Reports after the Fire

SAMPLER

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Pietro De Marchi

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Selected Poems

translated from Italian by
Peter Robinson

Shearsman Books

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INTRODUCTION

PIETRO DE MARCHI AND THE LOMBARD LINE

Evoking W. H. Auden's 'Musée des Beaux Arts' in epigraphs for two of his poems, the Swiss-based Italian poet Pietro De Marchi tests on his pulses aspects of the British poet's insights about human perspectives and pain, and of pain figured in artistic representation. The earlier of these is 'Davanti alla Pinacoteca' ('In Front of the Art Museum'), which uses a snippet to orientate readers by picking out the tiny detail that the suffering about which the old Masters were never wrong in Auden's poem 'takes place / While someone else is eating':

> Sat at a table in the corner bar
> between Brera and Fiori Chiari
> you watch and listen to the daily life.
> There's those who tell their own and others' stories,
> stories of children, of husbands and wives.
> There's those who explain the Golden Section
> because they have an exam this afternoon
> and still they don't get it.
> When a boy goes by dressed a bit like an artist,
> a girl turns and says, shit!, I'm falling in love.
> Her mobile goes off at that moment: it's her mother,
> she's heard it on the radio.
> There's those at another table who are informed:
> yes, bombs, this morning, on the London Underground.
> There's those who arrive only now and know nothing,
> they settle down, glance at the menu, order then
> white wine, melon and Parma ham.

Among the themes that this poem addresses, it might be said, is that in art things cannot be said once and for all, even when they are said definitively by classic poets, for the times move on, and the circumstances change so that it is possible to think that we have overcome the problems

of earlier societies. Yet, if anything, the predicament identified in the Brussels art museum late in 1938 has intensified with the developments in communication technology between then and 5 July 2005. The ploughman in Breughel's painting is both too busy and too far away to see Icarus's legs about to disappear beneath the waves in the middle distance, and there's nothing he could have done to help. Nor could the ship that 'sailed calmly on' have been able to redirect the wind to reach the mythological son of Dedalus and save him from his fate.

But the girl in De Marchi's poem has a mobile phone and finds out about the London bombings the same morning that they happen. How is human feeling and ethical attention to cope with the simultaneous coexistence of cruel, tragic, and pleasurable experiences. Given the short attention spans of contemporary existence, 'distracted from distraction by distraction', as T. S. Eliot put it in *Burnt Norton*, and the globally consumerised demands on individuals in our attention economy, it is down to the poets of every generation to relate themselves both to things past, and passing, and to come, and to remind us in their own terms of whatever it might feel essential for cultures to remember.

We can see this in De Marchi's poems that delicately touch on the fate of the Jews in Europe, and how they rise to the challenges articulated in, for example, Geoffrey Hill's 'September Song' as well as poems by Franco Fortini and Vittorio Sereni, or the poetry and prose of Giorgio Bassani and Primo Levi. Alongside its epigraphs and dedications, De Marchi's poetry is allusively aware of its inheritances and indebtednesses. These it can signal overtly, as in the epigraph to the final section of *Replica*, which is called 'L'estate' and evokes its theme by citing the phrase 'come di là dal valico un ritorno d'estate' ('like a summer's return from the far side of the pass') from Vittorio Sereni's 'Autostrada della Cisa' in *Stella variabile*, or it can be done tacitly, as when in the second section of 'Centerville, Iowa' (not included in this selection), immediately after the mention of Ellis Island, silently De Marchi cites 'con tutta quell'America davanti' ('with all of that America before them') which appears in the third part of 'Lavori in corso' ('Works in Progress') from that same poet's 1981 collection.

As we know from Walter Jackson Bate's *The Burden of the Past and the English Poet* (1970) and its psychologically agonistic successor *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (1973) by Harold Bloom, being a late arrival in a distinguished tradition is also a predicament. De Marchi's

poetry manifests at least three effective ways of overcoming the potentially silencing burden and angst of having such distinctive forebears as Eugenio Montale, Vittorio Sereni and Luciano Erba. These are a willingness to learn from predecessors, and the cultural memory that this requires, a readiness to acknowledge debts and to celebrate them with gratitude, and a determination to draw upon and articulate one's own intuitions, insights, and materials – which are inevitably those of his generation in its times. It is thus that, in the second poem that alludes to Auden's 'Musée des Beaux Arts', the background details from *Winter Landscape with Massacre of the Innocents* by Marten Van Cleve also 'will want to say something'.

