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Edition Ten, April 2022

THE Italian RIVETER

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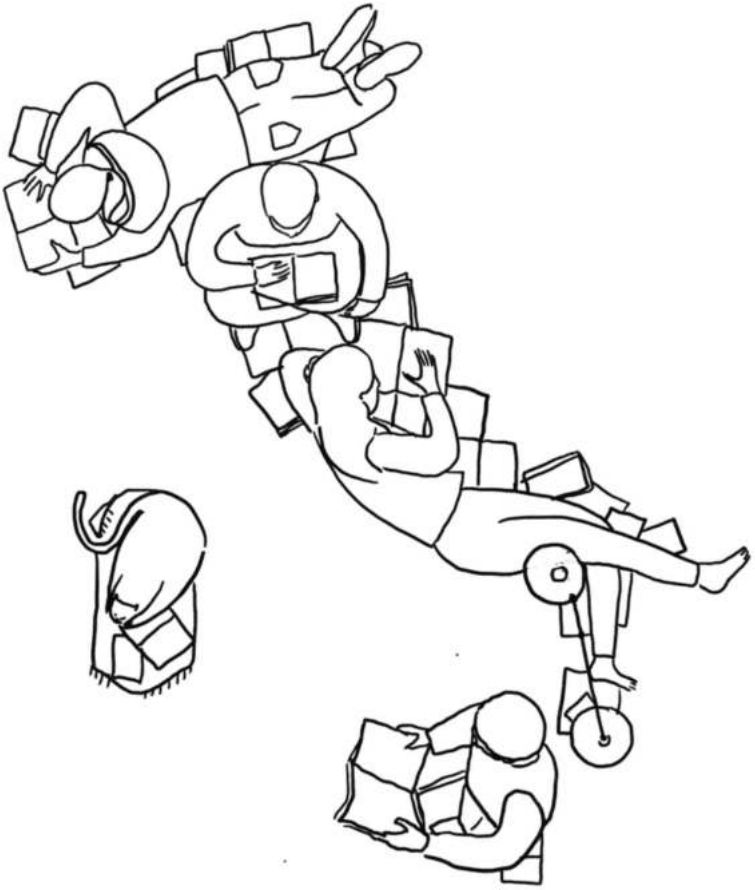

The Italian Riveter, Edition Ten, April 2022
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CRISTINA ALI FARAH

ALTARS

Translated from the Italian by Clarissa Botsford
First published in *La Repubblica*, 2007

It's nearly sunset. The Altar of the Fatherland is bathed in the dying rays of sun, and the seagulls circle above like clouds of cherubs. Maria climbs the white steps of the monument, feeling like her bare feet are walking on icing sugar, while the rush-hour traffic swarms around Piazza Venezia below her. She keeps going, past the guards standing like statues, her dress too tight, untied at the back, her imprisoned breasts bursting with milk. The days have gone by slowly, trying to remember how to make biscuits like she learned to as a child. Remembering simple ways to keep your hands busy while your body recoups energy.

Sieving the flour, freshly washed hands crumbling the butter, she remembers how her mother would sit her up on the marble table at work, to keep an eye on her while she made pastries for hour after interminable hour. Her opaque eyes, her gaunt profile: just a few more months and you'll see, they'll let me work a little less, then we can go to the park or to the cinema whenever we want.

Maria would smile back and work on her little piece of dough. She was keeping her mother company and didn't want to worry her. How did she do it? That woman with her big hands and ramrod back, she hadn't been scared to leave her country and tell everyone, she's my daughter and she has to stay with me. She could have chosen an easier life, let Maria grow up with her grandparents and cousins while she started her life in the city. But no, she decided that being cramped together was better than being apart.

Here she is, that daughter, now grown tall, climbing up the Altar at sundown. Maybe the last portion of milky light will fill the hollow space she feels inside, right here in her middle, from her ribs to her hips, as if a root has been ripped out of the ground.

