

ITALIAN CONTEMPORARY POETS

An Anthology

Edited by Franco Buffoni

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PREFACE

This is the first anthology of contemporary Italian poetry conceived and created in Italy entirely for a readership whose mother tongue or second language is English. It is intended for international circulation as a convenient instrument for the spread of Italian poetic thought. Hence the lack of a parallel text and the restriction of selected authors to forty. Forty living poets who have been fully active on the Italian literary scene over recent years.

As the editor I much regret, due to limited space, that I could not include in this initiative all those poets who would have well deserved it. On the other hand, a critical assessment of the situation in Italian poetry today is far more complex and varied than that of twenty or thirty years ago. It seemed then that the hermetic avant-garde approach almost entirely represented twentieth-century Italian poetry. Today the area that had been left in the shade during the Twentieth century seems at times more illuminated than elsewhere. And it is good that this is so, for it helps to achieve a critical balance that cannot certainly – at the moment – be regarded as definitive.

If we add to this fifteen years of intense poetic output seen after the arrival of the new millennium, it is easy to understand how an anthology conceived in this way cannot fail to provide critical stimulus, as well as providing information in aesthetic terms. For it offers pointers and evidence on the state of poetical research by some of the leading authors alive in Italy today.

On a specifically critical level, we have sought to give clear emphasis to the poetics of each author. This naturally consists – as Luciano Anceschi wrote – of operative norms and technical systems, but also of morals and ideals. Therefore each poem included here has, for us, an intrinsic value, as maximum expression of the poetics of that particular author, but it also provides an added value, which comes from the fact of being placed into a dialogue, into a relationship, with poems by other authors chosen with the same criterion.

Poetry doesn't save lives, as we well know, but it may perhaps help people and situations to live and to develop. Our implied hope is that this small drop might help ever more intelligent understandings to flourish between people of different languages and cultures. Our thanks to the translators and in particular to Richard Dixon, who with scrupulous philological care has undertaken the task of putting into English Italian texts that are, in many cases, complex and needful of careful contextual interpretation. The final result is one of smooth readability, sober and intense lyricism, and absolute respect for the original texts. We can only acknowledge our gratitude by offering this volume to the persons who have conceived and promoted it: the presidents of the Federazione Unitaria Italiana Scrittori, Francesco Mercadante and Natale Antonio Rossi.

Franco Buffoni
Rome, January 2016

ANTONELLA ANEDDA

Antonella Anedda-Angioy is a poet and essayist, born in Rome in 1958, where she lives. She has published six volumes of poetry which have won many prizes, including the Premio Montale. Her most recent book, *Salva con nome* (Mondadori, 2012) has won a number of awards including the prestigious Premio Viareggio-Repaci 2012. She has translated classical texts by Sappho and Ovid and numerous recent poets including Philippe Jaccottet and Anne Carson. Her four volumes of essays are concerned mainly with literature and the visual arts, though her last prose work, *Isolatria* (Laterza, 2013) was a study of Sardinia. *Archipelago*, her first work in English, translated by the poet Jamie McKendrick – who has also translated the four poems selected here – was published by Bloodaxe Books in 2014.

Courage

The kitchen is a promontory. The pans are rocks devoured
by a wolf wind that scours the island for prey. The
window's railing is a grey gust of rain - his companion,
our angular sister. Just woken, we are birds leaning over
the sink tired from night migrations, dazzled
by flares that drum on our dreams.
Winter fills the whole picture.
With the radio music we hear the clatter of hail.
Its whiteness quivers on the aerials and the balcony.
With its compassionate muzzle of cloud
dawn nudges us into life.

Chorus

We are the screen, the body, this light
which cuts the writing.
We're the alphabet that fades.
Go I say to the word
unsteady thing be gone
cancel myself at a stroke
let some other woman select you
and let me be free of time
and make nothing of my person
deprive her as you see fit of lament
dig in her an open gap for the wind.

Morning 7.00–12.00

overcast
mistral
(*superimposed voices*)

At dawn we are full of courage.
The alarm clock's music takes us by surprise.
Bach's Chaconne on the radio calms us down
and says between the dials: you'll live.
We have lived, we're still alive.
For many hours, for the whole day?
We need to pay tribute to all of this:
to cover our shoulders, wrap up our necks.
Put jackets on, scarves, turn up our coat collars.
Light falls on the cups, sways over the milk.
We have at least survived to sit in the kitchen,
hands on the table, heads in flames
under two lamps whose shades
checkered with white and red, and red.

News

It's here, the storm forecast tonight on the radio,
the shipping news listened to in the dark
as the wind whips up to gale force. The voice warns
but doesn't
tremble or lie, doesn't console.
The mistral obeys, whitens the sheets,
tries to unpick the boats from their moorings.
Behind windows whoever watches stores a secret joy
of unhinged sleep to which is given the name, life.

GIAN MARIA ANNOVI

Gian Maria Annovi was born in Reggio Emilia in 1978. He lives in Los Angeles, where he is an assistant professor of Italian at the University of Southern California. He received a doctorate from the University of Bologna and a Ph.D. in Italian Studies from Columbia University. His published poetry includes *Denkmal* (l'Obliquo, 1998), *Terza persona cortese* (d'if, 2007 – winner of the Premio Mazzacurati-Russo), *Self-eaters* (CRM, 2007 – finalist in the Premio Antonio Delfini), *Kamikaze e altre persone* (Transeuropa, 2010 – finalist in the Premio Lorenzo Montano), *Italics* (Aragno, 2013) and *La scolta* (nottetempo, 2013 – winner of the Premio Marazza). His poems appear in several anthologies and have been translated into English, French and Spanish. The sequence translated here by the author is taken from *Italics*, published by Aragno editore in 2013.

Little Glory

The little glory...
Oh poor child!
Giovanni Pascoli

I

The newborn baby inside the drawer
forgotten, perhaps, in the dresser
or behind the pile of yesterday's papers
must surely be hungry

(she will likely die)

but you survive
the fall of pine logs
in the woodshed
the lesson on Dante
in the hayloft

the glory of language
(it would seem)
does not cry out to be fed

II

but if glory be glory
(it follows)
it should speak of the glory of things

for instance
the name to describe
the bone structure of trees:
lignesion, ligneousness, or
lignesity, or — simply —
a lesion carved in the cerebral cortex
legible only if they crack
your skull open with a club

it should speak of new things

for instance
the names of its new citizens
the name of the country whose boundaries are
drowned bodies and volcanoes:

(that country's name
cannot be uttered)

language that loosens and falls from the gums
that recounts the absolute panic
of this woman, on a listing boat,
at night, with her baby between
her thighs, who doesn't breathe

III

the language that welcomes you on the island
among lamplights, and tourists, and sirens
doesn't have the grace, nor the glory
of a mother

you say your name
then: *water*; you say,
you ignore the word for thirst
(it voices your despair)

then they give you bread
they give you plenty of TV
and you learn how to say:

my daughter is floating somewhere

IV

language that is lost in absolute
subdued outburst:

cunîn, she repeats, to her Polish
caregiver: a dialect's little girl
after the Alzheimer's has entombed
the language in her brain:
she means to say *coniglio*

she never knew of the Latin *cuniculus*
nor that in *Coney*, *coniglio* is rabbit

a thing that gets buried under the sand
among diapers and waste
semi-Russian funny fair
hanging appendix and
peninsula inside the mouth

uncomprehended tongue that inters.

NANNI BALESTRINI

Nanni Balestrini was born in Milan in 1935, and lives in Rome. He was part of the Neoavanguardia movement and Gruppo '63. He helped toward the creation of such magazines as "Il Verri", "Quindici" and "Alfabeta". His volumes of poetry include: *Come si agisce* (Feltrinelli, 1963), *Le ballate della signorina Richmond* (Coop. Scrittori, 1977), *Apocalisse* (Scheiwiller, 1986), *Il pubblico del labirinto* (Scheiwiller, 1992), *Estremi rimedi* (Manni, 1995), *Elettra* (luca sossella, 2001), *Sfinimondo* (Bibliopolis, 2003) and *Blackout e altro* (DeriveApprodi, 2009). A large selection of his work appears in *Antologica. Poesie 1958-2010* (Mondadori, 2013), including the excerpts translated here by Richard Dixon. His novels include: *Vogliamo tutto* (Feltrinelli, 1971), *La violenza illustrata* (Einaudi, 1976), *Gli Invisibili* (Bompiani, 1987), *L'editore* (Bompiani, 1989), *Una mattina ci siam svegliati* (Baldini & Castoldi, 1995), *Sandokan, storia di camorra* (Einaudi, 2004), and *Liberamilano* (DeriveApprodi, 2011).

A Superficial Description of Signorina Richmond

Perched on a branch swiftly
she opens her wings producing at the same
time a rustle that can be
heard a hundred metres away

colour flame orange with long
legs colour olive green she hops between the branches
drops to the ground in search of food
plumage gold and deep orange

then goes back up to where the sun
still manages to pierce the dense branches
the light beats on the silky
feathers of her sides

when she is calm she emits sweet
and fluty sounds but when
irritated her voice
is shrill and raucous

colour blue grey she moves
between branches nimbly dragging
behind her long thin tail
she glides most ably in the air

bright and always ready to show off
in trills she has the habit of climbing
to great heights and then diving
downward among the branches

her white feathers are immaculate
the black ones dappled with iridescent
shades of green blue and purple
in harmony with the colour of her back

there she's seen strutting waving
her long fine tail of which
she's so fiercely proud
that she preens it constantly

colour of the sea darkened by the storm
with her bright pink tail
can live wherever flowers blossom
stays motionless in the air

with red breast she soars into the air
feeds on nectar displaying
her splendid plumage
prepares for the long flight

darts swiftly from flower to flower
living jewel swoops zooms
spins dives nose-first
glittering colour amethyst

contrasts with the immaculate whiteness
of her breast spends almost all her time
hopping from branch to branch
or flitting through the trees

a patch of colour green blue and gold
rarely drops to the ground and stays
almost always in the highest branches fills
the air with sharp and tremulous notes

her voice melodious and her feathers
radiant a small winged jewel
of colour violet blue when she flies among the flowers
and when she sucks the nectar

hovers without landing and sucks
the nectar keeping herself in flight
splendid and bright with feathers
of brilliant colours

Epic Prologue

Here I am once more
sitting in front of the poetry audience
that is sitting benevolently in front of me
looks at me and is waiting for poetry
as always I have nothing to tell it
as always the poetry audience knows this very well
it certainly doesn't expect an epic poem from me
seeing that it's done nothing to inspire one in me
the ancient poet indeed as everyone knows
was not the one responsible for his poetry
it was his audience that was really responsible
since it had a direct relationship
with its poet
who depended on his audience
for his inspiration
and for his remuneration
his poetry developed therefore
according to the intentions of his audience
the poet was no more than the individual interpreter
of a collective voice that used to narrate and judge
this is certainly not our situation
this isn't why you're here today in this room
the person you're listening to is unfortunately not
your epic poet.

ELISA BIAGINI

Elisa Biagini lives in Florence, where she was born in 1970. She studied in the U.S. for several years, obtaining a Ph.D. at Rutgers University. Her poems have been published in various Italian and American reviews and anthologies. She has published six volumes of poetry – some bilingual – including *L'Ospite* (Einaudi, 2004), *Fiato. parole per musica* (Edizioni d'if, 2006), *Nel Bosco* (Einaudi, 2007), *The guest in the wood* (Chelsea editions, 2013 – winner of the Best Translated Book Award 2014) and *Da una crepa* (Einaudi, 2014). Her poems have been translated into many languages and she has been invited to major poetry festivals. She has translated several contemporary American poets for reviews, anthologies and complete collections (including *Nuovi Poeti Americani*, Einaudi, 2006). The long poem translated here by Eugene Ostashevsky is taken from *Da una crepa* (Einaudi, 2014).

[www.elisabiagini.it]

The outing

*A wind that kneads me
with hot gas, that melts
my soles while
I pick: what stone
recalls you, the sound
of what siren.*

Now is the time
of the mine, clay
grazing my head,
hard language,
lamp gone out.

Stairs in the rock
claw the bottom, where
skin sweats stones,
gurgles the heart.

We go down the shaft
along a trail of pyrite
crumbs, go down
with our eyes, knees, go
down to trail
the trace, drop
marking the rock
by dropping, making
memory overflow.

(we melt with
the heat, drop by
drop, we knead
back into the sea.

we meet again,
knots on
eyelids).

I listen inward
to the support beams,
count the fuses
that open the view, I
amass us
for the flight,
look for us
in the dark, in the heat.

I look for us two:
you, a cloud of memory,
me, running from
myself like mercury, that
tremor of a thermometer
I swallow, glass and all.

*(A train from the dark,
a foot on each track,
an eye, blinded, that
looks for you,
a train*

in the dark, that waits for you.)

...

then

...

It is the crackle
of breath
that announces you,
all the dust got into the
alveoli, now sandpaper.

It is the glow
of a match within
the eye.

(dust comes down
from the mines,
interlaces with lung, at
each floor the sack sags,
gest more threadbare.)

...

in the gallery (fever still)
car running on
empty, overheating,
fast breath of
the one that feels
that one flees, a light bulb
sizzles and goes out.

...

*pulling the red
thread from your shoulder
blade, following you
in the earth
bones
beyond the frontier
of the lip,*

*us,
removed from light.*

This, the labor
of cutting and filling,
what matter whether with stone

or word.

SILVIA BRE

Silvia Bre is a poet and translator. She was born in Bergamo and lives in Rome. She began publishing poems in 1980 in leading Italian literary reviews. Her volumes of poems are: *I riposi* (Rotundo, 1990), *Le barricate misteriose* (Einaudi 2001 – winner of the Premio Montale), *Sempre perdendosi* (nottetempo 2006 – winner of the Premio Montano), *Marmo* (Einaudi 2007 – winner of the Premio Viareggio, Premio Mondello and Premio Frascati). Among many other works, she has translated poetry by Louise Labé (Mondadori, 2000) and Emily Dickinson (Einaudi, 2011 and 2013), and *The Garden* by Vita Sackville-West (Elliot, 2013). In 2010 she won the Premio Cardarelli. Her most recent collection of poetry is *La fine di quest'arte* (Einaudi, 2015), from which the poems translated here by Richard Dixon are taken.