Pietro De Marchi was born in Seregno, near Milan, in 1958. His family has roots in both Lombardy and the Veneto, and while his father was, as poems selected and translated here indicate more than once, a voracious reader and the poet grew up in a house of books, the employment of his male relatives included coal-mining and working for Pirelli, whose factory, the Bicocca, near where they lived, included an entire neighbourhood of Milan constructed to house its workers. De Marchi's familiarity with the two great classics of the Italian educational system, Dante's *Divina commedia* and Manzoni's *I promessi sposi*, as well as with the strong and unbroken tradition of Italian poetry from Leopardi to the present day began early and led him towards literature as the subject for his university degree.

After graduating from the University of Milan he crossed the border into Switzerland, going to Zurich to study for his doctorate. Since 1984 he has lived and worked in that most international of Swiss cities, teaching Italian literature at the university there, as well as giving classes at Neuchâtel and Bern. These briefest details of the poet's biography help explain some of the epigraphs and dedications that orientate a reader as regards his poetic affections and loyalties; and they might be described, with a certain equivocal irony, as prolonging and extending the Swiss branch of the *Linea Lombarda*, the Lombard Line of poets. But before we get to what such a set of allegiances might mean, there are also implications to be drawn from the poet growing up in Northern Italy in the second half of the 1950s.

Those born around the middle of the twentieth century in the industrial cities of Europe experienced forms of a society on the point of rapidly disorientating transition, and found themselves on the juvenile side of the first generation gap, and certainly the first gulf between the values of parents and children that was given that name. Yet they also came

to consciousness, and this was still true for those born in 1958 in Italy, before the so-called economic miracle had gathered speed to the extent of radically transforming the environment in which they and their parents were living.

Their grandparents will have been born towards the end of the nineteenth century. Their parents had grown up during the interwar years, which in Italy meant the totalitarian fascist state of Benito Mussolini. They were teenagers not in the swinging Sixties, but in the 'anni di piombo', the leaden and politically ossified years of the 1970s; and they experienced the Cold War not so much as a realization of the threat of nuclear destruction, but as a steady state in which nothing appeared likely to change. They experienced the Cold War as the normal. Not only were they able to glimpse in Italy, through their grandparental generations, an almost pre-industrial world, but they were surrounded by signs not merely of the fascist decades, but also of two world wars, and, in Italy, a brutal and highly politicized civil war as well.

Yet the dates given for the poems in Pietro De Marchi's first collection, 1990–1999, suggest a further irony, for it would seem that the poet only began completing work he was willing to collect *after* the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, and in the year of the fall of the Soviet Union. That's to say, he emerges as a poet at the very moment that the ideological, cultural and political framework of the post-war 'settlement' was undergoing a transformative change, ushering in the much more confused and confusing states of affairs that we are now obliged to imagine as the normal. One of the first signs of this change to be felt in Italy was a strong sensation during the 1990s that as the world was changing so, at the same time, historical memory appeared to be suffering a strange bout of amnesia. It is the consciousness of such a strategic, tactical and accidental forgetting for those in this particularly betwixt-and-between generation that goes some way to explaining the repertory of impulses and motivations shaping the poems presented and translated here.

Drawing attention to aesthetic allegiances through epigraphs and dedications is already a way of remembering things, but in De Marchi's case those very allegiances speak to the generational gaps and intermittences sketched above. The *Linea Lombarda* was the name given to a 1952 anthology of poetry edited by Luciano Anceschi. It included at least two poets, Luciano Erba and Giorgio Orelli, from whom De Marchi has learned much and to whom he as written tributes – the latter

of these having written the preface to his first collection, *Parabole smorzate* (1999). Here's how I attempted to characterize the Lombard Line in the introduction to Erba's *The Greener Meadow: Selected Poems* (2006):

> Anceschi identified and presented a grouping of poets based in or around Milan with roots in the Luino-Como-Varese 'Lake District' of northern Italy. He saw them as sharing a poetry of objects, of understatement, irony, and self-criticism, which included social commentary and cultural commitment – but only if mediated through a sceptical grid of humanistic intelligence and aesthetic detachment.