It all started the day she stopped at the pharmacy in Via Marmorata to buy a strip test, and said to the pharmacist, it's for a friend, even though she'd never see the man again. And anyway, thinking about it, what does a pharmacist care if a girl dressed like a sugared almond buys a pregnancy test? Maria

walked along with the packet gripped tight in her hand and thought about where she could rip it open. She walked towards the pyramid, which seemed to grow bigger before her eyes, its white tip thrust into the sky. She couldn't wait until she got home, so she decided to use the spotless basement bathrooms at the station, the ones you needed a one-euro coin to get into. There she could stare at the lines on the stick for as long as she liked, the coloured bands getting wider while the little root began to grow.

The growth was so insubstantial that she couldn't imagine it. Maria banged her head against the wall, hoping somehow that the presence inside her would dematerialise. She banged so hard the attendant was worried. Are you okay, miss? Don't knock down that door.

She walked away thinking, yes, this is happening, after everything I've cost my mother, this is the last thing I need, to get pregnant. No, she'll never find out, she's three hundred kilometres away, that should be far enough, and anyway, she always has so much work to do, if she doesn't see me for a while, she won't get suspicious.

She walked along the pavement, and, suddenly, a little girl shot out of a store right in front of her. Maria managed to grab her just in time, before she went hurtling into the traffic, and the girl's terrified mother, hard on her heels, gasped, thank you, thank God it was you she bumped into.

A nurse goes from bed to bed, handing out suppositories and saying, in her rasping voice, remember once this is inside you there's no going back.

She felt the hollow space fill up with gratitude, and a kind of itchy shiver went up her spine, a quiver of hesitation, thinking how great it would be to travel three hundred kilometres with a surprise like this and tell her, Mum, I'm going to have a baby, just like you did.

She cradled herself in these thoughts, and the idea grew in her mind, the idea of a little girl, dressed in lace, with tiny little braids, the ones only she knew how to plait.

At the end of the day, she still felt full of tenderness, so she got her best dress ready and wrapped her thin muslin veil around her head. Everybody said she looked like she was going to a wedding when she wore it.

Maria was the pearly white colour that women emanate when they are expecting, but he didn't take any interest in what

he saw, they had just started going out and now she was here with all these requests, where's your brain? How can you even be sure it's mine? There was no point in talking about love, she knew that much at least.

A few days later she went to the hospital, circling the building until she garnered the strength to go in. She said to the doctor who asked her, yes, I'm sure, a woman on her own is not enough for a baby, nobody knows that better than me, my mother took me away from her home country and ruined her life by working too hard, as if keeping me by her side was enough for a daughter, and look at the result, this is what I've turned into.

Yes, she is sure, she says the next time she has to meet the doctor, yes, she is still sure, though she is crying desperately on the doctor's immaculate white gown as she watches the delicate little shoot planted on the ultrasound screen.

The morning of her final appointment she goes into hospital with an empty stomach and sees how many women are in the same situation as her. A nurse goes from bed to bed, handing out suppositories and saying, in her rasping voice, remember once this is inside you there's no going back.

There's no going back is a cutting remark, especially for a girl dressed like a sugared almond, who has grown up making coconut biscuits for her dollies. Dollies she imagined to be like her little girl, dressed in lace, with tiny little braids, the ones only she knew how to plait.

This fantasy makes her get up and run out of the ward, her hand brushing along the plaster wall, it doesn't matter what happens, we'll take our time, delay things. It's true, I've never done anything special, but today I have, today I feel important.

She returned to her routine, and the weeks went by. Getting up early to open the café where she worked, she was surprised to find she enjoyed the smell of freshly baked croissants, which reminded her of her mother, and she was surprised to find she liked licking off the four-leaved clover design of milky froth her colleague topped her cappuccinos with.

Everything went smoothly, her only problem was the rent she always found hard to pay at the end of the month, and now that she was nearly seven months gone it was maybe time to slow down, her legs swollen and her breasts starting to drip, it's colostrum the doctor says, it will turn into milk.

Maria is slim and she dresses like a wedding favour filled with sugared almonds so she can hide her pregnancy for as

long as she can. The days slip by, and she keeps the secret tight inside her.

Maybe she would have gone on dreaming of her porcelain doll if it hadn't been for a trip with her friend to the seaside: Maria leaning over the railings in Ostia, staring at the waves. She had felt she needed some salty air, full of iodine, the desire releasing her thoughts. Leaning right over the railings she was close enough to feel that she could lick some of the foam, breathe in its hope.