Here is the night, which overtakes you

Here is the night, which overtakes you
and leaves you where you are not
inside another domain
inside another.

Only a cockerel still mute that you don't see
is its song more than ever
in the openness of an idea, in a dawn
that comes and comes so that it wakes you.

If our place is where

If our place is where
silent contemplation among things
needs us
saying is not knowing, it is the other
all fated path of being.
This is the geography.
That is how we stay in the world
pensive adventurers of humanity,
that is how we are the form
that forms blindly
in talking about itself
by vocation.

Like when in a certain season

Like when in a certain season
the instant emerges that will make it ours
– a glare
that leads to the quest
for that precise track in which to return –
I will look down,
I will be the confluence and its value
among all the sole-trodden green in the meadows of
Italy
and the pinnacle of the sun,
elementary master of length,
I will be time-old slowness of thought
before the image in flight.

But if those gathered around a fire

But if those gathered round a fire
entranced by such a distant thing as not to be there
if those who are here because they have run
behind an image that has transfixed them before disap-
pearing
and therefore we who hear the voices
come from the night
with our words and other accents
their barbarous whole that knows the stories of the sto-
nes
of the oceans
we transported into the unknown place to be lacunas
of other places
living secrets that are sorry they can't keep silent

dawn, while waking
what have you to tell that is not
what you carry in your cells of sun.

FRANCO BUFFONI

Franco Buffoni was born in Gallarate (Lombardy) in 1948 and lives in Rome. He is a full professor of literary criticism and comparative literature. His volumes of poetry are *Suora Carmelitana* (Guanda, 1997), *Il Profilo del Rosa* (Mondadori, 2000), *Guerra* (Mondadori, 2005), *Noi e loro* (Donzelli, 2008), *Roma* (Guanda, 2009), *Jucci* (Mondadori, 2014 – winner of the Premio Viareggio) and *Avrei fatto la fine di Turing* (Donzelli, 2015). Two full-length collections have appeared in the United States and in France. In 1989 he founded, and continues as editor of the review “Testo a Fronte”, dedicated to the theory and the practice of literary translation, published by Marcos y Marcos. As a novelist he has published *Più luce, padre* (Luca sossella, 2006), *Zamel* (Marcos y Marcos, 2009), *Il servo di Byron* (Fazi, 2012) and *La casa di via Palestro* (Marcos y Marcos, 2014). He collaborates with several magazines and radio programmes. The poems here are taken from *Poesie 1975-2012* (Mondadori, 2012) – the first three are translated by Richard Dixon and the fourth by Justin Vitiello.

[www.francobuffoni.it]

Just lichen and tundra

You came in there
at the mouth of the dell
where the vegetation abruptly changes,
just lichen and tundra
for a few acres.
Maybe the tongue of deep ice
that formed the lake
down below hasn't melted,
is still there among the drift with mammoth bones.
Perhaps it is there that time holds poetry.

Mother

When you were still an adult
before you shrank
I was happy to let you be alone,
you had to expand and I didn't see myself
in your spaces.
Then I really had the chance
to pay attention to your forms,
to their closure, and I took to defending
your spaces: the less you occupied them
the more I guarded them. Till all that was left
was a soft bundle with a voice to protect
in a hypothesis of space.

Invitation to Naples

And in this gulf crossed this morning
by four jets over Posillipo
and two cargo ships toward the port,
in the company of three gulls
on a balcony of the Royal Hotel
I check through my paper
for the conference on translation studies.
At the Orientale University today
we'll be many, children of navigators
saints and poets, now I come to think of it:
all of them once translators too.
Like the four pilots of the military jets
and the ten sailors on the cargo ships.
Leave me Naples
in their wake
and gently strangle me in the sky
or in the sea
from this eighth floor.
Don't translate me somewhere else.

To the English Language

Chanting in the syncopated loops
of the conjugated languages
to oppose the inane hollow thuds
of the ex-tongue of Chaucer
still perplexed in the palate
as the "u" escapes and doubles
and you can't hear the "r" any more...
One should know more about
the destiny of verb endings –
how splendid, that "en" of the plural!
Limpid lichens under ice,
Bulletin board lamps,
museum schedules.

MARIA GRAZIA CALANDRONE

Maria Grazia Calandrone was born in Milan in 1964 and lives in Rome. She has published *Pietra di paragone* (Tracce, 1998 – winner of the Premio Nuove Scrittrici 1997), *La scimmia randagia* (Crocetti, 2003 – winner of the Premio Pasolini Opera Prima), *Come per mezzo di una briglia ardente* (Atelier, 2005), *La macchina responsabile* (Crocetti, 2007), *Sulla bocca di tutti* (Crocetti, 2010 – winner of the Premio Napoli), *Atto di vita nascente* (LietoColle, 2010), *L'infinito mélo*, pseudoromanzo with Vivavox, CD of the poet reading her texts (luca sossella, 2011), *La vita chiara* (transeuropa, 2011) and *Serie fossile* (Crocetti, 2015 – winner of the Premio Marazza Prize and shortlisted for the Premio Viareggio); she appears in the anthology *Nuovi poeti italiani 6* (Einaudi, 2012); and her prose piece *Salvare Caino* is in *Nell'occhio di chi guarda* (Donzelli, 2014). The poems translated here by Johanna Bishop are taken from *La vita chiara* (transeuropa, 2011) and *Serie fossile* (Crocetti, 2015).

[www.mariagraziacalandrone.it]

GIUSEPPE CONTE

Giuseppe Conte was born at Porto Maurizio (Liguria) in 1945, his mother Ligurian, his father Sicilian. He graduated in 1968 in Milan, where he studied aesthetics with Gillo Dorfles, with a thesis on seventeenth-century rhetoric. He continued his research toward the exploration of myth, the sacred, and nature before founding the Mitomodernismo movement in 1995. His collections of poetry include *L'ultimo aprile bianco* (Guanda, 1979), *L'oceano e il ragazzo* (Guanda, 1983), *Le stagioni* (B.U.R., 1988), *Dialogo del poeta e del messaggero* (Mondadori, 1992), *Canto d'oriente e d'occidente* (Mondadori, 1997) and *Ferite e rifioriture* (Mondadori, 2006 – winner of the Premio Viareggio). His books of narrative include *L'impero e l'incanto* (Rizzoli, 1995), *Il terzo ufficiale* (Longanesi, 2002), *L'adultera* (Longanesi, 2008). As a journalist he has worked for various newspapers and periodicals, and has done much translation, mainly from English. He has also written stage plays and musicals such as *Boine* (1986), *Ungaretti fa l'amore* (2000), and *Nausicaa* (2002). The first three poems translated here by Richard Dixon are taken from “The Songs of Yusuf Abdel Nur” in *Canti d'Oriente e d'Occidente* (Mondadori, 1997); the fourth is taken from *Ferite e rifioriture* (Mondadori, 2006).

There's a sweetness below in life

There's a sweetness below in life
that I'd not exchange with any
of what belongs to heaven.
It's when who knows from where, for they start
between two mouths unfamiliar until then
the tepid dawn miracles
of kisses.

We have always loved as though it were

We have always loved as though it were
impossible for us to meet.
Perhaps that's why all between us has been real.
When the sun rises, the moon sets;
two sources of light cannot stay together
for a whole day: and yet
nothing is worth more than the near-mystery
of their slow, necessary pursuit.

I'm here sitting on a carpet

I'm here sitting on a carpet
of spring leaves and flowers,
and my silence is a prayer
and I have with me the cup and wine.
If my Beloved were close
if her shining mouth were here.
The perfume of her kisses
is sweeter than jasmine.
They say that I am wise because
I know every word of God
and I know his face cannot be seen
but to all rosaries he grants
his purple and his fire.
But I am wise because I drink, I play
I sing while time despoils us.
How many roses will open this morning
and how many will drop tomorrow
or beneath the blasts of storms
will shrivel. Time unites us
we who move beneath the same sky.
Is it not the same for all of us that
moon that seems a pomegranate
plucked slowly from its branch?
But I am wise because I love.

Give me, my life, an autumn

Give me, my life, an autumn
like that of coppice trees.
The glorious and chiming glimmer
of a lasting and infinite light,
the will still to exist,
the dream to be the sun that makes every leaf
before the fall.

MAURIZIO CUCCHI

Maurizio Cucchi was born in Milan in 1945, his father Milanese, his mother Sicilian. After an arts degree at the Università Cattolica, Milan, he taught for ten years in secondary schools before working as an editorial consultant, translator (particularly from French, including Stendhal) and journalist for various newspapers. His collections of poetry include *Il Disperso* (Mondadori, 1976), *Le meraviglie dell'acqua* (Mondadori, 1980), *Glenn* (San Marco dei Giustiniani, 1982 – winner of the Premio Viareggio), *Donna del gioco* (Mondadori, 1987), *Poesia della fonte* (Mondadori, 1993 – winner of the Premio Montale), *L'ultimo viaggio di Glenn* (Mondadori, 1999) and *Malaspina* (Mondadori, 2013). In 2005, once again with Mondadori, he published his first novel, *Il male è nelle cose*, followed in 2007 by *La traversata di Milano* and in 2011 by *La maschera ritratto*. His latest novel, *L'indifferenza dell'assassino*, was published by Guanda in 2012. The poems selected here from *Poesie 1965-2000* (Mondadori, 2001) have been translated by Michael Palma.

Oblomov's Dream

On the sofa
there was a forgotten towel
and the abandoned pipe.

Where are we?

It's a glorious morning ... The house,
the trees, the dovecote. Everything
starts casting a long shadow.
The little boy grows thoughtful
as he looks around him
and takes it all in, the adults
busying themselves in the courtyard.

Here, footsteps are heard,
one covers up his face with a handkerchief,
then drops down on the ground and stretches out
under a bush.

He speaks too,
in a voice that doesn't seem to be his own.

The man who's eating by himself

The man who's eating by himself
at the café and reading the Gazette
sneers between his mustache and juice
while a row of Japanese go passing by.
Blissful, he spreads out a bit and stretches
his legs under the table.
"I'm at the Cabaret Vert
a foreigner suspended in the light,
here there's the tranquil breeze
of a weightless guilt-free
harmony".
Satisfied and listless,
after one final sip,
he gets to his feet and hums *Cielito Lindo*
and in the high light slowly on the wane
he senses a slight shiver:
it's the unexpected joy of solitude.

The Lump in the Throat

If you look at me closely I'm already thinking
about that day not long from now when I'll have to clear
out my
stuff from here
and cart it all off to the other house.
The books and the piano I still haven't learned how to play.

And I'm already premeditating the inevitable lump in the
throat
that I can tell myself is my best part.

And the package, which you toss aside while saying
"here are the new pajamas I bought you as a gift" ...
From behind my eyes for a change
I feel the tear start rising, but this time
I hang on and hold it back. It's not a matter
of being a mama's boy, it's that the specter
of loneliness is doubling by now (not mine) ... and that
music
on the radio early Sunday afternoon makes a confession
and sets the amount of the punishment. And here

showing off playing the tough guy being ironic
so as not to feel
my insides torn apart over the matter ...
... it doesn't matter anymore I tell you.

Mistress of the Game

*Thus you will be the mistress of the game
(The Flower, CLVI)*

The father who'd talk to me
was boy with broad grin
and he had eyes that had already learned
I shelter in him I refresh my thinking
that fills in my fate.
I haven't betrayed you but I no longer dream of you
and if I dream of myself I dream myself with your face:
I raise myself on your chest
I entrust myself into your hand
with you the crowd opens up.
Damn you
you who know and don't know what to do
I'm a slothful little boy
who doesn't want to get up.

He went away throwing us
into sudden confusion and loss.
In a bag from the police,
there were checks, his comb,
his wrist bandage ...

So long, I tell you now without trembling.
I've saved you, listen to me.
I leave you the best of my heart
and, with the kiss of gratitude,
this passionate serenity.

CLAUDIO DAMIANI

Claudio Damiani was born in San Giovanni Rotondo (Puglia) in 1957, though at an early age he moved to Rome, where he works as a teacher. In the first half of the 1980s he was among the founders of the magazine “Braci”. His first two volumes poetry, *Fraterno* (Abete, 1987) and *La mia casa* (Pegaso, 1994), were collected in *La miniera* (Fazi, 1997 – the title taken from the new section that closes the book). His further volumes of poetry are *Eroi* (Fazi, 2000), *Attorno al fuoco* (Avagliano, 2006), *Sognando Li Po* (Marietti, 2008), *Poesie* (Fazi, 2010) and *Il fico sulla fortezza* (Fazi, 2012). The poems translated here by John Satriano are taken from *La Miniera*, published by Fazi in 1997.

Elegia

The charming hippos that in the water were completely submerged (you could see the tips of their backs, just barely) do you remember them, my love? How deliciously charming they were! And you said: "Where are they? If you can't see them, how can you say they're lovely?" Oh, my love, they were in the water, and maybe you knew not the Italian word when I said: "Darling! Hippos there are that, having seen the world, return to the water, quite rightly, with the other mammals emancipated from the sea." And when of the two one emerged, the delicious warmth of the water and the kisses of his mate abandoning, to breathe and bite a bit of mire on the bank (how disgusting! we thought, and I said: "What a foul mouth he must have!") and suddenly his mouth he opened in yawning, as far as it would go. How white and rosy were his fangs! And how surprised you were, what a precious start you gave! And with how many kisses would I have showered you, but I must needs drive on, for the other cars had amassed behind us and were a menacing and stupid herd.

