everyone was home – there was always some kid going off to the beach or something stupid like that. Not me. Given we were undermanned, that was when we got closest – when we spent more time together in twos or threes, even if we were mostly just wasting time. But whatever happened, whoever was in the team, we were always outside.

It was during the summer that I learned to loiter at night. This one time, Ixe showed up saying Hey guys, guess what, I've got hash. He'd taken it from a box in his older brother's bedroom which kind of freaked us out a bit since his brother wasn't exactly the most easy-going of guys. He never spent any time in our neighbourhood and we barely knew him – he was always with the high-rise guys. We were scared that Ixe'd get caught, but forgot all that

oublié tout ça et on s'apprêtait à fumer un joint pour la première fois ensemble. Au dire des uns et des autres, on avait tous déjà fumé, mais pour ma part ça s'était limité à tirer une latte. Mon père avait laissé son joint dans le cendrier et était parti faire une course. À peine il avait passé la porte d'entrée que je m'étais rué sur le joint et l'avais allumé pour le goûter. J'ai beaucoup toussé, c'était le feu dans ma tête. J'avais quatorze ans. Les mecs avaient décidé à l'unanimité que c'était à moi de rouler le joint parce que je devais avoir vu mon père le faire, et donc avoir quelques notions. La vérité c'est que je n'avais aucune foutue idée de comment on allait se démerder. J'ai le tout petit bout de shit dans la main, et Ixe dit qu'il faut le chauffer, alors je fais comme quand on a froid aux mains en hiver, je les joins puis souffle dedans où j'ai calé la croquette, mais Untel rigole et me dit que c'est avec le briquet qu'il faut chauffer le shit. Bah t'as qu'à le faire toi au lieu de casser les couilles, et c'est parti on s'embrouille. Tant bien que mal je finis par fabriquer un truc qu'aujourd'hui je ne fumerais pour rien au monde, mais à ce moment-là, putain, c'était le Graal qu'on tenait entre nos mains. Il y avait un adage qui disait qui roule boule, qui fournit suit. Rien que pour ça j'étais content d'avoir roulé, car le droit de l'allumer me revenait. La première latte me fait tirer une grimace irrépressible qui fait beaucoup rire Lahuiss. J'en tire une deuxième et vois autour de moi des mains qui s'approchent, vas-y c'est à moi, non c'est à moi, et je le donne à Ixe. On tirait deux lattes chacun et ça tournait, et il a pas fait long feu le joint, parce qu'on avait tous assez de vice pour se dire que deux lattes c'est une chose, mais la taille de ces lattes c'en est une autre. Untel tirait des taffes qui en faisaient trois à elles seules, et ça protestait de tous les côtés, vas-y Untel

pretty quickly and got geared up to smoke our first joint together. All of us said we'd smoked before but I personally had only ever had a puff. My dad'd left his joint in the ashtray and gone off to run an errand. He'd barely walked out the front door and already I was all over his joint, lighting it up to have a taste. I coughed a lot and my head felt like it was on fire. I was fourteen. The guys all agreed that I was the one who should roll the joint because I must've seen my old man do it and so know more or less what to do. The truth is I had no fucking idea how we were going to figure this out. I've got a tiny bit of hash in my hand and Ixe says it has to be warmed up so I clasp my hands together like in winter when they're cold and I blow into them where the clump of weed is, but Untel laughs and tells me that you have to heat it up with a lighter. Well why don't you do it, hey, instead of being such a little dick, and then things got messy. So much so that I ended up making something I sure as hell wouldn't consider smoking now. But back then it was like holding the Holy Grail in our hands. There was this saying: if you roll it you rule it, if you buy it you try it. Even just that made me happy I'd rolled it since it meant I could rule it, light it up. On the first drag I can't help screwing up my face and Lahuiss can't help laughing, a lot. I take a second and see hands coming at me, Come on it's my turn, No it's mine, and I give it to Ixe. We each took two puffs and passed it round and the joint didn't last all that long since we were all clever enough to know that two puffs was one thing but the length of those puff was another. Untel took puffs that were each the equivalent of three, and objections were yelled out from all angles – Come off it Untel you bastard. In the next half hour we laughed, a lot, sometimes so much so we ended up lying on the

t'es un bâtard. Dans la demi-heure qui a suivi on a beaucoup rigolé, beaucoup, parfois à s'en allonger par terre, et même en exagérant un petit peu, mais bon, on était heureux. On savait comment on allait occuper nos soirées désormais. C'en était fini de l'ennui. On tenait quelque chose. C'est Untel le premier qui en a vendu. Il y en avait tout le temps. Pour ses dix-huit ans on avait roulé un dix-huit feuilles, une batte le truc. Il fallait le tenir à deux mains, l'une au niveau du filtre et l'autre sous le foyer, sinon il penchait en avant et ça risquait de le casser. Quand on s'est mis à traîner non plus tous ensemble mais plutôt éparpillés, on pouvait toujours compter sur Untel. Avec Sucré et Ixe on achetait pour nous trois, et c'était Ixe qui gardait le morceau. Sucré et moi on lui faisait confiance, on savait qu'il allait pas en couper de petites lamelles et se les garder pour lui, parce qu'il avait ce truc de toujours penser pour le groupe. On avait tout en commun, shit, cigarettes, feuilles. Parfois je voulais fumer une clope et il refusait systématiquement. Il disait que c'était du gâchis, qu'elles ne devaient servir que pour les joints, parce qu'on n'avait pas d'argent, et c'était cher ces conneries-là. Quand j'insistais jusqu'à devenir carrément relou, il craquait, et on s'en fumait une à trois.

Et puis on s'est habitués. Ce n'était plus nos soirées qu'on passait à fumer, mais aussi nos journées. Nos nuits. Nos heures de cours. Peu à peu on n'avait plus un joint, mais trois, et puis est venu le temps où on a eu chacun le sien. Fumer n'était plus l'occupation, on fumait en se demandant ce qu'on allait bien pouvoir foutre. On n'était plus dehors. On s'est enfermés. On a opté pour d'autres jeux. Des jeux auxquels on peut jouer assis. On ne se lance plus de glands. On ne se lance plus de boules de neige. On ne se balance plus des ballons de

ground – playing it up a little, sure, but whatever, we were happy. We knew how we'd be spending our evenings from now on. That was the end of boredom for us. We had something. Untel was the first to start dealing. He always had a stash. For his eighteenth birthday we rolled an eighteen-leaf joint, a real beast of a thing. You had to use both hands to be able to hold it properly – one on the filter and the other on the rod, otherwise it'd tip forward and might break. When we stopped hanging out all together and became more scattered, we could always count on Untel. Sucré and Ixe and me bought enough for the three of us and Ixe held onto it. Sucré and I trusted him, we knew he wouldn't slice little bits off for himself, because he was always thinking of the group. We shared everything – hash, cigarettes, papers. Sometimes I wanted to smoke a cigarette and he'd always say no. He said it was a waste, that we should only use them for joints, because we had no money, and that shit was expensive. When I insisted so much that it became really fucking annoying, he'd cave, and we'd smoke one between the three of us.

And then it became a habit. We didn't just spend our evenings smoking, but our days too. Our nights. Our classes. Gradually we didn't just have one joint, but three, and then came the time when we each had our own. Smoking was no longer the activity – we'd smoke wondering what we might do afterwards. We weren't outside anymore. We locked ourselves up. We opted for other games – ones you can play sitting down. No more throwing acorns at each other. No more snowballs. No more basketballs in

basket dans la gueule. On ne se lance plus que des insultes. the face. The only thing we hit each other with now is insults.

Foreignization and Heterogeneity in the English Translations of Two Judeo-Spanish Folktales by Matilda Koén-Sarano

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In the 1980s Matilda Koén-Sarano realized that her native language, Judeo-Spanish was in serious decline and embarked on a mission to preserve as much of it as she could. She harnessed her background in Folk Studies and began collecting folktales from the oral tradition and publishing them; she has since published hundreds of tales in over a dozen books. This is but one of the preservation efforts currently underway, but the grim reality is that no speakers today are using the language as their primary form of communication and few, if any, are transmitting it to the younger generations. However, Koén-Sarano's work contributes more to the language than meets the eye.

Simply put, Judeo-Spanish is the language of the Sephardic Jews who were expelled from Spain in 1492 and resettled in Morocco and the Ottoman Empire. While it shares many features with modern Spanish, it is in fact descended not only from Castilian, but also from Portuguese, Catalan, Aragonese, and other Iberian languages. In addition to these influences it has significant vocabulary from Turkish, Greek, Hebrew, Arabic, Bulgarian, Bosnian, Serbo-Croatian, and other languages that it came into contact with over the past five centuries. Consequently, and due to phonetic shifts that affected Castilian and not Judeo-Spanish, the spoken language is not largely mutually intelligible with modern Spanish (Attig 832).

Prior to Koén-Sarano relatively little had been written in Judeo-Spanish. Beginning as early as the sixteenth century many Sephardim – the name for Jews who can trace their ancestry to Spain – had translated calques of biblical or rabbinical works to be used as didactic tools, and later in the nineteenth century others translated highly Gallicized versions of novels and plays, but Koén-Sarano is one of the few authors to publish original works in this language variety in a way that replicates how speakers use the language in their daily lives. This is in part because these texts are copied from the oral tradition and published in a way that replicates the speakers' own usage of the language. Below are two of her stories, originally published in her first collection, *Kuentos del folklor de la famiya djudeo-espanyola* (1986), and my English translations.

The aforementioned difference between Judeo-Spanish and Castilian, the orality of these tales, as well as the primary preoccupations of the author – to preserve her culture's folktales in writing – led me to conclude that a domesticated translation would not suffice; written fluency must be broken and orality must be reproduced. To achieve this goal I looked to Venuti's notions of both "foreignization" and "heterogeneity". In the former, Venuti advocates for making the foreign visible in the translation (Venuti, *Invisibility* 33-34). To do this I considered the most important element that contributed to the birth of Judeo-Spanish as a separate language variety from Castilian, the Jewish identity of its speakers. Since we believe that the Jews did not speak Spanish differently than their Christian counterparts prior to the expulsion, it was through the exile itself that Judeo-Spanish was born (Bunis 403). In attempting to pay homage to this defining element, I looked at how some writers have written Jewish English, most notably Mordecai Richler as his work makes clear syntactic and lexical distinctions between different generations of Jewish English speakers in a way that is more diverse than many other authors who have written Jewish English. The following examples, from

his novel *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz* (1959), demonstrate how he uses Yiddish expressions and syntactical structures to replicate how his characters speak:

“We know to deal with *tuchusleckers* here,” he [Duddy] said ... Two minutes later Duddy shot up in his seat. “Sir, there’s something I’d like to ask you. I’ve been looking at my hist’ry book and I see there’s only one paragraph on the Spanish inquisition. You don’t even mention it in class, so seeing we got lots of time now I thought you might like to tell us something about it.”

(Richler 35)

“Your Uncle Benjy with all his money is nothing too. Of your father I won’t even speak.”

(Richler 49)

In the first of the two tales that follow, *La Kadena de Arena* (Koén-Sarano 247-250), I attempt to harness similar models to highlight the Jewish nature of Koén-Sarano’s work in a way that would resonate with an English-speaking reader.

For the second tale, *Mazal and Hawd-Werk* (Koén-Sarano 177-180), I built on the previous approach, this time harnessing Venuti’s later notion of “heterogeneity”, itself a form of foreignization. Through the notion of heterogeneity, Venuti advocates for translating in a way that highlights the strangeness of the text to the translating culture – without necessarily bringing the reader to the source culture – thus requiring the reader to struggle. Ideally this would force the reader to recognize that the work is a translation and foreign/strange to the translating culture (Venuti *Scandals* 8-30). Keeping this in mind, and still desiring to focus on the Jewish context of this folktale, I attempted to translate into a phonetic approximation of a Jewish-English accent from New York City. This accent, along with the Montreal Jewish English that Richler invokes are closely related and would be familiar to a wide range of global English speakers. While there are sizeable Jewish communities in places like Sydney, Johannesburg and London – each with different varieties of Jewish English – none are as large or visible on the international scene as the nearly 2.5 million Jews who live in the Northeast US, Toronto and Montreal. Furthermore, a decades-long history of internationally syndicated television shows featuring Jewish accents from this region – such as *Rhoda* (1974-78), *Welcome Back Kotter* (1975-79), *Seinfeld* (1989-98), *The Nanny* (1993-99), *Will and Grace* (1998-2005, 2017-2018), *Curb Your Enthusiasm* (2000-current) and more – would conjure up Jewish references in the mind of many Anglophones from around the world in a way that other Jewish Englishes may not. To accomplish my goal I respected the syntactical difference that can be observed in Richler’s writings, but drew inspiration from the aforementioned shows and other Jewish film characters to render the spelling in a way that would make the English reader feel uncomfortable and out of place while conjuring a thick Jewish accent from Brooklyn or Queens.

No translation approach can possibly bring all of the cultural context and poetics of a work into a different language and we must make choices, prioritizing one element at the expense of another. At the outset of this introduction I stated that my primary goals were 1) to highlight the distance between global Spanish and Judeo-Spanish – the latter being a community language that has only rarely been written, has never been standardized and has never spread across an empire; 2) to replicate in some way the

author's focus on preserving her own culture; and 3) to render in English the orality of the source texts that had been copied down from stories told verbally to the author. I believe these translations do that.

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La Kadena de Arena
By
Matilda Koén-Sarano

Unos kuantos mansevos, asentados un día en un kafé, estaban avlando entre ojos, i estaban diziendo ke los viejos no aprestan, ke es mantenerlos en vazío, i ke kale ke se arrondjen de la sivdá.

El rey Shelomó, ke estava degizado entre ojos, sintiendo esto, se vino al palasio, yamó a todos los mansevos de la sivdá, ke vengan, ke los kere ver. Kuando ya vinieron, les disho: “Ya es verdá! Ke los estamos aziendo a estos viejos? Kale ke los ekspulsemos de la sivdá!”. “Bravo,” le disheron los mansevos a Shelomó, “ke estamos pensando kom’a él!”. I así fue echo.

Ma uno de los mansevos, ke kiría mucho bien a su padre, lo guadró en la musandará, i le preparava i le yevava todo lo ke tenía demenester para bivir: la kumida, la agua, el po... I ansina lo izo bivir al padre durante un mes.

Un mes después Shelomó los yamó a los mansevos i les disho: “Kale ke entro un mes me aprontésh una kadena de arena! Si no, mos vo a meter en prezo!”

Los mansevos, ke no savían naturalmente komo se aze una kadena de arena, estaban lokos de estrechura i de espanto, i provaron en munchas maneras, ma no riuseron a nada.

El mansevo, ke guadró al padre, estava tanto triste, ke se ulvidó del padre i lo deshó sin komer i sin agua. Después de tres días se akodró d’él i suvió arriva.

The Chain of Sand
By
Matilda Koén-Sarano
Translated by Remy Attig

Once there was, seated at a café talking, a group of youths. What do you suppose they were saying but that old people, they’re not so useful. Supporting them, they said, is for nothing. We should throw them out of the city, they said.

But, who do you suppose was amongst them disguised? I’ll tell you who. Shlomo hamelech—King Solomon, that’s who! Away he went to the palace and called all of the youth of the city that they should appear before him. And appear they did and he said: “It’s true, it is, what you say. What we’re doing with all these old people all over? All of them, they should be expelled from the city!” “Mazal tov,” they all replied. “That we should all be so wise, as to think like him!” And so it was.

But one of the young men, he loved his father very much, so what should he do but hide him in the attic. As if that weren’t enough he prepared and brought him everything he should need to live: he brought him food, and water, even he brought him the to..., anyway, and that’s how he kept his father alive for a whole month.

A month later, Shlomo hamelech, he summoned the young men to him and said to them, he said: “You have one month, I want you should make for me a chain of sand. If you don’t succeed, then jail it is!”

The shmos, that they should know how to make a chain of sand! By the end of the month, mashuganne, the whole lot. They tried and tried... Bupkis!

But the one, the mentch, so upset he was at this that he forgot about his father. Three days he left him without so much as a nosh. Finally, when he

Le disho el padre: “Kualo akontesió ke por tres días me deshates sin komer i sin nada?”. I el ijo le kontó lo ke el rey les demandó, pena la prezión.

Le disho el padre: “Si es sólo esto! ... A la ora orada ya te vo a dizir yo komo se aze la kadena de arena!”. Yeno de aligría, el mansevo fue onde sus amigos i les disho: “Ya vos vo a amostar yo komo se aze la kadena de arena!”

A la ora ke el rey los iva a resivir, svió el mansevo onde el padre i le disho: “Padre, komo es ke se va azer la kadena de arena?”. Le disho el padre: “Ijo mío, demándale al rey komo de kadena es ke kere: de kolié, de barko, de presiún?...”

I el ijo le disho al padre: “Esto es lo ke me ivas azer? Si no savías, deké me dishites ke me la vas azer?!”. I el padre le respondió: “Tú dile esto al rey, i verás ke ya va abastar!”

Fue el ijo kon todos los mansevos delante del rey, i se eskondió entre eyos, ma sus amigos al derredor de él empesaron a dizirle: “Ayde, tú dishites ke ya saves” Dí tú al rey komo se aze la kadena de arena!”. I el mansevo, yeno de verguensa, se aserkó al rey i le disho: “Ya es verdá, sinyor rey, ke demandates kadena, ma no mos dishites ke manera de kadena keres: de braso, de barko, de preziún?...”

Le respondió Shelomó: “A! Ken te disho de demandarme esto? Esto no viene de ti!”. “Biva Shelomó!” le respondió el mansevo, “Yo no arrondjí a mi padre de kaza! Yo lo guadrí, i es él ke me dio este consejo!”

“A bravo!” disho el rey, “Vitesh komo se keren a los viejos? Los mansevos tienen la fuersa i los viejos la sensia. Andá a traer a todos los viejos de los kampos, ke se tienen demenester!”.

remembered and went up to see him the father he said: “What happened that you should leave me three days. No food, no water, nothing for three days?” And so the son told him what the king, he had ordered lest he go to prison.

The father answered: “That’s all?! When it should be time for you to see the king, then, I’m going to tell you how you should make this chain of sand.” Full of nachas the young man went to his friends: “I’ll show you how to make this chain of sand,” he said.

The time came for the king to receive them and the young man he went up to see his father and told him, he said: “Aba, the chain of sand, how do you want I should make it?” “Son,” he replied, “first you must ask the king what kind of chain it is that he wants, a necklace, a chain for a boat, or one for the jail...”

The son said to his father: “That’s all you’re gonna tell me? Meanwhile, if you didn’t know, why not say so?” And the father replied: “Say that to the king...you’ll see.”

Off he went, the son, with all of the young men to the king, and hid among them. But his friends they started ask: “Nu, you said you know how. So you tell the king how to make the chain of sand!” The young man, embarrassed, approached the king. “It’s true, you asked we should make a chain, but still we don’t know what kind; a jewelry chain, a boat chain or a prison chain.”

Solomon replied: “What? Who said you should ask me that? You didn’t think of it yourself!” “A long life to Shlomo hamelech,” replied the man. “My father, I didn’t kick him out of my house! I hid him, and it’s him who gave me this advice.”

“Mazal tov!” said the King, “that’s how you take care of the elderly. Young men, they have the strength, but old men, old men have the wisdom. Go, bring all of the old people from the

Fueron todos los mansevos i trusheron atrás a sus kazas a los padres i a las madres.

El Mazal i el Lavoro
By
Matilda Koén-Sarano

El Mazal i el Lavoro, en forma de dos mansevos, estaban kaminando endjuntos i diskutiendo entre eyos. Disho el Mazal al Lavoro: “Si no ayudo yo a la persona, su lavor no sierve a nada!”

Le respondió el Lavoro: “No es verdá! El mazal sólo no abasta! Si uno lavora parviene presto u tadre a azerse una pozisión!”

En avlando los dos pasaron delante de la butika de un kuedrero, ke azía redes i kuedras para peshkadores, i se kedaron a avlar kon él i le demandaron: “Ke tal? Komo te está indo el echo? Te abasta para bivir?”

Les respondió el kuedrero: “El echo está muy basho i mi vida está muy difisil! No kito ni el pan para dar a komer a mis kriaturas!”

“Deké?” le demandaron los dos.

“Porké no tengo parás para empesar!” les respondió el ombre, “si tenía un poko de kapital, pudría dezvelopar mi echo, i ganar un poko mas de parás, para mantener mas mijor a mi famiya!”

Se miró el Lavoro en l’aldukera, kitó sien liras i se las dio. El ombre, alegre i kontente, serró la butika i se fue al charshí a merkar pishkado, para yevar a komer a su famiya. Tomó el pishkado, pagó i se metió el kusur de las parás en l’aldukera. Entre mientras pasó por ay un ladrón, le metió la mano en l’aldukera, i

countryside that they should know we need them here!” And away they all went, bringing their fathers and mothers back home.

Mazal and Hawd-Werk
By
Matilda Koén-Sarano
Translated by Remy Attig

Mazal an’ Hawd-Werk, in the shape ov tsew friends, wuh wawkin’ togetha’ and awgyuin’ with each otha’. Mazal¹⁷ said ta Hawd-Werk, she said: “Me, if I don’t help someone, theih werk, it’s bupkes.”

Hawd-Werk ans’e’d ‘e said: “Fooyey! mech, that mazal alone shud be anuff? If somewun werks hawd, soona’ oah late’ they’a gunna get ahead in life!”

Awl the wiyel tawkin’, the tsew wawk’t in frunt of a rope sto’ah that made nets an’ ropes fa fisha’min. They stawpt ta speak ta the rope-makeh an askt ‘im: “Howz by you? Howz ya’ bizniss? Yoah makin’ a gut livin’?”

The rope-makeh reploied: “Werk, it’s slow, life, it’s rough, as if that wurint anuff, I can’ affoad bread fa mai kids!”

“Azoy?” they askt ‘im – why?

“Cuz I don’t ‘ave munej ta git things stawded” ans’ed the maen, “oh that I should ‘ave some money, then could I develop mai bizniss, finally could I earn some mo’a munej ta give mai mushpacha a bette’ life.”

Hawd-Werk felt in ‘is pahcket, a hundred liras he tuk owt an’ gave it to ‘im. Bein’ very happy, the man, he closed his stoa’ an’ went to the moakit ta buy fish foa his fahmily. He bawt the fish, paid, and put the rest of the munej in ‘is pahcket. Then, what should happen, but aloang comes a thief. What

¹⁷ The bilingual reader may notice that the gender of the word “Mazal”, meaning “luck”, is masculine in Judeo-Spanish as it is in Hebrew, but the character named Mazal in the English translation is feminine. Mazal is a common female name in Jewish communities and as such I decided to retain the name but change the gender since Luck’s gender is otherwise not a significant element of this short story.

le tomó lo ke le avía kedado de las sien liras. Boltó el prove a su kaza, i se apersivió ke le rovaron las parás!

Pasó tiempo, i otra vez pasaron el Mazal i el Lavoro, ke estaban kaminando endjuntos, por la mizma butika. Se kedaron a avlar kon el mizmo kuedrero i le demandaron: “Ke tal está la vida?”, i él les kontó lo ke le avía afitado. Kitó el Lavoro de nuevo sien liras de l’aldukera i se las dio. Fue el kuedrero i merkó una partida de kányimo para azer kuedras, ma kuando fue para lavorarlo, se apersivió ke estava pudrido. I ansí pedrió las sien liras.

Pasaron mezes i por la tresera vez pasaron los dos mansevos delante de su butika, le repetaron la mizma demanda i resivieron la mizma repuesta. Se bushkó el Lavoro en l’aldukera i no topó mas nada. Entonses bushkó el Mazal en su aldukera i le disho: “Na, lo ke tupí es este pedaso de plomo. Tómallo!” Tomó el ombre el pedaso de plomo, i se fue a kaza, pensando: “A kualo me va a servir este plomo?”

A la noche ensupitó bateó a la puerta del kuedrero un peshkador, ke le demandó: “Tienes por azardo un pedaso de plomo de darne, porké pedrí el pezgo de mi red?” Entonses el kuedrero le dio el pedaso de polomo, ke le avía dado el Mazal. Al día de después vino otra vez a su kaza akel peshkador, i le trusho una resta de pishkados, diziéndole: “sikomo tuvi una buena peskha, te está trayendo estos pishkados, para rengrasiarte ke me ayudates anoche!”