At that moment her friend said to her, you'll never make it on your own, don't you realise what it means to bring up a daughter without any support? Maria saw herself asleep on the cold marble pastry table and thought, all my mother's love for me has not been enough to warm me up, but I'll succeed in giving my daughter the life she deserves.

And this is why, against everyone's advice, she did what she did.

This is why, after seeing that spark of white light, instead of saying what everyone says, instead of saying I want to see her, she signed the piece of paper that gives children a better life than one's own.

Now she is climbing the white steps with her breasts groaning with milk, and if she's crying it's because of the destiny she has not been able to live up to. She thinks that from up high she'll be able to keep watch over her little girl, and she thinks that someday, the world being what it is, she will just happen to recognise her daughter skipping in her little lace dress up to the very top of the Altar.

Cristina Ali Farah
Translated by Clarissa Botsford

THE RIVETER

WHY ITALY?

THE RIVETER
FEATURES

WHY AN ITALIAN RIVETER?

by ROSIE GOLDSMITH
Riveter-in-Chief

Italian literature is enjoying 'a moment', to echo the words of Jhumpa Lahiri, the Italophile author, translator and academic, in an exclusive interview for this magazine. There are several more exclusives in this, our tenth Riveter *magazine, which sets out to reflect this 'moment': the excitement and success surrounding Italian prose and poetry in translation and publishing today.*

As with all *Riveters*, it's also a reflection of my personal crusade to promote European literature in the UK; and here it's specifically a reflection of my passion for Italy and Italian, which is why Jhumpa's journey touches me deeply. Italian has 'completely transformed me', she tells me; 'It's circulating inside of me in a way that I no longer question it.' Jhumpa is herself a linguistic phenomenon. Born in Britain, she grew up in the US, won the Pulitzer Prize for fiction, taught herself Italian and today writes only in Italian. You can read all about her life-changing encounter with Italian in this magazine, where she tackles the big question: *Why Italian?*

What is Italian literature? Is there such a thing as a national literature or language? These are the eternal questions, of course, for all of us and not just for Italians. They've been posed ever since the father of modern-day Italian, the Tuscan poet Dante Alighieri, stormed the language barricades seven hundred years ago; ever since nineteenth-century Italian unification promoted a standard language for its disunited peoples; ever since fascism and the Second World War politicised Italian even further; ever since Italy became a republic and proclaimed new literary and linguistic freedoms and truth-telling, which are still alive today. The problem – or, as we Italophiles see it, the beauty – is that Italian literature is so varied, something that's mirrored in our glorious cover illustration – Italy as a multi-coloured boot of booklovers. Their homes are the many villages, towns and cities of Italy's rugged mountains,

graceful valleys, glittering lakes, sun-baked islands, coastal hotspots and volcanic plains: eight thousand different municipalities, each one with its own cuisine, culture, dialect and literature. Howard Curtis – one of several distinguished translators appearing in this magazine – points out that, 'Italian writers are sometimes accused of *campanilismo*, of sticking rigidly to their own little patch of territory, setting their works consistently in their own region, town or village', a trait which, to another featured author, Diego Marani, is both a blessing and a curse. He writes that self-referential 'Italian localism' is at odds with Italy's 'multiplicity' and 'great openness – the universal spirit of its tradition'.

Thirty years ago, when I first started reporting from Italy for the BBC, its preoccupations were with the Mafia, Catholicism, political corruption, sexual imbroglios and the north-south divide, all of which preoccupied its writers too – themselves often journalists. These issues have not gone away, but Italy today is perhaps even more complex, its literature even richer, less introspective and more outward-looking. In her introduction to *The Penguin Book of Italian Short Stories* (also featured in our magazine), Jhumpa Lahiri suggests that the Italian novel (as opposed to the indigenous short story) 'is the interloper, the imported genre', heavily influenced by Europe and looking both inside and outside Italy. I love this idea, because that is what's happening now: more Italian novels (80% of new publications in Italy are novels) are being written or rediscovered, translated and read in English today. Historical, family, psychological, fantasy, graphic and crime novels – they are addressing themes that concern us all: immigration, racism, gender, identity, climate change and mental health. Italian literature is a grand archipelago of loosely linked literary islands, and our series of 'Postcards from …', scattered across this magazine, go some way towards illustrating that diversity.