However grateful for the attention the anthologized poets might have been (Roberto Rebora, Giorgio Orelli, Nelo Risi, Renzo Modesti, Luciano Erba) and how happy to have been grouped as exemplifying 'la poesia dell'oggetto', their independent heterogeneity and quietly pointed irony, qualities that De Marchi has adapted for his own themes, is exemplified in Erba's short later poem which takes the 'Linea' of this title to be a railway line, and situates himself as if between two Milanese stations:

LOMBARD LINE

Prejudices, commonplaces I adore
I like to think that there are
always girls with clogs in Holland
that they play the mandolin at Naples
that just a bit anxious you await me
when I change between Lambrate and Garibaldi.

Erba is doubtless right that literary genealogies are inclined to encapsulate prejudice and commonplace, and Vittorio Sereni, a definitively emblematic poet of Milan and the Italian lakes, ruled himself out of his friend's anthology for such reasons; but the extent and amorphousness of this grouping can be sensed from its Italian Wikipedia entry, one which divides the *Linea Lombarda* into four generations, with the poets from Anceschi's anthology drawn from the third and fourth, and it places at its head none other than Alessandro Manzoni, born in 1785. Thus in talking of this line or tradition we might be referring to a strand in

mid-twentieth-century Italian poetry, or a cultural ambience, what the Wikipedia entry calls 'a typically Lombard *Weltanschauung*'.

Identifying the roots of the former, that strand in modern and contemporary Italian poetry, does, though, connect it with the continuance and evolution of a major vein in the corpus. Sereni, remembering Giuseppe Ungaretti at the time of his death in 1970, not only called himself the older poet's 'son' but quoted some of the last words Ungaretti said to him about preferring Milan to Rome; and Sereni expresses his initial surprise at this, only to recall the early poems from *Allegria* set in the city, lines which, he says, 'drew me, as a youth, to his poetry'. Again we find ourselves on the city's transport system, but this time on an evening tram:

> Even tonight will pass
>
> This loneliness going around
> shadow of the tram-wires rocking
> on the damp tarmac
>
> I'm watching the heads of tram drivers
> half-asleep
> nodding off

This brief imagistic urban poetry that wrings the neck of eloquence with its lightly unrhymed free-verse has had its influence on almost everyone, but especially on poets who know what the trams look like and have walked over that 'damp tarmac' or under the 'tram-wires rocking'. The earliest section of Ungaretti's first collection, where this poem appears, also contains pieces set in the Paris of Apollinaire's Cubists, and this is the precise moment when the vanguard experiments in French poetry and painting make their way across the Alps, continuing a strain of Francophile influence deriving from the exploits of Napoleon at the Bridge of Lodi in 1796 and recreated in Stendhal's Milan at the opening of *The Charterhouse of Parma*. This Francophile thread in Milanese poetry can also be traced in De Marchi's numerous pieces set in Paris or along the Seine.

In his early 'Garden Concert', Sereni may be holidaying in Luino, but his thoughts are inflected not only by Mussolini's war in Abyssinia, but also, thanks to Luino's frontier railway station, that moment across the entire continent:

At this hour
they're watering gardens all over Europe.
Hoarse trumpet of spray
gathers warlike children,
echoes in sounds of water
far as this bench's shade.