Tomó la mujer los pishkados i empesó a alimpiarlos. Ma, buskhando de avrir uno d’eyos, vido ke el kuchiyo no estava riushendo a kortaldo, porké estava enkontrando una koza dura. Metió la mujer mas muncha atansión i parvino a avrir la tripa del pishkado, i kualo ke tope adientro? Un ermozo aniyo!

‘id the gonif do, but put ‘is hand in the man’s pocket, an’ take what was left of the hundred liras. Arrivin’ home, the poah man found ‘is muney, it was goan!

Some time late’ an’ again Mazal an’ Hawd-Werk wu’ wa’kin’ t’gethe’ an’ past the same stoah. They stopt to speak with the same rope-makeh, they askt ‘im they said: “Howz bei you?” The rope-makeh told ‘em the whole stoari. Again, one hundred liras Hawd-Werk took out and he gave it ta the maen. The rope-makeh went and boahst sum hemp ta make rope, but when he began to work oan it, what should he discove’ it was rotten, the whole lot. And so he loast the hundred liras.

Months past an’ again, fa the third time the tsew wa’ wawkin’ in fron’ a the stoah. Again, they askt the same question an’ gat the same ayntseh. Hawd-Werk again reached in his pocket, gornisht. So Mazal felt around in ha’ packit, she said: “Meh, all I find is this toiny piece a lead, it’s yo’as!” The maen took the lead an’ went home. “Meanwhile, what I’m gunna do with a piece a lead?” he tho’at.

That night a fisha’min knocked at the rope-makeh’s doah, he didn’t expect it. He askt, he said: “Maybe you have a piece a lead ta give me? It’s the weight fa’ my net, I’ve loast it!” So the rope-make’ gave ‘im the lead that Mazal, she’d given ta ‘im. A day late’ who shud come baek to the maen’s house but that same fishe’maen an’ ‘e broat with ‘im a bunch a fish. “So great was my success las’ night that here I am ta thank you fa ya help, hea’s some fish.”

‘Is wife took the fish and she stah’ted ta clean ‘em. Meanwhile, troiyin’ ta cut one ov ‘em open, she soah, that the knife was hittin’ somethin’ sahlid. She focust an’ fainully she succeeded ta cut owpin the fish’s stumik. Wha’did she faind insoid, but a byoodiful ring!

La mujer, yena de aligría, se lo amostró al marido, i él fue pishín onde un djaverdjí, para azerlo apresiar. I el djaverdjí le propuzó pishín de merkárselo a un buen presio. Viendo esto, provó el kuedrero a amostraldo a otros dos, tres djaverdjís, i lo vendió al ke le dio mas demazía, kitando una fuerte suma de parás, ke lo izo riko.

Pasaron anyos, i un día el Mazal i el Lavoro se toparon a pasar de nuevo por la butika de kuedrero. Se kedaron ay delante i vieron ke se vendían ayá otras kozas.

Demandaron los dos a los viziniso ke si izo de akel kuedrero, i eyos les kontaron ke el ombre topó un trezoro, vendió la butika, metió una fábrica de kuedras i se izo riko. Le disho el Mazal al Lavoro: “Vites? Abastó ke yo le diera una koza de nada, para meteldo a kamino!”

Le respondió el Lavoro a su torno: “Ya tienes razón! Sin tu ayudo él no iva poder nunca empesar! Ma sin el mío no pudría nunca ir a delante!”

The woman, kvelling, showed it ta ha’ hussbend who immediately took it ta a juwleh that ‘e should appraise it. The jeweler oan one foot, oafehd ta bai it frum ‘im at a gut price. When he soah this, the rope-makeh showed it ta two othe’ juwlehs, three in total, an’ sold it ta the one who oafehd him the mowst. Qwait a lot ov muney ‘e gat foa the ring, enuff to become rich.

Yeas an’ yeas past an’ one day Mazal and Hawd-Werk again past in front ov the rope-makeh’s stoah. They stahpt outside fo’ a moment and soah that now the stoah sold somethin’ else.

Ta awl the neighbuhs they askt what happened ta the rope-makeh. They told them, they said, the man found a treazhu’, sold the stoah, opent a rope-makin’ factary an’ became rich. Mazal said to Hawd-Werk: “See? No soona’ do I give ‘im a smool nothin’ than he stahts oan the path ta success!”

Hawd-Werk ainsehd: “Ya’ right, if not fa yoah help ‘e might never ‘ave stoahed, but without mine ‘e wouldn’t ‘ave got very foah aithe!”

On Translating Wisława Szymborska's Poem "Widok z ziarnkiem piasku"

MARY BESEMERES
Australian National University

The poem "Widok z ziarnkiem piasku" by Polish poet Wisława Szymborska (1923-2012) was first published in her 1986 volume, *Ludzie na moście* (The People on the Bridge). Its title was then used for a selection of her poems, *Widok z ziarnkiem piasku: 102 wierszy* (View with a Grain of Sand: 102 poems), which appeared in 1996, the year in which Szymborska won the Nobel Prize for Literature. A selection translated into English by Stanisław Barańczak and Clare Cavanagh, first published in 1995 and reprinted in 1996 (presumably to meet post-Nobel demand), uses the same title: *View with a Grain of Sand: Selected Poems by Wisława Szymborska*. Evidently, the translators found "View with a Grain of Sand" both striking and characteristic enough of Szymborska's poetry to communicate its singular qualities to new, Anglophone readers.

My translation of the poem is not the first to appear in English. There is the version in the book by Barańczak and Cavanagh, and a more recent one by Joanna Trzeciak, included in her volume, *Miracle Fair: Selected Poems of Wisława Szymborska* (2002). I admire each of these translations and acknowledge the close kinship mine has with both of them, beginning with our titles, which are – unavoidably, given the stark original – identical. Like the majority of Szymborska's poems, "Widok z ziarnkiem piasku" is in free verse. I first translated it as a teenager, for whom it was (along with other poems in *Ludzie na moście*) a revelation. The translation offered here builds on that early attempt. It overlaps in some of its word-choices with one or both of the translations by Barańczak and Cavanagh and Trzeciak, but it also proposes some alternative renderings, particularly in the final four stanzas.

To highlight one of these overlaps: Barańczak and Cavanagh's translation of the lines about the grain of sand – "And that it fell on the windowsill/is only our experience, not its" (135) – seems almost perfect to me. My version hews close to theirs: "The fact that it fell on the window-sill/is only our experience, not its." With the phrase, "The fact that...", I try to capture the declarative Polish opening, "A to, że spadło..." (literally: As for this, that it fell...). To my ear, Barańczak and Cavanagh's briefer "And that it fell..." sounds too elliptical in English. Trzeciak's rendition of the same lines, "Its falling onto the windowsill/is only our adventure" (67), which keeps the Polish "przygoda" (adventure) but elides "nie jego" (not its), manages to be both fluent and succinct. I prefer Barańczak and Cavanagh's "experience", however, to Trzeciak's "adventure", which seems overblown in the context of a grain of sand landing on a ledge, where the Polish "przygoda" is mildly ironic. I think "experience" conveys a similar tinge of irony.

My translation departs more from the others in the later stanzas. Barańczak and Cavanagh translate "Bezdennie dnu jeziora/i bezbrzeżnie brzegom" as: "The lake's floor exists floorlessly/and its shore exists shorelessly" (135) (you can hear the internal rhyme they have introduced), while Trzeciak renders it more colloquially: "To the bottom of the lake, it's bottomless/and shoreless to its shore" (67). I propose a phrasing which I think sounds more natural in English than either of these and which conveys Szymborska's meaning more explicitly: "The bottom of the lake can't tell its depth,/its shores do not feel themselves shores." The other translations each use the suffix "-less"

(e.g. “floorlessly”, “bottomless”) to gloss the Polish prefix “bez-” (without). The use of “-less” to render “bez-” works well elsewhere in the poem, e.g. when “bezbarwnie” becomes “colourless”, and “bezboleśnie”, “painless”. But in the fourth stanza the use of “-less” makes the English sound more gnomic than the Polish: what does “exists floorlessly” (or “shorelessly”) mean? Trzeciak’s “shoreless to its shore” is also initially confusing: what is shoreless to whose shore? In Polish the lake’s shores (brzegi) are unambiguously shoreless to themselves, but Trzeciak’s line seems to imply that the lake’s floor is shoreless to the lake’s shore, which makes no sense. “Bezdenie dnu jeziora/i bezbrzeżnie brzegom” is strange but clear and resonant in Polish. The alliterative repetition of the sounds “bez”, “dnu”, “den” and “brze” give the lines an oracular quality. But the lines’ meaning is plain. The speaker’s perspective in the poem is unorthodox yet her language feels, by and large, normal, however invented particular words may be, such as “bezbrzeżnie” or “bezniebnie” (skylessly).

A conversational voice presenting strange or provocative viewpoints is typical of Szymborska’s poetry, which somehow makes the previously unthought-of seem uncannily familiar: for example, the cooing relative’s response to baby Hitler in “Fotografia Hitlera” (A Photograph of Hitler), or the voyeuristic official censor’s voice in “Głos w sprawie pornografii” (An Opinion on the Question of Pornography) (both poems from the 1986 volume *Ludzie na moście*). Readers of Szymborska’s poems often find themselves implicated in unnerving perspectives. In “Widok z ziarnkiem piasku”, the poet is effectively channelling the point of view of things – sand, water, stones, cloud – which have none. In doing so she draws attention to how peculiar human beings are in their relentless anthropomorphizing of the world. The poem’s rhythmically recurring use of “bez” (-less) and “nie” (not) highlights the tenacity of this habitual thinking by repeatedly resisting it. At the same time, Szymborska suggests how chillingly vacant the world would be, without an overlay of human perception. Despite the mention of waves breaking and wind tearing at a cloud, there is an unsettling stillness in the poem, worthy of a Magritte painting. And the closing image of time’s rapid and indifferent passing emphasizes just how finite are human perspectives.

“Widok z ziarnkiem piasku” forcefully defamiliarizes a reflexive human way of thinking. My translation seeks to convey the idiomatic quality of Szymborska’s voice without surrendering the surreal effect that her poem conjures.

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Widok z ziarnkiem piasku

By

Wisława Szymborska

Zwiemy je ziarnkiem piasku.
A ono siebie ani ziarnkiem, ani piasku.
Obywa się bez nazwy
ogólnej, szczególnej,
przelotnej, trwałej,
mylnej czy właściwej.

Na nic mu nasze spojrzenie, dotknięcie.
Nie czuje się ujrane i dotknięte.
A to, że spadło na parapet okna,
to tylko nasza, nie jego przygoda.
Dla niego to to samo, co spaść na
cokolwiek,
bez pewności, czy spadło już,
czy spada jeszcze.

Z okna jest piękny widok na jezioro,
ale ten widok sam siebie nie widzi.
Bezbarwnie i bezkształtnie,
Bezgłośnie, bezwonne
i bezboleśnie jest mu na tym świecie.

Bezdenie dna jeziora
i bezbrzeżnie brzegom.
Nie mokro ani sucho jego wodzie.
Nie pojedynczo ani mnogo falom,
co szumią głuche na swój własny szum
wokół nie małych, nie dużych kamieni.

A wszystko to pod niebem z natury
bezniebnym,

View with a Grain of Sand

By

Wisława Szymborska

Translated by Mary Besemeres

We call it a grain of sand.
It calls itself neither grain, nor sand.
It gets by without a name
either general or specific,
passing or permanent,
mistaken or accurate.

Our look, our touch mean nothing to it.
It feels neither looked at, nor touched.
The fact that it fell on the window-sill
is only our experience, not its.
To the grain it’s the same as falling on
anything
without knowing if it’s landed
or falling, still.

From the window, there’s a fine view of
the lake,
but the view cannot see itself.
Colourless, shapeless,
Soundless, scentless,
And painless is how it finds this world.

The bottom of the lake can’t tell its
depth,
its shores do not feel themselves shores.
The water feels neither wet nor dry,
the waves no sense of being one or
many;
they break, deaf to their own breaking,
over rocks neither large nor small.

And all this under a sky by nature
skylless,

w którym zachodzi słońce nie zachodząc
wcale
i kryje się nie kryjąc za bezwiedną
chmurę.
Targa nią wiatr bez żadnych innych
powodów,
jak tylko ten, że wieje.

Mija jedna sekunda.
Druga sekunda.
Trzecia sekunda.
Ale to tylko nasze trzy sekundy.

Czas przebiegł jak posłaniec z pilną
wiadomością.
Ale to tylko nasze porównanie.
Zmyślona postać, wmówiony jej
pośpiech,
a wiadomość nieludzka.

in which the sun sets without really
setting
and hides without hiding behind a
heedless cloud.
The wind tears at the cloud for no other
reason
than that it's blowing.

A second passes.
Another.
A third.
But they're only our three seconds.

Time's raced by like a runner with
urgent news.
But that's only our analogy.
The figure is made-up, his speed make-
believe,
the message inhuman.

Translating Colette Fellous' Short Story "Le Petit Casino"

LOUISE BERNASOCHI

Le Petit Casino is a short story by Colette Fellous which focuses on memories and feelings from the writer's childhood. The story featured as part of a collection of autobiographical stories written by French authors who originate from different countries. This collection, titled *17 Écrivains racontent une enfance d'ailleurs* (17 Writers Tell of a Childhood from Elsewhere) (1993), was collated by Nancy Huston and Leïla Sebbar, both authors who have themselves lived in France but were born and raised in other countries. The stories that feature in the collection focus on each authors' youth, their linguistic and cultural backgrounds, and the beginning of their journey as writers. *Le Petit Casino* is a standalone story, set apart from Fellous' novel of the same title, however focusing on the same subject matter and themes.

Colette Fellous was born in Tunisia's capital, Tunis, in 1950 and moved to Paris in 1967, where she studied under Roland Barthes at the Sorbonne. Fellous has worked for many years as a producer for France-Culture, written a dozen novels and numerous essays, and has a passion for photography. These days, she splits her time between France and Tunisia.

Le Petit Casino is an evocative retelling of Fellous' memories from the six summers her family spent at their summer house in Tunisia. Le Petit Casino is a small café where locals used to play, naturally, casino games, and Fellous' family would stay in the rooms upstairs in summertime. Fellous describes the daily rhythms of the house – dancing out on the terrace every afternoon, attempting and failing to take siestas, buying snacks from a travelling vendor, and going to the nearby beaches. The fragmented memories weave in and out of each other, complementing the recurrent image of a young Fellous dancing. At first, her recollections could appear to be random. Robert J. Watson states: "Fellous traverses historical epochs, perspectives, and voices with a fluid, associative style" (132). Fellous is purposeful and selective about what she shows the reader, building images and ideas gradually. Throughout the story the descriptions of the various settings are built upon and repeated; there are also repeated references to silence, dancing, and hints that something regularly takes place at the house that she does not understand.

In my translation the aim was to highlight the rich cultural aspects of the story as well as to convey the central themes, as well as the rhythm of the writing. Literary translation practices and literary theory were crucial to shaping this approach.

[W]hat translators do is [...] write – or perhaps rewrite – in language B a work of literature originally composed in language A, hoping that readers of the second language [...] will perceive the text, emotionally and artistically, in a manner that parallels and corresponds to the aesthetic experience of its first readers.

(Grossman 7)

It was important to me that the delicate, subtle aspects of the text came through to the reader. In the recurrent references to dancing on the terrace, a breathlessness and urgency is shown through lack of punctuation, which was a unique aspect I wished to maintain in the translation, staying close to the source text (ST) rather than using an

interventionist strategy: “three four five glissade arabesque seven eight nine piqué piqué déboulé déboulé déboulé and most of all don’t lose your balance most of all never lose your focus on the wall of the orphanage déboulé déboulé now faster”.

The text foreshadows what Fellous only understood in later years, which is revealed at the very end of the story. All instances of this delicate foreshadowing were kept as ambiguous in the target text (TT) as in the ST, rather than seeking to make these nuanced passages more explicit. “From summer to summer, I build my dance like this, very simply, all while trying to decipher what nobody shows me, and yet what takes place so close to me. Right beneath my feet.” Through this, the target audience (TA) also has the chance to be surprised by the conclusion.

Imagery, objects, and the scenes Fellous describes all hold relevance and importance to her experiences and to this distinct period in Tunisia. A strong example of this is when Fellous uses two French words for “car”, creating a distinction in the reader’s mind between her father’s car, an “auto”, to the cars of the Petit Casino’s clientele, “voitures”, showing a contrast between the two. There is a clear connotation that the “auto” is an ordinary car while the “voitures” are luxury cars like Jaguars and Cadillacs, however if both words were simply translated as “car” in English, this connotation would have been weakened and there would also be potential for confusion. Jean Boase-Beier and Michael Holman refer to translating literature as a “re-creative process” (8), and highlight the translator’s dilemma of “domesticating the foreign, or [...] acting as a channel for the new” (11). I explored multiple translation possibilities so that the nuance may be understood by the TA, working as Boase-Beier and Holman’s “inventive interventionist” (13). The outcome of trying different translation strategies resulted in using adjectives “little” and “scrappy” to describe the “auto”, and translating a problematic sentence in which both words appear as: “It’s just a car, not like the others”.

Marina Manfredi’s (45-72) work on interlingual translation practices was informative as it provided a lot of scope and freedom concerning the preservation of words potentially unknown to the TA. Upon researching the translation for the phrase “glibettes noires” (roasted and salted black sunflower seeds), I discovered that the name of this snack would potentially be just as foreign to a French person as to an Anglophone reader. To highlight the cultural specificity of this snack, common in Tunisia, I decided to keep the original French phrase in my translation. This also aided in maintaining the rhythm of the passage, as it is clear from the gloss that the English equivalent is lengthy.

To assist with the deep reading of the text, I utilized strategies for analysing autobiographical writing as outlined by Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson (165-179). Understanding the workings of autobiographical characteristics and conveying them to the TA in translation is important because these experiences provide the whole picture – personal, political, emotional, cultural – of the author at that time.

It was crucial in this translation to know when to intervene and use creative strategies and when to stay closer to the ST. In my translation I aimed to capture the subtlety and rhythm of Fellous’ writing which make this story so enjoyable to read and draw attention to cultural features wherever possible.

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Colette Fellous à 11 ans.
Terrasse du Petit Casino,
près de Salambô, en Tunisie.

[Colette Fellous aged 11.
Petit Casino terrace,
near Salambô, Tunisia.]

En 2000,
au même endroit.

[In 2000,
at the same place.]



Le Petit Casino
By
Colette Fellous

C'est elle, ma première scène.

Cette espèce de terrasse, posée maladroitement au-dessus du Petit Casino. La maison en elle-même n'a pas de caractère bien défini, mais on peut la voir d'assez loin quand on arrive de la ville et qu'on passe par la route du lac. Derrière la cuisine, une échelle bleu passé permet d'accéder à l'autre terrasse, celle qui sert à faire sécher les piments, les peaux de mouton, les pois chiches et les tout petits poissons. J'y vais parfois le matin. J'y vais pour m'éblouir les yeux et regarder le monde en blanc. Jusqu'au vertige je fais ça. Même le parc des voisins devient tout blanc. Même le figuier, même le chat endormi sous les palmes. Après, je retourne dans ma chambre et j'enlève ma robe.

Mon public, c'est le silence. Le silence de la sieste, du pays tout entier.

Sur cette scène, c'est vrai, j'ai lentement appris à respirer la langue du pays. Je veux dire celle qui restait dans l'air quand personne ne voulait se risquer au soleil et que les mots ne circulaient plus qu'à l'intérieur. Seules les choses semblaient alors vivantes. La route, le mur, les feuilles, la poussière, le croisement, les feux de signalisation, le sable.

Je veux parler aussi de cette langue invisible qu'il me serait insoutenable, aujourd'hui encore, de quitter. Celle qu'à mon tour, à l'intérieur, je ne me lasse pas de fredonner, sans savoir la nommer.

Je viens là, sur cette terrasse, tous les après-midi.

Et c'est peut-être bien sur ce petit théâtre moucheté noir et blanc que j'ai peu à peu compris comment la langue pouvait se glisser bien plus

Le Petit Casino
By
Colette Fellous
Translated by Louise Bernasochi

That's it, my first stage.

This kind of terrace, awkwardly placed above Le Petit Casino. The house in itself doesn't have much character, but you can see it from a distance when you arrive in town if you take the road by the lake. Behind the kitchen, a period blue ladder provides access to the other terrace, the one used for drying chillies, sheep skins, chickpeas, and tiny fish. I go there sometimes in the mornings. I go to make my eyes dazzle and see the world in white. I do that until I'm dizzy. Even the neighbours' park goes all white. Even the fig tree, even the cat asleep beneath the palm trees. Afterwards, I go back to my room and take off my dress.

My audience is silence. The silence of the siesta, of the entire country.

On this stage, it's true, I slowly learnt to breathe the country's language. I mean the one which stayed in the air when nobody wanted to risk exposure to the sun and words only moved about indoors. Only objects seemed living then. The road, the wall, the leaves, the dust, the crossing, the traffic lights, the sand.

I also want to speak of this invisible language that I would find unbearable to abandon, even today. The one that I never get bored of humming inside, without knowing what to call it.

I come here, to this terrace, every afternoon.

And it's possibly atop this small, mottled black and white theatre that I understood little by little how language could slide a lot more maliciously in images and in sounds than inside words.

malicieusement dans les images et dans les sons qu'à l'intérieur des mots.

Je viens là, et je danse.

C'est l'été, bien sûr.

Je danse pour le vide, pour les rues désertes, pour les murs de l'orphelinat, pour les avions, pour le bruit du train, pour les branches du mimosa, pour la forme des figues, pour les hirondelles. Ma danse a le dessin d'une prière païenne, je souris au vide, j'accueille la rue tout entière, je la laisse se faufiler dans mon corps.

J'ai dix ans passés quand j'arrive dans cette maison, et j'y reviens régulièrement, pendant six étés. Après, je prends l'avion, je quitte le pays, je n'entends plus la même langue. Le jour de la photo, je sais que j'ai glissé ma main dans les cheveux pour ne pas attirer l'attention sur le premier bouton de ma robe à bretelles, celle que je ne voulais pas abandonner mais qui ne fermait plus très facilement depuis que ma poitrine s'était mise à enfler. Avec le bras levé, ça se voyait moins. Je n'osais parler à personne de cette transformation, pas même à ma mère qui dormait là-bas, enveloppée dans sa mélancolie, de l'autre côté, au bout du couloir. Alors je l'ai dit à la photo. C'est mon frère qui, ce jour-là, avait emprunté l'appareil aux voisins. Sans eux, je n'aurais jamais eu aucune trace de ma scène. L'appareil venait de France, tout le quartier l'avait essayé.

D'été en été, je bâtis ma danse comme ça, très simplement, tout en essayant de lire ce qu'on ne me montre pas et qui se joue pourtant tout près de moi. Juste sous mes pas.

Je cherche aussi dans les livres. Tout ce qui me tombe sous la main trouve sa traduction immédiate sur cette terrasse. Je fouille dans *La Maison Tellier*, dans *Les Raisins de la colère*, dans *À l'est d'Eden*. Je déclame *Les Nourritures terrestres* et *Les Chants de Maldoror*. C'est bizarre comme la voix

I come here, and I dance.

It's summer, of course.

I dance for the emptiness, for the deserted streets, for the walls of the orphanage, for the planes, for the sound of the train, for the mimosa branches, for the shape of the figs, for the swallows. My dance has the pattern of a pagan prayer, I smile at the emptiness, I welcome the street entirely, I let it weave in and out of my body.

I was over ten years old when I first arrived at this house, and I returned there regularly over six summers. Afterwards, I would take the plane, leave the country, no longer hear the same language. The day of this photo, I know that I slid my hand into my hair to avoid drawing attention to the first button of my strappy dress, the one I didn't want to let go of that no longer did up very easily since my chest had begun to swell. With my hand raised, you couldn't tell as much. I didn't dare speak to anyone about this change, not even to my mother shrouded in her melancholy who slept over there, on the other side, at the end of the hallway. So I said it to the photo. It was my brother who had borrowed the neighbours' camera that day. Without it I never would have had any record of my stage. The camera came from France, the whole neighbourhood had tried it.