Albio

Albio is the little walnut tree at the left of the road climbing from the house to the gate. This morning passing by I looked at him and saw he had made little walnuts, in pairs, biggish already, bright green, a bit sparse, not a lot but oh so lovely and I thought that last year he hadn't made any yet, and this year was the first time he was making them, and I also looked at his leaves, clear and perfect and oval, without a blemish, without a single spot or hole, nothing, and at his high little branches too, down to his smooth and slender white trunk and at the perfect and graceful form of the whole little tree, standing straight in the light, and I thought: Everywhere I look, the apple trees, the pear and plum trees, the two little cypresses bent by the snow, the roses, even the weeds! are sick, but, Albio, you are so healthy and bright, beautiful and neat and you're standing in your lovely corner in the light; and I thought (and it was as if he were waiting for someone or something), I thought: they're all sick in some way or other, there isn't one without something, and it was up to me to cure them, that's right, give them poisons, prune their

branches, and instead I haven't done a thing,
and before long I'll have to leave home too
and all this, the pair of little cypresses
and Antenor the first to bloom in the
apple grove, and the fig and pine trees, both dead,
and the roses and the weeds growing
without respite and the garden of the one I love,
all will I have to leave, all, and
Albio, you are so lovely, oh why,
why are you so healthy and lovely, Albio?
Who for? I thought, who for?... and I could almost
hear his quiet breath and already I was
chasing a crooked shadow away and
a sparkle in the light and already I wanted to
see him no more, and down the street I returned
and I knew not your glory, no,
I knew it not, I knew nothing at all,
and my eyes were filling with tears.

How lovely that this time

How lovely that this time
is like all other times,
that I write poems
the way poems have always been written,
that this cat before me is washing herself
and her time is passing
despite the fact she's alone, almost always alone in
the house,
yet she does all that she does and forgets nothing
— now for instance she is lying down and looking
around —
and her time is passing.
How lovely that this time, like every time, will end,
how lovely that we are not eternal,
that we are not different
from anyone else who has lived and died,
who has calmly gone to death
as if on a path that seemed hard and steep at first,
but instead was easy.

MILO DE ANGELIS

Milo De Angelis was born in 1951. He lives in his native Milan, where he teaches at a prison. He has written numerous volumes of poems and essays. He has also published translations of modern French authors and Lucretius's *De rerum natura*. His books include *Somiglianze* (Guanda, 1976), *Millimetri* (Einaudi, 1983), *Biografia sommaria* (Mondadori, 1999), *Tema dell'addio* (Mondadori, 2005), *Quell'andarsene nel buio dei cortili* (Mondadori, 2010), *Incontri e agguati* (Mondadori, 2015). The poems translated here by Susan Stewart and Patrizio Ceccagnoli are taken from *Quell'andarsene nel buio dei cortili* (Mondadori, 2010) and appeared in *Theme of Farewell and After-Poems* (University of Chicago Press, 2013).

It was dark. August was dark at its center

It was dark. August was dark at its center
like a naked body. I could not find
rest or motion; only the blood
throbbing at the lips. The dark
arrived from the open breath, from the winged
arrow that penetrates the world. The dark
was there. It was there, in the vertex
of the first fall, it was myself,
this cold that, beyond centuries, speaks to me.

The vertical line is next to the soul

The vertical line is next to the soul.
Within a song, we suburbanites were fetched
by the afternoon, the moment turned into nakedness
and Greek powers of conclusion; we are suppliants
left to listen, the sky born
in each of us, a squad of boys
in love with the right number,
the beautiful epic, the soccer ball's mortal weight.

I found out, my friend

for Viviana Nicodemo

I found out, my friend,
that you were within a limit. Me, too,
in the intervals of a one and only and great death
I slept among the hovels
where the mad gather in winter
with the divided word and the density
of ideas: a perfume
from raisins wafted in and the snow
of the encounter hurled
my night into yours.

It's late

It's late
clearly. Life, with its
lost pivot, floats vaguely
along the streets, thinking
of all the love that's been promised.
What does it expect from me? Where
is the heartbeat of the forsaken? Is this
the mysterious destination of all
that lives?
Home turns away
from the house, everything
is surrendered to the obvious
end, everything flees...
...but the syllable
that gripped the throat
is this.

ROBERTO DEIDIER

Roberto Deidier was born in Rome in 1965. His first poetry appeared in 1989 in “Tempo Presente” with an introduction by Elio Pecora. He was awarded an arts degree and a doctorate in Italian Studies at the Università La Sapienza. After founding the review “Trame” (1989-1995), he published *Il passo del giorno* (Sestante, 1995) with a preface by Antonio Prete, receiving the Premio Mondello for a first published work. In 1999 he published *Libro naturale*, with an engraving by Giulia Napoleone, and in 2002 *Una stagione continua* (peQuod edizioni) and *Il primo orizzonte* (San Marco dei Giustiniani). New poems came out in 2007 in the *Almanacco dello Specchio* (Mondadori); in 2011 with Empiria he published *Gabbie per nuvole*, a selection of poetry translations, and *Solstizio* (Mondadori) appeared in 2014. He is a full professor of comparative literature at the Koré University of Enna. The poems translated here by Richard Dixon are taken from *Solstizio* (Mondadori, 2014).

In the kitchen

The doubtful sincerity of memories
As the light moves the shadows
From one to the other part of the day.
The table is still clear
And the chair is empty.
Nervously the neighbour's dog
Climbs up and down metal stairs.
I listen to its claws.

On that shelf there was your photo
In a red frame.
You were stretched out on the grass.
It must have been a meadow in springtime,
Dandelions and light clothes.
A good way to break the morning in,
On this and that side of the pane of glass
We remain looking at each other
Pretending the future doesn't exist.

Giuseppe

My father had enough time to teach me
The sadness of dreams, when my brothers
Forced me down into this well.
But can sadness for the future exist
If the days follow like the quarter
Crescents that light this water
And I have no other? Who do I talk to?
Only to dream and read my thoughts
I still hold out down here.
That bit of sun that appears at midday
Has only lies to tell
And what my mind projects
Is true as my words.
I dreamt of a convoy, a job,
Dreams of dreams, even a crown.
All to invent myself a pardon.

Variations on Atropos

By no means innocent, those two—
The one who too subtly goes spinning,
The other who takes improbable
Measures. But it's my scissors
That each in the end abhor.

You don't go up to the mothers, but down
By crags or steps, the experience
Has sheer walls. And I alone
Know it to be bottomless.

When the thread is taut for cutting
I am always where I'd like to stay,
Distracted as though in love.
And I don't understand, don't understand
To whom the voice belongs
That calls me back in great sweeps:
The mouth of the dead is a hollow well,
A strip of black desert.

Sunny morning

She is sitting in the middle of the bed,
Feet pointing at the window,
The bed covered by a shroud
That no one in the night will have worn.

On identical picture frames a sun beats
Just the same. It is an absent figure,
Like in a game of bluff.
It casts shadow from inside at the wall.

A second window at her shoulders,
Naked, except for her slip
Which must certainly have shone
With another red, and her hands clutch

Her knees, fall crosswise over her shins.
But it's her face, her face with no eyes,
A black hole between her ear and forehead.
I look ahead in the light of time,

She seems to say, while she stares at a point
Known only to her. Between her body
And the day, where she cannot sleep
The experience of a forbidden art.

Those lips fastened, still stained
And the smear of makeup on her cheek.

EUGENIO DE SIGNORIBUS

Eugenio De Signoribus was born in 1947 in the coastal town of Cupra Marittima (Marche), where he lives. His published collections of works include *Case perdute* (Il lavoro editoriale, 1989), *Altre educazioni* (Croccetti, 1991), *Istmi e chiuse* (Marsilio, 1996), *Principio del giorno* (Garzanti, 2000), *Ronda dei conversi* (Garzanti, 2005), *Trinità dell'esodo* (Garzanti, 2011) and *Veglie genovesi* (Il Canneto, 2013). His collected works, *Poesie (1976 – 2007)*, were published by Garzanti in 2008, for which he was awarded the Premio Viareggio in 2008. The poems translated here by Richard Dixon are taken from *Trinità dell'esodo* published by Garzanti in 2011.

Hidden cemeteries

from one look around
there's no place living
or that seems to have form

there's no wise man in waiting
no one who gets up and goes
who takes fright and hides ...

in what's left of time
it is twice deserted
it is deserted three times

the sky is a mirror
at whose spectral face
each body turns to stone

it is aground... it is no one
an unknown jumble
of unsmoothed stones

but in the earth
beats the grimmest point
audible only from there

there, stretched on the ground
in deepest contemplation
of the map of veins

a cry that drives and urges
a cry that pours in
where? for whom?

It is the age of unforgiveness

it is the age of unforgiveness
that seeps low
into one and into the mass

it is the age waylaid
by myths of return
of power and crusade

it is the age when only
the seed of sentiments
brings me back to me

and time to time I'm reborn
and you are reborn in me
oh brothers and lost spirits

in the hells of the age
in the radial dissent
in the defeat of the one

and of the multitude

If we had the gift

if we really had
the gift of rebirth

in a snatch of time
as the powder keg sleeps

people in tatters
would rise from every boundary

people unbounded
on common soil

people set free
from every murderous seed

But would the people

but would the people
cheered toward that new age
still see all?

or from unhealed torments
or from blazing fortresses
another risk of war?

GIANNI D'ELIA

Gianni D'Elia lives in Pesaro, where he was born in 1953. He translates from French and teaches courses and seminars on Italian and French literature. He founded and directed the journal "Lengua" (1982-1994), and has collaborated as a critic on publications such as "Manifesto", "Poesia", "Nuovi argomenti", "L'Unità" and "L'Indice". His volumes of poetry include *Non per chi va* (Savelli, 1980), *Febbraio* (Il lavoro editorial, 1985), *Segreta* (Einaudi, 1989), *Notte privata* (Einaudi, 1993), *Congedo della vecchia Olivetti* (Einaudi, 1996), *Sulla riva dell'epoca* (Einaudi, 2000), *Bassa stagione* (Einaudi, 2003), *Trovatori* (Einaudi, 2007), *Trentennio. Versi scelti e inediti 1977-2007* (Einaudi, 2010), *Fiori del mare* (Einaudi, 2015). His poetry moves in the tradition of Pasolini's civil poetry, to which D'Elia has dedicated two monographs, *L'eresia di Pasolini* and *Il petrolio delle stragi*, published by Effigie in 2005 and 2006. He has produced a CD entitled *La via del mare* with Claudio Lolli and Paolo Capodacqua. The poems translated here by Richard Dixon are taken from *Fiori del mare* published by Einaudi in 2015.

Presence

And the look, the look given,
re-given and withdrawn of that
young girl, for which you're only one
of the many who frequent this planet,

in an evening now no longer summer,
at the tables of a pizza bar
where people eat, pass by, and leave...
And toward the sea walking, by the shore

of your days now surprises
just surprises, with no intuition,
struck thus by a little mean emotion,
will you tell me on some paper—in her,

in you, will it remain?...

Faraway

What good was there in this life,
now gone from the dark room?...
Oh, pain, desertion, fury betrayed...
They were talking in the bar, he and she,

with the mirrors and the fake plants...
They were talking love, he and she,
more painful than love and it was,
it was love a little crazy and mild...

Confused as well the love affronted,
but what mild affront it was in the heart
not to know how to say it: lyre and love
of love and anger and frenzy elsewhere united...

Flower of the sea

Or a dark deluded sense, of words
clear, like wisps of gelid air;
here, where the sea spread a light blue cloth
slams at a thread; here, where the green

grass follows meandering walls and
oxide faces gas the passersby;
that strange sense that gets us,
at times, crossing the earth,

beneath the sky, just once,
not able to say it or stay quiet;
like a flower silent on the bank,
dazed by the half light of the coasts,

in the fragrance that foams, pensive wave,
its fragile presence, from the ages...

The wave of the dead

These bodies beached, among bathers
of coasts and of famous islands,
remind us that migrants arrive,
the sea of the living, on the most cruel wave...

Mediterranean, you are the great tomb
for these flowers, that Africa bakes
in the sun of war and deep hunger,
hurled from boats and from the cross...

The little Romani girls disturb the meals,
the siestas of the pretty and re-oiled wives,
the yachts at anchor and the splendid pomp
of drunken rich and posing whores...

Wave of the dead, pity is not enough...
Gentle Summer, foam among the corpses,
undulates for each one who came
with hope frozen in their lapels,

cradle them gently adrift,
may You accompany them to the final shore...

PAOLO FEBBRARO

Paolo Febbraro is a poet and essayist, born in Rome in 1965. He teaches Italian in public high schools. His poems have been widely published in journals such as “Poetry Magazine”, “Po&sie”, “Nuovi Argomenti”. He has published *Il secondo fine* (Marcos y Marcos, 1999), *Il Diario di Kaspar Hauser* (L’Obliquo, 2003), *Il bene materiale. Poesie 1992-2007* (Scheiwiller, 2008) and *Fuori per l’inverno* (nottetempo, 2014). His collections of essays include *L’idiota. Una storia letteraria* (Le Lettere, 2011) and *Leggere Seamus Heaney* (Fazi, 2015). He is also a regular contributor to the cultural sections of “Il Sole 24 Ore”. He is married to the psychoanalyst Daniela Cinelli. “Deposition”, translated here by Geoffrey Brock, is taken from *Fuori per l’inverno* (nottetempo, 2014); the other three poems, translated by Anthony Molino, are published by courtesy of John Cabot University Press.

Deposition

“I’m giving testimony, making a statement
that there was a time when one sang for the mirror,
when spring was late or sickened us,
when women could be bought with hearts.
Night, sunset, and evening
stood for death, while the sign
of love was daylight, and blindness.
I hereby affirm the sea’s maternal cruelty,
the terse bend in the trunk of the tree.
Having seen and approved what here was law,
I weep, forget it, and deposit it in the urn.”

Iscairiot

“Talk? I trust what so many
of you have said. Just like when
I surrendered by his side,
in the ring and fire of the fraternity.
It was like falling asleep, the first dream.
But when we’d sit down his straight
back bothered me, like his gentle voice:
unbending and sweet as an absolution.
Which is why mixed in the fragrance
of miracles I smelled something parched,
the frayed scroll of the Law.
Yet another priest, too much
poetry. In haste I turned the pages
to get to the end. To the Chalice
and Cross. I welcomed
his verbal suicide, tore from the book
the line most mine. And swinging realized
that from the tree I was writing
your own squeaky lines.”

James to Nora, 1941

“In the long run, I should have known,
your beauty would have blinded me.
Or it withdrew from me right off
and in my eyes was left the light
of a wily delay of yours,
of envisioned ventures, and song—Yes—
that we’d forge, to disturb the world.
It’s poets that women, infinite and pale,
of themselves unconscious, want.”