'*Diversità*' is not a word you hear enough in the Italian book world. Since its launch in 2017, *The Riveter* has prided itself in being all-embracing and category-defying, but this time I feel compelled to draw your attention to the outstanding writing of the 'New Italians', including Cristina Ali Farah, author of our opening short story, translated by Clarissa Botsford. In her follow-up essay for us, Clarissa describes the rise of 'migrant literature' by the 'new' or the 'blended Italians', while simultaneously rejecting those labels: 'There is no one-size-fits-all definition for a remarkable array of authors who, for one reason or another, have intersected with Italian culture and write in Italian.' Clarissa also quotes the Somali-Italian writer Igiaba Scego: 'We've always been

pigeonholed under that hateful label "migrant literature". But, listen up folks, "migrant literature" doesn't exist. Literature exists.'

This is the first-ever magazine of contemporary Italian literature in English, and it explores what I believe is a new era for Italian literature at home and abroad. Reading and book sales had declined over several decades in Italy, but now, thanks to concerted national campaigns and some charismatic champions, Italians are once again falling in love with books, which in turn has positively influenced us, the devotees of Italian books abroad. It's also brought about a long-overdue modernisation of the book trade in Italy. Only recently you could not buy books easily online; lockdowns have changed all that. Book fairs and festivals were cancelled during the pandemic, so it fell largely to the Italian Publishers Association (the AIE), the Ministries of Culture and Foreign Affairs and the rebooted Centre for the Book to rally round books and reading – and they did it in exemplary fashion, with programmes in libraries, bookshops, schools and colleges. During lockdown in June 2020, *newitalianbooks*, a pioneering online portal to promote Italian translation, was launched. Here I'd like to pay tribute to its managing editor, Paolo Grossi, in my eyes one of Italy's greatest champions of the book; he's also another of our essayists.

You'll recall that Italy was the first European country to go into lockdown. They weren't only singing from their balconies at that time but also writing Europe's first pandemic literature, as you'll read in Paolo Giordano's essay 'Things I Don't Want To Forget', reprinted here in *The Riveter*.

Paolo Giordano has won both of Italy's leading literary prizes, the Strega and the Campiello, and they are guiding lights for publishers, in a similar way to the Booker, Costa and Dublin prizes in the UK and Ireland. Literary fiction is wonderfully robust in Italy, as is crime writing, both the popular and literary varieties. Read all about it in the following pages, where we also learn that erudite crime novelist Gianrico Carofiglio has an equally famous brother, Francesco: our editor, West Camel, has interviewed them both, together! We also examine the continuing popularity of Italian children's books, and there's an appreciation of book art and illustration, which is very close to our *Riveter* hearts. We discover Italian contemporary poetry, thanks to our resident poet, Anna Blasiak. We embrace the short story, now increasingly popular in the Anglosphere and reawakening after a long sleep in Italy, after the post-war golden age of Italo Calvino, Primo Levi, Natalia Ginzburg, Alberto Moravia, Cesare Pavese and others. And alongside all this, we celebrate the greater visibility of translators,

with contributions from protagonists such as the aforementioned Jhumpa Lahiri, Howard Curtis and Clarissa Botsford, but equally Ann Goldstein, Tim Parks, Shaun Whiteside, Katherine Gregor and many more.

English-language publishing is blessed with some crusading Italian and Italophile publishers. Heartfelt thanks to all of them, but especially to Europa Editions, not only because their in-house designer, Ginevra Rapisardi, created our beautiful cover design, but also because they publish Elena Ferrante.