From summer to summer, I build my dance like this, very simply, all while trying to decipher what nobody shows me, and yet what takes place so close to me. Right beneath my feet.

I also search in books. Everything I can get my hands on I translate right away on this terrace. I delve into *La Maison Tellier*, *The Grapes of Wrath*, *East of Eden*. I recite *The Fruits of the Earth* and *The Songs of Maldoror*. It's strange how the voice of these words always rings true. I even want to believe

de ces mots tombe toujours juste, je veux même croire, au moment où je les découvre, qu'ils n'ont été écrits que pour être lus ici, à l'heure de la sieste, avec la rumeur du café sous mon ventre et le pays allongé lascivement d'un bout à l'autre de la côte, jusqu'à la frontière libyenne, jusqu'au désert, comme un grand corps d'homme enroulé sur lui-même, et protégeant son secret.

Le Petit Casino, c'est le nom du café. Et c'est bien sûr aussi mon adresse. J'ai oublié la couleur des lettres sur la toile, je ne sais plus si c'était du rouge ou du noir.

À chaque fois, je dois pourtant préciser que j'habite au premier étage, que mes parents ne tiennent pas le café, non, que nous sommes juste locataires pour l'été, et quand je surprends chez certains un sourire ou une gêne, je ne cherche jamais à comprendre, je lance aussitôt une autre question pour ne pas m'attarder sur celle-là, tout en me récitant à voix basse les mots du propriétaire, le premier jour.

Il se passait régulièrement la main sur son crâne quand il parlait. Son chandail jaune paille moulait son ventre, et ses yeux me faisaient très peur quand il les écarquillait comme ça. À peu près toutes les trois secondes il faisait remonter ses sourcils, pour donner sans doute plus de vérité à ses phrases. Sa voix avait beaucoup plu à ma mère, ce premier jour. Une voix à la fois pointue et puissante. C'est un homme qui a de la classe, ce propriétaire, m'avait-elle chuchoté en me pressant la main, tu ne trouves pas ?

« Avant, on venait de partout pour jouer chez nous à la roulette et au baccara, mais maintenant c'est fini, on a tout repeint à la chaux. Vous pouvez vivre comme chez vous, installer les meubles que vous voulez, les pièces sont bien fraîches à l'intérieur vous verrez, et le coin est plutôt tranquille. Allez, installons-nous sous le mimosa et

that, in the moment I discover them, they were written only to be read here, at siesta time, with the murmur of the café beneath my stomach and the country laid out lusciously from one end to the other, up to the Libyan border, to the desert, like the body of a big man wound back on himself, and protecting his secret.

Le Petit Casino is the name of the café. And of course it's my address. I've forgotten the colour of the letters on the canvas, I don't remember if they were red or black.

Every time though I have to clarify that I live on the first floor, that my parents don't run the café, no, that we are just tenants over summer, and when I notice a smile or awkwardness from people, I never seek to understand, I immediately throw out another question to move on, all the while reciting the proprietor's words from the first day in a low voice.

He regularly runs his hand over his head while he speaks. His straw-yellow jumper hugs his stomach, and his eyes really scare me when he opens them wide like that. Nearly every three seconds he raises his eyebrows, presumably to make his sentences more truthful. His voice pleased my mother a lot, that first day. A voice both sharp and powerful. He's a man with class, this proprietor, she had whispered to me while squeezing my hand, don't you think?

“Before, people came from everywhere to play roulette and baccarat at our place, but that's over now, we've repainted everywhere with whitewash. Live like you're at home, put the furniture where you like, you'll find the rooms are cool inside, and this area is fairly quiet. Come on, let's sit under the mimosa and share an anisette to celebrate

partageons une anisette pour fêter votre arrivée. Quelle fournaise il faisait en ville ce matin... Et la petite, alors, elle a quel âge ? »

Moi, de toute façon, je ne réponds pas, j'écoute.

J'écoute et puis très vite, je traduis en dansant. Je vais un peu plus loin, derrière les caisses de bière, entre les tables du fond et le couloir, je tourne je tourne, là encore jusqu'au vertige. J'ai pris cette habitude, de danser sur tout ce que j'entends, et même si le sourire de cet homme me paraît légèrement tendu, je le fais très vite se confondre avec le paysage autour, je l'engouffre sous mon pas, la maison est tellement claire, tellement transparente que je décide d'aimer pleinement toutes ces heures d'été, quoi qu'il arrive, je sors les tissus, les nattes et les robes de coton brodées au point de croix, j'étale les pinceaux et les crayons de couleur sur la grande table, j'ouvre toutes les fenêtres, je chasse les odeurs anciennes, j'arrose le géranium, j'essaie les robinets. Et de toute façon je veux bien croire que c'était un casino cette maison puisqu'ils ont laissé dans l'entrée la reproduction des *Joueurs de cartes* de Cézanne. Mon joueur préféré, c'est celui de gauche, celui qui est en train de perdre, j'aime dire. Quand je ne sais pas quoi faire, je vais à côté d'eux et je les regarde jouer. Pour moi, ce sont des parents ou d'anciens locataires. Surtout que leur petite table de jeu, en bois vert légèrement écaillé, est restée dans notre cuisine. Dans le petit tiroir, en arrivant, j'ai caché mes caramels.

Un vrai labyrinthe cette maison. Je fais encore la toupie en chuchotant « Je t'aime, je t'aime », et je ne sais même pas à qui je parle, ça aussi c'est une habitude que j'ai prise, de dire je t'aime en secret quand je suis très très contente, je tourne je tourne, je bois à même le robinet et je vais visiter la maison. Côté jardin, c'est donc la terrasse, avec le grand mimosa qui monte jusqu'à nous et

your arrival. It was hot as an oven in town this morning... And how old is the little girl?"

In any case, I don't reply, I listen.

I listen and then very quickly, I translate through dance. I go a bit further, behind the crates of beer, between the tables at the back and the hallway, I turn I turn, once again until I'm dizzy. It's a habit of mine, to dance out everything I hear, and even if this man's smile seems to me slightly strained, I quickly mix it with the landscape around us, I stamp it out under my steps, the house is so bright, so open that I decide to fully love all of summer's hours, no matter what happens, I unpack the material, the mats, and the cross-stitched cotton dresses, I spread out the brushes and coloured pencils on the big table, I open all the windows, I get rid of all the old smells, I water the geranium, I try the taps. And anyway, I really want to believe that this house was a casino because in the entrance they have left a print of Cézanne's *Card Players*. My favourite player is the one on the left, who's in the middle of losing, I like to say. When I don't know what to do, I sit beside them and watch them play. To me, they're the parents or former tenants. Especially as their small, lightly chipped green wood gaming table is still in our kitchen. When I got here, I hid my caramels in the little drawer.

This house is a real labyrinth. I spin around again while whispering "I love you, I love you", and I don't even know who I'm speaking to, that's another habit of mine, to say I love you in secret when I am very very happy, I turn I turn, I even drink straight from the tap and go around the house. On the garden side is the terrace with the big mimosa that rises as high as us, and the sea at the end, but

la mer tout au bout, mais on ne la voit pas vraiment, on la devine, ça fait une tache plus claire dans le ciel, les oiseaux se dirigent toujours vers ce point et comme les oiseaux vont vers la vérité, je dis que c'est la mer. Côté cour, c'est plus triste. La voie ferrée, les enfants qui jouent au foot, le terrain vague, et les poules noires près de la petite buanderie. Plus loin encore, quand on ouvre entièrement la fenêtre et qu'on se penche par-delà le figuier, tiens, les volets sont cassés, on peut apercevoir les avions. Là aussi, le ciel s'éclaircit. C'est par là que je m'envolerai quand je serai grande, je le sais.

Mais pour le moment, cette danse me suffit.

C'est d'ailleurs une drôle de danse, balbutiante, prise à chaque fois entre le figuier et le mimosa, entre la mer et les trains, entre le sable et le lac. Une chose tout de même que je ne m'explique pas encore, c'est le silence qui tapisse ma chambre, celle qui justement donne sur la cour intérieure. Un silence qui ne ressemble pas à celui de ma terrasse. Plus moite, plus inquiétant. Qui m'attire et m'effraie en même temps. Je n'aime pas rester ici trop longtemps dans l'après-midi, il fait trop sombre, je laisse plutôt mes frères y jouer.

Je préfère courir de l'autre côté et trôner sur ma scène.

Des années pourtant il m'a fallu pour déchiffrer ce silence. Un jour, il a pris la couleur de l'éblouissement du matin, quand je m'amusais à fixer le soleil. Alors, j'ai fermé les yeux à mon tour sur ce vertige. Comme tous les autres sans doute. Je faisais partie désormais de ceux qui savaient, mais disons que ça ne se voyait pas. C'était cela la règle du jeu. La règle de ce Petit Casino. Savoir et ne pas dire, savoir et ne pas montrer. Comme dans les grandes maisons.

you can't really see it, you sense it, it's a clear patch in the sky, the birds always head towards this point and, as birds always go towards the truth, I say that it's the sea. The courtyard side is gloomier. The railway track, children playing soccer, wasteland, and the black chickens close to the small laundry. Further still, when you open the window completely and lean across the fig tree, well, the shutters are broken, you can catch sight of the planes. There too, the sky clears up. Over there is where I will fly away when I'm big, I know it.

But for now, this dance is enough for me.

It's a strange dance actually, faltering, taking hold each time between the fig tree and the mimosa, between the sea and the trains, between the sand and the lake. One thing all the same that I still can't explain is the silence that lines my bedroom, which happens to face out onto the inner courtyard. A silence unlike that of my terrace. Clammier, more worrying. That entices and frightens me at the same time. I don't like to stay here too long in the afternoons, it's too bleak, instead I leave my brothers to play there.

I prefer to run to the other side and take pride of place on my stage.

Yet it took me years to decipher this silence. One day, it took on the dazzling colour of the morning, when I was playing at staring at the sun. So I closed my eyes in turn against the dizziness. Like everyone surely. From then on, I was part of those who knew, but you couldn't tell. That was the rule of the game. The rule of this Petit Casino. Know and don't say, know and don't show. Like in the great houses.

À gauche, sous les eucalyptus, la route file droit vers le Kram et Salambô, juste avant de monter sur Carthage. En vélo, c'est d'ailleurs cette « montée de Carthage » qui trace la frontière entre l'enfance et l'adolescence. Un jour, quelque chose surgit dans le corps, on a douze ou treize ans, quelque chose qui permet de franchir cette ligne très abrupte et de se risquer encore plus loin, jusqu'aux autres villages. Amilcar, Sidi-Bou-Saïd, la Marsa. Sans jamais le dire à personne, on quitte la maison et on la voit se développer cette liberté nouvelle qui rayonne dans le corps, on apprend peu à peu à la reconnaître, elle qui saura désormais nous capter et nous surprendre, de la même façon que plus tard, dans une rencontre ou un amour.

Une liberté qui ne s'est partagée qu'avec le silence de l'après-midi, un jour où sans doute débordait alors de soi l'urgence de comprendre comment pouvaient bien être dessinées les choses dans ce pays, au-delà du rond-point. On ne savait presque rien de la géographie. Personne n'avait pris la peine de nous expliquer qui nous étions. Où nous étions. Pourquoi cette langue, pourquoi ces gens, pourquoi ces fêtes, pourquoi les choses ne collaient pas entre elles et pourquoi c'était normal. Il fallait voir, c'est tout. C'était là notre seul enseignement. Voir et chercher une réponse en soi-même, à partir de ces images. On ne savait même pas montrer l'Afrique sur la carte. On était encore plus ahuri quand il fallait pointer la France avec la règle de la maîtresse, on avait beau entendre des voix d'enfants souffler « là, là, là... », tous les pays étaient pareils. On savait pourtant très bien les dessiner quand ils étaient séparés, mais une fois mis ensemble, dans l'atlas ou sur un globe, ils devenaient indifférents, comme s'ils appartenaient à d'autres gens, pas à nous. On s'appliquait à passer lentement toutes sortes de couleurs, bleu pour la Merjerda,

To the left, under the eucalyptuses, the road runs right toward Kram and Salambô, just before going up to Carthage. By bike, it's this "rise to Carthage" that traces the border between childhood and adolescence. One day, at 12, 13 years old, something emerges in the body, something that suddenly allows you to cross this line and to venture even further, up to the other villages. Amilcar, Sidi-Bou-Saïd, La Marsa. Without telling anyone, you leave the house and you see this new freedom developing that shines throughout the body, you gradually learn to recognise it, something that knows from then on how to capture and surprise you, in the same way as encounters and lovers later on.

A new freedom shared only with the silence of the afternoon, one day when you are filled with an urgency to understand how things might really be shaped in this country, beyond the roundabout. Growing up, we knew almost nothing of the geography. Nobody had bothered to explain to us who we were. Where we were. Why this language, why these people, why these celebrations, why things didn't add up and why it was normal. You had to see, that was all. That was it, our only education. See and seek an answer in yourself, based on these images. We didn't even know how to find Africa on a map. We were even more bewildered when we had to point to France with the teacher's ruler; while we'd heard the children's voices prompting "there, there, there...", all the countries were alike. We knew very well how to draw them when they were separate, but once they were put together, in an atlas or on a globe, they became indifferent, as if they belonged to other people, not to us. We made an effort to slowly put in all kinds of colours, blue for the Merjerda, pink for the Chott El-Djerid, yellow for the Sahara, green for the Aïn-Draham forest,

rose pour le Chott El-Djerid, jaune pour le Sahara, vert pour la forêt d'Aïn-Draham, sans oublier bien sûr le tracé des frontières à l'encre de Chine. Mais les noms restaient toujours somnambules sous les doigts, comme dans l'attente d'une véritable existence. Presque en dehors du monde, ils étaient. Et nous avec.

C'est pourquoi la plupart du temps, je me contentais de rester là, sur ma terrasse, à regarder ce qu'on m'avait installé sous les yeux. Et curieusement, cela me suffisait. La scène qu'en réalité j'aimerais raconter est très courte, elle ne dure pas plus de quelques secondes, mais en même temps, elle est immobile, elle enjambe des années entières, elle est lascive, elle ne se presse pas pour comprendre, elle a compris trop tôt, alors maintenant elle s'invente d'autres images pour masquer celle qu'elle n'a jamais vue, elle va sur la droite, sur la gauche, devant, derrière, elle ne sait pas trouver les mots qui dessineraient l'autre scène, celle qui se répète pourtant tous les jours sous ses pas, non, elle est encore trop petite, elle ne sait pas.

En un sens, le pays tout entier était déjà contenu dans ce modeste cercle qui servait de rond-point, tracé en rouge et blanc au milieu des broussailles. Quand il y avait une fête nationale, dès dix heures du matin, on y flanquait un policier qui passait d'ailleurs le plus large de son temps à bavarder avec le propriétaire du café, mais en général, on ne voyait que des graviers et des voitures qui ralentissaient, se guettaient, puis repartaient. Quelquefois, un accident. Un vélo, une vespa, une camionnette. Une étourderie, en général, plus qu'un excès de vitesse.

À gauche, donc, c'est Carthage.

En face, on peut entendre à toute heure du jour les chants de l'orphelinat, mais on ne voit jamais les enfants. Le mur est très délabré. Par endroits le chèvrefeuille déborde. À côté, un

without forgetting to outline the borders in India ink. But the names always remained sleepwalking under our fingers, as if waiting to really exist. Almost outside of the world, they were. And us with them.

That's why most of the time, I was happy to stay there, on my terrace, to look at what had been put right before my eyes. And strangely, that was enough for me. The scene that I would really like to describe is very short, it doesn't last more than a few seconds, but at the same time, it is motionless, it spans across entire years, it is sensual, it doesn't rush to understand, it understood too early, so now it creates other images to hide what it never saw, it goes from right, to left, in front, behind, it doesn't know how to find the words that would describe the other scene, the one that repeats itself every day under its steps, no, it is still too small, it doesn't know.

In a sense, the entire country was already contained in this modest circle that served as a roundabout, outlined in red and white in the middle of the bushes. When there was a national holiday, from ten in the morning, they put a policeman there who spent most of his time chatting with the proprietor of the café, but in general, we only saw gravel and cars slowing down, looking out, then leaving. Sometimes, an accident. A bike, a Vespa, a van. Absent-mindedness, in general, more than speeding.

And so, to the left is Carthage.

In front, you can hear singing from the orphanage at all hours of the day, but you never see the children. The wall is very dilapidated. In places the honeysuckle is taking over. To the side, a

hibiscus jaune, une allée de figuiers de Barbarie, et toujours des graviers. J'aime la mélancolie de cet horizon, j'aime sa nudité.

Quand on dépasse l'orphelinat, on est aussitôt sur le petit sentier qui conduit à la plage. Elle s'appelle « l'Aéroport ». C'est ma plage préférée. Elle est prise entre les deux cafés, le Bikini et l'Oiseau bleu. Le samedi, on y donne des jam-sessions, mais les enfants n'y entrent pas, ils restent sur le sable avec les parents. C'est seulement pour les jeunes.

Tous les matins on le prend, ce sentier. Après avoir aidé la mère à préparer les poissons, à faire griller les tomates et les poivrons. Après s'être aussi longuement lavé les mains pour faire disparaître l'odeur et la brûlure du piment. Au retour, vers deux heures de l'après-midi, on a parfois des frissons dans les bras tellement les pieds nous incendient, mais c'est comme ça par ici, on ne met jamais de chaussures pour aller à la plage puisqu'on a très vite appris à trier du regard tous les bouts de verre, tous les cactus et même les branches de bois brûlé.

À droite, on peut rejoindre l'autre plage, celle de Khereddine, au pied des palais beylicaux en ruine, mais pour cela, il est préférable de traverser le champ de maïs, à force on a réussi à se frayer un chemin entre les feuilles brûlées. Si on préfère, on peut aussi dépasser le canal et marcher jusqu'à la Goulette, mais ça, c'est déjà un tout autre pays.

Eux, les frères, les voisins, les parents, je ne sais jamais où ils sont quand je suis sur cette scène. Peut-être ils dorment, peut-être ils sont encore à la plage, peut-être ils sont allés passer la journée à Tunis.

Je suis seule et je danse.

Le ciel est blanc. Il doit être trois heures de l'après-midi puisque je vois déjà la silhouette de Ravailac se dandiner tout au bout de l'image, au coin

yellow hibiscus, a path of Barbary figs, and still more gravel. I love the melancholy of this horizon, I love its nudity.

When you go beyond the orphanage, you are immediately on the little path that leads to the beach. It's called "l'Aéroport". It's my favourite beach. It runs between two cafés, le Bikini and l'Oiseau bleu. On Saturdays they have jam sessions, but children don't go in, they stay on the sand with their parents. It's only for teenagers.

Each morning we take this path. After helping mother to prepare the fish, and grill the tomatoes and capsicums. After washing our hands for a long time, as well, to get rid of the smell and the sting from the chilli. Returning, around two in the afternoon, our arms tingle sometimes because our feet give us hell, but that's how it goes here, we never put shoes on to go to the beach because we learnt very quickly to look out for bits of glass, all the cactuses and even burnt wooden branches.

On the right, you can reach the other beach, the one in Khereddine, at the foot of the rundown Bey palaces, but for that it's better to cross the cornfield, where we eventually manage to make our way through between the burnt leaves. If you prefer, you can also go by the canal and walk as far as La Goulette, but that's entirely different country.

The others – brothers, neighbours, parents – I never know where they are when I'm on this stage. Maybe they're sleeping, maybe they're still at the beach, maybe they've gone out to spend the day in Tunis.

I am alone and I dance.

The sky is white. It must be three in the afternoon because I can already see Ravailac's silhouette prancing about at the end of the image, alongside the

de l'orphelinat, le grand panier de cacahuètes posé sur son turban. En quittant la plage, il poursuit sa tournée chez les particuliers. Avec Ravailac, on ne se parle jamais, on se sourit c'est tout, il ne faut pas réveiller ceux qui dorment à côté, chut, deux cornets d'amandes et un paquet de glibettes noires s'il te plaît, ça suffira jusqu'à demain, je te donnerai l'argent à la plage. Il me lance le tout sur la terrasse, on se fait un grand signe de la main, et il continue sa route vers le Kram.

Je n'ai pas besoin de musique pour danser. Seules les hirondelles ont le droit de m'accompagner si elles passent par là.

Voilà que mon corps tout à coup décide de se jeter vers le ciel de tourner et d'attraper au passage toutes les couleurs des arbres et du sable avec ma voix qui chuchote pour guider les pas et surveiller les bras trois quatre cinq glissade arabesque sept huit neuf piqué piqué déboulé déboulé déboulé et surtout ne pas perdre l'équilibre surtout ne jamais quitter du regard le mur de l'orphelinat déboulé déboulé encore plus vite à genoux maintenant pour un vrai salut tellement chaud vertige éclats de rire vertige encore je suis si bien ici au milieu de ce carrefour une vraie danse publique que ma danse je me laisse glisser jusqu'au sol et j'écoute battre la terre comme apaisée je suis.

Gardienne du silence je suis devenue, gardienne du murmure qui sommeille sous les pierres, près des scarabées et des scorpions.

Gardienne, et complice malgré moi.

De temps en temps, une voiture s'engage sur le terre-plein et s'arrête sous ma terrasse. Une Jaguar, une Cadillac, une Mercedes. Elles sont toujours noires, les voitures qui viennent au Petit Casino, je ne sais pas pourquoi. Certaines ont même de petits rideaux de soie rouge à l'arrière. Quand mon père revient de la ville, ça fait toujours drôle parce que son

orphanage, a big basket of peanuts placed on his turban. After leaving the beach, he goes on his rounds to people's houses. We never speak with Ravailac, we only smile, we mustn't wake the people sleeping nearby, shhh, two cones of almonds and a packet of *glibettes noires* please, that will do until tomorrow, I'll give you the money at the beach. He flings it all up to me on the terrace, we give each other a big wave, and he continues on his way toward Kram.

I don't need music to dance. Only the swallows are allowed to accompany me if they come by.

And now my body suddenly decides to throw itself toward the sky, and on the way turn and catch all the colours of the trees and the sand with my voice that whispers to guide the steps and mind the arms three four five glissade arabesque seven eight nine piqué piqué déboulé déboulé déboulé and most of all don't lose your balance most of all never lose your focus on the wall of the orphanage déboulé déboulé now faster on your knees now for a real bow so hot dizzy bursts of laughter dizzy again I feel so good here in the middle of this intersection a real public dance my dance I let myself slide to the floor and I listen to the earth beating how calm I am.

Guardian of silence I have become, a guardian of murmurs that lie dormant beneath the stones, close to the beetles and scorpions.

Guardian, and accomplice despite myself.

From time to time, a car enters the median strip and stops beneath my terrace. Jaguars, Cadillacs, Mercedes. They are always black, the cars that come to Le Petit Casino, I don't know why. Some even have little red silk curtains at the back. When my father comes back from the city it's always funny because his little car blocks the others in. Yet it's

auto tranche sur toutes les autres. Elle a pourtant la même couleur. Mais sur le parebrise et les portières, elle a gardé la poussière de la route, une couche de rouille grignote le rétroviseur et surtout le numéro 6116, tracé à la peinture blanche, est resté légèrement tremblé depuis le jour où mon père a voulu changer lui-même la plaque. J'aime la présence de cette auto sous ma terrasse, même si mon père n'apparaît pas pour le moment sur l'image. C'est une auto, pas une voiture. C'est toute la différence qu'il y a entre mon père et les autres hommes. De la même façon, mon père ne porte ni cravate ni chevalière et il ne peut jamais non plus avoir le visage tendu que découvrent tous ces hommes sans âge quand la portière claque et qu'ils s'engouffrent à l'intérieur du café.

Ils sont toujours très polis avec moi. Ils me sourient dès qu'ils me voient danser, mais c'est bizarre, presque aussitôt, ils baissent la tête. Moi, je mets d'abord ça sur le compte de l'élégance, je dis que c'est à cause de leur cravate, de leur voiture, de leurs cheveux crantés et brillants qu'ils baissent la tête. Je dis aussi qu'ils doivent être très timides les hommes riches qui viennent ici, très timides devant les petites filles qui osent danser comme ça, devant tout le monde et devant eux.