Thus, in that first stanza, that specifically Lombard *Weltanschauung* turns out to be unusually European and in that might only reflect the changing fortunes of Milan and environs before unification, a city governed at one time or another by the Spanish Bourbons, the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and both Revolutionary and Imperial France. Just so, in 'Qualtieri solari', Erba can announce that 'it seemed to me I was in Europe' or in another poem about his home town that calls it by its German name, 'Mailand', he concludes by alluding to the Germanic loan-words for doughnuts and pastries, and confessing:

truth was going home myself I'd be wearing
a heavy odour of *krapfen* and *kipfeln*
red cushions and yellow-black trams
I'd be climbing stairs without elevator
of ordinary people, of ordinary Europe

Erba's poetry is a preeminent example of how to address the crisis of subject matter, in which writing about yourself is selfishly egoistical and writing about others is appropriative. He addressed the final frontier of *terra incognita* in Italian poetry by concentrating on the lineaments of private and family life. The family is of great importance in Italy, of course, and it is perhaps unsurprising in this light that there should be a school of family therapy associated with Milan. Italian poetry has distinctly more poems in which men write poems on their mothers, as well as on their fathers, as is more frequent in Anglophone poetic contexts. The concretion, the objects, of the *Linea Lombarda* then find their natural focus in the minutiae of domestic situations – within which the understatement and self irony function to mediate complex feelings of attachment and dependence crossed with their opposites.

A second of Sereni's father figures, one pictured by the poet angrily going from one Milan square to another in the aftermath of the 1948

elections, was Umberto Saba (1883–1957), and in his work a different strand of lightness was wedded to a more formal verse, as in his 'Portrait of my Little Girl' from *Cose leggere e vaganti* (1920), whose title phrase derives from its final line:

> My little girl with a ball in her hand,
> with large eyes the colour of sky
> and her summer outfit: 'Daddy,'
> she tells me, 'I want to go out with you today.'
> And I was thinking: of the many apparitions
> admired in the world, I know very well
> to which I'd compare my little girl.
> Certainly to foam, to the seaside foam
> whitening waves, to that blue wake
> emerging from roofs and the wind disperses;
> likewise to the clouds, the indifferent clouds
> being made and unmade in clear sky
> and to other light and roaming things.

Saba's *Canzoniere* initiated the intimist and domestic thread in Italian poetry, too, with its many poems dedicated to feelings for his wife and daughter. In an essay on De Marchi's work reprinted as an afterword to *Der Schwan und die Schaukel / Il cigno e l'altalena* (2009), Fabio Pusterla notes the presence of Saba not only in a shared attachment to a lightness of touch, but also in the direct allusion to 'La capra' ('The Nanny-goat') in the sonnet 'At the Corner of Freiestrasse' where early in the last century Saba could refer to the goat's 'Semitic face' but, after all that has happened, De Marchi 'Non puoi dire: semita'. He can't use the word, although he is able to cite it in this negating form.

Urban isolation and fond feeling, a lightness of lyrical occasion and technique, a certain self-consciousness or self-mockery, and a commitment to embodying the lineaments of an occasion, often with political overtones, but without elaborating its significance too far beyond the moment itself – all of these features can be found too in 'The Black Trout' by Eugenio Montale, a tacitly ironic love poem set in Reading (England), to which De Marchi also alludes:

Curved on the evening water
graduates in Economics,
Doctors of Divinity,
the trout sniffs at and clears off,
its carbuncular flash
is a ringlet of yours undone
in the bath, a sigh rising
from your office catacombs.

But I have said that De Marchi is a poet from the Swiss branch of the Lombard Line, and to appreciate what this might mean we need to remember how close, for the lake poets of northern Italy, the border with Switzerland is, and how, to the north of the country, not only do you have the German-speaking Südtirol on the southern side of the border, but the Italian-speaking cantons of the Swiss Federation, of Ticino, over it to the north. This border is the literal frontier metaphorically extended, with the help of Conrad's *The Shadow Line* and Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms*, in Sereni's first collection *Frontiera* (1941); and while its poet was a POW in North Africa between 1943 and 1945, his configuration of that border would be experienced as a site of real escape.

Just as Renzo, the hero of Manzoni's novel, had done in attempting to avoid capture after his misfortunes in Milan by passing into the Veneto in *I promessi sposi*, so would Franco Fortini and Luciano Erba, among many others, cross from the Republic of Salò into internment in Switzerland, a border crossing whose consequences figure in a number of their poems. Meanwhile, in the person of Giorgio Orelli (1921–2013), born in Canton Ticino, we have a Lombard Line mentor poet who was in fact Swiss, and whose collected poems De Marchi has edited for the Oscar series published by Mondadori. The first two stanzas from his early 'In the Family Circle' sketch a traditional context from which it may make no sense to flee but many would have to leave, figured by the returning dead:

A funerary light, one quenched,
re-freezes the conifers
with their bark enduring beyond death,
and all is still in this shell
hollowed out tenderly by time:
in the family circle
from which it makes no sense to flee.