You have probably read this far wondering why on earth I've only now mentioned Ferrante's name, when the popular success of the modern Italian novel and my passionate engagement with it is largely thanks to her. As one of Ferrante's greatest fans, I'm saving this moment to the last, and here's why: I launched our online monthly *#RivetingReviews* sitting on our terrace in the mountains of the Garfagnana in 2015, at the height of 'Ferrante fever' and out of a selfish desire to read and review all Ferrante's books. I wrote then:

> 'I believe that we will still be talking about Elena Ferrante in decades to come … Sitting here in Italy, her country and my second home, writing this review of a novel about two Italian women set in Italy, I can only express gratitude to Ferrante for helping me to better understand this magnificent but mercurial land.'

I am exceptionally pleased, therefore, that I have managed to gather an impressive Ferrante girl gang for this edition of *The Riveter*, including not only Elena Ferrante herself (OK, only in spirit!) but her dedicated translator Ann Goldstein, writing about her eighteen-year collaboration with Ferrante; Enrica Maria Ferrara, the Naples academic who runs Ferrante Studies at Trinity College Dublin; and the Italian journalist Maria Teresa Carbone, who examines the roots of Ferrante fever and the growth in Italian women's writing.

The Italian Riveter is for everyone. It's for all of you who read it and have helped create it, with sincerest thanks. Thanks to the authors, translators, reviewers, interviewees, academics, journalists and publishers; to our generous sponsors, the Italian Cultural Institutes of London, Dublin and Edinburgh – without their support this magazine would not exist; to my supremely dedicated and creative colleagues at the European Literature Network, namely West Camel, our Editor, Anna Blasiak, our Managing Editor, as well as our Editorial Assistants Alice Banks and Rosie Eyre, Business Manager Max Easterman, and joining us from Plymouth University, the very talented publishing student, Peter Cast. Italy is enjoying a golden age of literature and translation, and this magazine is the glittering proof.

Rosie Goldsmith

JHUMPA LAHIRI
interviewed by Rosie Goldsmith

Jhumpa, if you and I were meeting in person, not on Zoom, we might be sitting together having a coffee or a prosecco. Where would you like to be?

I'm in my house in Rome right now, which I love. I've been spending a lot of time here because of the whole Omicron situation. And it's been really lovely, I'm very fortunate.

One of the things I associate with Italy is being out amongst people. Is that difficult now, in the pandemic?

I've been socialising outside every day. I take long walks with friends. And we just sit in the sun wherever it is – we sort of follow it. There's less indoor socialising – needless to say – but Rome is such an amazing place to just walk.

At the moment my Italian is incredibly rusty because I'm not in Italy. Do you find that the pandemic has had an impact on your language?

Not really. I have a completely bilingual brain at this point. I write in Italian every day. I'm constantly speaking and writing in Italian – whether I'm in Rome, whether I'm in Princeton. That has really been a big shift in my life since moving back to the United States in 2015, which was when I wrote the 'Why Italian?' essay.

That essay is one of a series written over several years in your new book with Princeton University Press called *Translating Myself and Others*. Is that question, *Why Italian?*, still relevant for you?

It has receded. I think people will continue to ask it – certainly people who don't know me, who have never heard of me, those people who may know me from another phase, in another linguistic reality. But it's been such a long time now that I've been working in Italian. I;ve produced so much in this new language that it's now in a completely different phase.

What would you say that new phase of your Italian is? Not just your linguistic skills, but what Italian has enabled you to do?

I feel that it's completely transformed me. It's circulating inside of me in a way that I no longer question it. That's not to say there's not an ongoing form of discovery, and every time I come to Rome I discover new ways of saying things, new words – that happens more when I'm here, because there's more Italian just circulating. In the United States, I have a very robust Italian life in that I now have a lot of Italian friends, I teach in Italian, I teach Italian, I have Italian colleagues. That too has been fortifying, but not in the same way. It's here in Rome where my Italian always gets another layer, and another and another. That continues, it never plateaus, but it's totally different. That's why I put the essays in my new book in chronological order to reflect that. I've also written a book of short stories in Italian, out this fall in Italy, and the next fall, in English. I've now written three books in Italian. But my main project right now is translating Ovid's *Metamorphoses* out of Latin. So that is a further sign to me that my Italian, it's there, it's not going anywhere. And if anything, I can now really lean on it, to go back to yet another language I learnt that has been lying

dormant for several decades since my college days. It's Italian that's leading me back to Ovid, leading me back to Latin.