Et puis parfois, je ne sais pas pourquoi, il m'arrive de penser qu'à ce moment-là, sur ce petit chemin entre la voiture et le café, ils auraient préféré être complètement invisibles. Sans doute parce qu'ils ont mis trop de parfum sur leurs joues et sur leurs corps pour venir jusqu'ici et que maintenant, ils ne savent plus comment faire pour passer inaperçus. Mais je dis tout cela seulement quand il fait très chaud, et que le parfum monte par bouffées jusqu'à moi. Je ne veux plus penser à cette odeur.

the same colour. But on the windscreen and the doors it still has dust from the road, a layer of rust eats away the rear-view mirror and most of all the number 6116, outlined in white paint, is still slightly shaky from the day my father wanted to change the number plate himself. I like the presence of this scrappy car under my terrace, even if my father doesn't come into view right away. It's just a car, not like the others. That's the only difference there is between my father and the other men. In the same way, my father doesn't wear a tie or a signet ring, and neither will he ever have the strained face that all these ageless men reveal when the car door shuts and they dive inside the café.

They are always very polite to me. They smile when they see me dance, but it's strange, almost immediately they lower their heads. I mostly chalk it up to their elegance, I say that it's because of their tie, their car, their wavy and glistening hair that they lower their heads. I also say they must be very shy rich men who come here, very shy in front of little girls who dare to dance like that, in front of everyone and in front of them.

And then sometimes, I don't know why, the thought occurs to me that at this very moment, on this little path between the car and the café, they would have preferred to be completely invisible. Undoubtedly because they've put too much cologne on their cheeks and their bodies just to come here and now they no longer know what to do to pass by unnoticed. But I say all this only when it's too hot, and the cologne rises in wafts up to me. I no longer want to think of that scent.

Après, je ne les vois plus.

Je ne sais pas ce qu'ils deviennent, tous ces hommes. Ils vont vers le café, et puis plus rien, c'est de nouveau le silence.

Je les vois aussi passer sous le mimosa, ils se courbent sous les branches en riant et ils disparaissent. Avec le café, on se partage le mimosa. Lui possède le tronc, nous les branches. Elles recouvrent toute une partie de notre terrasse et masquent presque entièrement la cour. Si on veut voir ce qui s'y passe, on doit les écarter sans faire de bruit, éviter de perdre l'équilibre et se pencher légèrement sur le côté. Je ne l'ai jamais fait. J'ai commencé, mais je ne suis pas allée au bout de mon geste. Enfin, je ne sais plus très bien.

Je crois que j'ai attendu que les choses viennent à moi tranquillement, au fil des années. Un jour, le chat s'est laissé aller au plaisir d'offrir son pipi aux feuilles du mimosa et le propriétaire a fait la remarque à ma mère, en lui conseillant d'essorer davantage son linge avant de l'étendre. « Ce n'est pas pour moi, c'est surtout pour les clients », avait-il précisé. Ma mère a préféré ne pas du tout parler du chat, et à travers les branches de l'arbre, elle s'est excusée très poliment, tout en me tripotant une fois de plus la main, comme chaque fois qu'elle cherchait ma complicité.

De mon côté, quand elle me priait d'aller faire la sieste, je ne pouvais pas lui avouer que certains bruits me gênaient dans la chambre et m'empêchaient de dormir. Je disais que la chambre m'étouffait quand les volets étaient fermés et que si je les ouvrais, c'était encore pire. Et puis, je ne savais pas, je n'aimais pas l'odeur de la sieste, il fallait me laisser tranquille, voilà.

Elle, elle disait toujours que j'étais folle.

Afterwards, I don't see them anymore.

I don't know what becomes of them, all these men. They go towards the café, and then nothing more, it's silent again.

I also see them pass beneath the mimosa, they bend under the branches while laughing and they disappear. We share the mimosa with the café. It has the trunk, we have the branches. They stretch over a whole section of our terrace and almost obscure the courtyard completely. If you want to see what's happening, you need to spread the branches without making noise, avoid losing your balance and lean gently to the side. I've never done it. I started, but I didn't go through with it. Well, I don't really know anymore.

I think I expected things to come to me gradually, over the course of the years. One day, the cat decided to go and pee on the mimosa leaves and the proprietor made a remark to my mother, advising her to wring out her laundry more before hanging it out. "It's not for me, it's mostly for the clients", he clarified. My mum didn't want to speak of the cat at all, and through the tree branches she excused herself very politely, while tapping my hand once more, like she did every time she sought my complicity.

As for me, when she asked me to go take my siesta, I couldn't confide in her about the noises that bothered me in my room and stopped me from sleeping. I said that the bedroom suffocated me when the blinds were shut and that if I opened them, it was worse still. And then, I don't know, I didn't like the smell of siesta time, just leave me alone, that's all.

She always said that I was crazy.

Je ne pouvais pas non plus lui expliquer que c'était surtout le bruit du silence qui m'inquiétait. En bas, sous le figuier, quelque chose bougeait, mais je n'entendais que des rires de femmes, mon cœur s'emportait. Ils montaient jusqu'à moi en se faufilant dans les branches du figuier. J'étais immobile, au centre de la chambre. Immobile et nue. Dès que je commençais à reconnaître le début d'un mot, la voix se perdait immédiatement dans le bruit d'un train ou dans le désordre du poulailler, et il fallait tout recommencer. Parfois, un avion passait juste au-dessus de la maison et c'était alors comme un orage. J'étais apaisée, je n'étais plus seule, j'applaudissais même son passage.

Je ne faisais jamais le lien entre ces rires et les robes à volants qui bruissaient sous le mimosa. Et je ne comprenais pas pourquoi ces mêmes voix de femmes murmuraient au milieu de leurs rires des prénoms d'hommes. C'était cela le début des mots. Jamais plus de trois syllabes. Khaled, Salah, Abdel, Lotfi, Sofien. Des mots qui sonnaient comme une chanson dans l'après-midi, une chanson que les femmes se chantaient d'habitude sous la douche ou en s'épilant les jambes. Mais nous n'avions pas de voisins au rez-de-chaussée, était-il possible que les voix viennent de plus loin, de derrière le parc ? Les hommes, par contre, étaient tout à fait muets. Jamais je n'ai entendu le moindre son de leurs voix. Un jour, j'ai ouvert les volets et je me suis penchée. Les feuilles étaient poussiéreuses et par endroits, elles formaient une échancrure, comme un trou de serrure. Mais il n'y avait rien à voir, je crois. On pouvait juste entendre les rires et les respirations. Si proches elles étaient maintenant. J'ai alors regardé le ciel longtemps longtemps, et quand ça m'a brûlé, j'ai reposé mes yeux sur les figues encore nouvelles. Elles étaient vivantes, je les touchais une à une et le lait qui

Neither could I explain that it was the sound of silence most of all that worried me. Downstairs, beneath the fig tree, something moved, but all I could hear was women's laughter, my heart beat like mad. It rose up to me, sliding through the fig tree's branches. I stayed still, in the middle of the bedroom. Still and naked. As soon as I began to recognise the start of a word, the voice immediately got lost in the sound of a train or a disturbance in the chicken coop, and I'd have to start over. Sometimes, a plane passed right over the house and then it was like a storm. It calmed me down, I was no longer alone, I even welcomed its passing.

I never made the link between the laughter and the ruffled dresses that rustled beneath the mimosa. And I didn't understand why these same women's voices murmured men's names in the middle of their laughter. That's what the beginning of the words was. Never more than three syllables. Khaled, Salah, Abdel, Lotfi, Sofien. Words that rang out like a song in the afternoon, a song that the women usually sang to themselves in the shower or while shaving their legs. But we didn't have neighbours on the ground floor, was it possible that the voices came from further away, from behind the park? The men, however, were completely silent. I never heard the least sound of their voices. One day, I opened the blinds and leaned out. The leaves were dusty and in places they formed an inlet, like a keyhole. But there was nothing to see, I think. You could only hear the laughter and the breathing. They were so close now. And so I looked at the sky for a long, long time, and when it burned me, I laid my eyes on the still new figs. They were living, I touched them one by one and the liquid that came out was all sticky. I wiped myself with the leaves and slowly, after staring at the

s'échappait était tout poisseux. Je me suis essuyée à même les feuilles et lentement, après avoir encore fixé le soleil, j'ai refermé la fenêtre et j'ai mis très fort *Pepito*, la toute dernière chanson des Machucambos.

sun again, I closed the window and I played *Pepito* on high volume, the latest song by Los Machucambos.

Klaus Mann in 21st Century Australia: “Tradapting” *Anja und Esther*

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The *skopos* (Reiß and Vermeer 86), or goal, of my “tradaption” of Klaus Mann's first published play, *Anja und Esther* (1925), was to create a performance piece (i.e. not intended to be read only) in the specific context of 21st Century Australia, to raise fundamental questions about the role and visibility of the theatre translator. The aim was to explore queer translation strategies, and to promote a minority culture i.e. the LGTBIQA community. Throughout my process I focused on the “intersemiotic activity” (Brodie 156) which is intrinsic to a theatrical context – distinguishing the theatre text from other literary text types (Windle 154) – namely, I focussed on setting, costume, as well as the voice and register of contemporary Australian English speakers. Drawing on Lawrence Venuti’s cornerstone text *The Translator’s Invisibility* (1994) as well as Brian James Baer and Klaus Kaindl’s recent edited volume *Queering Translation, Translating the Queer: Theory, Practice, Activism* (2018), my translation was devised as a contribution to the existing literature on translating theatrical texts and queer translation practice, as a way of increasing the visibility of the theatre translator, as a revival of Klaus Mann’s first published play, and promoting interculturalism in the Australian queer theatre.

Anja und Esther debuted in both Munich and Hamburg in 1925 and was considered shocking at the time given its homosexual content (Senelick 167; Adler et al. caption 022).¹⁸ The play is set in an isolated old Monastery-turned-children’s “Home”, based on the Odenwaldschule in Heppenheim (Senelick 166). A “co-educational school for talented problem children in the mountains near Heidelberg”, Mann was sent there in 1922 (Senelick 163). The characters of Anja, Esther, Kaspar, and Jakob are in their late teens and are pupils-turned-teachers at the Home. Their students only study singing and dancing, and they perform a pantomime during the play. Anja and Kaspar are half-siblings. Anja and Esther are in love with each other, and Jakob is in love with Anja. All of these characters are young, artistic intellectuals. The young and attractive stranger Erik, “ein Bursche von etwas proletarischem Aussehen” (a lad of a somewhat proletarian appearance) (Mann 19), stumbles across the Home and precipitates further love triangles. The extract I have translated is Act 2, after Erik has spent the night at the Home. Kaspar falls in love with Erik, as does Esther. Jakob is highly antagonistic towards Erik, mainly because he identifies Erik's power of attraction and the ensuing chaos it causes. It is a play of adolescent angst, intergenerational conflict, sexual fluidity, sadomasochism and highfalutin intellectualism.

As is clear from this summary, *Anja und Esther* is surprisingly modern in its queer sensibilities. The handsome stranger Erik is fluid not only in his career choices – from in-house tutor to waiter to Cabaret tap-dancer – but also in his sexuality: he has had relationships with both men and women. Esther, initially in love with Anja, falls passionately in love with Erik. Although Jakob appears only in love with Anja, he is afraid of Erik's body, perhaps in case he too falls for Erik. The characters neither

¹⁸ Mann himself performed in the Hamburg staging the play, along with his sister Erika, Gustaf Gründgens and Pamela Wedekind.

question their sexuality nor are they persecuted because of it. This is a remarkable contrast to many early queer literary works of the same era.¹⁹ It is this innate “queerness” of the play that makes its translation so interesting and so relevant for a contemporary audience in Australia, especially given the present socio-cultural context: the very recent legalisation of gay marriage and the continuing problems involving the civil rights of LGBTIQ people (Carnie). Furthermore, *Anja und Esther* has never been performed to an English-speaking audience to date.²⁰

The term “tradaptation” was first coined by Michel Garneau in reference to his translations of three Shakespearean plays during the 1970s and 1980s, which he adapted for a specifically Québécois audience (Knutson 112). Tradaptations are, according to Jennifer Drouin, “[...] neither literal translations of Shakespeare nor adaptations that largely modify the content of the source text” (93). Garneau does not ostensibly change the settings or characters of the plays; instead, he uses an archaic version of Québécois (Salter 64; Brisset 111) and more specifically, deploys strategies including metonymy, intertextuality (Drouin 93), “reductive simplification” of stage directions, omissions and additions (Brisset 113-114), which are aimed at a Quebec audience. His work presents a clear example of one of the strategies Venuti espouses as a way of disrupting the marginalization of translators and promoting visibility (“Call to Action” 310). Namely, Venuti suggests taking a canonical work from the source culture and translating it “with a marginal discourse (e.g. archaism)” (“Call to Action” 310). Venuti not only suggests archaism, but also “experimenting with . . . slang, literary allusion and convention” (Venuti, “Call to Action” 210).

In this project, I have aligned the concept of tradaptation with the greater visibility of the translator and the “queer turn” in Translation Studies (Santaemilia 13). In my tradaptation of *Anja und Esther*, I have appointed myself as translator *and* director,²¹ in that I have made significant changes to the setting, costumes, and stage directions in the text, as well as heightening the queer elements embedded in the text. This moves beyond the commission of creating a “literal” translation in the theatre, which is common practice in the theatre industry, where a “literal” translation is commissioned and then “reworked by a better- paid and better- known dramatist” (Krebs 46).

In this way I am also *queering* the role of the translator. According to Baer and Kaindl:

queer theory challenges the status of dominant regimes of knowledge/
power as natural and universal by focusing on the constructedness of
those models, on their historical contingency, and on the politics of
those models (who is empowered by them and who is left out?).

(3)

¹⁹ See for example *The Well of Loneliness* (1928) by Radclyffe Hall and *Der Skorpion* (1919) by Anna Elisabet Weirauch.

²⁰ Part way into this project, I discovered a collection of translated plays entitled *Lovesick: Modernist Plays of Same-Sex Love, 1894-1925*, compiled by Laurence Senelick, in which an English version of *Anja und Esther* appears. There was no indication that any of these plays have been performed and I deliberately did not consult the translation of the play. I only examined Senelick’s introduction to the play as a way of further understanding its context.

²¹ Please note the play has not been rehearsed or staged.

The current treatment of theatre translations continues to marginalise their status. In tradapting the source text (ST) I am also following St André's "performative metaphor" of translation, which considers translation as a non-essentialist form of transcreation and something which increases the visibility of translation (86). Specifically, St André focuses on drag *as* translation, drag emphasising "the performative nature of translation through exaggeration and parody" (86). I have applied this by "heightening" the queer elements of the text, such as the addition of literal drag costumes in the stage directions (see extract below).

As translator-director, my choice of setting turned out to be a very specific performance space in Melbourne, Victoria. This aligns with my first *queering* strategy, in that I am creating a text for a fixed performance space in a fixed time, aware that there is no ultimate translation or tradaptation. Marc Démont explains that "queering translation remains constantly sensitive to the queerness of the text by voluntarily refusing to offer an 'ultimate' translation [...]" (168). I chose the Great Hall at Montsalvat²², a working artists' colony in the outer-Melbourne suburb of Eltham, which I denote as "a Christian boarding school in a medieval style former artists' colony, near Melbourne, Australia" in the target text (TT). I specifically denoted the school as "Christian" as a type of political statement, in light of the ongoing political debates around discrimination against LGTB teachers and students in Australian religious schools (Karp). Built in a Medieval style and including a chapel, Montsalvat clearly reflects the religious imagery in the play.

In Act 2, presented below, the many entrances/exits of the tradaptated performance space are spatially representative of the romantic entanglements in the play. For example, each character visits Erik's bedroom, appearing one after the other, not only for comic effect but also to display their respective relationship to Erik. For example, Jacob enters from the "main door", the most formal entrance, given his hostile attitude towards Erik. Casper enters from the closet under the stairs to the right, as he is in a sense "coming out of the closet" by giving Erik a love poem.

My two other strategies to *queer* the TT are evident in this extract, i.e. costume and spoken language. When Casper enters, he is cross-dressed, wearing the queer pride-specific "rainbow-coloured wig" and platform shoes and gloves, which is an intertextual tribute to one of Australia's most iconic and popular gay films: *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* (1994). I also adopt "an anti-essentialist aesthetic" (Kinloch 83) in the use of differing registers of spoken language, from Erik's everyday colloquialisms to the long and complex constellations of the other teenagers. This language is not standardised in the tradaptation, meaning I am not conforming to "fluent domestication" of the text (Venuti, "Invisibility" 15-16). Instead, I am *queering* the text and raising the visibility of the translator. According to Venuti, "the domestic work on foreign cultures can be a foreignizing intervention, pitched to question existing canons at home" ("Call to Action" 310). For example, Erik is from a poorer background and is a young city-dweller. His language is youthful and colloquial and he uses such words as "dunno",²³ as well as the favoured Australian verb "reckon". While Erik uses the formal "you" (Sie) in the German ST, this is only out of politeness, as well as due to levels of unfamiliarity between speakers. We do not differentiate these modes of address in English. In the TT, I only retain such formality when Jacob addresses Erik

²² Established in the 1930s, Montsalvat is a mixture of medieval-style buildings, constructed from local materials (Montsalvat).

²³ The children use slang too because they are young and they are copying the Housemistresses, characters who appear in other Acts and who use very strong Australian vernacular language.

as “Sir” in order to highlight Jacob's hostility towards Erik.

By drawing on Garneau's politicised tradaptations of Shakespeare in late 20th century Quebec, re-writing the setting, designing the costumes and differentiating the voices of the play according to an “anti-essentialist” ideology, I have aligned the concept of tradaptation with the translator’s visibly and queer translation strategies. I have adopted an intervionalist approach of appointing myself as translator *and* director and have utilised inter-semiotic strategies in order to create performance text. I have selected the local space of Montsalvat as the literal setting and combined that with drag costumes to celebrate queer love in a contemporary Melbourne setting. Being the director and translator fits in with Venuti’s various strategies to increase the visibility of the translator as well as queers the role of the translator. And finally, I hope that by *Anya and Esther* entering the Australian queer theatre polysystem (Even-Zohar 192-193), it becomes evident to a potential audience that the history of queer desire and identity is clear, present, and cross-cultural.

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Anja und Esther: Zweites Bild

**By
Klaus Mann**

Eriks Schlafzimmer. Ein kleiner, fast zellenartiger Raum. Im Hintergrund ein verhältnismäßig hohes Fenster. Das Zimmer ist im Erdgeschoß gelegen, so daß man vom Fenster aus direkt in den Garten sehen kann. Rechts an der Wand das sehr einfache Bett mit einem Stuhl daneben. Links, ihm gegenüber, der Tür. - Es ist am Vormittag. Sonne scheint ins Zimmer. Im Bett liegt, in kindlich schlafender Stellung, Erik. Er hat ein derbes, leinenes Nachthemd an und ist mit einer biedereren wollenen Decke zugedeckt.

Am Bett stehen ein kleines Mädchen und ein kleiner Junge - es sind Gimietto and Eliza -, weiß gekleidet, wie am Schluß des ersten Bildes. Das Mädchen trägt sorgsam eine Tablette mit Teller, Tasse, Frühstückseßwaren, der Junge eine Teekanne auf einem Untersatz.

DAS MÄDCHEN: Er schläft noch.

DER JUNGE: Wir müssen ihn wecken.

DAS MÄDCHEN: Tust du's?

DER JUNGE: Vielleicht schimpft er dann -.

Erik bewegt sich im Schlaf.

Wacht er jetzt auf?

DAS MÄDCHEN: Nein - ich werd ihn schon wecken müssen.

Ohne das Tablett aus der Hand zu stellen, kitzelt sie ihn ganz vorsichtig.

ERIK erwacht under Gähnen, sieht die Kinder am Bett: Wer ist denn da -?!

DAS MÄDCHEN: Der Alte hat uns mit Frühstück zu Ihnen geschickt.

ERIK: Der Alte-?

DER JUNGE: Hat sogar von seiner eigenen besten Marmelade herausgegeben.

ERIK: Ja - stellt es nur hin - danke schön -.

Anya and Esther: Act 2

**By
Klaus Mann
Tradapted by Meaghan Bruce**

Erik's bedroom. A simple bed has been pushed up against the large window, centre right. The bed is facing the audience. A chair stands next to the bed. It is morning. Magpies are chortling and the sun shines into the room. Erik lies in the bed, curled up like sleeping child. He's wearing an old T-shirt and a pair of briefs. He's covered with an old, floral doona.

A small girl and a small boy stand by the bed - it's Gimietto and Eliza - dressed in white, like at the end of the first Act. The girl carefully carries a tray with a plate, cup and breakfast food. The boy carries a teapot on a saucer.

THE GIRL: He's still asleep.

THE BOY: We gotta wake him up.

THE GIRL: Are you gunna do it?

THE BOY: Perhaps he'll be grumpy -

Erik moves in his sleep.

Is he waking up?

THE GIRL: Nah - I'll just have to wake him.

Without putting down the tray, she tickles his feet very carefully.

ERIK awaking under a yawn, sees the children by the bed: Who's there?! -

THE GIRL: The Old Man sent us with your breakfast.

ERIK: The Old Man? -

THE BOY: He's even given you some of his best jam.

ERIK: Cool - just put it there - cheers -

DIE KINDER *stellen die Sachen auf ein Tischchen neben das Bett. Treten sofort bis an die Tür zurück: Brauchen Sie sonst noch etwas?*

DAS MÄDCHEN: Der Alte läßt Sie bitten, wenn Sie irgendeinen Wunsch hätten, ihn uns ruhig mitzuteilen.

DER JUNGE: Wenn Sie zum Beispiel Lust hätten, ein Bad zu nehmen.

ERIK: Ein Bad? - Danke. Aber könnt Ihr mir vielleicht sagen, wo ich hier bin?

DER JUNGE UND DAS MÄDCHEN *genau zusammen, mit ganz hohen Stimmen, wie man etwas Eingelerntes, durchaus nicht Verstandenes hersagt: Sie sind hier im Erholungsheim für gefallene Kinder.*

Sie sind hinaus.

ERIK *sieht ihnen entgeistert nach: Erholungsheim? - Gefallene Kinder? - Und was für eine merkwürdige Luft hier ist - als seien Tierkäfige in der Nähe. Aber die Kinder sahen blaß aus.*

Er legt sich wieder zurück, sieht zur Decke.

Und dieses Zimmer - es ist mir, als läge ich in einer Klosterzelle -. *Ohne vorher zu klopfen, tritt Esther ein. Sie ist stark geschminkt und schon in ihrem Kostüm zur Pantomime. Sie trägt ein enges, weißseidenes Hemd, dazu ganz bunte Schuhe und eine bunte, rote oder grüne Glasperücke. Sie hat die lange Gerte aus der ersten Szene in der Hand.*

Erik bemerkt sie zunächst nicht, liegt still und sieht zur Decke.

ESTHER *an der Tür, scharf: Guten Morgen.*

ERIK *fährt auf, sieht sie entsetzt an: Um des Himmels willen -.*

ESTHER *lächelt: Sie erschrecken über mein Kostüm. Damit hat es aber weiter nichts auf sich. Wir haben heute morgen Generalprobe, und da ist es natürlich bequemer, gleicht nach dem Aufstehen die Narrengewänder anzulegen.*

THE CHILDREN *put the breakfast items on the little table next to the bed. They immediately withdraw to the door, upstage right: Do you need anything else?*

THE GIRL: The Old Man says that if you want anything, you should tell us.

THE BOY: Like if you wanna take a bath.

ERIK: A bath? - Thanks. Hey, maybe you could tell me where I am?

THE BOY AND THE GIRL *in unison, with very high voices, just like you would recite something you've learnt but don't quite understand: You are in a Christian Boarding School for Fallen Children.*

They leave.

ERIK *watches them, aghast: Christian Boarding School? - Fallen children? - And such a weird smell - like in the zoo. But the kids looked so pale.*

He lies back again and looks up at the ceiling.