It’s not poetry

The eighteen-year olds at their friend’s funeral
listen, wearing black, huddled in the pews
of the church, to the priest
who two or three times says “Daniel”
only to forget him in sequences of angels,
of lifted woes and eternal life
to which the Lord calls from the pits
of sin. “It’s not poetry”, he confirms,
“but the surety of our Church.”

The vestments are purple, signify mourning.
The living memento evaporates, religion
sets in. And the parvis, faking a July day,
burns in this close of September;
not far off, the long
lamellar memory of the sea.

UMBERTO FIORI

Umberto Fiori was born in Sarzana (Liguria) in 1949 and lives in Milan, where he graduated in philosophy. From 1973 to 1983 he was a singer and songwriter for the Italian rock band Stormy Six. Later he wrote opera libretti, critical essays and a novel (*La vera storia di Boy Bantàm*, Feltrinelli, 2007). His first book of poetry, *Case*, was published in 1986 by San Marco dei Giustiniani. Other collections of works – *Esempi* (1992), *Chiarimenti* (1995), *Tutti* (1998) and *La bella vista* (2002) – were published by Marcos y Marcos, followed by *Voi* (Mondadori, 2009). His collected works, *Poesie 1986-2014*, were published by Mondadori in 2014. The poems translated here by Carla Sanguineti, Alistair Elliot and The Irish Terminus Poetry Team are taken from *Esempi* (Marcos y Marcos, 1992).

Apparition

High above the ringroad, clear,
two tower blocks, a warehouse between them.
This is the apparition,
but there's nothing to announce.

And yet, just seeing them there,
still, straight against the sun,
the walls console you
more than words could ever do.

Gates, railings,
stairs, pillars, cornices: everything looks
as though someone
were really to stay.

Excavation

High up the cranes swing round
and down below there's a criss-cross
traffic of sirens
but this hole
they're making in the midst of houses
is like those dried-up streams in the country,
dead still.

The building site
all of it now on view
from above, from the sixth, the seventh floor,
is a large extinct crater.
It's frightening to see how much light,
how much wind it holds.

For months and months in this huge theatre
the shouting of measurements will be heard.
Then the whole empty space of the stage
will have been covered in concrete and glass
and on some tiny balcony—someone still wanting to watch—
a towel will be flapping.

Foundation

First there was level ground, a field
cramped between two houses. Now they were
working on it. Everything
was already dug up.

They put up hoarding around it
even if inside it's empty, there's nothing.
They do it like that, as you'd cover a body
at the scene of the accident.

The earth was there, still
in the sunlight, down at the bottom.
Hurrying past,
people peeped through the gaps.

Name

As on a green a child,
while there is still light,
sees things grow dark around him,
and stays sitting on the grass
where he played all day,
touches the warm earth
and watches, and listens
—from this voice that wants me
and keeps on calling me
I learn what it is
to have a name,
to be here, in the place
that sustains and spare us.

ALESSANDRO FO

Alessandro Fo was born in Legnano (Lombardy) in 1955 and is professor of Latin at the University of Siena. He has translated Rutilius Namatianus's *De Reditu* (Einaudi, 1994), Apuleius' *The Golden Ass* (Einaudi, 2010) and *The Tale of Cupid and Psyche* (Einaudi, 2014), and Virgil's *Aeneid* with critical introduction (Einaudi, 2012). His special interests included the theme of literary fortune in the classics (above all Virgil, Horace and Ovid) and contemporary Italian literature (especially Angelo Maria Ripellino). His collections of poetry include *Otto febbraio* (Scheiwiller, 1995), *Giorni di scuola* (Edimond, 2000), *Piccole poesie per banconote* (Polistampa, 2002), *Corpuscolo* (Einaudi, 2004), *Vecchi filmati* (Manni, 2006) and *Mancanze* (Einaudi, 2014 – winner of the Premio Viareggio Rèpaci 2014). He is also the author of the critical work *Il cieco e la luna. Un'idea della poesia* (Edizioni degli Amici, 2003). The poems translated here by Todd Portnowitz are taken from *Mancanze* (Einaudi, 2014).

and to the Son

(not far from Ostia)

Now, at my old house,
shaking the tablecloth out
on the balcony for the sparrows,
it would all be shouting children
out from school.

It was love up there, in the shadow
of a storied romance, heads already
in the clouds of future children.

From the terrace, if willing,
I could reach to God—
if not like Augustine
then perhaps by launching myself
beyond all doubt in a leap
to the moon, the Great Bear,
the way I did as a boy, with a Fosbury Flop.

Then again,
nothing is ever as it seems,
but at least seven times more complex.

Blessed Is the Fruit

Distant, she may be writing me in this instant.

Her thought, filled with herself for me,
fires like an impulse through her nerves,
spreads to her eyes, cheeks, neck
right shoulder, ring of her underarm
slides down through her arm muscles
and out at the fingertips, takes root
in her firm grip around the pen,
goes in ink and fixes itself to the page,
encoding in idea symbols, warmth and affection.

And I, as I imagine, resurface
from the page, where her eyes are fixed
and, in perspective, I too am reflected,
in her pen, her fingers, hand,
arm and neck,
her temples, in her thought,
which is, in truth, a thought,
the fragment of a relationship, a plan,
no less than an idea
once had by God.

Troubled Angel

Another nightmare. Talking in her sleep...
Softly, I stroked her hair.
She grew calm again (it seemed).

Come morning I stroked her hair.
“Did I really? I didn’t even realize.”

Then, the day ahead.

And again that night, going back to bed,
my hand found the silk
of her troubled little head.

And she said, a little uneasy,
“But...when I die,
will you still stroke my hair?”

Angels on the Stairs

When I saw her come down the stairs
I called in jest, “Here comes the bride!”
Just moments later, the precious
white luminescence in a scarf
gave evidence of her Down’s.
Circling lightly through the evening,
she listened with intent to every poem,
taking part, now with a smiling
irony, now turning skittish.

Creature of another realm,
she took a seat by a youthful beauty
dressed in black, with glowing,
sharp brown eyes.

In their own ways,
almost as if in contrapuntal motion,
two masterpieces of their Creator:

she too, yes, though constrained,
confined to a limited range
of fascination and allure
took pride in the fact.

And, like a movie star,
she dove back into her wide, luxurious circling,
flicking an abandoned gaze around the room,
her lunar neck bent low
like a skittish horse,
then quit the scene, back up the stairs
to where her earthly mother
had first let go, her face
stricken by grief without end.

BIANCAMARIA FRABOTTA

Biancamaria Frabotta was born in 1946 in Rome, where she lives and teaches contemporary Italian literature at the Università La Sapienza. Her collections of poetry include *Il rumore bianco* (Feltrinelli, 1982), *Apunti di volo e altre poesie* (La Cometa, 1985), *Controcanto al chiuso* (Rossi & Spera, 1991), *La viandanza* (Mondadori, 1995 – winner of the Premio Montale), *Terra contigua* (Empiria, 1999), *La pianta del pane* (Mondadori, 2003 – winner of the Premio Lerici), *Da mani mortali* (Mondadori, 2012) and *Per il giusto verso* (Manni, 2015). As a novelist she has written *Velocità di fuga* (Reverdito, 1989 – winner of the Premio Tropea) and *Quartetto per masse e voce sola* (Donzelli, 2009). For the theatre, she has written the trilogy *Tritico dell'obbedienza* (Sellerio, 1996). She has also edited the anthologies *Donne in poesia* (Savelli, 1976) and *Poeti della malinconia* (Donzelli, 2001). Her essays include *Giorgio Caproni il poeta del disincanto* (Officina edizioni, 1993) and *L'estrema volontà* (Giulio Perrone Editore, 2010). The poems translated here by Richard Dixon are taken from *Da mani mortali* (Mondadori, 2012).

From **The Happy Combination**

Shake off your inborn discontent

Shake off your inborn discontent
at the fervours of the December day
the winter sun flows swiftly
welcoming to our worn bones
toward a new fulfilment.
In the beginning all was present and formless
but today a work much sought begins
go sliver of blue between
the bars of the dungeon, fly
simple as a greeting
to one who has asked it.

For infinite false attempts, half by chance

For infinite false attempts, half by chance
roaming in the darkening of the womb forgive me
sadness of worlds, the intermittence of statistics
indulge the torment of a dreamer.
Imperfect copies of my love for you
I promise you an incompatible distance
and the futile claim to explain the cosmos.

Oh, that I could be friend to you!

Oh, that I could be friend to you!
Of every greying head of hair
loosen the knots from the comb
sketch out a decipherable gesture
in the apprenticeship of worldliness.
In short, become like you, enter
into the ages, into the adult age, god dead
of irreligious Christians, irascible Muslims,
asthenic Buddhists, Jews, massacred
Pantheists I fear always they talk of me
in the lagers where prisoners are held
similar to me, nameless comrades, Gods
etched with blood on your belts.

Drawing a silk thread over the universe

Drawing a silk thread over the universe
I involved you in the nebulous contemplations
of my Face. So as not to suffer their hardships
I invited you to comparison with the nebulae.
To the consoling conviction that soon everything will
be clear.
From here it is impossible to sense the gaiety of the
skylarks
the sadness of the grass snakes, the torpid stirring of
the flowers
the croaking of the frogs born unbeknown to me in the
marshes.
Impossible. Do I still have to repeat it? When will you
believe me?
Even the stars, in the halo of gases, feel pity for me.

GABRIELE FRASCA

Gabriele Frasca (born Naples, 1957) has published four volumes of verse: *Rame* (1984), *Lime* (Einaudi, 1995), *Rive* (Einaudi, 2001), *Rimi* (Einaudi, 2013), and a collection of selected poems, *Prime. Poesie scelte 1977–2007* (luca sossella, 2007). He has written three novels: *Il fermo volere* (Edizioni d'if, 1987), *Santa Mira* (Le Lettere, 2001), and *Dai cancelli d'acciaio* (luca sossella, 2011). His many essays include *Un quanto di erotia. Gadda con Freud e Schrödinger* (Edizioni d'if, 2011 – winner of the Edinburgh Gadda Prize), *Joyicity. Joyce con McLuhan e Lacan* (Edizioni d'if, 2013), *Lo spopolatoio. Beckett con Dante e Cantor* (Edizioni d'if, 2014), and *La letteratura nel reticolo mediale. La lettera che muore* (luca sossella, 2015). With his factory-band ResiDante he produced the audio CD *Il fronte interno* (2003) and the DVD of the “video drama for a single spectator” *Nei molti mondi* (2014). He has translated works by Samuel Beckett and Philip K. Dick. He teaches Comparative Literature and Comparative Media at the University of Salerno. The poems translated here by Geoffrey Brock are taken from *Lime* and *Rive* (Einaudi, 1995 and 2001).

[www.gabrielefrasca.it]

of all this nothing

of all this nothing. this nothing you have worn
like a body. this garment that now fades.
that frays. that ravel under the abrading
fingernails of years. these lights that have gone
inexorably out. this perforate and cranky
mind. of all these hours you have chased
to make of them mirrors witnesses for lost
and sunken hours. nothing of this remains.
like the sponge you take in everything.
spit yourself out. absorb yourself. meanwhile
the serum that's drowning you is deepening.
and after comes an after. naught on naught
till slow entire it rises. the taste of the whole.
that blind adhesive. which gives life to thought

ill-belated oar

get up, open and close the door, and now
reopen it, close it once more, how many
times, and how many after that, and how
large the sum of instants, of naked minutes,
of bare, haphazard, useless hours that fled,
opening, closing, that wore themselves out,
becoming commonplace, count them, the mute
math of one who opened, of one who held
the door a little while, and then it ends up,
it ends up you're no longer opening the door,
or closing it, it ends up that you're there,
standing, at the door, and then it ends up

hey can you hear me

hey can you hear me. can you. i'm alive.
this is why you can't hear me. it's not my heart.
it's this flesh here that's making itself heard.
as if it were running. expected to arrive.
running all the while in my temples. while
I write of what I deafen. lost in the motor
that's bleeding. life. with all the usual vigor.
my own unfortunately habitual.
but so much force. such rage it interweaves.
this fabric dedicated to restraining.
so that the narrow pass is never breached.
if you can't hear. it's just because I'm wasting
your silence. inasmuch as it still screeches
about me. i live on these discarded lives

this evening i as ever

this evening i as ever am suspended
feeling again the thing I feel unfold
inside me where the flame already failed
on the old torch that outside still enkindled
burned with a tense extended exhalation
like the hissing of a steady wind
or like the sluggish sizzling sound
of static that when pulling in a station
from some tower in some far-off town
spits from the radio in an unexpected
yet quiet and resigned nostalgic fit
for everything unknown that becomes known
if one considers it its own objective
or if the tuning knob is turned a bit

BRUNO GALLUCCIO

Bruno Galluccio was born in 1953 in Naples, where he lives. He graduated in physics and has worked on international cooperation projects involving automation systems and spatial systems. He has published two volumes of poetry – *Verticali* (Einaudi, 2009), and *La misura dello zero* (Einaudi, 2015). The poems translated here by Richard Dixon are taken from *La misura dello zero* (Einaudi, 2015).

the void always an enigma and a myth

the void always an enigma and a myth
residing with horror of the first
childish questions on the universe
when leaving home is a worry
and beyond was marked
by the nightmare of abandonment

and that void seemed right there
lying in wait outside the house
a lying in wait distant and imminent
a blind distancing
or pointless movement
abandoning the cardinal points

today we know the void does not exist
there are quantum fluctuations everywhere
field disturbances everywhere
that make photons or matter appear
since even here zero
is a phantom function
an exact value that cannot be reached

dying is not reunion with the infinite

dying is not reunion with the infinite
it is abandonment after having tried out
this potent idea

when the human species becomes extinct
that set of accumulated knowledge
in flight and confusion
will be scattered
and the universe cannot know
it is condensed for a limited period
into a tiny fraction of itself

the standard model moves

the standard model moves
at the same time in many minds
takes from the bending of time
and of space in proximity to suns

takes from Boson messengers
of forces weak and strong
from those of Higgs that confirm we have weight
explores the wizened surface of white dwarfs
and the collapsed rotations of pulsars

this human model projects out toward the extremes
and finds roots in calculus and images
generated by terrestrial life

is fuelled with traces of particles and collisions
and with analysis of the universe's background noise

the man of nights of amazement
bows now to study the data gathered
by instruments extensions of his body

the model descends through rivulets
toward a complete circle
the big bang shines on the equations
like the singular zero
like a zero that has no measure

we go recognizing the normal flow of things

we go recognizing the normal flow of things
the barriers and more centrally the possibility of losing
the formulas have developed unknowns
even when the evening is a gathering of masks

the neutrinos message of supernovas
cross incessantly the body
and the brain
but it's not for this that brainwaves
are altered
nor that our vision of the world alters

what alters is the eye which in front of the flight
of the accelerator finds confirmation
of this strange matter almost devoid of substance
and then feels the emotion that everything
takes place as had been thought
is formed into a coherent picture

MASSIMO GEZZI

Massimo Gezzi was born in Sant'Elpidio a Mare (Marche) in 1976. He has published three volumes of poetry: *Il mare a destra* (Atelier, 2004), *L'attimo dopo* (luca sossella, 2009 – winner of the Premio Metauro and Premio Marazza) and *Il numero dei vivi* (Donzelli, 2015 – winner of the Premio Carducci). He has also published *Tra le pagine e il mondo* (Italic Pequod, 2015), a collection of his reviews and interviews with various poets (including Seamus Heaney and John Ashbery). He also edited the commentary on Eugenio Montale's *Diario del '71 e del '72* (Mondadori, 2010) and the collected poems of Franco Buffoni (*Poesie 1975-2012*, Mondadori, 2012). He is currently working as a teacher in a high school in Lugano. The poems translated here by Damiano Abeni and Moira Egan are taken from *L'attimo dopo* (luca sossella, 2009).