The surprise – which you describe in your 'Why Italian?' essay – for so many of your readers, who, like me, had read *The Interpreter of Maladies* and *The Namesake*, was that here was a Pulitzer Prize-winning author we'd never associated with Italian, who suddenly declared that she was only going to write in Italian! Was it sudden, or was it a growing love affair?

It was very sudden for a reader, I can understand, but if you look at [my first book in Italian in 2015] *In altre parole* ('In Other Words') it was a slow growth and process, which goes back to my studying Latin in college, then my dissertation work and learning to read Italian for that, and then coming to Italy . . . But that happened so long ago. It was the realisation that without the language, I would not be living a full life, as crazy as that sounds. It was that feeling or that intuition that led me into the language, and then the culture and the people.

At the time some people did wonder, were you abandoning English, that language that had given you the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction, that language that you had grown up with? Did you feel that you were abandoning English, or your other roots – your Indian roots – in taking up Italian?

No, I didn't. I felt that I was trying to move away from something and explore something in a different way. I think 'abandonment' is a very loaded word, a very dramatic word. There is no growth without loss. If we stay still, we don't explore anything, nothing happens and nothing changes. So my moving into Italian was a very emphatic decision and process and state of mind and dedication.

So you were quite strict with yourself?

I was. Because I knew that there was no other way that I was going to be able to get the Italian really inside of my brain and inside of my heart otherwise. So I limited the English that was coming in. I did this to dedicate myself to a new language, to get it to a place where I needed it to be, to gain fluency, to gain comprehension – deep comprehension – to be able to think and write in a new language which is a language I did not grow up with, didn't have in my family, didn't have in any kind of relationships, anything – just coming out of a desire to learn and to complicate the linguistic panorama, and to stabilise it somehow.

Do you sometimes pinch yourself and say 'this is extraordinary'?

It occurs to me that I was a totally different person ten years ago – that occurs to me. So if I say, OK, it's 2022, ten years ago I moved to Rome with my family, and I was still essentially sort of scratching the surface of Italian and the Italian language, and had studied it and wanted to get better at it, but basically it was still something I really had to reach toward. So when I think about how different my life is right now, I'm struck. [...] But in terms of what happened linguistically, the linguistic shift, I've always followed models of people who have done analogous things, and for the better part of my life, I've had people like Beckett and Nabokov and others in my mind, people who live and work across languages. Then, when I started thinking about Italian writers, I recognised how many Italian writers were also working in two or more languages, and dialect, and in formal Italian, and reading across languages. And the more I do this, the more I realise that most of literature

is actually born from people who did exactly this, for whatever reason, because they sought it out or because they happened to find themselves in these linguistic situations or because they were curious about them. There are so many examples of writers who have shifted languages and felt the need to express themselves in languages that they have gone out of their way to learn.

Could you talk more about your relationship with Italian in terms of literature and the empathy you have for Italian writers? You have translated three novels by one of the greatest living Italian writers, Domenico Starnone, and with *The Penguin Book of Italian Short Stories*, which you edited and partly translated, you brought some incredible writers to English. Was that your campaigning way to get more Italian writers into English?

Well, the reason I started writing, the reason I started reading Italian was because I wanted to learn Italian, and I wanted to know the literary language as well as a more conversational language. And that reading of Italian turned me into an Italian writer in my own right. So the more I wrote in Italian, the more I needed to read in Italian, because my writing in Italian is basically a reaction to what I'm reading in Italian, just as my writing in English has always been a reaction to what I've read in English. Then eventually, because I started to think about translation and because I began teaching at Princeton and I was working with Italian writers, I wanted to share some of the Italian writers that I was excited about and looking for good translations of. That sort of led to the whole Penguin project. It was exciting to gather together a group of writers, some of whom had crossed over into English, and others who hadn't or had been forgotten or never translated at all. It's been very gratifying to hear reactions to these writers – 'Oh, I had never … !' And then one realises how crucial the act of translation is – because it is only the translator who can open up these points of closure between languages, between cultures, between literatures.