And this room - it's like I'm lying in a monastery cell -

Without knocking beforehand, Esther enters, upstage right. She is heavily made-up and already in her costume for the musical. She's wearing a tight silk shirt, a velvet multi-coloured waistcoat, slacks and a brown Afro wig and a fake moustache. She has the long whip from the first Act in her hand.

Erik doesn't notice her at first, lies quietly and looks up at the ceiling.

ESTHER *creeping up behind the bed, sharply: Good Morning.*

ERIK *starts up, looks at her in horror: Jesus Christ! -*

ESTHER *smiles: It's only a costume. We've got a dress rehearsal this morning, and it's more comfortable to put on this ridiculous outfit first thing.*

ERIK *lächelt jetzt auch*: Sie sehen so bunt aus.

ESTHER *setzt sich auf den Stuhl, neben sein Bett*: Aber es ist doch hübsch, mein Kostüm? Ich habe es selbst entworfen.

ERIK *wie geblendet*: Bunt - unnatürlich bunt -

ESTHER *ungemein seriös und damenhaft*: Ich wollte mich eigentlich nur nach Ihrem Befinden erkundigen und wie Sie heute nacht geschlafen haben. Gestern aben hatte ich den Eindruck, als wenn es Ihnen nicht gar zu gutginge.

ERIK: Nein - sicherlich nicht. - Offen gesagt kann ich mich so genau nicht mehr besinnen. Aber jetzt bin ich ja hier.

ESTHER *mit Munterkeit*: Und vielleicht bleiben Sie gleich ein paar Wochen und kurieren sich gründlich.

ERIK: Ich weiß nicht. - Finden Sie nicht auch, daß es hier wie nach Tierkäfige riecht?

ESTHER: Das hat seinen guten Grund darin, daß vor Ihrem Fenster die Tierkäfige des Altren beginnen.

ERIK: Der Alte? Wer ist der Alte? - Ist er ein Tierzüchter? - Hier spricht alles von ihm.

ESTHER *mit einer gewissen Feierlichkeit*: Der Alte: Das ist der Leiter dieses Instituts.

ERIK: Und Sie? Sind Sie hier Schülerin oder Lehrerin? Ich meine: Sind Sie ein gefallenes Kind oder sind Sie jemand, der diese bessern soll?

ESTHER *leise*: Ich bin schon viele, viele Jahre hier - als achtjähriges Mädchen brachte man mich ins Stift -, übrigens gebessert eigentlich soll hier niemand werden.

ERIK: Aber eine Art von Verbesserungsanstalt muß es doch wohl sein, nach allem, was ich höre.

ESTHER *steht plötzlich auf, zieht sich scheu zurück*: Das kann ich Ihnen so in dieser Kürze nicht erklären. Nein, Besserungsanstalt ist sicher das richtige Wort nicht -

ERIK *also smiling now*: Wow, you're so colourful.

ESTHER *sits on the chair next to his bed*: But do you think my costume's pretty? I made it myself.

ERIK *as if dazzled*: It's colourful - weirdly colourful -

ESTHER *tremendously serious and lady-like*: I actually just wanted to enquire after your health and how you slept last night. Yesterday evening I got the impression you weren't well at all.

ERIK: No - definitely not - honestly I can't really remember anymore. But here I am.

ESTHER *with courage*: And perhaps you'll stay a few weeks and thoroughly recover.

ERIK: I dunno . . . hey, don't you reckon it smells like a zoo in here?

ESTHER: There's a good reason for that. The Old Man's animal cages are right outside your window.

ERIK: The Old Man? Who's the Old Man? - Is he an animal breeder? - Everyone keeps talking about him here.

ESTHER *with a certain solemnity*: The Old Man is the head of this institution.

ERIK: And what about you? Are you a pupil or a teacher here? I mean: are you a fallen child or are you someone who helps these kids get better?

ESTHER *quietly*: I've been here for many, many years - I was brought to the school as an eight year old girl - by the way, the institution's aim is not to make the children better.

ERIK: But from all I hear it's got to be like a reform school.

ESTHER *suddenly stands up, moves back shyly*: I can't explain that to you in such brief terms. No, reform school is definitely not the right word -

Plötzlich lächelnd und wieder einige Schritte näher bei ihm:

- aber ich will Ihnen etwas sagen: Heute bei Tisch sollen Sie zwischen mir und dem Alten sitzen. Dann will ich mich mühen, Ihnen mehr zu erklären - ja?

ERIK: Ja - *Sieht sie an und lacht plötzlich.*

ESTHER: Warum lachen Sie denn?

ERIK: So bunt sind Sie - und auf so komische Art - schrecklich bunt -.

ESTHER: Ja - ich habe es selbst entworfen. - Noch eins - Erik: Ich möchte so gern, daß Sie heute abend in der Garderobe sind - wir haben doch heute Premiere - Sie sollen in der Garderobe bei uns sein. - Ich möchte es gern -

ERIK: Ja, wenn Sie es gern möchten - und wenn "der Alte" nichts dagegen hat -

ESTHER: Ach, der hat gegen vieles nichts einzuwenden. Und außerdem...

Plötzlich sehr laut lachend:

Wer selbst im Glashaus sitzt -

Bricht ab; mit Zärtlichkeit:

Aber Sie sind noch müde. - Schlafen Sie noch einem ein -.

Ihre Hand macht den Ansatz zu einer Geste, als wolle sie sein Haar streicheln.

Aber sie zieht sie zurück und läuft zur Tür:

Guten Morgen.

Sie ist hinaus.

ERIK: Jetzt ist sie fort - ob ich träume oder nicht, das weiß ich nicht ganz genau. Wenn ich die Augen noch so fest schließe: Wunderlichere Gesichter können mir auf keinen Fall kommen, als mir gerade eines erchien.

Er schließt die Augen.

Jetzt kommt, gleichfalls kostümiert, Jakob leise herein. Er trägt eine Art von spanischer Tracht mit spitzem Degen und blutroter Krause.

JAKOB *leise, aber sehr scharf:* Schlafen Sie noch?

ERIK *fährt auf, starrt ihn an:* Aber was ist denn jetzt schon wieder?

JAKOB: Sie scheinen geträumt zu haben. Ich dachte mir nur, es sei höflicher, sich

Suddenly smiling and moving a few steps towards him again:

- but I want tell you something: you should sit between me and the Old Man at lunch today. Then I'll try to explain more to you - ok?

ERIK: Ok - *Looks at her and suddenly laughs.*

ESTHER: Why are you laughing?

ERIK: You're so colourful - and in such a funny way - like, horribly colourful -

ESTHER: Yes - I made it myself . . . one more thing - Erik: I'd really like you to be in the green room tonight - we have a premiere today - you should be in the green room with us - I'd really like that -

ERIK: Ok, if you'd really like me to - and if "the Old Man" doesn't have anything against it -

ESTHER: Oh, he doesn't have much against anything. And besides . . .

Suddenly laughing very loudly

Whoever lives in a glasshouse -

Stops, with tenderness:

But you're still tired - go back to sleep -

Her hand makes the beginnings of a gesture, as if she would have liked to stroke his hair. But she pulls it back and runs to the door, upstage right:

Bye!

She leaves.

ERIK: She's gone - I don't really know if she was ever here. If I close my eyes very tightly: I won't see any more of these fantastical faces.

He closes his eyes.

Now Jacob enters quietly via the main door, also costumed. He wears a traditional Spanish dress, fishnet tights and blood red ruffles.

JACOB *quietly, but very sharply:* You're still sleeping, Sir?

ERIK *starts up, stares at him:* For Christ's sake! What is it now?

JACOB: You seem to have been dreaming. I just thought I should look

heute morgen gleich ein wenig nach Ihnen umzusehen. Sie sind doch sehr fremd in dieser Umgebung, und da neigt man in allgemeinen zu Mißstimmung und lästiger Melancholie.

ERIK: Nein - danke. - Ich bin nicht mißgestimmt - danke. Sie sind wohl auch schon zur Generalprobe angezogen?

JAKOB *der etwas Gehässiges in der Stimme hat*: Sie erraten es. - Ich finde übrigens, daß Sie nicht nur nicht krank, sondern geradezu auffallend gesund wirken.

ERIK: Warum sollte ich denn krank aussehen?

Lacht zur Decke.

Nein, ich bin gesund!

JAKOB: Da haben Sie weitere Liebesdienste wohl nicht nötig. Ich wünsche weiterhin erquicklichen Schlaf. Schwierige Träume, denke ich, werden Sie ohnehin nicht oft enervieren.

Er empfiehlt sich mit einem Bückling.

ERIK: Ganz starr war sein Gesicht von Schminke - starr, wie eine Maske - und warum sprach er wohl so übertrieben gewandt und aufgeregt?

Es klopft vorsichtig an der Tür.

Jetzt kommt noch jemand, um mich zu besuchen. Bitte sehr, nur herein!

Kaspar kommt, in einem Kostüm aus schwerer schwarzer Seide, hochgeschlossen und gleichfalls mit buntem Haar.

KASPAR: Entschuldigung Sie, daß ich störe -.

ERIK: Das hat nichts zu bedeuten.

KASPAR: Ich wollte nur, ehe ich zur Bühne hinüber muß, einen Augenblick zu Ihnen hineinschauen, um mich nach Ihrem Befinden zu erkundigen, natürlich - und dann auch - erlauben Sie, daß ich mich eine Sekunde setze? Ich bin noch so müde.

ERIK: Setzen Sie sich doch, das geht es Ihnen wie mir.

KASPAR: Ja, ergeht es Ihnen da auch so? - Daß Sie sich zunächst nach dem Erwachen vom Schlaf nicht trennen

after you a little this morning, Sir. This place is very strange to you, and one tends to feel generally uneasy and tediously melancholic.

ERIK: No - thank you - I'm not uneasy - thanks. You're also ready for the dress rehearsal?

JACOB *with some spite in his voice*: You've guessed it, Sir . . . you know, I don't think you look sick at all. In fact, you look perfectly healthy.

ERIK: Why should I look sick?

Smiles at the ceiling.

Nah, I'm great!

JACOB: You probably don't need any more favours then. Have another pleasant sleep, Sir. I think you mostly won't be troubled by disturbing dreams.

He leaves via the main door.

ERIK: Man, his face was stiff with make-up - stiff like a mask - and why was he talking so formally and anxiously?

A careful knock at the door upstage left, under the main staircase.

And another one! Please, come on in!

Casper enters in a high-necked, heavy silk black dress, long black gloves, platform shoes and a rainbow coloured wig.

CASPER: I'm sorry to bother you -

ERIK: No worries.

CASPER: I just wanted to look in on you and of course enquire after your health, before I go over to the stage - and also . . . can I sit for a minute? I'm still really tired.

ERIK: Same here. Take a load off.

CASPER: You really feel the same as me? - You're still sleepy when you get up? - You can't shake it off because

können? - Daß Sie nicht loskommen von ihm, weil er Sie vielleicht gar zu innig eingesponnen hatte? - Ich gehöre die erste Stunde am Tag immer halb noch dem Schlaf.

ERIK: Ja - schlafen ist schön -.

KASPAR: Der Schlaf ist das einzig Schöne - mit Ausnahme von noch etwas

-

ERIK: Das find ich nun nicht.

KASPAR: Aber eigentlich wollte ich Ihnen etwas geben - das hat allerdings auch zu tun damit, mit dem Schlaf. Ich habe es gestern ganz spät in der Nacht geschrieben, da war mir der Kopf schon ein wenig benommen. Hier -

Er gibt es ihm mit abgewandtem Gesicht.

ERIK *sieht es sich an, beinahe mit Ehrfurcht*: Das sind Verse. - Sind sie für mich?

KASPAR: Lesen Sie nur -.

Steht plötzlich auf.

Aber ich will lieber nicht dabei sein, wenn Sie es lesen - sehen möchte ich es lieber nicht. Und wenn Sie lieber schlafen wollen, dann schlafen Sie bitte. Schlafen ist schöner - obwohl es damit zu tun hat

-.

Er ist schon an der Tür.

ERIK *sieht vom Papier auf*: Tanzen Sie jetzt?

KASPAR: Ja - jetzt tanze ich in meiner Pantomime. Mit Anja und Esther.

ERIK *sieht ihn an*: Was Sie nicht alles können: Tranzten und dichten. Wieviel müssen Sie loszuwerden haben. - Was erleben Sie hier?

KASPAR: Hier hat man nur ein Erlebnis, und das können Sie nicht verstehen. Aber mir ist es fast -.

Er wendet sich.

ERIK: Kommen Sie doch! Geben Sie mir doch die Hand! Warum laufen Sie so geschwind davon?

KASPAR *wie in Angst*: Ja - jetzt muß ich tanzen. - Aber vielleicht kann ich beim Mittagessen neben Ihnen sitzen?

maybe you're too deeply bound to sleep? - I'm still half asleep for the first hour of the day.

ERIK: Yeah - sleeping's nice -

CASPER: Sleep is the most beautiful thing - apart from -

ERIK: No, I don't think so.

CASPER: But actually I wanted to give you something - even though it's a little about that, about sleep. I wrote it very late last night, my head was in the clouds then. Here -

He gives it to him with an averted face.

ERIK *looks at him, almost with awe*: A poem - it's for me?

CASPER: Just read it -

Suddenly gets up.

But I'd rather not be there, when you read it - I'd rather not see it. And if you prefer to sleep, please just sleep. Sleeping's better - although it's a little about that -.

He's already at the main door.

ERIK *looks up from the paper*: You're off to dance now?

CASPER: Yes - I'm going to dance in my musical. With Anya and Esther.

ERIK *looks at him*: What can't you do? Dance and write poems? You've got a lot on - what inspires you out here?

CASPER: There's only one inspiration here, but you can't understand that. But to me it's as though -

He turns away.

ERIK: Come back! Take my hand! Why are you running away so fast?

CASPER *as if afraid*: Well - I have to dance now . . . but maybe I could sit next to you at lunch?

ERIK: Nein, das geht leider nicht. Darum hat jemand anderes mich schon vor Ihnen gebeten.

KASPAR: Ja - ja, das hätte ich mir eigentlich denken können. Entschuldigen Sie, daß ich gefragt habe.- Auf Wiedersehn.

Er ist hinaus.

Erik sieht ihm ernst nach. Dann vertieft er sich wieder in das Gedicht. Er liest mit kindlich-ernster Aufmerksamkeit. Während des Lesens kommt ein Lächeln in sein Gesicht.

Dann klopft es leise.

ERIK *spricht, ohne sich deshalb vom Papier zu trennen:* Bitte sehr -.

Anja kommt herein. Sie trägt ein schwarzseidenes Kleid mit weit gebauschtem Rock, das ihr halb das Aussehen einer Rittersfrau, halb das einer spanischen Hofdame gibt.

ANJA *an der Tür:* Ich störe Sie - Sie lesen, wie ich sehe -.

ERIK *sieht ihr mit vom Lesern verschleierte Augen entgegen:* Ja - ein Gedicht. Aber Sie habe ich gestern schon einmal gesehen - im Garten - nachts -.

ANJA: Mit Esther zusammen.

ERIK: Ich dachte, Sie wären allein gewesen. - Kommen Sie zu mir! Wollen Sie sich auch nach meinem Befinden erkundigen?

ANJA: Ich möchte Ihnen nur guten Morgen sagen.

ERIK: Von allen, die heute morgen bei mir waren, haben Sie das schlichteste Kleid an.

ANJA: Das liegt an der Verteilung der Rollen in unserer Pantomime. - Waren heute morgen schon viele bei Ihnen?

ERIK: Ja - ich weiß nicht mehr -, ich bin wohl noch immer nicht wach. Jetzt habe ich auch noch diese Verse gelesen, die Kaspar für mich gedichtet hat, als er schon beinahe schlief.

ERIK: No, I'm sorry you can't. Somebody's already asked me.

CASPER: Yes - yes, I should have thought of that. I'm sorry for asking - goodbye.

He leaves.

Erik looks after him gravely. Then he immerses himself in the poem again. He reads with the earnestness of a child. Whilst reading he starts to smile.

Then a quiet knock at the door, which leads to the stone staircase in the audience's space.

ERIK *speaks, without looking up from the paper:* Come in -

Anya enters and stands on the landing. She wears a traditional Spanish bullfighter's costume: high white socks, three quarter lengths pants, a shirt, tie and black jacket, trimmed with gold.

ANYA *on the balcony:* I'm disturbing you - I see you're reading -

ERIK *looks at her through veiled eyes from reading:* Yeah - a poem. But I've already seen you yesterday - in the garden - at night -

ANYA: With Esther.

ERIK: I thought you would've been alone . . . come down here to me! You also want to enquire after my health?

ANYA *makes her way down the stone steps and towards the stage:* I just wanted to say Good Morning.

ERIK: Man, out of everyone who's visited me today, you've got the simplest outfit.

ANYA: That's just because of my role in the musical . . . have a lot of people visited you this morning?

ERIK: Yeah - I dunno anymore - I'm not really awake yet. I just read this poem Casper wrote for me. He was sleeping nearby.

ANJA: Hat Kaspar Ihnen Verse gemacht? - Wissen Sie eigentlich, daß er mein Bruder ist?

ANYA: Casper wrote you a poem? - Did you know that he's my brother?

ERIK: Ist er wirklich Ihr Bruder? - Vielleicht erinnert er sogar in manchem an Sie.

ERIK: Is he really your brother? - Yeah, maybe he looks a lot like you.

ANJA: Mein Halbbruder, um genauer zu sein. Wir haben verschiedene Väter.

ANYA: Well, my half-brother, to be more exact. We have different fathers.

ERIK: Ihr Halbbruder - darf ich Ihnen die Hand küssen?

ERIK: Your half-brother - can I kiss your cheek?

ANJA *erschrocken*: Nein - warum wollen Sie das?

ANYA *shocked*: No - why would you want to do that?

ERIK *bittet inständig*: Ich möchte es gern - ich möchte es doch so gern! Sie können wahrlich nichts dagegen einzuwenden haben!

ERIK *asks imploringly*: I want to - I really want to! You can't say no.

ANJA *überläßt ihm halb lächelnd die Hand*: Ich habe nicht viel dagegen einzuwenden.

ANYA *turns her face to him, half smilingly*: I can't say no.

ERIK *preßt seinen Mund eng und ganz heiß auf ihre Hand*: Wie kühl Ihre Hand ist - oh - wie kühl. Ich möchte sie dir so warm machen - und deine Arme, du hast so magere Arme, wie die Knaben sie haben.

ERIK *kisses one cheek, then the other*: My God, you're cheeks are so cold - really cold. Come here, let me warm you up - and you've got such thin arms, like a boy's.

ANJA *mit geschlossenen Augen*: Nicht. - Was machen Sie denn - nicht -

ANYA *with closed eyes*: Don't - what are you doing - don't -

ERIK: Von allen, die ich gestern abend vielleicht sehen durfte, kann ich mich deiner allein noch entsinnen - du standest im Garten -

ERIK *presses his mouth tightly and very hotly against her neck*: Of all the people I might've seen last night, I can only remember you - you stood in the garden -

ANJA *macht sich los, läuft zur Tür*: Nicht - das sollen Sie nicht! Wie haben Sie mich denn angefaßt?!

ANYA *disengages, runs to the main door*: Don't - you shouldn't do that! My God, the way you kissed me!

Sie fährt sich den Arm entlang, als tue er weh.

She holds her hand against her neck, as if it hurts.

Wieso habe ich mir das gefallen lassen können? Sind Sie zu den andern auch so gewesen?

How could I have said yes to that? Were you also like that with the others?

Schlägt den Blick plötzlich nieder.

Casts her eyes down suddenly.

Haben - haben Sie Esther auch so gestreichelt?

Did you - did you kiss Esther like that?

ERIK *beteuert lebhaft*: Esther nicht - nein, die andern habe ich nicht so gestreichelt! Kommen Sie wieder, ich bitte Sie: Kommen Sie wieder!

ERIK *protesting animatedly*: No, not Esther - no, I didn't kiss the others! Come back, please: Come back!

ANJA: Sie dürfen mich nicht darum bitten. Ich möchte nicht unfreundlich gegen Sie sein -

Jetzt setzt entfernte Musik ein.

Oh, die Ouvertüre fängt ja schon an. Jetzt muß ich fort. - Auf Wiedersehn.

Sie ist schon hinaus.

ERIK *ruft ihr nach*: Und wenn Sie schon nicht bei mir bleiben mögen, so sagen Sie mir wenigstens, wie Sie heißen - welchen Namen Sie haben, damit ich doch an Sie denken kann!

ANJA *etwas entfernt schon*: Anja heiße ich - Anja -.

ERIK: Anja - Anja - ein dunkler Name. Anja und Esther. Anja und Esther -.

Draußen am Fenster geht der Alte vorbei, man sieht ihn bis zur Brust.

DER ALTE *winkt lachend ins Zimmer*: Oho, dieser Langschläfer! Wir sind alle schon fest an der Arbeit. Nun, schlafen Sie sich nur aus!

Er ist lachend vorüber.

Ihm folgt der Zug der Kinder, die gerade so groß sind, daß man ihre Köpfe über dem Fenster sieht. Die Köpfe ziehen, wie auf dem Puppentheater, am Fenster vorbei.

ERIK *hat sich im Bett half aufgerichtet, um sie zu sehe. Fällt dann in die Kissen wieder zurück*: Jetzt aber - weiß ich nicht mehr, wo ich eigentlich bin. - Auf der Erde nicht, auf unserer gewöhnlichen Erde sicher nicht. - Und diese Musik. - Und dieser Geruch von den Käfigen - und dieses Alten Gelächter - und die schöne Anja - und diese Esther -.

Die Musik schwillt an: Erik schließt die Augen.

ANYA: You can't ask me that. I don't want to be mean to you -

Distant music starts playing: a Medieval-style chant.

Oh, the overture's already starting. I have to go - bye!

She is already gone.

ERIK *calls after her*: Well if you don't wanna stay with me, at least tell me your name - what's your name, so I can think about you!

ANYA *already a little distant*: I'm Anya - Anya -

ERIK: Anya - Anya - a dark name. Anya and Esther. Anya und Esther -

The Old Man enters via upstage right, on to the balcony, followed by the children.

THE OLD MAN *waves laughingly over the bannister*: Aha, the late riser! We're all already hard at work. Have a nice sleep-in!

He walks on, laughing, and up the small staircase to the trap door.

The train of children are follow him. The also wave down at Erik as they go by, going by one by one, like little soldiers.

ERIK *has turned in his bed in order to look up at them and waves back. Then falls back into the pillows*: But now - I dunno where I am anymore - not on this planet, definitely not on our normal planet - and this music - and this smell of the cages - and the Old Man's laugh - and beautiful Anya - and Esther -

The music rises; Erik closes his eyes.

Translation Commentary: “The Ragpicker” by Théodore de Banville

PATRICIA WORTH

“The Ragpicker” is a story about something beautiful that serves no purpose, inspired by Théophile Gautier’s theory of “art for art’s sake”. The original story, “La Chiffonnière” by Théodore de Banville, is taken from a collection, *Contes féeriques* (1882). Banville was at the centre of a French movement of poets, the Parnassians, who wrote in the 1860s and 70s and, following in Gautier’s footsteps, produced writing which evoked beauty and eschewed any didactic, moral or useful function. Banville detested realism and lamented the decline of romanticism. He believed that humans are better when they surround themselves with beautiful antiques and ancient masterpieces of art and literature than when they pursue capitalist, bourgeois progress. He published poetry from 1842, and then from the beginning of the Decadent era, the 1880s, began writing fantastical story collections and was instrumental in bringing the genre of the fairy tale back into fashion.

The paradox of the last two decades of the nineteenth century is that a large part of the arts world was producing works of imagination while proponents of positivism were rejecting anything which had origins in intuition or the supernatural, which could not be interpreted through reason and logic. Parnassians saw the advances of their time – electricity, mechanical devices, collectivism, acquisition of riches – not as progress but as a sterile step backwards which produced mediocrity and discouraged individualism.