Within a silence so well-known
the dead are more alive than the living:
from cleaned rooms smelling of camphor
they come down by trap-doors in warm rooms
replenished with wood, adjust their own portraits,
revisit the stall to look once more
at the brown, the pure-bred animals.

Orelli concludes: 'And me, to a more /discreet love of life I am restored…'. The senior poet characterized De Marchi's work as distinguished by its 'arguzia' (pointed wit) in his preface to *Parabole smorzate*. The multilingual, multi-cultural border territory of a Milanese poet who has lived since 1984 in Swiss-German-speaking Zurich is the landscape of Pietro De Marchi's poetry, and it makes him a poet intensely conscious of displacements, language differences, and how they mark a person as inescapably connected to or not belonging in a place, a place where Swiss or Swiss-based Italophone poetry is often published in bilingual editions with German translations *en face*.

Of course, the linguistic differences inevitably revealed in a translation can also be inspiring, and can help to put us back in touch with those who are dearest to us, as here in 'Disillusion and Meter', the first of De Marchi's poems I translated, challenged by the fact that because the metrics of English and Italian are quite distinct, both in how they work and how they are named, the final line of his sonnet would have to be transposed into differently self-referential terms if it were to make sense. The starting point for De Marchi's poem is his reading some words of Montale's from his late poem 'A tarda notte' (Late at Night) translated by Harry Thomas ('Now after many years the other voice / doesn't remember and maybe thinks I'm dead'):

At Heathrow, in the airport,
to trick away the wait
I read a Montale in English translation,
and back to mind comes the other summer

when my father asked me on the phone
if any post had arrived,
but not stuff of no importance to him,
electricity bills and bank statements.

'Postcards, for instance?'
No, sorry, I was saying, there's nothing,
and so he pronounced that phrase

which now I repeat to myself without let-up
('You see they think that I'm already dead'),
a perfect pentameter with second-foot caesura.

Here many of De Marchi's themes and affections characteristically coincide. There is: a tacit crossing of borders and language barriers in the Heathrow waiting area; an encounter with a familiar source of inspiration, but in the estranging form of an English translation; a *memento mori* in the form of a much-loved father's words, which may, or may not, be recalling the Nobel laureate's lines, words concerning a simple domestic incident; all these focused upon the role of the accuracy of poetic sound-sense structures in forming what Robert Frost famously called 'a stay against confusion'.

I have mentioned these Italian poets, and cited a few of my translations from them, to suggest the kinds of literary tradition from which De Marchi sets out, and to which his work has already begun to return. Making a large selection from his work available to an Anglophone readership is to suggest that his poetry deserves to find a home in that larger international heritage to which he has also dedicated himself in interview. To my mind, here is a poet who has recognized the challenges for a writer of his generation who finds himself in a globalising world of accelerated change and ever shortening memory span, of information overload and chronic lack of time to think and feel truly. His poetry exemplifies how a sensibility and a conscience can create authentic art out of such pressures and contradictions, offering spaces in which we are once more invited to both think and feel as truly as we are able.

NOTE ON THE TRANSLATIONS

As in my earlier books of translated poems, and as argued for in *Poetry & Translation: The Art of the Impossible* (2010), the aim here has been to combine fidelity to the original poems with a commitment to make poems and that work in English. The idea of fidelity in translation, as in other things in life, requires the acceptance and accommodation of differences. As I argue in that critical study of poetry translation practices, this art, which has been described as to all intents and purposes impossible (not least because the musics of languages are so irreproducibly different), is not ruled out because of those impossibilities but challenged to achieve what it can within those defining conditions – at whose heart is the acceptance of the irreducible incompatibilities of other languages and poetic traditions. It is after all not the easy similarities, but the intractable differences that prompt and inspire the translator of poetry to make such forays into 'the impossible'.