Of the names from *The Penguin Book of Italian Short Stories*, who did you discover through reading Italian?

All of them. I knew very few of them before I moved to Italy. A handful – Moravia, Pavese, Morante . . . Maybe that was it. I hadn't really read any of them because I hadn't read them in Italian. So it's really only when I started reading them in Italian that I had a full relationship with them, and started reading each of them and their work more deeply and discovering their whole body of work. But most of the writers in that Penguin anthology I discovered because I was living here and befriending writers and talking to them. One would lead me to another, and to another.

Now you've a much better overview of Italian literature, do you think it is neglected in English? Do you think there is still a lot to be translated?

Potentially, yes. There's been a lot more attention in recent years, due to various things. There's been more attention on translated literature in general these days, which is wonderful. And of course today we have the example of writers like Domenico Starnone, Elena Ferrante, new versions of Anna Maria Ortese, or this Penguin book of short stories being commissioned. This is a moment Italian literature is enjoying – a moment of relative attention, which has been lovely. It sort of dovetails with where I am right now, and what I am doing, in some form, is also part of this whole ecosystem of what's going on in terms of Italian literature within the Anglosphere.

You can read the whole interview with Jhumpa Lahiri online at eurolitnetwork.com.

JHUMPA LAHIRI

WHY ITALIAN?

From *Translating Myself and Others*
Princeton University Press, 2022

After moving to Rome in 2015, I sought to respond to this question. For many years, I had studied Italian from afar, without ever having lived in Italy. The desire to speak it every day, to plunge into a new idiom, to encounter new people and a new culture, led me there. Once I arrived, I wanted nothing other than to express myself in Italian as often as possible. But nearly each time I opened my mouth, I would hear the same question: *Why do you speak our language?* I tried to explain. I said that I'd studied Italian because I loved it, that I felt the need to have a relationship with the language. I said that I'd learned to speak some basic Italian thanks to private lessons in New York. Given that I had chosen to do so without any practical need, and without any obvious connections – familial, personal, or professional – my explanation didn't satisfy. People told me, *You're of Indian origin, were born in London, raised in America. You write books in English. What does Italian have to do with any of that?* The more I explained, the more people I met in Rome persisted, intrigued, a little stupefied: *But why, exactly?*

> While no one expected me to speak Italian, I didn't expect the question. It was reasonable enough to ask, but it put me a bit on the defensive. Why was it, I wanted to ask my interrogators, that I needed to justify myself?
>
> In truth, the reason I couldn't respond to their question was because I had never asked it of myself. I didn't think that my growing dedication to the Italian language was anything unusual. Before coming to Italy, I'd never paused to consider what it meant. I was more interested in the how than the why: how to speak the language better, how to make it my own.
>
> It was only in Rome that I started to ask myself: *Why Italian?* I wrote *In altre parole* ('In Other Words') to give a definitive response, both to others and to myself. It was born from the realisation that I am a writer without a true mother tongue; from feeling, in some sense, linguistically orphaned. But that book, which I wrote in Italian, complicated the situation considerably.

After *In Other Words* was published, first in Italian and then in English, the question of *Why Italian?* – which I'd hoped to resolve – only turned more frequent and urgent. I was asked by friends, journalists, writers, readers, editors, Italians, Americans, everyone. The question has led to a realisation: that while the desire to *learn* a new language is considered admirable, even virtuous, when it comes to *writing* in a new language, everything changes. Some perceive this desire as a transgression, a betrayal, a deviation. What I did – distancing myself suddenly from English, passing precipitously into Italian – tends to trigger resistance, diffidence, and doubts.

Everyone wants to understand the genesis, the motives, the implications of my choice. Some people ask me, *Why Italian instead of an Indian language, a closer language, more like you?*

The short answer remains: I write in Italian to feel free. But when I would talk about the book in public, during speeches and interviews, I felt repeatedly forced to defend, to justify this liberty. To provide a key, to clarify the issue.

If *In Other Words* needs a key, it's the book itself. I began with a metaphor that led me to another, and then another. That was how my thinking unfolded. In the book, my slow but stubborn learning of Italian is a lake to cross, a wall to climb, an ocean to probe. A forest, a bridge, a child, a lover, a sweater, a building, a triangle. If, by the last page of the book, *Why Italian?* remains incomprehensible, I am to blame.