The Linden Tree Seed

As I waited for the bus I watched
the tides of linden tree seeds
splashing on the pavement after a flight
of a few feet: they won't take root,
car tires will crush them
in a fine powder that the earth
will swallow with September's rains.
I was stupefied by their wits, by that slight
natural aircraft they use to hover,
in their descent towards a time
they'll never witness.
Driving home at night
I felt something slipping down
from my hair, and one of those seeds
landed on my arm, its
wings beaten and its stem creased.
Too bad I wasn't
a prairie buffalo, or an antelope
crossing mountains in a leap:
with a swerve from my hurried course
I'd have dropped the seed nestled in my fur
down into fertile land. But I'm a city
man, and its short passage
was of little use, if now
I relinquish that seed on my terrace,
placing my hope in something more useful
than myself, some wind, for instance.

Bricks

If you want a brick you should get
a brick, to mend a wall
or to fill up a hole
in a herringbone floor.

A brick: a solid that lives in three
dimensions, it's heavy, it feels
rough or porous, and, if left piled up
with others long enough, will become
a nest for centipedes, spiders, and earwigs.

A brick that exists, that if split by a hammer
will sound tack just once, a beautiful sound,
brick-sound, snappy, precise.

A brick is worth more than the words
that imitate it, resting
one on top of the other.

With poetry, I would like to make bricks.

Mulberries

You traced this simple gesture with your hand:
you raised it to your face,
you stretched it towards my window,
while I was driving: I looked,
and against the hazy morning
light I counted them:
eight, eight mulberries with outspread branches
like the tail of a stuffed peacock,
a procession along the line
of our gaze, so perfect
that for a moment I forgot
time-tables and connections
and I slowed down to comprehend
how one can say of eight trees in a row
“look, how beautiful!”, as you said,
if they have not decided to be that way, and
everything’s
just a chain of senseless alternation,
or whether a gesture of the hand and a smile
are enough to make, out of eight trees
in a row, an illusion of redemption.

Tuesday Wonderland

September, one would say. Or maybe a morning
in mid-May: the train, the dozing
Oberland landscape against the slowed-down
factory smoke in the background—
it was the usual path
from home to station, five minutes
(slightly less), before funnelling onto the ramp
of escalators, ascending
to the pale-blue-gray Längasse sky.
A repetitive music was unhinging
the chain of events: the lady,
as always, going to work,
the crazy bearded guy with beady eyes
peeking into other people’s pockets:
a day like many others, probably Tuesday.
The train slowed down, the doors slid open,
the escalators re-started their ascent
at the first touch of a foot.
All things remained what they were
the moment before: light was light,
buses were buses, maples were
themselves, with a few additional leaves.
However, it looked as if everyone knew it,
while quietly waiting for the traffic light to change,
or burdened by their groceries, on foot or on bicycles,
turning around a corner, never having been there
before.

ANDREA INGLESE

Andrea Inglese, poet, essayist, blogger and translator, was born in Turin in 1967 and lives in Paris. He has a Ph.D. in comparative literature and teaches contemporary Italian literature at University of Paris III. He has published eight books of poetry and prose. His most recent collection of poetry, *Lettere alla Reinserzione Culturale del Disoccupato*, has been published in Italy (Italic Pequod, 2013) and France (*Lettres à la Réinsertion Culturelle du Chômeur*, translated by Stéphane Bouquet, NOUS, 2013). He is a member of the literary blog “Nazione Indiana” (www.nazioneindiana.com) and the editorial committee of “alfabeta2”. He is the curator of “Descrizione del mondo”, a collective project based on exhibitions and online (www.descrizonedelmondo.it). The poems translated here by Natalia Nabel are taken from *Lettere alla Reinserzione Culturale del Disoccupato* (Italic Pequod, 2013).

Dear Cultural Rehabilitation of the Unemployed

that I'm sick, or that I was ever sick, or that I could
under your eyes, or my own eyes, wearing what I wear,
(certain black shoes with laces)
get sick,

I consider among the most certain
improbabilities.

And yet I exist,

one more time, in this dreamlike health,
being faithful to my calves,
two heels, to my growing nails,
I hesitate: like dust, the ointments, the wardrobes
to take apart and burn, the tin plated lids
to throw in the air.

It's of this existence that I could speak to you,
of its vagueness,
but today I don't feel like it, not like this,

not with this distance
that newly
without a smile
you put between you and you.

Dear Cultural Rehabilitation of the Unemployed

a continuation isn't possible
you yourself

wouldn't tolerate it, (I imagine you

dressed and seated, or you sitting down
and dressing yourself, first the one,
slipping on your clothes, perhaps a skirt,
then something else, finally,
without hesitating,
sitting down,
— not alone, of course,

no, unfortunately, not alone)

many things that we could have told one another,
many of those things,
sheltered from both your telling and mine,
still persist.

(For example, those
iron balusters, and the prefabricated,
with on the roof,

on the roof,

the little flag.)

Dear Cultural Rehabilitation of the Unemployed

my social relations exist
I can be serene when I happen to think of them
in their togetherness
without even weighing them from nearby
the relations—I tell myself—are there
and this is sufficient: one thought
(the totality of my existent social
relations) and I'm invaded
by a feeling of tranquility
and I don't count them nor do I want to
consider them with excessive precision—
under a global aspect
like this it is sufficient: these are relationships of society
very evident that they exist
all of them together for my tranquility
when I move about with public transport
machines going at very high speeds or in a car
driven by a private person also at full speed thrown
along the straight stretch of the expressway or above
soft carpets of flying clouds
also not opening my mouth looking
absently outside the window
my social relations persist undamaged
as though the movement the silence
the total absence of intentions or memories
could not corrode at all
their overall surfaces as though
they live their existence completely outside of me
in total autonomy without the need
of my small agitation in the middle
to exist

Dear Cultural Rehabilitation of the Unemployed

being sick, for me, has never been a problem.
When it's time to be sick, I can do it,
be sick for a long time, uninterruptedly, without
reserve. In Buenos Aires, a cold city,
I was sick for more than a year, with a few
brief interruptions at sunset, and after dinner, gone,
it started again. (And at the port, or the restaurant
seated by myself at a table, learning by heart
the brief phrases of my order: "sole
in sauce of red onions with white rice.")

The hard part is the physical. To have
something physical. You know,
the ethical storms may be prolonged,
diversified, accelerated as one likes.
But a leg is not broken every day.
Many years have passed since I've broken a leg.
I go up, down, I slip into the most unthinkable places,
in certain back alleys, nothing to do.
It is all a work. All a different work.
But I also wanted to tell you:
the film you sent me to see,
or that I thought you'd sent me to see,
doesn't have a final scene.
This could be a message.
Could it? I say,
for both of us?
And above all: are we "both"?

VIVIAN LAMARQUE

Vivian Lamarque was born in Tesero (Trento) in 1946, though she has always lived in Milan where she teaches Italian as a foreign language. In 2002 her collected poems were published in *Poesie 1972-2002* by Mondadori. In 2007 she published *Poesie per un gatto* (Mondadori), and in 2009 *La Gentilèssa* (Stampa), verses in Milanese dialect. Her awards include the Premio Viareggio (1981), the Premio Montale (1993), the Pen Club (1996), and the Premio Cardarelli (2006). In 2008 she was awarded the Ambrogino d'oro, and in 2014 the Premio Tirinnanzi lifetime award. She has written fables translated into various languages (Premio Rodari 1997, Premio Andersen 2000) and the collections of poetry *Poesie di Ghiaccio* (Einaudi Ragazzi, 2004) and *Poesie della Notte* (Rizzoli, 2009). For the Fabbri music series she has written on the works of Mozart, Stravinsky, Tchaikovsky, Prokofiev, Schumann and Chopin. She has translated Valéry, Baudelaire and La Fontaine. A selection of her articles for the "Corriere della Sera" was published under the title *Gentilmente Milano* (Meravigli, 2013). The poems translated here by Richard Dixon are taken from *Poesie. 1972-2002* (Mondadori, 2002).

Condominium

I walk quietly, below here
on the third floor a dead neighbour
is asleep. He came back dead tonight
from the hospital, they took him up
the stairs, opened the door for him
without even ringing, he used
the word “enter” for the last time.
He slept along with all the rest of us
being night time it seemed just the same
he slept eight hours but then more
and more and more past the soldiers’
morning bugle, past the sun
high in the sky, now that we move about
he’s no longer like us. He’s a dead
neighbour. He’ll go downstairs with no legs.
He was kind, stood at the window
had a canary, had his thousandth share
in the property, look they’re clipping
its wings.

Testament

to the new black Milanese

To certain people I know
I leave all and to others none.
And the best poems to friends
and the worst to foes.
And things of value? The most valuable of these
I give to the new black Milanese
who for two cents make the windows shine
(or emigrants innocent and benign
who come for two cents from afar
with goods to sell on a street bazaar).
And to my garden I leave my flowers
and the gentle soil that will be my bower
we’ll keep each other silent company
and hello death please welcome me.

P.S.

*My daughter, make two windows that can be ours
to climb up and once more see the stars*

The last time he said to me

The last time he said to me
if I get sick you'll look after me?
and I said yes
can you get stains off jackets?
and I said I'd try
the morning after you die
you can't wake up
life is finished
it's the start of death
the dead if you touch them they're cold
whereas the living are quite another thing

*this quiet dust
was gentlemen and ladies*

I don't want to be still
I don't want to be dust
in lives when they put the date of birth
I go straight to see the date of death
then I do the subtraction
and get the result
I'm not dead I was born
the 19th April 1946

*I'm alive I think
the branches are my hand
they are full of convolvulus*

When the holiday's over

When the holiday's over, looking from the train
at those still on the beach playing, bathing
their holiday is not yet finished:
will it be like that, will it be like that
on leaving life?

VALERIO MAGRELLI

Valerio Magrelli (born in Rome, 1957) is the author of six volumes of poetry for which he has won the Premio Mondello, the Premio Viareggio and the Premio Montale. In November 2003 the Accademia dei Lincei awarded him the Premio Antonio Feltrinelli. A professor of French literature at the universities of Pisa and Cassino, he is also a frequent contributor to the cultural pages of various Italian newspapers. His poems have been translated into many languages. As literary critic he has recently published an anthology of Italian poetry 1000-2000 (*Millennium Poetry. Viaggio sentimentale nella poesia italiana*, Il Mulino, 2015). The poems translated here by Jamie McKendrick and Clarissa Botsford are taken from *Esercizi di tiptologia* (Mondadori, 1992), *Disturbi del sistema binario* (Einaudi, 2006) and *Il sangue amaro* (Einaudi, 2014).

Gestures that go astray

Gestures that go astray
appeal to me—the one
who trips up or upturns
a glass of...the one who forgets,
is miles away, the sentry
with the insubordinate eyelid
—my heart goes out
to all of them, all who betray
the unmistakable
whirr and clunk
of the bust contraption.
Things that work are muffled
and mute—their parts just move.
Here instead the gadgetry,
the mesh of cogs, has given up
the ghost—a bit sticks out,
breaks off, declares itself.
Inside something throbs.

Child Labour

Look at this child
who's learning to read:
she tightens her lips in concentration,
draws forth one word after another,
fishes, and her voice a rod,
eases the line, flexes it and now
lifts these writhing letters
high through the air
so they shine
in the sun of utterance.
so they shine

Music, music, what do you want from me?

Sonata, what do you want from me?

Bernard de Fontenelle

Music, music, what do you want from me?
What body is shaping itself out of
your long chain of molecules?
What track am I following as I
proceed picking up those notes left like crumbs
to guide someone home?
What home would you have me return to?

On an aria in Rossini's Turk in Italy

*Dear Italy, finally I spy
your friendly shores. Greetings to you!*

Gioachino Rossini

The shores of Italy rest in peace
while, like a necklace, the drowned
surround the Peninsula. Each of them a piece
of bread tossed to the waves for safe passage round.

But the fish have eaten the crumbs
and the migrants, lost at sea with no return,
plumb the depths like so many Tom Thumbs
circumnavigating the land they yearn.