In his 2019 essay 'Translation and Tradition, and the Myth of Untranslatability', Pietro De Marchi reminds us of words by Luciano Erba in his Introduction to *Dei cristalli naturali e altri versi tradotti (1950–1990)*, where he described translation as 'above all a great recycling operation on materials supplied by the tradition' and De Marchi adds that whoever 'wants really to translate in a language cannot fail to take account of the tradition expressed in that language', underlining Erba's invitation 'not to refuse, rather to embrace', like an 'additional perfection', echoes, resonances, inlays or even thefts. 'We are', De Marchi continues, 'in that double game of losses and compensations about which Franco Fortini has spoken', explaining that –

> if the intertextual aura that encircles a text is almost inevitably lost in the target language, it can nonetheless be compensated for, at least in part, with the assistance of this target language's literary tradition. But the recourse to the tradition or more strictly to the literary culture tied to the language in which one translates is obviously welcomed even there where it is not, in the text to translate, a recognizable or declared hypertext.

De Marchi's essay was first published in a 2019 collection he edited with colleagues from the University of Zurich and called, bilingually, *Zwischen den Sprachen / Entre les langues* (Between the Languages). The import of his final point here appears to be that – thanks to the interrelations of languages, the histories of exchange and engrafting between them, and, equally, perhaps, the tendency of writers to be on the whole outward looking and inspired by elsewheres – that even where there is no obvious presence of the target language's literary culture in the original text, still, it is welcomed *in potentia* by means of the mutually recognizing and inter-defining co-existence of language cultures in the world.

Though I have never quite had the confidence to assert as much myself, until now, that is, in responding to the act of translating those words of De Marchi's into English, my own writings on this subject, gathered in *Poetry & Translation: The Art of the Impossible*, which includes a chapter on implications in Osip Mandelstam's nostalgia for a world culture, an idea first formulated in the word *Weltliteratur* by Goethe, I believe, are in full accord with this profession of De Marchi's, while the presentation of this selection of his poems does its best to live up to these principles. It does so by presenting the poem in an *en face* bilingual edition, so that the linguistic inspiration of the originals, their thematic, contextual, and linguistic bindings and structures, may be appreciated either alone, or in light of the solutions that these promptings have inspired in the English translations that face them.

When translating these poems, I have done my best, in light of those comments above by Erba and Fortini, both poets I was lucky enough to meet and have translated, simultaneously to attend to the poetic promptings of the second language and, as much as humanly possible, to cast the draft renderings of the originals into rhythmical units inevitably derived from experience of poetry in English; while, when revising, I have attempted to enhance the poetic qualities of the translation even when remaining faithful to as many aspects of the original as I was able. In this way I have hoped to produce a book that effectively represents the qualities of Pietro De Marchi's poetry for those that can appreciate the originals, for those that can make out the originals with the help of translations that cleave closely to the shape and structure of the work on the left hand pages, and for those whose sense of this poetry has to be grasped at the remove of my translations.

Even where I have chosen to render lines, words and phrases differently, I have benefitted greatly from the versions of De Marchi's work in Marco Sonzogni's translation for *Here and not Elsewhere: Selected Poems 1990–2010* (Toronto: Guernica Editions, 2012). I have also found assistance and confirmation for intuitions and English possibilities from the German versions by Christoph Ferber published in *Der Schwan und die Schaukel* / *Il cigno e l'altalena: Gedichte und Prosastücke 1990–2008* (Zurich: Limmat Verlag 2009) and in *Das Orangenpapier* / *La carta delle arance* (Zurich: Limmat Verlag, 2018).

Finally, I would like to thank the poet Pietro De Marchi for his friendship and support while working on this project, and his wife Antonella for her good will and hospitality. These translations would not have come about had I not encountered by chance a copy of *Das Orangenpapier* / *La carta delle arance* in a bookshop in Winterthur, Switzerland, in September 2018, for which opportunity I am indebted to the hospitality of my elder daughter Matilde and to Raphael Roten. My wife, Ornella Trevisan, has, as ever, been patience itself in helping with my efforts, and, last but by no means least, there has been the perpetual challenge of my younger daughter Giulia's perfect pitch and multilingual capacities to help me keep my feet on the ground – which is surely where a poet's ought to try and be, after all.