Fairies, however, excited wonder in certain artists and writers disenchanted with industry and commercialism. In *Contes féeriques*, a collection in which each of the tales hangs on the intervention of a magician, fairy or other supernatural figure, Banville fused the real with the ideal. In “The Ragpicker”, for example, a woman who makes a living cleaning up the city’s debris is converted into a wish-granting fairy. At first, she is a scrawny hag about to be trampled by horses, mocked and ignored by wealthy youths, for Banville saw his contemporary world as ugly and cruel. While realists were portraying such urban scenes as sordid, Banville’s ragpicker, by contrast, is saved by a poet and changed into a beautiful fairy who offers her saviour a magic cigar. The poet Silvant nevertheless keeps her at a respectful distance as fairy love is fatal to men, according to Banville and his peers. This morbid aspect of fin-de-siècle fairy tales reflects the vague threat posed by fairies to their creators, most of whom were male.

I learnt of Banville through other Decadent fairy tale authors, Jean Lorrain and Catulle Mendès, whom I have also translated. As with these works, I wrote for a 21st century adult readership and aimed to retain something of the nineteenth-century language and tone. Reading English literature of the late 1800s, I studied the style and expressions which could aid me in my choice of words. While I did not try to produce a text that reads as though originally written in English, either nineteenth- or twenty-first-century, I retained some terms which would take the reader back in time. Examples are “tallow candle”, “pale Valois”, “knaves”, “lackeys” and “alas”.

The translation challenges were in the title, the imagery and the ancient names. While common equivalents of *chiffonnière* are “rag-and-bone woman” or “ragwoman”, they are heavy words for this lighthearted theme. Nineteenth-century photos online entitled “Ragpicker” gave me a more suitable title for the era and for the light, short vowel sounds of the French word. For the imagery, dictionary definitions of words

which have changed their meaning over time required more research. *Capharnaïms*, for example, are “shambles” according to most French-English dictionaries, but, warned that shambles once meant “meat markets”, I looked elsewhere and found photos of overstocked little shops evoking the word “cluttered”, which I used instead. Another example is *fête galante*, unhelpfully “translated” in the dictionary as “fête galante”; I found “amorous festivity” in other writings, more meaningful for today’s reader. The description of Silvant’s friend as *à la fois belle et jolie* cannot be translated as “both beautiful and pretty” since in English a woman is usually one or the other. In an online discussion of these words, a native speaker described *une belle femme* as one who has an inner beauty, while *une jolie femme* has a pretty face: here was my solution.

“The Ragpicker” has many references to classical and ancient writers and artists – Banville’s muses. I mined online information and images where I found, for instance, the Louis XVI couch, and learnt that the gardens of Semiramis are better known as the hanging gardens of Babylon, and the ancient Greek artists Zeuxis and Apelles were still inspiring painters in Banville’s century. Even the fairy Eryx is named after a Hellenized ancient city of Sicily, and Shakespeare’s *Timon of Athens* was meaningful once I knew of Timon’s fears as a newly rich man, which are also Silvant’s fears.

Maps and photos proved that Silvant’s fairy encounter was located in real Parisian streets, and were helpful for imagining his evening stroll down the narrow Rue Brise-Miche. One image which I translated with some uncertainty was the large grocery with a bay cut into the floor, not having seen such a shop and not able to find a photo. The bay was described as *large*, meaning wide, which is puzzling because it was also square. Though tempted to write “large”, I avoided it as it is needed in the same clause for the *grande épicerie*, a large grocery. For the hole, “good-sized” is a good substitute.

To read “The Ragpicker” is to ask “what if?” What if I were offered four wishes as long as I did not wish for the world’s misery and suffering to end? The satisfaction comes when Silvant finishes up desiring nothing other than his life as it is, preferring the richness of the places his imagination could take him, to power, money, women and “more talent than Victor Hugo”. He makes no wishes, remembering that his talent comes from the soul. And of course, “fairies do not make souls”.

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La Chiffonnière
By
Théodore de Banville

En quête d'impressions et de paysages bizarres, le poète Étienne Silvant se promenait, après son dîner, dans la rue Brise-Miche, et s'amusait à inventorier cette voie étrange, qui semblerait appartenir aux plus lointaines provinces, si le grand mouvement d'une foule toujours pressée et compacte, circulant entre la rue Saint-Merri et la rue Maubuée, ne lui donnait en même temps un caractère très parisien.

Aux vagues lueurs que jetaient dans la rue l'éclairage insuffisant des boutiques, il ne se lassait pas d'admirer le vaste atelier rustique du tonnelier, où il voyait assembler et cercler des fûts, celui de la blanchisseuse où les jeunes filles savonnaient, épaules et bras nus, celui du menuisier où un petit apprenti resté seul rabotait à la clarté d'une chandelle, et les étroits capharnaüms des revendeurs, encombrés d'objets poudreux et vagues, et la grande épicerie où une large baie carrée, ouverte dans le parquet près de la devanture, permettait de voir l'épicier lui-même, semblable à un pâle Valois, assis au milieu des pains de sucre, dans sa cave éclairée d'un bec de gaz, et sans doute méditant quelque bon coup de commerce.

Il jouissait de ce spectacle animé par le jeu des ombres et par de violents coups de lumière, lorsque, tout à coup, il fut arraché à sa flânerie par un cri affreux, déchirant, sorti comme d'une poitrine brisée.

Une voiture chargée de moellons, qui tenait toute la largeur de la rue, avait dispersé la foule ; mais sous les pieds des chevaux rétifs était tombée une vieille chiffonnière, à qui le pied avait manqué

The Ragpicker
By
Théodore de Banville
Translated by Patricia Worth

Seeking strange impressions and landscapes, the poet Étienne Silvant was strolling after dinner along the Rue Brise-Miche, amusing himself by surveying this odd little street which could easily have belonged to the farthest provinces, had not the movement of a crowd, compact and continually bustling and circulating between the Rue Saint-Merri and the Rue Maubuée, lent it a very Parisian character.

In the dim glow cast onto the street by the inadequate lighting of the shops, his admiring eye was drawn to the large rustic workshop of the cooper where he saw barrels being assembled and banded, and then to the washerwoman's premises where young women, shoulders and arms bare, were lathering up garments, and now to a carpenter's workshop where a young apprentice, left alone, was planing by the light of a tallow candle, and to the cramped, cluttered rooms of the retailers, overstocked with dusty indefinable objects, and then to the large grocery where a good-sized square opening in the floor near the shop window afforded a glimpse of the grocer himself, seated like a pale Valois amid the sugarloaves in his cellar lighted by a gas lamp, and no doubt meditating on some profitable transaction.

Étienne was enjoying this spectacle animated by shadow play and sharp bursts of light when all of a sudden he was wrenched from his idle stroll by a frightful, harrowing scream, coming as from a crushed chest.

A cart laden with unhewn stone, taking up the full width of the street, had dispersed the crowd. But an old ragpicker woman had slipped and fallen under the hoofs of the restive horses and

et qui allait être écrasée, infailliblement. Par malheur, il n'y avait plus là d'ouvriers ; seulement deux mauvais drôles en casquettes de soie virent la malheureuse dans cette situation terrible, s'éloignèrent sans la secourir, et l'un d'eux murmura en ricanant : – « Fricassée, la vieille ! » Mais Étienne Silvant aussi l'avait vue, maigre, pâle, vêtue de loques verdâtres, écrasée sous le poids de sa hotte renversée sur elle, et dans l'ombre il entrevoyait son visage convulsé, sur lequel pendaient tragiquement de très longues mèches blanches. Il s'élança sous les chevaux, saisit fortement la chiffonnière qu'il enleva dans ses bras, et n'eut que le temps de s'appuyer avec elle contre la boutique du tonnelier.

Les chevaux, vigoureusement fouettés par le charretier, avancèrent enfin, la lourde charrette passa, et Étienne put alors poser à terre sa compagne glacée et mourante. Mais lorsqu'elle se redressa, sans qu'il eût cessé de tenir d'une main sa main grêle, tandis que de l'autre il entourait son corps mince, le poète eut l'agréable surprise de voir la chiffonnière transformée en une femme belle, jeune, à la taille svelte, dont les cheveux blonds resplendissaient sous le gaz avec des frissonnements de lumière et d'or. Coiffée d'un béret de peluche, orné sur le côté d'un petit bouquet de plumes, elle montrait sur son noble visage, un peu pâle encore, le plus charmant sourire, et sa robe de cachemire couleur mousse, avec les garnitures et les agréments en peluche, était d'une élégance irréprochable. A point nommé, se trouvait là un coupé bleu clair, attelé de deux chevaux noirs, et le correct valet de pied ouvrit la portière. La belle dame monta dans cette voiture, d'un geste ami invita le poète à s'y asseoir près d'elle, et les chevaux partirent, faisant jaillir des gerbes d'étincelles sous leurs fins sabots, qui frappaient, en s'enfuyant, le vieux pavé stupéfait de la rue Brise-Miche.

was without doubt going to be trampled. Unfortunately, all the workmen had gone for the day; only two arrant knaves in silk caps saw the wretched woman in this terrible situation; they went away without helping her, one of them uttering with a snigger: "She's mincemeat, the old woman!" But Étienne Silvant had seen her too, thin, pale, dressed in greenish rags, crushed beneath the weight of her wicker pack turned upside down on her, and in the shadow he caught a glimpse of her contorted face over which tragically hung very long strands of grey hair. He threw himself under the horses, firmly took hold of the ragpicker and lifted her in his arms, with only enough time to press himself and her against the cooper's shop.

The horses, vigorously whipped by the driver, finally moved off, the heavy wagon passed and Étienne could then lay his freezing, dying companion on the ground. But when she sat up, although he had not stopped holding her frail hand in his while his other arm embraced her slender body, the poet had the lovely surprise of seeing the ragpicker transformed into a beautiful young woman with a willowy waist, her blonde hair shining brightly under the gas lamp with shimmers of light and gold. On her head she wore a plush beret ornamented on the side with a small bouquet of feathers, and on her noble face, still a little pale, the most charming smile; and her dress of moss-coloured cashmere with plush trims and accessories was of an impeccable elegance. A light blue coupé drawn by two black horses made a timely appearance, and a very proper footman opened its door. The beauty climbed into the carriage and with a friendly gesture invited the poet to sit beside her. The horses galloped away, and sprays of sparks leapt from beneath their fine hoofs as they struck the old cobblestones of the stunned Rue Brise-Miche.

Alors, se tournant gracieusement vers Étienne, la dame rompit le silence. – « Je suis, lui dit-elle, la fée Eryx, une de celles qui ont pour mission d’enseigner aux Parisiennes les enchantements, les grâces irrésistibles et le secret de communiquer la vie aux étoffes inertes ! Mais je dois songer à celles qui souffrent comme à celles qui triomphent. Ce n’est pas tout de donner aux chiffons une âme charmante : il faut ensuite que quelqu’un les ramasse dans la boue ! Voilà pourquoi je deviens, tous les samedis, une simple femme, sujette aux infirmités, à la vieillesse, à la mort, et je serais morte en effet, si vous ne m’aviez courageusement sauvée en exposant votre propre vie. Je n’ai rien à vous donner qui soit vraiment digne de vous, car l’amour des Fées ne peut qu’être fatal aux hommes. D’ailleurs, je sais que vous êtes aimé comme vous méritez de l’être, et fidèle ! et, pour rien au monde, je ne voudrais aller sur les brisées de la charmante madame Estelle Chezely. Mais, ajouta-t-elle en tirant de sa poche un long et mince écrin, fait avec de la peau de serpent bleu, vous me permettrez du moins de vous offrir un très bon cigare ?

– Madame, dit Étienne Silvant, excepté ce dont il ne peut être question entre nous, vous ne pouviez, certes, me faire un présent qui me fût plus agréable que celui-là. Et, reprit-il en ouvrant l’écrin, très visible alors, car le coupé roulait sur le boulevard en pleine lumière, voilà ce que nul Rothschild ne peut se procurer, c’est-à-dire un cigare d’une adorable couleur blonde, qui ne s’affaisse ni ne se brise sous le doigt, qui déjà, sans être allumé, exhale le plus délicieux parfum, et qui, à coup sûr, me donnera une fumée pleine de caresses, de mystérieux bercements et de rêves.

– Oui, dit la Fée, c’est un bon cigare, et aucun roi de la terre n’est assez riche pour en fumer un pareil ; mais il a encore d’autres mérites, par-dessus le

Then, turning graciously to Étienne, the lady broke the silence.

“I am,” said she, “the fairy Eryx, one of those whose mission it is to teach Parisian women about enchantment and irresistible graces, and the secret of giving life to inert cloth! But I must think of those women who suffer as well as those who prevail. It’s not enough to give rags a charming soul; someone must then pick them up out of the mud! That’s why every Saturday I become a simple woman, subject to infirmities, to old age, to death, and I would indeed have died if you had not bravely saved me by risking your own life. I have nothing to give that you are truly worthy of, for a Fairy’s love can only be fatal to men. Besides, I know that you are loved as you deserve to be, and faithful! And not for anything in the world would I want to compete with the charming Madame Estelle Chezely. But,” she added, pulling from her pocket a long thin case made from the skin of a blue snake, “will you at least allow me to offer you a very fine cigar?”

“Madame,” said Étienne Silvant, “with the exception of that of which there can be no question between us, you could certainly give me no present more agreeable than this. And,” he continued, opening the case which was quite visible in that moment, for the coupé was rolling along the boulevard in broad daylight, “this is something that no Rothschild can obtain, that is, an adorably blond cigar that does not droop or break in the fingers, which already, before it is lit, has the most delicious aroma, and which will surely give me a smoking pleasure that is sensual and mysteriously soothing, filling me with dreams.”

“Yes,” said the Fairy, “it is a fine cigar, and no king on earth is rich enough to smoke one like it; but it has still other advantages into the bargain. Look at this,

marché. Remarquez cela, monsieur le poète, il est coupé dans sa longueur par quatre toutes petites taches pâles, comme on en voit quelquefois sur les meilleures feuilles de la Havane. Lorsque vous l'aurez allumé et que vous le fumerez, vous n'aurez qu'à former un vœu, si inouï, si titanique, si ambitieux qu'il puisse être, et votre vœu sera immédiatement exaucé, à une seule condition, c'est que vous aurez soin d'éteindre votre cigare avant que le feu ait pu atteindre la tache dont il sera le plus voisin. Vous aurez donc à former quatre souhaits que rien ne limite ! Aussi pouvez-vous à votre gré construire les jardins de Sémiramis, trouver l'édition originale de Shakespeare avec une reliure du temps bien conservée, accrocher dans votre chambre un tableau authentique de Zeuxis ou d'Apelles...

– Mais, interrompit Silvant, ce pouvoir prodigieux, puis-je l'employer à soulager les souffrances de tous, à supprimer les malheurs immérités, à réparer les abominables injustices du sort ?

– Hélas ! dit la Fée, conformément à de suprêmes desseins que nous n'avons pas le droit de scruter, et dont le but et la logique nous échappent, Misère est la reine du monde ! Elle pose son pied hideux sur les poitrines, arrache le pain des bouches affamées, montre au désespéré la vengeance et le couteau sanglant, et, baissant ses yeux brûlés qui n'ont plus de larmes, offre au petit enfant blême sa mamelle vide et tarie. Peut-être un jour le genre humain, ce héros intrépide, doit-il terrasser et étouffer le monstre ; mais cette heure de délivrance et d'ineffable joie n'est pas encore venue. Pour le moment, faites le bien avec toute l'ardeur, avec toute la bravoure, avec toute l'obstination de votre charité ; mais quant au talisman que je vous donne, il ne peut servir qu'à votre bonheur personnel.

– Hélas ! dit le poète.

Monsieur poet: it is divided lengthwise by four very small pale marks as are seen sometimes on the best leaves from Havana. Once you have lit it and begun to smoke, you will only have to make a wish, as outrageous, as titanic or as ambitious as could be, and your wish will be granted immediately, on just one condition: that you are careful to extinguish your cigar before it has burned down to the next mark. You will make four wishes, with no restrictions! So you can at your whim build the hanging gardens of Semiramis in Babylon, find the original edition of Shakespeare with a well-conserved binding of the time, hang an authentic painting by Zeuxis or Apelles in your room..."

"But," interrupted Silvant, "this prodigious power, can I use it to relieve the sufferings of all, to put an end to undeserved misfortunes, to put right the abominable injustices of fate?"

"Alas," said the Fairy, "in accordance with supreme designs that we do not have the right to scrutinize, and whose goal and logic escape us, Misery is the queen of the world! She rests her hideous foot on chests, snatches bread from starving mouths, shows vengeance and a bloody knife to the desperate, and, lowering her burning tearless eyes, offers the small pallid child her empty, dried-up breast. Perhaps one day, humankind, that intrepid hero, will strike and suffocate the monster; but this hour of deliverance and unspeakable joy has not yet come. For the moment, do good with all the passion, all the bravery and all the persistence of your charity, but as for the talisman I'm giving you, it can be used only for your own personal happiness."

"Alas!" said the poet.

– Donc, reprit la fée Eryx, souhaitez des luxes, des trésors, des dominations, tout ce qu’il vous plaira, et votre vœu sera exaucé tout de suite, pourvu qu’après avoir fumé, vous ayez soin d’éteindre votre cigare, sans que le feu soit arrivé à l’une des petites taches pâles. Et, comme il faut tout prévoir, si au contraire il vous semble si agréable à fumer que vous n’avez pas le courage de l’éteindre, eh bien ! alors, vous resterez, sans plus, le savant et habile artiste que vous êtes, et votre désir ne se réalisera pas ; mais, en revanche, vous aurez acquis la sagesse ! »

Comme la fée Eryx achevait ces mots, le poète vit que la voiture était justement arrivée dans la rue de Lille, à la porte de la maison qu’il habitait. La Fée ajouta : – « Souvent, sans que vous le sachiez, je me donnerai le plaisir de voltiger près de vous dans un rayon, invisible et présente, car je me rappellerai toujours que je vous dois la vie. Et si vous avez besoin de mon secours, vous pouvez me faire accourir en m’appelant par quelques vers très bien rimés, ce qui ne vous sera pas difficile. » Puis, elle tendit à Étienne sa main admirablement gantée, et au moment même où il mettait le pied sur le seuil de sa porte, la Fée, la voiture, les chevaux, les laquais, disparurent comme un rêve, ce qui ne causa au poète aucun étonnement, parce que la nature de son esprit le portait à n’être étonné de rien, si ce n’est, toutefois, de ce qui n’est pas surnaturel.

Conrad, le fantasque valet d’Étienne Silvant, s’était-il trouvé par hasard dans son jour d’honnêteté, ou bien était-ce l’influence de la fée Eryx qui se manifestait déjà ? Quoi qu’il en soit, lorsque le poète entra dans sa chambre, il y sentit une atmosphère de gaieté, de repos, de joie mystérieuse et tranquille. Les rideaux de damas antique étaient

“Therefore,” continued the fairy Eryx, “wish for luxuries, treasures, domination, everything that would please you, and your wish will be granted straight away, provided that after smoking you are careful to extinguish your cigar before the embers have burned down to one of the small pale marks. And, as everything must be taken into consideration, if on the contrary it seems so enjoyable to smoke that you don’t have the courage to put it out, well then, you will remain the scholarly and skilled artist that you are, nothing more, and your desire will not be realized, but, on the other hand, you will have acquired wisdom!”

Just as the fairy Eryx finished speaking, the poet saw that the carriage had arrived at the Rue de Lille, right at the door of the house where he lived. The Fairy added:

“Often, unbeknown to you, I will take pleasure in hovering close to you in a sunbeam, invisible and present, for I will always remember that I owe you my life. And if you need my help, you can have me come quickly by calling me with a few well-rhymed verses, which will not be difficult for you.”

Then she offered Étienne her admirably gloved hand, and at the very moment he set foot on his threshold, the Fairy, the carriage, the horses and lackeys disappeared like a dream, which for the poet occasioned no surprise, because by the nature of his mind he was not inclined to be surprised at anything, except, however, that which is not supernatural.

Was Conrad, Étienne Silvant’s capricious valet, by chance having a day of civility, or else was it the influence of the fairy Eryx already becoming manifest? Whatever it was, when the poet entered his room he sensed an atmosphere of cheer, of rest, and mysterious, peaceful joy. The ancient damask curtains were neatly closed. A

fermés soigneusement. Un grand feu de braises et de flammes, avec ses nappes rouges et roses, brûlait dans la cheminée. Les lampes étaient allumées, ainsi que les bougies des candélabres, et posés sur les tapis de riches étoffes, dans cette demeure presque exempte de meubles, les vases étaient remplis de fleurs coupées aux corolles écarlates. Après avoir revêtu ses habits de molleton blanc, Étienne se coucha sur un lit de repos de forme Louis XVI, terminé à la tête et aux pieds par des dossiers inégaux, circonscrits par une moulure à la ligne mollement tourmentée.

Près de lui, sur une petite table turque d'écaille et de nacre étaient posés son Rabelais et un volume des Odes de Ronsard ; la théière se tenait chaude devant la cheminée. Après avoir savouré un instant l'immense satisfaction de n'être ni à la comédie, ni dans le monde, ni ailleurs, le poète se versa du thé dans une petite tasse japonaise ornée de fleurs légères, et alluma enfin le cigare de la fée Eryx. Oh ! la belle fumée, claire, légère, aérienne, céleste, divinement bleue qui s'échappa alors de ses lèvres en flots gracieusement envolés ! Quant au goût même de cette fumée, velouté, à la fois ferme et subtil, caressant toutes les papilles avec une délicatesse amoureuse et tendre, il était si parfaitement exquis, si moelleusement suave, qu'il communiquait à l'instant même au fumeur extasié l'idée et le sentiment absolus du bonheur.

Alors, en lançant les bouffées de fumée transparente et claire, Étienne Silvant, rimeur de profession, se souvint qu'il était le maître du monde, plus puissant que Nemrod et Alexandre et Bacchos conquérant des terres indiennes, et que, s'il le voulait, il pouvait mettre à la place où gémissent les ruines des Tuileries un palais colossal taillé dans un seul diamant ; ou encore, acheter et faire démolir le boulevard des Italiens avec les rues avoisinantes, et à la place des maisons qui peuplent ces riches quartiers,

good fire of coals with pink and red flames burned in the fireplace. The lamps were lit as well as candles in the candelabras, and in this home, almost spare of furniture, vases filled with scarlet flowers had been placed on richly woven carpets. After changing into his white flannel nightclothes, Étienne lay down on a couch in the style of Louis XVI, its head and foot of different heights and edged with a softly twisted moulding.

Close by on a small Turkish table of tortoise-shell and mother-of-pearl were his Rabelais and a volume of Ronsard's *Odes*; the teapot was keeping warm on the hearth. After savouring for a moment the immense satisfaction of being neither at the theatre nor in society, nor elsewhere, the poet poured some tea into a small Japanese cup decorated with delicate flowers, and finally lit the cigar from the fairy Eryx. Oh, the lovely smoke, clear, light, aerial, heavenly, divinely blue, escaping his lips and gracefully drifting away! As for the taste of this smoke, velvety, at once firm and subtle, caressing all the taste buds with a loving, tender delicacy, it was so perfectly exquisite, so mellow and smooth, that it immediately communicated to the ecstatic smoker the absolute idea and feeling of happiness.

Then as he blew out puffs of clear, transparent smoke, Étienne Silvant, professional rhymer, remembered he was master of the world, more powerful than Nimrod and Alexander and Bacchus conquering the Indian lands, and that, if he wanted, he could remove the groaning ruins of the Tuileries and in their place put a colossal palace cut from one sole diamond; or even buy and demolish the Boulevard des Italiens with the neighbouring streets, and, in place of the houses

faire planter d'arbres tout venus un grand parc de gazons verts, dans lequel il donnerait à ses camarades une chasse au lion ou au sanglier, après quoi il pourrait y offrir à son amie une fête galante, très exactement copiée sur cette *Fête chez Thérèse* que Victor Hugo a si magnifiquement inventée dans ses *Contemplations*. Cela était bien simple ; pour réaliser ces prodiges, ou encore, pour organiser une armée de deux cent mille hommes, composée de clowns plus rusés que des thugs et plus agiles que les Hanlon, le poète n'avait qu'à éteindre son cigare avant que le feu touchât à la petite tache pâle, et en vérité, cela était moins que rien.