FRANCESCA MATTEONI

Francesca Matteoni was born in Pistoia (Tuscany) in 1975. She has published several collections of poetry: *Artico* (Crocetti, 2005), *Higgiugiuk la lappone* in “X Quaderno Italiano di Poesia” (Marcos y Marcos, 2010), *Tam Lin e altre poesie* (Transeuropa, 2010), *Appunti dal parco* (Vydia, 2012), *Nel sonno. Una caduta, un processo, un viaggio per mare* (Zona, 2014), *Acquabuia* (Aragno, 2014), and has written a novel, *Tutti gli altri* (Tunué, 2014). As a researcher in history and folklore she has published works in English and Italian. She is also one of the editors of the literary blog “Nazione Indiana”. She teaches courses on Italian culture, medieval philosophy and the history of magic at American Universities in Florence. The poems translated here by Richard Dixon are taken from *Acquabuia* (Aragno, 2014).

We lived in the woodland

We lived in the woodland.
We followed veins of rich soil
or up for shaded hours
tails dangling, blue wood.

People of leather and cloud.
The raptors' eyes were white
scrawny lamps in the night.

Rocks, remains, brushwood.
In the middle of the stone was water
thrust onto the outlines of the world -
an ancient blackness from the depth.

I sniffed it flowing in my face
into my broken, arborescent body.

The grass that comes clear and cutting.

The cubs are not stars

The cubs are not stars
they don't know when it's time to die
time to clash, without learning.

They radiate from no desire.
They go away, continually
against the animals, the jagged plants

harpoons, strangulating mud.
They strew plasma and dust of siblings
that haven't come out.

They have useless half-shut eyes.
cold bones, mothers' gewgaws
on their back.

Into children monsters empty

Into children monsters empty.
Before the whistle, the change
into shrike or cuckoo feathers.

Inside, the children spike themselves
in the thorn thicket—
every monster makes a blood—red egg

hides it in the hole.
So the rostrum is a nest
the straight pit, the broken wrist

making mud now above the sky.
To play a slow, woody part in the world
you have to rot down to the bottom.

This is my heart

This is my sewn heart.

In the night kitchen
on the ledge that ends at the stove
I nestle and sew
small sleeping tigers
on its broken valve.

Strand of forest from the grimy window.
There are many layers of sleep
here above—

lashes that fall on the eyes
from the hair of tigers.
Light that splutters, snarls—

the heart is buried
in the freezer.
You cannot open it.

It has a ball of ice
in its tail.

When you watch it
I see it.

GUIDO MAZZONI

Guido Mazzoni (born in Florence, 1967) has lived and worked in Pisa, Paris, London and Chicago. He teaches literature at the University of Siena and lives in Rome. He has published two collections of poetry, *La scomparsa del respiro dopo la caduta* in “Poesia contemporanea. Terzo quaderno italiano”, edited by Franco Buffoni (Guerini, 1992) and *I mondi* (Donzelli, 2010). His essays include *Forma e solitudine* (Marcos y Marcos, 2002), *Sulla poesia moderna* (Il Mulino, 2005), *Teoria del romanzo* (Il Mulino, 2011 – English translation forthcoming) and *I destini generali* (Laterza, 2016). He founded the literary website “Le parole e le cose”. The poems translated here by Damiano Abeni and Moira Egan are taken from *I mondi* (Donzelli, 2010).

Territories

The person who passes into your life punching the keys of the cash register knows nothing of you, but she understands from the way you dress what you own and what you wish to have; she can measure the distance that keeps your worlds apart while repeating the action for which she gets paid and that allows her to live. Somewhere, she safeguards the passions that make tolerable the gestures she repeats, again and again, among these shelves for eight hours, gestures that transmit to her the meekness with which she remains seated to replicate the same movements, adhering to what surrounds her, to what has been made of her, as to a fate that is unreasonable to protest. She protects herself by dragging on with habits, by building a territory. Yours begins beyond the door you just opened, among the passers-by under the billboards, while the landscape you know brings you back to yourself, a sky stretched beyond the buildings, the morning light above your commonplaces.

AZ 626

Now that the clouds let us see
the whole curve of the earth in the form
of the formless suburbia where we'll have to live,
I listen to the bloodflow in the earphones when the
music is over,
looking at the worlds of others who cross paths with
mine, their networks
of fear and desire within the most fragile tube—

or the gestures that tie them to the present
when they stare at the ice on the incredible lake,
our human life 25,000 feet below.
Now, I know it makes no sense to break
the nearsightedness that allows us to exist, I see differently
the monads who protect us, their webs in the muddle;
I follow the patches of light the sun
throws on the landscape, the sky—pure and indifferent.

Surface

Now that the conversation blows you off in a kind of cone and the things that, a few minutes ago, were rippling the relations between you and the people seated at your table seem without weight, you still perceive the field of tensions that a conversation about cars, the cut of a dress, a lifestyle, about news that in ten days you will forget, can open suddenly, but you strain to salvage the value of what, for a moment, had been so important that it represented your identity and deserved a defense. The undertow that pulls you away rips apart the patina of your actions and makes you understand the slightness of the distance that separates you from others, how fragile the contents with which we fill up the game of balance and imbalance that ties people together, generating the surface on which we move. However, you live on the surface, you are the surface that made you speak out impassioned, absurdly, about a local election or someone you don't even know; and it is because of this that, when you go out a little before dawn, and the crisscross of the lampposts, the lines of trees among the houses of the suburbs, and the outlines of the commuters headed to work will surprise you, you will be struck by some kind of shame that you will easily overcome, because this is your life now, the only thing that counts for you, the horizon that you cannot go beyond.

Dearborn Bridge

The vapor of water along the edge
of the freezing river, an empty afternoon,
the boats imprisoned in the perfect light of an aimless
day
when each moment is enough in itself
and in the things that it carries—the pale blue
among the skyscrapers, the boulevards in shadow,
our faces in the clouds reflected
on the walls like mirrors, the passersby who form anew
behind us the walls of others—

and the features inside the stations, while they say
that people are unknowable,
they search for balance in their own likenesses,
wanting to placate desires, to be alive
for a few completed moments beyond the present
when the on-ramps close in to reveal
the lake, the rows of houses, these trees
that incise the ice and are preserved, other beings
in the train-cars, while they sit and exist—

and there is no sense but infinite adaptation,
the imperceptible balance that a form
of life imposes on itself. In a bit it will reabsorb you,
a person who walks by will have your face, this body
made of water will seem normal to you. We will cover
with words the void that we were able to see—
only disorder beyond the clouds and the names,
end the splendid signs hiding things.

ALDO NOVE

Aldo Nove is the pen name of Antonio Centanin, born in Viggiù (Lombardy) in 1967. In 1995, after graduating in moral philosophy, he wrote *Woobinda e altre storie senza lieto fine* (Castelvecchi, 1996), republished as *Superwoobinda* (Einaudi, 1998). Poet and storyteller, he also writes for the theatre, cinema and television. His recent books include the novel *Tutta la luce del mondo* (Bompiani, 2014), the collection of poetry *Addio mio Novecento* (Einaudi, 2014) and the story *Un bambino piangeva* (Mondadori Electa, 2014). The poems translated here by Richard Dixon are taken from *Addio mio Novecento* (Einaudi, 2014).

The Space

We all have a tremendous
need to say or rather to write
that we no longer know what to say
nor what to write everywhere
and endlessly since silence
is the white space into which falls residue
the meaning in excess but so much,
too much present and everywhere.

What remains of the world
is prose that rankles expressing
its own syntax
only or not even.

It is this normal scare.

Time

Another hour and they'll have been,
they'll still be, perhaps less
than before, contained in houses,
constrained in things, and perhaps too much
is left of them, of hours to fill,

of hours already passed,

unjoined, pieces of days
to make one of them, a whole day,
at least one, a day that is real:
it would be enough, I think, in the iniquitous
racket of hours, just one day.

Is this our time?

It's this and it isn't ours,
if it flows in marshes
and we at times flow together with it
alone and if we find ourselves it's too,
really too little, dead and living,

but you don't notice, but you write

Goodbye My Nineteen Hundreds

There was a garden full of light
full of walls to climb
and we used to climb them
and all this had a meaning
and the garden was immense
and the walls were real.

Not, just, thoughts.

Things

As our hands burn far away
and we no longer grasp things
the fire of dusk
has no end for those who inhabit it.

ELIO PECORA

Elio Pecora was born in Sant' Arsenio (Campania) in 1936 and has lived in Rome since 1966. He has published volumes of poetry, prose, essays and plays, and has also edited anthologies of Italian contemporary poetry and collections of popular tales. For much of his career he has worked as a literary critic with newspapers, weekly magazines and journals, and on cultural programmes for RAI television. Since 2003 he has directed the international magazine "Poeti e Poesia". His recent books include *Favole dal giardino* (Empiria, 2004), *Simmetrie* (Mondadori, 2007), *Tutto da ridere?* (Empiria, 2010), *Nel tempo della madre* (La vita felice, 2011), *In margine, congedi e altro* (Oedipus, 2011) and *Dodici poesie d'amore* (Frullini, 2012). The poems translated here by Richard Dixon are taken from *Simmetrie* (Mondadori, 2007).

City pictures

The crowd returns, to attack, to hold
the tight city walls between the gates.
Among the shouts, the laughter, the cries,
also threats, also words of comprehension:
the future free of all surrender or retribution.

In the sky the first quarter moon appears,
the sun falls behind terraces and aerials.

Each of many understands in their dark heart
the extreme urgency of this going together,
one next to the other, carrying the rule
that comes before bread, before sleep,
and here urges and consumes in the swift day.

They go: hands, feet, faces

They go: hands, feet, faces
– boundless multitude of expectations,
of hopes, of equals
for hunger, for death,
each one searching
that reassures, averts
all pursuing destinies
variously entwined,
never stopping behind the arteries,
until inside the laughter or the cry,
the fear of being chased
from a fence unprotected.

The white-haired man talks

The white-haired man talks
into the grey telephone
—outside an oblique light,
a bustle, a roar.
The voice penetrates
tunnels and ditches,
up down hillsides,
it clambers,
gasps, slows down,
to another room
where a man stirs
sluggishly from sleep. He says:
“I dreamt again tonight.
In my first house,
from the last room,
terrified I heard
a footstep.
I’m still looking for
the passage of that fear.”

In the narrow ground-floor garden

In the narrow ground-floor garden
on the chipped seat,
among pots of zinnia and geranium
he leaves bread for the birds:
tits, sparrows, starlings,
sometimes in the morning a jay.

Yesterday he dug beneath the magnolia
to bury the cat
that died of old-age on the couch.

In two metres of ground,
the corpses are gone,
not even the bones,
of the Alsatian there for six years,
of the griffon, buried last year,
twice pregnant
with tiny stillborn pups.

LAURA PUGNO

Laura Pugno was born in 1970 in Rome, Italy. She has published a collection of short stories, *Sleepwalking. Tredici racconti visionari* (Sironi, 2002), and four novels: *Sirene* (Einaudi, 2007), *Quando verrai* (Minimum Fax, 2009), *Antartide* (Minimum Fax, 2011) and *La caccia* (Ponte alle Grazie, 2012). Her poetry has appeared in five volumes: *Tennis* (Nuova Editrice Magenta, 2001), *Il colore oro* (Le Lettere, 2007), *DNAct* (Zona, 2008), *Gilgames'* (Transeuropa, 2009) and *La mente paesaggio* (Perrone, 2010). The poems translated here by Craig Arnold are taken from *Il colore oro* (Le Lettere, 2007).

[www.laurapugno.it]

kayak series

kayak, is
a word, move
the torso the back the muscles: make a cut
on the surface,
there, it breaks like milk
is a girl with a straight back
small white ears with pearl earrings
you don't see her legs—
red hair glued to her back—
you don't see her mermaid shape,
the water is motionless beneath
the kayak carries her body,
it's all like oil
you have a life racket over breast and back
all your body is protected and fastened
you eat crackers and algae,
the whitest teeth, you can't stop:
or this body will die
get out of the water
dry your body off: it's warm, meat and salt,
the body repeats its rounds,
nape and knees, bones and eggs
take a piece of bread like a plate
wipe off your mouth with breadcrumbs
you go home,
bread and milk, now write
the word kayak perfectly,
don't you see, bread, milk and algae
with the snow, it will melt like snow

it's not the same language that you speak

it's not the same language that you speak
if your body is the sun,

always the same terrain is bounded,
a few meters of ice with an oasis,
orange cloth
bright on a carpet:

a language, if it gets invented

or rather, a dark red
towel that covers your head:
this is the measurement
of the desert:

at night you dream of covering territory in the dark
with a blue bandage
around your wrists, and blue
salt on your mouth and on your back

further on, if the language is shared

further on, if the language is shared, that
which is on the carpet,
the intermittent light:

enter the leopard, put
your hands inside the sculpture—sand
from this garden,
white stones,

that have a number or a name

put on a plastic pelt,
your leopard-colored eyes,
the same
as last night, will see in the dark

or else enter the wolf,
the green that surrounds it
drawing ever tighter, the exact
point where the light filters over the lake

open the black box

open the black box,
it contains forbidden
meat, turtle, dolphin:
this is what they eat since
the kingdom came,
the reef was invaded by this luminescence

if now is the hour of light,
you will shine,

cover your muscles with oil
in front of you on the ground
there's a cloth light like gold
you could throw over your shoulders

FABIO PUSTERLA

Fabio Pusterla (b. 1957) teaches at Lugano high school and at the Università della Svizzera Italiana, and lives between Switzerland and Italy. He also works as a translator, in particular of Philippe Jaccottet. His first volume of poetry, *Concessione all'inverno* (Casagrande, 1985), was followed by *Bocksten* (1989), *Le cose senza storia* (1994), *Pietra sangue* (1999), *Folla sommersa* (2004), *Corpo stellare* (2010) and *Argéman*, (2014), all published by Marcos y Marcos. Some of his work has been collected in *Le terre emerse* (Einaudi, 2009). "The Heel of the Rhine" is taken from *Bocksten* (1989), "The Two Adversaries" and "To Those Who Come After" from *Pietra sangue* (1999), "On Tiny Wings" from *Corpo stellare* (2011). His collections of essays include *Il nervo di Arnold* (Marcos y Marcos, 2007), *Una goccia di splendore* (Casagrande, 2008), and *Quando Chiasso era in Irlanda* (Casagrande, 2012). The poems translated here by Simon Knight are taken from *Days Full of Caves & Tigers*, published by Arc Editions in 2012.