Peter Robinson
December 2021

DA

PARABOLE SMORZATE

(1999)

FROM

STUNNED PARABLES

(1999)

SAMPLER

PARABOLE SMORZATE

Se l'avversario è più forte che mai
se con urlo strozzato si avventa sulla palla
e affonda di diritto
e incrocia col rovescio a due mani
tu non lo assecondare nel gioco a fondo campo
perché alla lunga ti sfiata ti spompa e alla fine
non avrai scampo un suo passante
ti infilerà

Tu invece rompi il suo ritmo
smorza la palla liftala dàlle
più effetto che puoi
fa' che ricada appena al di là della
rete.

STUNNED PARABLES

If the opponent's stronger than ever
if he attacks the ball with strangled cry
and buries a forehand
and responds with two-hand crosscourt
don't indulge him with a baseline game
because in the long run he'll wind deflate you
you'll not in the end escape his passing shot
it'll get you

Rather you break his rhythm
you stun the ball you lift it give it
such spin as you can
making it drop down just over
the net.

CAPRICCIO

Si fa di celluloide il mondo fuori,
voci doppiate, grida soffocate
dallo schermo di vetro…
È un istante, poi tutto

si appiattisce, ripiombi
nel sonno, nel *sueño*…
Il mondo si dilegua in verticale:
e allora gufi, pipistrelli,

un cane che è un gatto
e altri effetti speciali, prevalenza del nero.
Ma la mano che ti scuote, la voce

che ti chiama («Su dài, dobbiamo scendere»)
è la mano del mondo e la sua voce
vera.

CAPRICCIO

It's made of celluloid, the world outside,
dubbed voices, suffocated cries
from the glass screen…
A blink it is, then all

is flattened, you tumble
back into sleep, in the *sueño*…
The world's dispersed in vertical:
and then bats, owls,

a dog that's a cat
and other special effects, predominantly black.
But the hand that shakes you, the voice

calling you ('Come on now, we've got to get off')
is the world's hand and its own true
voice.

NON LONTANO DA DOVE

la guerra non è un gioco,
ragazzi coi fucili
giocano alla guerra.

Uno è più svelto a sparare, fa fuoco
con la bocca ed esulta trionfante:
«Adesso tu sei morto, cadi a terra!»

Ma l'altro non s'arrende. Dice che non vale.
Morire? Non gli va. Neanche per finta,
neanche per gioco.

NOT FAR FROM WHERE

war isn't a game
children with rifles
are playing at war.

Quicker on the trigger, one fires
with his mouth and triumphantly cries:
'You're dead now, fall on the ground!'

But the other won't surrender. Says it doesn't count.
Die? He won't. Not even pretending,
not even in play.

CON VALENTINA, DALLE ANATRE

I

L'hanno vista arrivare
col sacchetto di plastica
e a gara tutte insieme (tranne *Fritzli*)
le sono corse incontro sulla neve.
È la nonna delle anatre:
è lei che ha dato il nome a *Fritzli*,
l'anatra che zoppica.

II

Sì, zoppica, lo vedi anche da te:
bisogna che qualcuno se ne occupi.
Se vola non si nota,
e neppure se nuota,
ma ora sul laghetto
c'è una crosta di ghiaccio
e due dita di neve.

III

Ricordi, l'anno scorso,
quell'anatra che aveva il becco storto?
Spezzavi il pane in pezzi piccolissimi,
poi le andavi *vicino vicinissimo*,
vincendo la paura.

WITH VALENTINA, AT THE DUCKS

I

They saw her approach
with the plastic bag
and competing all together (minus *Fritzli*)
they ran towards her on the snow.
She's the ducks' grandmother:
it's she who gave the name to *Fritzli*,
the duck that has a limp.

II

Yes, he limps, you see it too:
someone needs to care for him.
If he's flying you don't notice,
and neither if he swims
but on the small lake now
there's a crust of ice
and two fingers of snow.

III

Remember, a year ago,
that duck who had a twisted beak?
You broke the bread into tiniest pieces,
then you went up *near*, *so very near*,
conquering your fear.