Moins que rien ! Sans doute, pour un notaire, ou pour un receveur des contributions. Mais ce délié, ce sagace, ce puissant artiste, capable d'apprécier le charme d'une sensation absolue et complète, comment aurait-il pu se faire que volontairement il la brisât, anéantissant ainsi, de gaieté de cœur, une volupté surhumaine, démesurée, continue, semblable à elle-même ? Comme je déteste les surprises, les angoisses pour rire, la brutalité des coups de théâtre, et, sous quelque forme qu'elles se produisent, les *Suites au prochain numéro*, je dirai tout de suite que savourant par gorgées la fumée caressante et subtile, et se rassasiant lentement de cette ambrosie éthérée, Étienne Silvant fuma le cigare jusqu'au bout, sans donner un regret à tous les biens qu'il dédaignait, et stoïquement sacrifia ainsi l'empire du monde. Mais peut-être ne sera-t-il pas inutile de raconter en quelques mots comment les choses se passèrent alors dans son esprit ?

Naturellement, Étienne n'était pas assez naïf pour concevoir ce que nous appelons l'ambition politique, et tout de suite il alla droit au but, rêvant la domination souveraine dans quelque vaste empire d'Asie, où, debout devant son trône, immobile comme la force

occupying these rich neighbourhoods, have full-grown trees planted in a large park of green lawns where he would arrange a lion or wild boar hunt for his friends, and where afterwards he would offer his lady an amorous festivity copied exactly from the *Fête chez Thérèse* so magnificently created by Victor Hugo in his *Contemplations*. It was very simple. To produce these wonders, or even to organize an army of two hundred thousand men composed of clowns more cunning than Thugs and more agile than the Hanlon Brothers, the poet had only to extinguish his cigar before the embers touched the small pale mark, and in truth, there was nothing easier.

Nothing easier! Probably, for a notary or a tax collector. But this astute, shrewd and powerful artist capable of appreciating the appeal of a sensation that is absolute and complete, how could he possibly put an end to it of his own free will and gladly reduce to nothing a superhuman, immoderate and continuous pleasure such as this? Since I hate surprises, anguish inflicted for fun, the sudden dramatic turn of events, and, in whatever form they are produced, episodes *To be continued*, I will say right now that Étienne Silvant, savouring mouthfuls of the soothing and subtle smoke, and slowly satisfying his desire for this ethereal ambrosia, smoked the cigar all the way to the end without one regret for the riches he spurned, and hence stoically sacrificed control of the world. But, might it not be worthwhile to recount in a few words how things passed through his mind?

Naturally, Étienne was not naïve enough to conceive a plan according to what we call political ambition. He went straight to the pinnacle, dreaming of sovereign domination in some vast Asian empire where, standing stock-still before his throne, in absolute strength, in all-

absolue et la toute-puissance, il ferait trembler les peuples par une imperceptible contraction de son sourcil, tandis que les armées aux cuirasses d'or, les éléphants pensifs, les chars attelés de tigres, les bataillons d'amazones attendraient son suprême caprice, et où le soir il s'endormirait en mettant sa tête dans la gueule de son lion familier. Il y avait là quelque chose de séduisant ; mais tout compte fait, en vrai Parisien, ce poète, évocateur de syllabes divines, avait horreur du cabotinage, et de tout ce qui aurait pu assimiler sa vie à un tableau de drame à spectacle. Et puis, le cigare était si bon à fumer qu'il laissa le feu dévorer la première tache, et continua à fumer encore.

Puis, il songea à être plus riche que cent mille Rothschild ! Mais Étienne était un shakespearien sachant par cœur (en anglais) son *Timon d'Athènes*. Il se vit machine à signer des chèques, dévoré par des amis de rencontre, des parasites, des courtisanes imbéciles, des valets, et la seconde tache y passa comme la première. La troisième aussi, et voici pourquoi. Étienne Silvant qui, pour n'ignorer rien, ainsi que le recommande judicieusement le bon Théophile Gautier, avait dessiné dans les ateliers d'après le modèle nu, savait combien il existe de femmes physiquement mal construites, sans parler de leur intelligence obscure, et dont la configuration blesse nos idées d'ordre symétrique par une incomplète harmonie des proportions.

Aussi, après avoir, pendant un quart de seconde, rêvé d'être don Juan Tenorio, au moment même où le cigare donné par la fée Eryx était plus délicieux que jamais, il s'aperçut bien vite qu'un tel rêve aboutissait à désirer... rien du tout ! Étienne avait le bonheur d'aimer, d'adorer son amie madame Estelle Chezely, qui l'aimait aussi, par le plus grand des miracles, et qui proportionnée, elle, comme une ode bien faite, à la fois belle et jolie et de bonne humeur, ne disait

powerfulness, he would make his subjects tremble with an imperceptible contraction of his eyebrow, while armies in golden breastplates, contemplative elephants, chariots hitched to tigers, and battalions of amazons would await his ultimate caprice, and where in the evenings he would fall asleep by putting his head in the mouth of his pet lion. There was something appealing in this, but all in all, as a true Parisian, this poet, a conjurer of divine words, hated showing off and anything that likened his life to a scene in a melodrama. And anyway the cigar was so good to smoke that he let it consume the first mark and kept smoking.

Then he dreamt of being richer than a hundred thousand Rothschilds! But Étienne was a Shakespearean knowing by heart (in English) his *Timon of Athens*. He saw himself as a machine for signing cheques, preyed upon by acquaintances, by parasites and idiotic courtesans and valets, and the second mark went the way of the first. The third also, and here's why: Étienne Silvant, in order to be ignorant of nothing, as the good Théophile Gautier judiciously recommends, had drawn from the nude in art studios and knew how many women exist who are not well formed, without mentioning their obscure intelligence, and whose shape offends our ideas of symmetry by an incomplete harmony of proportions.

Therefore, after dreaming for a quarter of a second of being Don Juan Tenorio, at the very moment when the cigar from the fairy Eryx was more delicious than ever, he quickly noticed that such a dream ended with him desiring... nothing at all! Étienne had the good fortune to love and adore his friend Madame Estelle Chezely, who loved him too by the greatest of miracles, and who was nicely proportioned like a well-constructed ode, having at once an inner

jamais aucunes bêtises, parce qu'elle n'en savait pas. Et pourquoi aurait-il changé cette compagne riante et pleine de grâces, contre mille et trois femmes affolées et quelconques ? Non, il fuma, fuma encore, aspirant et lançant avec un pur ravissement la claire fumée bleue, et le feu dévora la troisième tache du cigare.

Puis enfin, cependant, Étienne crut avoir eu quelque chose qui ressemblait à une idée. – « Avoir, s'écria-t-il, plus de talent que Victor Hugo ! » Mais, tout à coup, s'apostrophant lui-même : – « Imbécile ! dit-il, pendant que nous sommes seuls, avoue que tu possèdes un talent très suffisant pour exprimer ton âme telle qu'elle est, et, si puissantes qu'elles soient, les Fées ne fabriquent pas des âmes ! » Voilà comment il fuma jusqu'au bout les belles feuilles de tabac doré, brûlant la quatrième tache pâle comme les autres, et lorsque cela fut fini tout à fait, n'éprouvant aucun regret, parce qu'il avait été complètement heureux, il se dit en parfaite connaissance de cause : – « C'est qu'en effet, tout ce que l'homme peut envier ici-bas, pour lui personnellement, ne vaut pas un bon cigare.

– Et, dit à son oreille une voix murmurante et douce, voilà précisément la vraie sagesse ! »

Cette voix était celle de la fée Eryx, qui en même temps voltigea, se montra vaguement dans un rayon de lumière, puis disparut. Je crois qu'elle avait eu bien envie de mettre un baiser sur le front de son sauveur, mais elle résista à ce désir et ne voulut faire aucune peine à l'amie du poète, ce en quoi elle se montra supérieure à bien des femmes. Mais sans cela, à quoi lui eût-il servi d'être une Fée, enivrée par les vertes senteurs de la forêt,

beauty and a pretty face and good humour, and who never spoke any nonsense because she knew none. And why would he have exchanged this cheerful companion, full of grace, for a thousand and three besotted, ordinary women? No, he smoked and smoked, drawing and blowing the clear blue smoke with a pure pleasure, and the embers burned up the third mark on the cigar.

Then, finally, however, Étienne believed he had something resembling an idea.

“To have,” he exclaimed, “more talent than Victor Hugo!”

But all of a sudden he shouted at himself:

“Idiot! Since we're alone, admit that you possess a talent that's quite sufficient to express the thoughts of your soul just as it is, and, powerful as Fairies are, they do not make souls!”

This is how he smoked the beautiful leaves of golden tobacco to the end, burning the fourth pale mark like the others. When it was quite finished, feeling no regret at all, for he had been completely happy, he said to himself with full knowledge of what he had forsaken:

“Anything that man can desire here below for himself personally is, in fact, not worth as much as a good cigar.”

“And,” said a soft murmuring voice in his ear, “that, precisely, is true wisdom!”

The voice was that of the fairy Eryx, who all at once fluttered about and appeared faintly in a beam of light, then disappeared. I believe she wanted to place a kiss on her saviour's forehead but resisted the desire, and did not want to cause the poet's lady friend a moment's sorrow; in this she showed herself superior to many women. For otherwise, what purpose would she have served as a Fairy, intoxicated by the green redolence

et peignant ses blonds cheveux avec un peigne d'or, au bord des fontaines ? of the forest, combing her blonde hair with a gold comb on the rims of fountains?

A Letter – Translator’s Introduction

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The key challenge to translating this piece by the poet Sapardi Djoko Damono – whose lyricism pervades the prose – was to capture the idea of this being a response to another piece of writing. The translation thus needed to convey both the essence of the original letter and the response itself.

The author of that earlier piece – Seno – is mentioned in the very first line. For an Indonesian reader familiar with contemporary literature, the allusion to the writer Seno Gumira Ajidarma would be clear. For most English-speaking readers of the translation, it would be just a name. The translator’s dilemma becomes whether or not to explain who Seno is. I felt that the context of the piece gave enough information without needing the translator to step in in this way.

The letter to which the narrator is responding here has a dreamlike quality about it, a quality I felt needed to be captured in the translation of the response, which also has a conversational tone, including idiomatic expressions. Although the piece includes some quite short sentences, these do not interfere with the lyricism of the prose, as can often be the case. I had to choose language that didn’t feel abrupt and jarring. I was concerned, for example, that the one-word sentence “Intact” was too harsh. The Indonesian “Utuh” with the soft “h” ending felt gentler, less intrusive. On a more granular level, I agonised for some time over whether it should be “a slice of sky” or “a piece of sky”, opting in the end for the more sibilant and alliterative “slice”.

While the original letter asks the reader to believe that it is possible to cut a piece out of the sky and put it in an envelope, in this story the narrator is asking us to believe the perhaps even more fanciful notion that the sky can feel pain. This is a suspension of belief that the translator must preserve. I think it helped that the narrator poses questions about the sky’s pain, rather than presenting it as a given: *Please ask him if the sky whimpered in pain and bled when he cut it. Did it suffer convulsions on account of the relentless pain? Did it have to steel itself in order to hold back the tears?* I am still not completely happy with my choice of the adjective “relentless” here. The Indonesian “tak habis-habisnya” implies something going on forever, unremittingly. But I’d already used the adjective “unremitting”, and I found the English language wanting.

There are a lot of adjectives in this short piece of prose. As a translator, I often find adjectives problematic. It is not just because it is often so hard to find the right adjective in English to convey the nuances of an Indonesian adjective; it’s also because I have a bit of an aversion to adjectives in general. I recall the words of those formidable grammarians Strunk and White, in *Elements of Style*: “The adjective hasn’t been built that can pull a weak or inaccurate noun out of a tight place” (71). But as the translator, it is not my prerogative to do away with them. The colours of the rainbow were not such a problem – though they were listed in a different order in Indonesian than we usually express them in English – but does “pink” adequately convey the colour of the paper on which Seno’s letter was written? The Indonesian “merah jambu” alludes to the colour of the guava. “Pink” seems to cover a wider spectrum of colours.

I found this piece of writing to be clever and evocative, a flight of fancy that managed to feel grounded and realistic at the same time. I leave it to the reader to decide whether I have managed to preserve those features in translation.

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Surat
By
Sapardi Djoko Damono

Tolong sampaikan kepada Seno bahwa suratnya sudah kuterima. Lengkap dengan potongan langit yang diselipkan dengan sangat hati-hati di lipatan kertas suratnya yang berwarna merah jambu. Menakjubkan. Langit itu, maksudku. Dan warna surat itu mengingatkanku pada masa remajaku ketika kami suka menghubungkan-hubungkan warna dengan maksud tertentu yang disembunyikan di balik surat itu. Sepotong langit, serpihan mega yang mengambang, sedikit ujung bukit yang kena gunting, dan beberapa ekor burung yang kebetulan melintas dan tidak bisa menghindarkan diri dari guntingnya itu.

Sambil terus melihat lembaran potongan langit itu, aku melongok ke jendela dan kusaksikan – sungguh! – bahwa langit yang di luar sana masih tetap seperti biasa. Utuh. Lengkap dengan awan putihnya, sempurna dengan warna kebiruannya, dan sesekali dilintasi juga oleh beberapa ekor burung – entah apa namanya. Aku hampir tidak bisa membayangkan apa yang terjadi dengan langitnya, setelah sebagian digunting untuk diselipkan dalam surat yang dikirimkannya kepadaku ini. Aku membayangkan rasa sakit yang tak ada batasnya yang telah menimpa langit itu, sementara sebagian pesonanya diambil hanya untuk menyiratkan cintanya padaku. Aku masih perawan, namun sering mendengar dari ibu betapa sakitnya ketika melahirkanku. Itulah yang kubayangkan dirasakan langitnya ketika dimanfaatkannya untuk melahirkan cintanya padaku.

Katakan padanya, apa begitu perlu menggunting seserpih langit itu, kalau sekedar untuk membujuk – katakanlah, memaksa – seorang gadis seperti aku ini agar yakin bahwa cintanya

The Letter
By
Sapardi Djoko Damono
Translated by Pamela Allen

Please tell Seno that I've received his letter, complete with the slice of sky that had been so carefully inserted into the folds of its pink pages. It was spectacular. The slice of sky, I mean. And the colour of the letter reminded me of my teenage years when we would make connections between the hidden intent of a letter and the colour of the paper on which it was written. A slice of sky, scraps of drifting cloud, a little piece of hillside that had been nicked by the scissors, and some birds that happened to be flying past and had been unable to escape those scissors.

As I gazed at that piece of sky, I stole a glance out the window and noticed – no kidding! - that out there the sky was still the same as usual. Intact. A perfect shade of blue, complete with white clouds and the occasional bird of indeterminate breed flying by. I found it hard to fathom what would have happened to the sky after some of it had been cut out and tucked into that letter he sent me. I imagined the unremitting pain that the sky would have felt when part of its allure was stolen simply to symbolise Seno's love for me. I'm still a virgin, but my mother often tells me about the pain she suffered when she gave birth to me. That's what I imagine the sky would have felt when Seno used it to give birth to his love for me.

Ask him whether it was really so necessary to cut out that slice of sky purely in order to coax – one might say force - a girl like me to believe that his love is like the sky. How the sky must

seperti langit itu. Langitnya pasti menderita, tidak seperti langit di sini yang utuh dan entah sampai kapan tak habis-habisnya memandangi dengan penuh kebahagiaan segala tindakan kita. Tolong tanyakan padanya, apakah langit itu merintih dan mengeluarkan darah ketika diguntingnya? Apakah langit itu kejang-kejang karena menahan sakit yang tak ada batasnya? Apakah langit itu mengeras menahan air mata? Aku tidak berani membayangkan penderitaannya.

Tolong katakan pada Seno bahwa aku sudah menghayati cintanya, tanpa potongan langit itu pun. Sudah. Hanya saja aku harus menghancurkan serpihan langitnya itu agar tidak memburu-buru bayanganku tentangnya. Tapi apakah itu sopan? Apakah itu tidak berarti mengkhianati cintanya padaku? Aku bingung, tapi bagaimanapun aku harus segera membakarnya, bersama suratnya yang berwarna merah jambu itu. Aku tidak tahan lagi membayangkan rasa sakit langit itu.

Malam ini kubawa surat dan gambar itu ke pekarangan sebelah; tak ada seorang pun saksi. Kurobek-robek surat itu. Kunyalakan korek api, tetapi kemudian aku tiba-tiba menjadi ragu-ragu. Kukumpulkan kembali robekan-robekan surat dan gambar itu, kususun seperti teka-teki potongan gambar, lalu kuperhatikan – dan seketika rasa sakitku bergolak, seperti apa yang kubayangkan tentang langitnya itu. Aku harus tabah. Harus. Tak ada pilihan lain. Harus membakar surat itu agar langitnya yang indah itu kembali seperti sedia kala. Maka kunyalakan korek api itu lagi.

Nyala apinya seperti bianglala: merah, oranye, kuning, biru, hijau, indigo, violet. Tidak melengkung tetapi membumbung ke atas. Tetapi tiba-tiba saja aku merasa telah menjadi pengkhianat. Telah memusnahkan cinta, keindahan, harapan, dan masa depan. Telah menjadi manusia yang seburuk-buruknya di dunia, yang sejahat-

have suffered, unlike the sky here that remains intact and will forever happily watch over everything we do. Please ask him if the sky whimpered in pain and bled when he cut it. Did it suffer convulsions on account of the relentless pain? Did it have to steel itself in order to hold back the tears? I can't bear to think about its suffering.

Tell Seno that his love was already part of me even without the slice of sky. It really was. Only I had to destroy that fragment of sky to stop myself from dwelling on the images I kept conjuring up of it. Was destroying it a decent thing to do though? Did it not mean that I was betraying Seno's love for me? Yet, despite these uncertainties, I had to burn it straight away, along with the pink letter. I couldn't bear to think about the sky's pain for a moment longer.

Tonight I took the letter and the picture to the yard at the side of the house; not a soul saw me. I tore the letter up. I lit a match but then suddenly I began to waver. I gathered up all the pieces of the letter and the picture and I put them back together like a jigsaw puzzle and looked at it closely – and instantly the pain churned inside me, a pain like I imagined the sky had suffered. I had to be resolute. I had to. There was no other option. I had to burn the letter so the sky could be restored to its former state. So I lit the match again.

The flame resembled a rainbow: red, orange, yellow, blue, green, indigo, violet. It wasn't curved like a rainbow though; it soared into the air. But suddenly I felt that I'd turned traitor, that I'd destroyed love, beauty, hope and the future. I'd become the world's worst person, the most despicable. Who knew what other adjectives could be thrown at

jahatnya, yang entah apa. Aku tiba-tiba berharap agar dari asap itu muncul bayangannya, bagaikan burung phoenix yang dengan perkasa melesat dari kobaran api. Aku satukan jari-jari tanganku, kutengadahkan kepalaku. Kutatap tajam langitku yang dulu itu juga, yang tidak pernah mengkhianati harapanku. Tetapi api itu tetap membumbung, semakin mirip bianglala. Dan aku terus menunggu.

Sampaikan kepada Seno bahwa aku akan terus menunggu kobaran itu sampai diriku menjelma asap, menyatu dengan bianglala itu, membumbung ke langit yang setia, yang tidak pernah meninggalkanku.

me. Suddenly I wished that his image would emerge from the smoke, like a phoenix rising from the flames. I brought my fingers together and I gazed upwards at that sky of mine, the sky that had never betrayed my hopes. But the fire just kept soaring upwards, more and more rainbow-like. And I just kept watching over it.

Tell Seno that I will keep on watching over the flames until I become smoke, united with the rainbow, soaring into a faithful sky that will never leave me.

A Translation of Sapardi Djoko Damono's "Surat": Reflections on Context

SOPHIE REVINGTON

Sapardi Djoko Damono is known for his vivid lyrical poetry and translations of Rumi's poetry into Indonesian. His short story "Surat" (The Letter) (2000) is full of the kind of evocative and metaphysical imagery typical of his poetry. "Surat" is a woman's response to her lover's declaration of devotion in the form of "sepotong langit" (a piece of the sky) enclosed within a letter (Damono 140). My goal as a translator was to go beyond the surface meaning of the text and try to translate Damono's imagery and metaphor so that it not only makes sense but is beautiful to read. I asked myself: What does the imagery evoke? What kind of feelings? What kind of atmosphere? Image and metaphor are key in the translation of poetry and lyrical prose as the communicative purpose of these texts is to go beyond a mere exchange of information and evoke an emotive or spiritual response in the reader through meaning and poetic effects (Jones). Yet a reader's affective response to and interpretation of a text is not solely dependent on the language used. Social context, ontology and ideology also play a role. Thus, it stands to reason that a translation must also consider the personal, social, cultural and ideological contexts in which both the source text and translated text are embedded (Baker; Hanks and Severy; Munday). The language choices I made were informed by these reflections, as well as the context of metaphysical poetry, Damono's previous work, and the broader social context of current events.

In "Surat", Damono employs evocative poetic techniques which pose an interesting challenge to the translator. For example, the letter sent by the woman's lover was written on "kertas (...) yang berwarna merah jambu" (rose-pink paper) (Damono "Surat", 140). The term *merah jambu* refers to the pink colour of guava flesh and in Indonesian it has a lyrical feel as the vowel sound in the second syllable of *merah* is echoed in the first syllable of *jambu*. I couldn't find a term in English that mirrored this poetic vowel harmony, but instead of translating the term literally as "guava-red" I chose to translate *merah jambu* as "rose-pink" as that colour's symbolic association with romantic love induces an emotional response in the reader. Another instance of poetic effect in "Surat" is the use of the word *melahirkan* which can mean both "to give birth" and "to express (e.g. feelings)". Damono trades on this double meaning in the excerpt below:

[S]ering mendengar dari ibu betapa sakitnya ketika melahirkanku. Itulah kubayangkan dirasakan langitnya ketika dimanfaatkannya untuk melahirkan cintanya padauk.

(Damono 141)

I have often heard my mother talk about the pain of childbirth. That is how I imagined the sky felt when he cut away this piece, an embodiment of his love

(My translation)

Rather than translate the second instance of *melahirkan* as "expression", I used "embodiment" as I felt this choice of words reflected the corporeal, metaphysical nature

of the word's double meaning in Indonesian and evokes the violence of the idea of tearing away a piece of sky.

The metaphysical poets used extended metaphors to characterise intense feelings of love and lust as an intersection between the physical, corporeal world, and the spiritual. In one of John Donne's most well-known poems, "The Sun Rising", he writes, "To warm the world, that's done in warming us/ Shine here to us, and thou art everywhere;/ This bed thy centre is, these walls, thy sphere" (Donne 92). As the sun rises through the couple's bedroom window, its light and heat cannot eclipse the intensity of their romantic love and connection. The rest of the world pales in comparison to the universe contained within their bedroom. Damono's use of the sky as a metaphor for romantic love in "Surat" is metaphysical. The lover intended the inclusion of a piece of sky in his letter as an embodiment of his love and what could be more infinite and eternal than the sky?

This use of the sky as this overarching metaphor in the narrative is consistent with Damono's usual style. Themes of love and longing are expressed using imagery from nature, emphasising the eternal and inevitable quality of his feeling. Like the couple's love in "The Sun Rising", Damono's love is more epic and intense than anything in the natural world, even time itself. In the poem "Yang Fana Adalah Waktu" he proclaims simply, "Yang fana adalah waktu/ Kita abadi" (Time is fleeting/We are forever) (Damono, *Perahu Kertas*). In "Hatiku Selemba Daun" (My Heart is a Leaf) moments become an eternity, and in "Aku Ingin Mencintamu Dengan Sederhana" (I Want to Love You Simply) the force of love is greater than the forces that burn wood to ash, dissolve clouds into nothingness (Damono, *Perahu Kertas*). In "Surat" the sky is an embodiment of Seno's love, and yet the object of his love does not accept the conceit,

[A]pa begitu perlu menggunting seserpih langit itu, kalau sekedar untuk membujuk - katakanlah, memaksa - seorang gadis seperti aku ini agar yakin bahwa cintanya seperti langit itu. Langitnya pasti menderita.