The Heel of the Rhine

Now sister indeed, and more than ever,
as you wriggle desperate through spills of atrazine
and slicks of viscous oil;
or, exhausted, beat your tail against
the caressing wave of phosphates blackening
the gravel on the shore
(the shore, the strand,
the sludgy shingle
probed by the torches of the rescue teams,
helicopters dart away, two-tone
sirens flash their bluish lights),
as now even the Baltic is doomed,
your journey circumscribed
by a steel ring of fires and explosions,
and you dive back down to sunken treasures, the
wreckage of
rusted hulls and anchor chains,
down through vertical currents, masses of
colder water, where you find a quiver of life,
the instinct to swim, because the sea
is a distance fragrance, the hint
of a dream interrupted just before daybreak,
enough for your fins and stubbornly
palpitating gills to wrest a moment
from asphyxiation, an idea of life
from the factual evidence, a final challenge from
anxiety, utopia
from your common fear.

The Two Adversaries

Birch trees frozen to stone, black stack
of wood laden with snow and in the sky
wind or ice choking off life. Total
silence, then, a cycle
that no mercy can break or describe, blind
winter that will not hear of spring?
Frost that cleaves tree trunks, opens the veins
of the fields, breaks down the clods
and watches them die?

But look, six feet away, a shrew!
What can a shrew be doing? It scurries,
scratches the snow with feeble claws,
suddenly stops, sniffing. What is there to sniff?
Then the sun comes out and it disappears:
splashes of light, droplets of light everywhere.
Particles of watery light:
maybe the shrew
feeds on such elements, surviving
in the dark of its burrow.

And both are here: gutted matter
and bright limpid light. Adversaries
who never parley. Which way to look, you wonder,
which eye believe, which part yield to.
Should the mist part, for a moment,
should a gust of icy wind from on high raise the curtain,
there, where chance directs the gaze,
appears, in clarity, a swathe of mountain, but detached
from earth, as if in flight: immense eagle
of black rock and snow, talon and wing.

To Those Who Come After

You, then, who will turn
your gaze on us from the summits
of your splendid times, like someone scanning a valley
he does not even remember passing through:
you will not see us, behind the screen of mist.
But we were here, custodians of the voice.
Not every day and not every hour
of the day; just sometimes,
when it seemed possible
to muster a little strength.
We closed the door
behind us, abandoning
our sumptuous houses
and resumed our way, directionless.

On Tiny Wings

Along the Po, below Superga,
all seemed like night, the river and time
gliding silent. Through congested
streets with weary tread
breasting the current of darkness
with no special prospects.
But a sudden sign on the water
signalled surprise, a white wake.
Canoes, two quicksilver hulls, mirth
bubbles up, touches you by chance
and flies, even on the darkest evenings,
on tiny, tiny wings.

ANDREA RAOS

Andrea Raos (born 1968) has published *Discendere il fiume calmo* in “Poesia contemporanea. Quinto quaderno italiano” (ed. Franco Buffoni, Crocetti, 1996), *Aspettami, dice. Poesie 1992-2002* (Pieraldo, 2003), *Luna velata* (CipM – Les Comptoirs de la Nouvelle B. S., 2003), *Le api migratori* (Oèdipus, 2007), *Prosa in prosa* (Le Lettere, 2009 – collective work), *I cani dello Chott el-Jerid* (Arcipelago, 2010) and *Lettere nere* (Effigie, 2013). He has a Ph.D. in classical Japanese poetry and has translated various Japanese, American and French poets. His latest publication as a translator is Charles Reznikoff, *Olocausto* (Benway Series, 2014). Some of his poems, translated into English by Kathleen Fraser, have been published in “The New Review of Literature” (vol. 5 no. 2, Spring 2008) and in “Aufgabe” (no. 7, 2008). Others can be read on the “Poetry International” website (translated by Sarah Riggs and Abe Casper) and in the “Free Verse” online magazine (translated by Natalia Nebel). The two pieces of poetic prose translated here by Richard Dixon and the two poems translated by the author are still unpublished in Italian.

The adventures of Allegro Leprotto – Moon in the sky

One day Allegro Leprotto decided to go and see how the sky was made and, having lied to his parents to get out of the house, he set off walking.

He walked for almost a week climbing, one leap after the other, the highest mountain that there is. Little by little the trees and the flowers disappeared, then the animals and the meadows, and he found himself grazing his fingertips against the masses of cold sharp rocks toward the top.

Finally reaching the summit he stayed there leaning out toward the sky, now so close, for several days and nights until, stretching and straining as much as he could, he managed to grasp the edge of the celestial vault with his fingers. For a few moments he caught his breath with his head half inside, hoisted into a darkness which he didn't understand, and his bottom half outside, in the normal world made of light and muons; then with a last thrust, he reached up a little further and fell headlong inside and behind the sky. It was like heaving a sigh, looking sideways, and in the end a small "click". Sitting on his backside, still dazed from the tumble as he fell down, he looked around. He saw that behind the sky all is dark. There was just coldness and nothingness.

Allegro Leprotto understood that the planets and the stars that he saw shining from down below, when he went on summer evenings to chase lizards in the fields filled by the fragrance of new-mown hay, are stones that spurt light toward the earth rolling and clashing in absolute silence, like black pulsating gallstones that produce a sneer if pressed against the membrane that closes them.

I hope your life comes apart.

Allegro Leprotto and the dragon bones

One morning Allegro Leprotto got up very early and went straight out, for when he woke he always liked breathing the bright air of a brand new day, perfumed with freshness as though filled with invisible coriander.

He set off walking along the beach and was playing at jumping back so the waves wouldn't wet his feet when he came across a long line of dark stones that rose from the ground, grew and then disappeared once more, blinded by the pale winter sun until the white sand and their blackness were equal on the retina.

Even today people wonder how and why the dragon, whose skeleton he saw almost entirely swallowed up on that morning, had plunged there to its death.

So very few those hours

So very few those hours
that we live, barely or not all
alive, the wind
pursuing them until the end
of the day—so very few
those hours that never come back.

Everything sums up to

Everything sums up to
one turn of the key
and a double turn of the key
and if I wish to continue
and feel like I'm falling
I give yet one more turn to the key.

Everything falls
I don't know where.
Everything is snow.
How short.

ANTONIO RICCARDI

Antonio Riccardi was born in Parma in 1962 and studied philosophy at the University of Pavia. He has worked since the 1980s in the publishing industry, in particular at Mondadori, where he was literary director.

As a poet he has published *Il profitto domestico* (Mondadori, 1996; new edition, Il Saggiatore, 2015), *Gli impianti del dovere e della guerra* (Garzanti, 2004) and *Aquarama e altre poesie d'amore* (Garzanti, 2009). He has also published a volume of prose, *Cosmo più servizi. Divagazioni su artisti, diorami, cimiteri e vecchie zie rimaste signorine* (Sellerio, 2014). The poems translated here by Richard Dixon are taken from *Aquarama e altre poesie d'amore* (Garzanti, 2009).

Young girls left much alone

Young girls left much alone
when grownup are women irresistible.
So are the mermaids.
They're seen at dusk in certain latitudes
swimming in the fluorescent water
sweet skin, charming and auburn lower down.
Sometimes at day they leave the water,
remain still in the shade beneath the porticoes
and feel the surge of regret.

Poised, the peacock

Poised, the peacock
on the perfect curve of the arch

—its tail in the glazed grass
its body iridescent, its apparent
tranquillity when the leaves
rustle loud from the line of poplars—

is a match for the world's most beautiful
who stretches her hand to the feathers,
smiles and perhaps thinks that never again
will she be so happy.

I saw them, one morning, five or six

I saw them, one morning, five or six
on a plane-tree between the Planetarium
and Gio Ponti tower. Parrots.

Aray araruna, aray macao, cacatua,
left perhaps from the times of the zoo,
the last to know there was the jungle
in the ordered woodland of Signor Piermarini.

They seemed uncertain, in daytime
at night, lost, unaccustomed to the woodland
from life in the aviaries.

Their plumage though was still of lacquer
and mother-of-pearl shook beneath the feathers
of their tails.

On the other hand you also live in this city.

Seem to see him, in dinner jacket

Seem to see him, in dinner jacket
in the light of burning embers by the pool
at the Copacabana Palace in the last year
of President JK —a world,
a war and almost another world away—
focus for an instant
on the bright transparent water
before she arrives smiling,
for him always the most elegant.

Seem to understand, it seems there is
a geometry in their passions:
every solution, a perfection.

MARIO SANTAGOSTINI

Mario Santagostini was born in Milan in 1951. His volumes of poetry include *Uscire di Città* (Ghisoni, 1972; Stampa, 2012), *Come rosata linea* (Società di poesia, 1981), *L'Olimpiade del '40* (Mondadori, 1994), *L'idea del bene* (Guanda, 2001), *Versi del malanimo* (Mondadori, 2007), *Felicità senza soggetto* (Mondadori, 2014). His collections of essays include *Manuale del poeta* (Mondadori, 2007). He has also translated from Latin and German. The first three poems selected here are taken from *Felicità senza soggetto* (Mondadori, 2014); the fourth is unpublished. Translations by Richard Dixon.

The ex-communist

I returned to Cinisello, one sultry Sunday.
A truck was carrying away a dog.
This was the workers' district.
And I was, like many, a communist.
And I imagined a future
with no work, when bodies
would have been of little use,
almost none. I went
as far as asking what a body
is made of, whether it is worthy
of life alone, or something other.

The first break

One day, what happened
on Sinai we won't recall
neither God, nor men.
Nor even the burnt out brambles. Only
the rarest goats:
animal-wreckage, and ready
for interminable fasting
or to feed on the roots of broom.
They seem born from nothing.

I, in 1970

I live beyond the end of the line.
Here, they still exploit the meadows,
they search for edible herbs
or hallucinogenic mushrooms.
The air is heavy with ozone, the mimosas
seem more alive with wasps,
dragon flies. What pity, you might
say, for the simplicity of the infinite
when it feels all
its fear for the inanimate.
As though it's expecting help.

(A woman I met many years ago writes to me. Or I pretend she does and I record here the final part. The reply is mine)

(...)
On the glass, there's a swarm
of wasps they call summer mayflies.
They live just a day.
As you read, they are dead.
And they get rid of them with water jets.
I'll come to you: like
others you haven't even seen, I didn't love you.
I passed into your life,
or into something else
that resembled it, and where
not all arrive.
Pained and unwilling, but I passed.
Are you happy just the same?

—yes.

LUIGI SOCCI

Luigi Socci was born in 1966 in Ancona, where he lives. Business agent, part-time versifier, performer and poetic (re-)animator, he has written around a hundred poems. Some can be read in *Freddo da palco* (Edizioni d'if, 2009), in “VIII Quaderno italiano di poesia contemporanea” (Marcos y Marcos, 2004) and in *Samizdat* (Castelvecchi, 2005), as well as online and in magazines, or heard at public readings or poetry slams. Some have been translated into Russian, Spanish, English and Serbo-Croat. He is artistic director of “La Punta della Lingua” poetry festival in Ancona, and of the series by the same title, published by Italic Pequod. The four poems translated here by Alessandra Grego and Giovanna Capogrossi are taken from *Il Rovescio del dolore* (Italic Pequod, 2013), with which Socci won the Premio Metauro and the Premio Tirinnanzi-Città di Legnano in 2014.

In my own hand

I write your letter to me
so long as my hand holds out
so long as my fist resists, so long as it clasps
so long as I know Italian.
As a consolation or a retaliation
I write your letter to me:
it's a fabrication.

I write to myself in my own hand
(the writing is not mine)
without a draft
copy, without the need
of waste saliva
to seal or stamp.
I write your letter to me.
Then I'll get you to sign it.

Through the peephole

I keep my own eyes
to watch the shadows on the horizon,
through a diminishing lens,
of many people.

Through this hole
I have seen witnesses for instance
of jehova the cleaning women
the ill-boding emissary
of the tenement manager.
The ex junkie still on drugs
whom I owe a wonderful
fish-scented set of
sponges for the house
I spied on him wondering
–is he coming out or not?–

Through this opening
in the door a pupil-black
spark could pass.

But try to picture
a back shivering familiarly,
shadow among the doormats
shaky at the top of the stairs,
taking off in a glass bubble,
the ones with venice or st peter's
thick with an unctuous air, frictionless.
Hanging from the banister,

convex, unrushed,
indifferent to the tag
with my last name coming off.

A souvenir deprived
of memory and snow
only a foot of
delusive distance away.

Lost in the to-ing and fro-ing
forever as usual
staying and awaygoing
without passes or visas
trotting tumbing disbanding
running late on the timetable of the unexpected.

From the enclosed shelter
I watch her as one shouldn't
confined in safety
on the side you can see from.

But stop and think
how your sight contracts
before something that's too close
try to think of steam
on the peephole.

The unknown traveller

Bathrobes stolen from hotels
Soaps with hairs stuck in them
Train-caused acne breakouts:
unmistakable signs of a journey
more or less.

The notice to mariners was encrypted.
It was clear the place was wrong.

Wind and falling stars
as reference
and fixed point.

It was clear the place was wrong.
Not only the dog
does not recognize
but it is even complicated to
move it away from calf.

It was clear the place was wrong:
unknown guys,
limited spaces,
plenty of risks.
No friends of mine
have such sofas.

As in a moral
with no shadow of a fairy tale
It was clear I was wrong too,
gone to an end
and back.

LUIGIA SORRENTINO

Luigia Sorrentino is a professional journalist and poet. She currently works for RAI television and radio, where she presents “Poesia, di Luigia Sorrentino”, the first RAI poetry blog, for Rai News 24. For several years she has interviewed major foreign and Italian writers and artists for RAI news and television programmes. She has published the following books of poetry: *C'è un padre* (Manni, 2003), *La cattedrale* (Il ragazzo innocuo, 2008), *L'asse del cuore* (Almanacco dello Specchio, 2008) and *La nascita, solo la nascita* (Manni, 2009). Sorrentino has received critical acclaim and has been awarded the Premio Laurentum and the Premio Luciana Notari. Her most recent collection, *Olimpia* (Interlinea, 2013), was published in French in 2015 by Recours Au Pòeme Editeurs, translated by Angèle Paoli. The sequence “The Garden”, translated by Anthony Molino and Gray Sutherland, is taken from *Olimpia*.

The Garden

we gained access from the depths
from the crack surprised
by the sudden light
cast upon us
spreading from clusters of grapes

the warm yellow of lemons enfolded
the song of blazing leaves
the earth,
the names of trees

in single file they walked
simulacra

we bore what we had been
what we not yet were
onto our faces slid
what reveals itself to us
only now
from the grass in the garden feet
made their way to us

beds of young roses
assailed us
the jay's jerky flight

across the vine
dipped into the very opening we'd made
a sure sign
and the sun, the true sun sank
into a random moment of life

into the fields I followed you
quickly you'd exit through the back
the smooth wind sweeping to the lair

here light is, your life
touched
every cell in light
hands raised over the vineyard
in narrow space diligence
patience, content

glimpsing you wasn't always easy
in the arms of the dawning

and so you continued, now
and then, to gesture at the hydrangeas
at the immature blue
at the imprecision,
the flowering callistemon
drank from scarlet stamens
and still the water welcomed it,
earthly

one day from the garden you glimpsed the sea
your hand, perhaps, had opened
your eyes
or maybe the pruning of the trees
on a distant farm

amid the walls of your estate
you'd hid your garden
quickly
from a single path
beneath abundant vines
head bowed I could only follow you
to a turning point
beneath a sudden sky

PATRIZIA VALDUGA

Patrizia Valduga was born in Castelfranco Veneto in 1953 and lives in Milan. She has published *Medicamenta* (Guanda, 1982), *Medicamenta e altri medicamenta* (Einaudi, 1989), *Donna di dolori* (Mondadori, 1991), *Requiem* (Marsilio, 1994), *Corsia degli incurabili* (Garzanti, 1996), *Cento quartine e altre storie d'amore* (Einaudi, 1997), *Prima antologia* (Einaudi, 1998), *Quartine. Seconda centuria* (Einaudi, 2001), *Lezione d'amore* (Einaudi, 2004), and *Il libro delle laudi* (Einaudi, 2012). She has translated John Donne, Molière, Crébillon fils, Mallarmé, Valéry, Shakespeare and Tadeusz Kantor. In 1988 she directed the magazine "Poesia". The poems translated here by Geoffrey Brock are taken from *The FSG Book of Twentieth-Century Italian Poetry*, 2012.

from **One Hundred Quatrains – 1997**

8

By now you know: I need the words.
You'll have to learn the right technique.
It's my sick mind, it feeds on words.
I'm begging you, for God's sake: speak!

17

Hurry, pin my wrists in place,
nail me to your bed like Christ...
comfort me, caress my face...
fuck me when I expect it least.

45

From nerves veins valves ventricles
from tendons cartilage nerves ducts
from follicles nerves ribs clavicles...
from every pore my soul erupts.

47

You liked that? you actually came?
but how? Explain to me. But why?
If you got off on that, you're doomed.
A charge I can't and don't deny.

71

Why is even pleasure a kind of chore?
Why is what sense I have left leaving me?
Come on, explain. Who do you take me for,
your personal doctor of philosophy?

from **Quatrains: Second Hundred - 2001**

107

I have always been the way I am
even when I wasn't the way I am
and none can ever know the way I am
because I am not merely the way I am

122

Him or someone else, what's it to me
if every time I'm lonely afterward?
Alone here with my moribidity...
if there only were such a lovely word...

124

These hemorrhoids, this bleeding from behind...
I'm spilling out of all my holes—yes, all.
My ass is wrecked... (My speech is so refined...)
There ought to be a plumber I could call.

154

You want to die with me, you dumb shit?
Excavate my heart with your shovel?
This is getting to be a hell of a habit.
Want me to swear on my knees? Grovel?

GIAN MARIO VILLALTA

Gian Mario Villalta was born at Visinale di Pasiano (Pordenone) in 1959. After an arts degree at Bologna University he taught in a high school, and has been artistic director of the Pordenonelegge Literary Festival since 2003. He made his first appearance as a poet at a young age in Luciano Anceschi's journal "Il Verri", then in "Studi di Estetica" and "Alfabeta", and was later included in "Nuovi Argomenti", "Testo a Fronte", "Baldus" and "Diverse Lingue". He has published poetry in Venetian dialect: *Altro che storie!* (Campanotto, 1988) and *Vose de Vose/ Voce di voci* (Campanotto, 1995). He has also published collections in Italian: *Vedere al buio* (luca sossella, 2007) and *Vanità della mente* (Mondadori, 2011 – winner of the Premio Viareggio), from which this sequence has been chosen, translated by Richard Dixon. His first book of narrative, *Un dolore riconoscente*, was published by Transeuropa in 2000. This was followed by the novels *Tuo figlio* (Mondadori, 2004 – winner of the Premio Napoli), *Vita della mia vita* (Mondadori, 2006), *Alla fine di un'infanzia felice* (Mondadori, 2013) and *Satyri-con 2.0* (Mondadori, 2014).

Single Act

*To you one single
dedication, ashes that bring
breath, a single act*
Milo De Angelis

I waited for the end of day, and tiredness
before coming to this ground
and I brought no flowers,
for the ground has made these flowers, and takes them.
I brought you my hands, I laid them down
on this square patch of ground, for these hands
our mother made and we cannot return them.

Disappearing like that, grudging
from a house, going off like that
to sully it, leaving all there forever
in everyday disorder.

One last time the new jacket,
put it back in the wardrobe, with a smile: like that
it ought to be, I thought.
A word or two, a “see you later”: like that.

In hospital, the body—smaller
and already elsewhere, another.

Watching television the whole night
for one night, four nights,
to blur the senses, sleep.

The asphalt a few inches.
Soft—everywhere—the road.

“In there, it’s in there,” close it up.
Now the hole, the strokes of a shovel.

I couldn’t.
And the looks, the hands that touch where
strangers never do: the neck,
inside the arm.

Nothing that really speaks of him—
my brother—in that which I've written—
of nothing that I felt—which was nothing.

The word they used is accident.

Blindness in the lives where I was.

The lips taste of ash and sand
in the hollow of sleep, they know how
it all opens and sinks into the night
along with the house
silent.

What is in the stone?
Faraway clouds swim—
hands empty the sky. What is inside
the stone?

They taste of water, the lips, of flatland
and cold milk, expectation, indecipherable writing of
stubble,
they know how to talk to the stone,
how the stone
listens.
No one helps our god
to carry on creation,
no one catches him any more in the depth of evil
with hook-soul: even just one
of these morsels he'd spit back: breath
and clay, black seeds in our dream.
Even the stone grows, a word
calcareous white drip
on white—no one helps our god
still to write—
and the sky, the grass, what
do I have to marvel at.

CESARE VIVIANI

Cesare Viviani was born in Siena in 1947 and has lived in Milan since 1972. After degrees in law and education, he has worked since 1978 in psychoanalytical research and practice. His volumes of poetry include: *L'ostrabismo cara* (Feltrinelli, 1973), *Piumana* (Guanda, 1977), *L'amore delle parti* (Mondadori, 1981), *Merisi* (Mondadori, 1986), *Preghiera del nome* (Mondadori, 1990 – winner of the Premio Viareggio), *L'opera lasciata sola* (Mondadori, 1993), *Una comunità degli animi* (Mondadori, 1997), *Silenzio dell'universo* (Einaudi, 2000), *Passanti* (Mondadori, 2002), *La forma della vita* (Einaudi, 2005), *Credere all'invisibile* (Einaudi, 2009), *Infinita fine* (Einaudi, 2012). His published essays include *Il sogno dell'interpretazione* (Costa & Nolan, 1989), *Il mondo non è uno spettacolo* (Il Saggiatore, 1998) and *L'autonomia della psicanalisi* (Costa & Nolan, 2008). The poems translated here by Richard Dixon are taken from *Preghiera del nome* (Mondadori, 1990).

A citizen sees me sitting

A citizen sees me sitting
on the bench which the first light
turns white, astonished
he stops and wants
me to answer. He says
that I am white in the face.

The time you began to rock the villa

The time you began to rock the villa
and in the ballroom the chandelier and the plaster fell,
furious cries, two guests
Cresci and his friend ended up beneath, dead,
and the wall to the right collapsed torn like paper...
I ran to you, at the end of the park I flew from the door-
way
searching for you in the cottage in your room. You said:
“But how can you love someone who pulls everything
apart.”

They were right to tell us: don't press on any further

They were right to tell us: don't press on any further,
go as far as the large vineyard and turn back.
Look at the things you already know,
the limes in the avenue,
the line of willows along the ditch,
the vegetable patch at the old spring, the wood,
later the houses of San Romolo appear and continue on
as far as the chapel and the rows of vines.
Take the usual footpath, take
a stroll.

Liliana from Corbetta

Liliana from Corbetta was my
first real girlfriend, clumsy I remember once
while kissing me she slipped banged
her head on the table—
I think the Lombard storyteller
tells it better than me—the last great
writer of the nineteen hundreds, I think
you're close but that you lack
decision—
if it's only this I'd like
to take Liliana to India
to the Tibetan monasteries, I remember a film
that described a valley where our doubles live,
and to say to her: "Look Liliana we'll stay here
for the rest of our days".

VALENTINO ZEICHEN

Valentino Zeichen was born in Fiume (now in Croatia) in 1938 and has lived in Rome since 1950. He made his debut as a poet with *Area di rigore* (Cooperativa di scrittori, 1974), with an introduction by Elio Pagliarani, followed by *Ricreazione* (1979) and *Pagine di gloria* (1983) published by Guanda; and *Gibilterra* (1991), *Metafisica tascabile* (1997), *Ogni cosa a ogni cosa ha detto addio* (2000), *Poesie. 1963-2003* (2004), all published by Mondadori. He has also written a novel, *Tana per tutti*, published by Lucarini in 1983, a theatre play *Apocalisse nell'arte* (2000), and a series of radio plays entitled *Matrigna* and *Aforismi d'autunno* (2010). The poems translated here by Richard Dixon are taken from *Poesie. 1963-2014* (Mondadori, 2014).

To ill-posed questions just the same answers

Though boasting plausible
and honourable service
truth does not allow that for too many times
they ask her the very same questions.
And she replies like a glove that on being taken off
lets its inside
be mistaken for the out.
Having to satisfy
in various different ways
the questions of many generations.

The poet

Presumably,
I seem to be a poet of high standing
even though my cardiac insufficiency
has by medical virtue the book called "heart."
I live just above sea level
whereas health, wealth, purity
and winter sports
rack beyond the thousand metres.
And so I oxygenate breathing the air
of alpine paradises
so boldly photographed
by social climbers
despite the perilous difference in altitude.

Poetics

In cutting the nails of my toes
my thoughts flow by analogy
to the form of poetry;
this practice reminds me
of the fine technical skill
of shortening falling lines;
filing the jagged points,
rounding resonant angles
to jarring adjectives.
It's best to keep my nails short
the same is true of verse;
poetry gains in hygiene
and the poet finds a new Calliope
for inspiration: the podiatric muse.

Poet divided

To sublime altitudes
good monads orbit,
market shares soar.
Up there I yearned to climb
purifying the witty ego
to make a rarefied spirit of it.
But a contrary force
has always pushed me back
toward the abyss, among foul
scatological catastrophes.
Between dual tendencies
I am split equally
into two half poets
waiting for reconciliation.
I waver between Petrarch and Rabelais,
between the angel and Pantagruelle.

EDOARDO ZUCCATO

Edoardo Zuccato was born at Cassano Magnago, near Milan, in 1963. He has published four collections of poems in Lombard dialect: *Tropicu da Vissévar* (Crocetti, 1996), *La vita in tram* (Marcos y Marcos, 2001), *I bosch di Celti* (Sartorio, 2008) and *Ulona* (Il Ponte del Sale, 2010). Other poems have appeared in journals and anthologies and in *Opera Minima* (with Bill Tinley, Sotto Voce Press, 1990). He has edited bilingual editions of poems by Romantic and contemporary English authors. He has translated into dialect Virgil's *Eclogues* (*I Bùcòligh*, Medusa, 2007) and, with Claudio Recalcati, the ballads of François Villon (*Biss, lüsèrt e alter galantomm*, Effigie, 2005). *Il dragomanno errante* (ATì, 2012) is an anthology of his translations. He is a lecturer in English literature at the IULM University, Milan. The poems translated here by Bill Tinley are taken from *Tròpicu da Vissévar* (Crocetti, 1996).

Country Pub

Where hours are measured in glasses
and flow lightly up with bitter clouds, and the spirits
lifted in a yellow clock
recognize the moon.

Of the deserted railway along the river

Of the deserted railway along the river
only the sleepers are still in an uneven file,
the spine or skeleton of some pachyderm
extinct for obscure reasons.

On the rails, loaded with sun, lizards creep quickly.

The Gardens of Milan

The gardens of Milan commuters see
are footnotes to a rash of high-rise flats:
tumbledown sheds are roofed with broken doors;
walls consist of galvanize, window frames
of outcast cupboards and bedside tables;
chipped roof-tiles pave the gap-tooth hopscotch paths.
The gardens, though, are only made of garden.

Together, all these scattered plots amount
to what the city looks like in a dream,
our shattered jigsaw puzzle world arranged
again at random. Uninhabited,
save at weekends, these are white-collar fields—
a caricature of the countryside
and of the labourers who shaped them.

Christening

Today, somewhere, they christened a new star,
patient astronomers panning the sky
as if seeking water inside water,
glass within glass, the world inside itself;
and still, behind this daughter-star, they search
for where she came from and who begot her.

So if, in the dark spaces of the mind
something we don't quite understand appears,
we put a name on it; *water, girl, flower*;
as also we name those things that words leave
orphaned, only half-familiar, distant,
things we cannot know; *sorrow, peace, sorrow*.

Finito di stampare nel mese di gennaio 2016
presso la VEAT Litografica snc, Morlupo (RM)
www.veatlitografica.it