(Damono 141)

Did he really need to cut out this fragment of sky just to convince - force, even - a girl like me to believe that his love is like the sky? The sky must have suffered.

(My translation)

To her, love is beyond metaphor, something she feels in her soul. Love is more powerful and true than the sky, so she cannot understand why it was necessary to desecrate it.

Although "Surat" was written well before these events, the context of the #MeToo movement also strongly informed my interpretation of the text. As I was working on my translation of "Surat", the allegations of sexual harassment and assault against Harvey Weinstein were emerging, which triggered a discussion about gender equality and rape culture in popular culture more generally. A recurring trope in many popular romantic films, books, short stories is the lovelorn male protagonist who will stop at nothing to win the woman he loves. Think of the Mark, the best man character (played by Andrew Lincoln) in the film *Love Actually* (Curtis, 2003), who arrives on the doorstep of newly-married Juliet (played by Keira Knightly) to declare his love through a series of Subterranean Homesick Blues-esque cue cards. While cast in the

narrative as grand romantic gestures, in light of the #MeToo Movement, these kinds of actions, the idea that the male protagonist can “win” the object of his desire if only he persists, can be reinterpreted as a form of sexual harassment. Damono’s story also turns this trope on its head. Seno’s declaration of love in the form of a piece of sky is reframed as an oppressive act of violence,

[A]pakah langit itu merintih dan mengeluarkan darah ketika diguntingnya? Apakah langit itu kejang-kejang karena menahan sakit yang tak ada batasnya? Apakah langit itu mengeras menahan air mata? Aku tidak berani membayangkan penderitaannya.

(Damono “Surat”, 141)

Did the sky cry out and bleed when he cut it? Did the sky convulse because it could not stand the pain? Did the sky try to hold back its tears? I cannot even begin to imagine how it suffered.

(My translation)

Rather than accepting this gesture of “romance”, the female protagonist is haunted by the pain inflicted on the sky. She burns and destroys the letter and the piece of sky. And overwhelmed by suffering she ends her own life, “aku akan terus menunggu kobaran itu sampai diriku menjelma asap” (I will keep watching the flames until I myself turn into smoke) (Damono “Surat”, 143).

Whether as a reader you accept my interpretation of the text or not, the exploration of the intensity and depth of human emotion in “Surat” is extremely powerful, as it is in all of Damono’s work. I hope that my translation has managed to convey some of that complexity.

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Surat
By
Sapardi Djoko Damono

Tolong sampaikan kepada Seno bahwa suratnya sudah kuterima. Lengkap dengan potongan langit yang diselipkan dengan sangat hati-hati di lipatan kertas suratnya yang berwarna merah jambu. Menakjubkan. Langit itu, maksudku. Dan warna surat itu mengingatkanku pada masa remajaku ketika kami suka menghubungkan-hubungkan warna dengan maksud tertentu yang disembunyikan di balik surat itu. Sepotong langit, serpihan mega yang mengambang, sedikit ujung bukit yang kena gunting, dan beberapa ekor burung yang kebetulan melintas dan tidak bisa menghindarkan diri dari guntingnya itu.

Sambil terus melihat lembaran potongan langit itu, aku melongok ke jendela dan kusaksikan – sungguh! – bahwa langit yang di luar sana masih tetap seperti biasa. Utuh. Lengkap dengan awan putihnya, sempurna dengan warna kebiruannya, dan sesekali dilintasi juga oleh beberapa ekor burung – entah apa namanya. Aku hampir tidak bisa membayangkan apa yang terjadi dengan langitnya, setelah sebagian digunting untuk diselipkan dalam surat yang dikirimkannya kepadaku ini. Aku membayangkan rasa sakit yang tak ada batasnya yang telah menimpa langit itu, sementara sebagian pesonanya diambil hanya untuk menyiratkan cintanya padaku. Aku masih perawan, namun sering mendengar dari ibu betapa sakitnya ketika melahirkanku. Itulah yang kubayangkan dirasakan langitnya ketika dimanfaatkannya untuk melahirkan cintanya padaku.

Katakan padanya, apa begitu perlu menggunting seserpih langit itu, kalau sekedar untuk membujuk – katakanlah, memaksa – seorang gadis

The Letter
By
Sapardi Djoko Damono
Translated by
Sophie Revington

Please tell Seno I received his letter.
And the piece of sky he placed so carefully between the folds of rose-pink paper. Amazing. The sky, I mean. And the coloured paper reminded me of when we were teenagers, when the colour of our letters held a special secret meaning. A piece of the sky. Fragments of floating clouds. The point of a snipped-off hilltop. And some birds in mid-flight that couldn't escape the scissors.

While I examined this piece of sky, I glanced out of the window and I saw - incredibly - that the sky outside was normal. Whole. Complete with its white clouds, its perfect blueness, and the occasional bird flying past - who knows what kind of birds they were. I could hardly believe what had happened to the sky. A piece of it had been cut out and sent to me in a letter! I imagined the unbearable pain the sky must have felt when some of its magic was taken away, just for Seno to express his love for me. I am still a virgin, but I have often heard my mother talk about the pain of childbirth. That is how I imagined the sky felt when he cut away this piece, an embodiment of his love.

Ask him, did he really need to cut out this fragment of sky just to convince - force, even - a girl like me to believe that his love is like the sky? The

seperti aku ini agar yakin bahwa cintanya seperti langit itu. Langitnya pasti menderita, tidak seperti langit di sini yang utuh dan entah sampai kapan tak habis-habisnya memandangi dengan penuh kebahagiaan segala tindakan kita. Tolong tanyakan padanya, apakah langit itu merintih dan mengeluarkan darah ketika diguntingnya? Apakah langit itu kejang-kejang karena menahan sakit yang tak ada batasnya? Apakah langit itu mengeras menahan air mata? Aku tidak berani membayangkan penderitaannya.

Tolong katakan pada Seno bahwa aku sudah menghayati cintanya, tanpa potongan langit itu pun. Sudah. Hanya saja aku harus menghancurkan serpihan langitnya itu agar tidak memburu-buru bayanganku tentangnya. Tapi apakah itu sopan? Apakah itu tidak berarti mengkhianati cintanya padaku? Aku bingung, tapi bagaimanapun aku harus segera membakarnya, bersama suratnya yang berwarna merah jambu itu. Aku tidak tahan lagi membayangkan rasa sakit langit itu.

Malam ini kubawa surat dan gambar itu ke pekarangan sebelah; tak ada seorang pun saksi. Kurobek-robek surat itu. Kunyalakan korek api, tetapi kemudian aku tiba-tiba menjadi ragu-ragu. Kumpulkan kembali robekan-robekan surat dan gambar itu, kusun seperti teka-teki potongan gambar, lalu kuperhatikan – dan seketika rasa sakitku bergolak, seperti apa yang kubayangkan tentang langitnya itu. Aku harus tabah. Harus. Tak ada pilihan lain. Harus membakar surat itu agar langitnya yang indah itu kembali seperti sedia kala. Maka kunyalakan korek api itu lagi.

Nyala apinya seperti bianglala: merah, oren, kuning, biru, hijau, indigo, violet. Tidak melengkung tetapi membumbung ke atas. Tetapi tiba-tiba saja aku merasa telah menjadi pengkhianat. Telah memusnahkan cinta, keindahan, harapan, dan masa depan.

sky must have suffered. Not like the sky here - whole, stretching for eternity, gazing down on all our comings and goings full of happiness. Please ask him, did the sky cry out and bleed when he cut it? Did the sky convulse because it could not stand the pain? Did the sky try to hold back its tears? I cannot even begin to imagine how it suffered.

Please tell Seno that I feel his love for me already, even without this piece of the sky. I feel it in my soul. But the thing is, I have to destroy this fragment of sky or my imagination will get carried away. But is it the right thing to do? Does it mean I am betraying his love for me? I am troubled but I know I must burn it as soon as possible, along with his rose-pink letter. I cannot bear to think about the sky's pain any longer.

So tonight I took the letter and the piece of sky with me into next door's yard; no-one saw me. I tore them up. I lit a match. But then I hesitated. I picked up the torn pieces of letter and sky and laid them out like a jigsaw puzzle. Then I remembered how I imagined the sky had felt, and for a moment my stomach lurched. I must be resolute. I must be. There is no other choice. I must burn the letter so the beautiful sky can be whole again. So I lit another match.

The light of the fire shone like a rainbow: red, orange, yellow, blue, green, indigo, violet. The flames weren't arched like a rainbow, but rose straight up. In that moment I felt like a traitor. I had destroyed love, beauty, hope, the future. I was the worst person in the

Telah menjadi manusia yang seburuk-buruknya di dunia, yang sejahat-jahatnya, yang entah apa. Aku tiba-tiba berharap agar dari asap itu muncul bayangannya, bagaikan burung punik yang dengan perkasa melesat dari kobaran api. Aku satukan jari-jari tanganku, kutengadahkan kepalaku. Kutatap tajam langitku yang dulu itu juga, yang tidak pernah mengkhianati harapanku. Tetapi api itu tetap membumbung, semakin mirip bianglala. Dan aku terus menunggu.

Sampaikan kepada Seno bahwa aku akan terus menunggu kobaran itu sampai diriku menjelma asap, menyatu dengan bianglala itu, membumbung ke langit yang setia, yang tidak pernah meninggalkanku.

world, the most evil, the most... I suddenly hoped that a vision would appear from the smoke, like a phoenix rising majestically from the flames. I clasped my hands together and raised my head. I gazed at my sky, how it used to be, the sky that did not betray my hopes. But the fire continued to blaze, looking more and more rainbow-like. And I just watched.

Tell Seno that I will keep watching the flames until I myself turn into smoke. At one with the rainbow. Rising into the faithful sky. The sky that never left me.

A Poetic Vision of Love and Loss

JAMES SCANLAN

I consider myself very fortunate to have had occasion to deepen my appreciation of the work of the Indonesian poet Amir Hamzah (1911-1946) through the medium of this beautiful and enigmatic poem – a poem that, in its multi-layered complexity, lends itself to a variety of interpretations. In what follows I reflect on the very personal response to “Barangkali” that has informed my translation.

Soon after embarking on the project I began to feel that the key to an integrated interpretation of the poem could lie in its final two lines – lines that, in their tone of sombre introspection, stand in dramatic contrast to the rest of the poem. This feeling was strongly influenced by what I knew of Amir Hamzah’s biography, and my reading of those final two lines led me inevitably to the pivotal crisis in his life: his decision, at the age of 26, to abandon a pioneering literary career in Jakarta – and his beloved Javanese sweetheart Ilik Sundari – and dutifully return, at the behest of his aristocratic Malay family, to an arranged marriage and an administrative role in the court circles of a Sumatran sultanate.

“Barangkali” was first published in 1937, at the time of Amir’s fateful decision to return to Sumatra. Could it be that in those final lines he is thinking of himself – or at least his life of poetry and love in Java – as an ocean wave [gelombang] that, after flinging itself [membanting diri] exultantly through the surf, now lies washed up on the shore [pantai] of eternal regret?

The penultimate line offered no resistance to a straightforward, word-for-word translation: “Perhaps, dying [mati] along the shores of the heart”. “Shores”, however, seemed unsatisfactory for considerations of both prosody and euphony and, after long deliberation on possible alternatives, “margins” floated up into consciousness. This not only satisfied the demands of the formal constraints, but brought together the geographical, anatomical, psychological and emotional associations so beautifully evoked by Amir’s “pantai hati” [margins of the heart]. Then, viewing those final two lines in the context of the whole poem, I began to see the first four stanzas as an extended invocation in which the poet is praying for a visionary – and perhaps final – experience of the “plunging ecstasy” he feels he is about to lose forever, just as a drowning man is said to “recall” [kenang] or “relive” his past experience.

Having decided to adopt this narrative outline as the structural skeleton of my translation, I was faced with the challenge of attempting to translate the richly textured and living substance of “Barangkali” from the linguistic/literary/cultural context of Indonesian-language poetry into that of English-language poetry – with the emphasis on *poetry*.

Starting, then, with the first word of the poem, the question immediately arose: Who (or what) is the mysterious entity being addressed through the personal pronoun “engkau” [you]? Used familiarly in addressing social equals or inferiors, but also in addressing God (who is above all social distinctions), “engkau” here seemed to refer to a heaven-sent spirit of love both personal (lying dormant within the poet’s heart) and universal (extending throughout the created world).

Here, too, may be echoes of the poetic trope, familiar to Amir as both scholar and translator of oriental mystical verse, in which earthly romantic love can serve as a type or symbol of union with the divine. And to me, the curious image of the arch of an

eyebrow [alis] providing a haven for the heavenly spirit in its microcosmic manifestation suggested nothing more than a telling sparkle in the eyes of the poet's sweetheart.

As I proceeded, Amir's acute sensitivity to the poetic potential of the then-nascent Indonesian language [bahasa Indonesia] became increasingly apparent. Reflecting, then, on certain linguistic correspondences between Indonesian and English – particularly in their hybrid heritage and phonemic structure – I began to wonder if these correspondences could be exploited as linguistic “bridges” in the translation process.

The first stanza offered opportunities for experimenting with these inter-language correspondences. The second line has two distinct halves: the first half, “akasa swarga” [firmament of heaven], comprises two Sanskrit-based words, while the second half, “nipis-tipis”, is a reduplicative combination – for emphasis – of two Malay words meaning “thin”. The connection with the language of the gods and the long, open vowel sounds of “akasa swarga” combine to evoke images of an infinite celestial realm, while the homely Malay flavour and short, close vowel sounds of “nipis-tipis” bring us abruptly back to human dimensions. I tried to replicate this effect by juxtaposing the Greek-based “ethereal”, with its elevated, literary associations and extended vowel and diphthong sounds, and the more colloquial-sounding, shorter-vowelled “breath of heaven”, firmly rooted in Anglo-Saxon. And in the fourth line, I chose the words “linger below” in response to the effect created by the repeated [l] sounds of Amir's “terlindungi alis” [sheltered by an eyebrow].

The first two lines of the second stanza evoked the picture of a worshipper approaching the shrine of a deity. In isolation, the first line – literally “I carry you on (or above) my head” – can be read simply as one variant of a stock expression of obeisance, addressed to a ruler by one of his subjects or servants, and frequently found in the Malay prose romances and histories so well known to Amir. In the context of this poem, however, the poet could also be drawing on the figurative content of the expression, with its connotations of ceremonial worship and “offerings borne aloft”. His paean of public worship becomes an intimate, protective lullaby in the stanza's last two lines as his perspective on the object of his invocation moves from its universal to its personal aspect.

This enigmatic entity is apostrophized as “Gunung” [Mountain] in the first line of the third stanza. I pondered for days over words that might capture the symbolic significance of “Gunung” before finally settling on “exalted Presence” to suggest a mysterious spiritual being whose domain extends from the lowly human realm to the heights of heaven. Then, although the imperative “Bangkit” could be perfectly well translated as “Arise”, I chose an alternative meaning of the verb – “to inspire” – to express the poet's desire to be transported to those mystic heights.

The spiritual “Presence” now begins to assume an angelic feminine form as the poet enters on his supplication – delivered in picturesque detail throughout the rest of the third stanza and all of the fourth – for her to orchestrate that visionary, ecstatic experience.

From the beginning of the fifth stanza the poet's address changes direction, as signalled by the informal tone of “Mari menari” [Let's dance]. Consequently, I read the first two lines of the stanza as being directed towards the spirit of Ilik, his “beloved maiden” [dara asmara], begging her to join him in the celestial celebration and expressing his longing to hear – perhaps for the last time – her “most beautiful voice”

[swara swarna]. Then, in the final couplet, comes his dramatic descent from the heights of poetic rapture to the desolate “margins of the heart”.

The image of dying waves in “Barangkali” echoes a piece of poetic prose that Amir published in 1932 when he was beginning to establish himself in Jakarta as a new voice in Indonesian literature. In that piece, titled “Pujangga Baru” [The New Poet] (Jassin 56-57), he speaks of “waves dying along the shore” [ombak mati kepantai] when referring to the waning potency of Malay literary traditions – “sastra dewi” [goddess writings] – within a modern Indonesian literature turning increasingly towards Western models. But “wanderers from the land opposite” [kelana dari tanah seberang] eventually arrive in Java; they strike “the gong of memory” [gung kenangan] by brushing the dust off the old writings, rousing the “goddesses” [dewi] in their literary temples, and firing the hearts of the young with the deeds of the heroes of old. Those “wanderers from the land opposite” are Amir himself and other young Sumatran writers of the “*Pujangga Baru* generation”, such as Sanusi Pane, who sought to revitalize traditional literary themes, forms, and images.

Five years after the publication of Amir’s “Pujangga Baru” the symbolic literary significance of those dying waves is retained in “Barangkali”, now immeasurably enriched by their poignant reference to the poet’s own life and literary career. On his return to Sumatra Amir virtually abandoned poetry. Thus, while “Barangkali” may be read as a personal – and regretful – farewell to poetry, we can marvel that, from the bitter depths of that regret, he was able to conjure one of his most beautiful poems.

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Barangkali
By
Amir Hamzah

Engkau yang lena dalam hatiku
Akasa swarga nipis-tipis
Yang besar terangkum dunia
Kecil terlindungi alis

Kujunjung di atas hulu
Kupuji di pucuk lidah
Kupangku di lengan lagu
Kudaduhkan di selendang dendang

Bangkit Gunung
Buka mata-mutiaramu
Sentuh kecapi firdusi
Dengan jarimu menirus halus

Biar siuman dewi-nyanyi
Gambuh asmara lurus lampai
Lemah ramping melidah api
Halus harum mengasap keramat

Mari menari dara asmara
Biar terdengar swara swarna
Barangkali mati di pantai hati
Gelombang kenang membanting diri.

Perhaps . . .
By
Amir Hamzah
Translated by James Scanlan

You, who sleep in the depths of my
heart –
Ethereal – a breath of heaven –
Can enfold the world in your wide
embrace
Yet linger below the arch of an eyebrow.

I honour you with offerings borne aloft,
Your praises ever rising from my
tongue.
I hold you in my lullaby's embrace,
My song a shawl of woven harmony.

Inspire me, exalted Presence.
Unveil the pearly lustre of your eyes.
Waken the strings of the heavenly lute
At the touch of your delicate fingers.

Summon the goddess of song
– and the dancers –
The dancers of love
so straight and slender,
Lithe and graceful as tongues of flame
That perfume a shrine with incense.

Come to the dance, beloved maiden.
Let me hear that most beautiful voice.
Perhaps,
dying along the margins of the heart,
Spent waves relive their plunging
ecstasy.

Translation of Amir Hamzah's "Barangkali"

KEITH FOULCHER
University of Sydney

"There are two great maxims of translation—either turn the foreign author into a native author or induce the reader to go out to the author's foreignness" (J.W. von Goethe, 1813).²⁴

The age-old question that haunts every act of translation – domestication or estrangement? – is perhaps particularly acute in the case of Amir Hamzah. A Malay prince and Indonesian nationalist, who turned his back on the promptings of his heart under the heavy weight of inherited duty and who died prematurely as the victim of social revolution, Amir belongs to a past world, "another country" in more ways than one. He wrote in a language never before used as a language of literature – a unique blend of the classical Malay of his courtly heritage and the emerging form of modern Malay that had only recently been dubbed "Bahasa Indonesia", "the language of Indonesia", or Indonesian. Within a decade, his world, and his literary idiom, would be swept away by the tumultuous birth of the Indonesian nation, leaving him and his poetry preserved in time, a small jewel in the new nation's heritage.

For me, the translator's search for a pathway between domestication and estrangement begins in this case with a sensitivity to the poem's origins and a consideration of its likely effect on the ear of a modern Indonesian reader. Seen in this light, Amir's "Barangkali" does indeed appear "distant" and "strange": its form recalls the metre of the traditional Malay quatrain with its regular mid-line caesura, it is peppered with archaisms and self-consciously poetic idiom, and its sonorities are replete with the assonance and alliteration so beloved of the oral tradition that gives birth to it. Perhaps equally distant is the sentiment that propels the poem: the sublimation of earthly desire into a longing for mystical union with the Divine. Strange indeed—but how redolent of its times!

Outside of his own Malay/Indonesian heritage, Amir Hamzah knew and took inspiration from the mystical religious poetry of Asian traditions; he also had some familiarity with nineteenth century European Romanticism, to which he and his peers were introduced through their colonial Dutch education. Among his many translations from Dutch language sources are two poems by the great Bengali poet Rabindranath Tagore, who died just five years earlier than Amir himself, in 1941. Tagore translated his own poems of this time into English, producing an idiom which in my imagination rings with the voice of his younger Indonesian contemporary: "If thou speakest not I will fill my heart with thy silence and endure it. I will keep still and wait like the night with starry vigil and its head bent low with patience..." (*Gitanjali* 19). This may be a "strange" voice to the modern ear, but to me it is one worth going out of our way to meet on its own terms, rather than "domesticating" according to our own.

It was this approach, and this model, which was the guide for my journey between domestication and estrangement in translating Amir Hamzah's "Barangkali".

²⁴ This quote was sourced from: Aurobindo Bose. "On Translating *Balākā*." In Rabindranath Tagore. *A Flight of Swans, Poems from Balākā*. Translated by Aurobindo Bose. London: MacMillan, 1962: 11.

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Barangkali
By
Amir Hamzah

Engkau yang lena dalam hatiku
Akasa swarga nipis-tipis
Yang besar terangkum dunia
Kecil terlindungi alis

Kujunjung di atas hulu
Kupuji di pucuk lidah
Kupangku di lengan lagu
Kudaduhkan di selendang dendang

Bangkit Gunung
Buka mata-mutiara-mu
Sentuh kecapi firdusi
Dengan jarimu menirus halus

Biar siuman dewi-nyanyi
Gambuh asmara lurus lampai
Lemah ramping melidah api
Halus harum mengasap keramat

Mari menari dara asmara
Biar terdengar swara swarna
Barangkali mati di pantai hati
Gelombang kenang membanting diri

Perchance
By
Amir Hamzah
Translated by Keith Foulcher

Thou who slumber'st inside my heart
Vault of heaven yet filament fine
Wrapped large within the earth's
embrace
Sheltered small beneath an eyebrow's
span

I bear thee aloft, my head bowed low
I sing thy praise on the tip of my tongue
I cradle thee in the arms of my song
I rock thee to sleep in my lullaby's lilt

Arise my Beloved
Open thine eyes of pearl
Touch the heavenly lyre
With thy fingers delicately tapering

Let the goddess of song be roused
Summon love's dancer, supple and
strong
A flickering flame softly illuming
Holy fragrance in smoke-laden air

Come let us dance, young maiden of
love
Let the golden voices be heard
Perchance to be free from the call of
time past
Pounding like waves on the shores of
my heart.

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Sophie Revington is a freelance Indonesian to English translator living on the Far South Coast of NSW. She has been speaking Indonesian for over 20 years as a student, researcher, traveller and translator. Her research interests include contemporary Indonesian literature, colloquial varieties of Indonesian and documentation of minority languages in Indonesia. She has an MA in Linguistics from the University of Western Australia and has written several works about the Minangkabau language, as spoken in West Sumatra, Indonesia.

Julie Rose is a French translator who has translated over 40 books and plays – most recently, Emile Zola, *Dr Pascal*, to be published by Oxford University Press in 2020. She is a Chevalier de l'Ordre des arts et des lettres and was recently made an Honorary Fellow of the Australian Academy of the Humanities.

James Scanlan lives in the small town of Uralla on the Northern Tablelands of NSW. After retiring from a career in journalism in Australia and abroad, he decided to undertake the study of Indonesian at my local university (and most recent employer), the University of New England. Jim found that Indonesian provided exciting new avenues for pursuing his lifelong interest in languages (particularly Asian languages), literature, and the practice of creative writing. Attempting an English-language version of a wonderful poem by Amir Hamzah has engaged all those interests in a particularly exciting way.

Shani Tobias coordinates and teaches translation units in the Master of Interpreting and Translation Studies at Monash University. She is also a NAATI-certified translator between Japanese and English. Her research focuses on cultural and literary translation between Japanese and English, in particular the translation of metaphor.

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