Once my first attempt to write in Italian was behind me, I began another one. From time to time new metaphors came to mind, even if I didn't look for them anymore.

In order to conquer any foreign language, one needs to open two principal doors. The first is comprehension. The second, the spoken language. In between, there are smaller doors, equally relevant: syntax, grammar, vocabulary, nuances of meaning, pronunciation. At this point, one gains relative mastery.

In the days immediately preceding the release of the book, while I was preparing to discuss it in public, I discovered three new metaphors that I found particularly fruitful, ambiguous, and evocative. Had it been possible, I would have added three chapters to *In Other Words*. The present essay serves as a sort of 'external' epilogue.

For the last metaphors, all three, I was indebted to my readings in Italian. They came to me from two writers, both of whom are central points of reference for me. One has passed away, the other is still living. One was little known outside of Italy and the other is known all over the world, though no one knows her real identity. I discovered the former in Rome, the latter in the United States, before moving to Italy. They are two Italian writers, both women, with two distinctly different styles. The first is Lalla Romano. Elena Ferrante is the second.

I had never heard of Lalla Romano before coming to Italy. I learned about her thanks to an article published in *La Stampa*, written by Paolo Di Paolo. It's not easy to find the works of Lalla Romano in Italian bookstores. But Paolo Di Paolo was a liaison between me and Antonio Ria, Romano's second husband, who kindly sent me a large package of books.

I read several titles in one go: *Nei mari estremi* ('In Extreme Seas'), *Maria, Inseparabile* ('Maria, Inseparable'), *L'ospite* ('The Guest'), *Le parole tra noi leggere* ('Light Words Between Us'). I was struck straightaway by the singular force of her taut, meditative, sorrowful writing. I was drawn to her dry, essential style. I admired her concise sentences, brief chapters, and distilled language.

The evening before I discussed *In Other Words* for the first time, in Venice, I was reading *Le metamorfosi* ('The Metamorphoses'), Romano's first book of prose, published in 1951. It spoke to me; even the title was a word I had used for one of the chapters, and was one of the metaphors of my book. Romano's work, which essentially recounts a series of dreams, represented a definitive turning point for the author, signalling her passage from painting to writing – from one means of creative expression to another. This, too, struck a chord. At the end of the fourth part, the author recounts a dream that she calls 'Le porte' ('The Doors'), cited in its entirety here:

> 'The door is not yet closed, but it is about to shut. One of the panels, tall and massive, falls slowly upon the other. I run and succeed in passing through. Beyond it is another door, identical to the first. This one is also on the point of closing; this time, running, I also succeed in passing through. There is another one, then another. One must be very quick in order to get there on time. Nevertheless, I hope I can always pass through, seeing as no door is closed. But one must keep running, and I am getting increasingly tired: I'm starting to lose my strength. The doors appear, one after the other, all of them the same. I can still pass through; but it is useless. There will always be another door.'[1]

I read Romano's dream as an existential nightmare: the tale of an ominous, frustrating, and difficult road. It indicates a trial, disorienting and exhausting. It describes a sense of dismay, desperation, and finally, defeat. The doors represent an ongoing effort, a journey without end: the condemnation of finding oneself forever waiting, on the outside, in a kind of purgatory.

This paragraph – this dream – made me reflect at length on the excitement and anguish of my path to Italian. For decades, ever since I immersed myself in the language, ever since I fell in love with it, I've struggled to open a series of doors. Each one leads me to another. The more I confront them, the more I pass through them, the more others appear, needing to be opened, to be overcome. This is how the study of a foreign language – an asymptotic trajectory – proceeds.

In order to conquer any foreign language, one needs to open two principal doors. The first is comprehension. The second, the spoken language. In between, there are smaller doors, equally relevant: syntax, grammar, vocabulary, nuances of meaning, pronunciation. At this point, one gains relative mastery. In my case, I dared to open a third door: the written language.

Bit by bit, as one studies, the door to comprehension swings open. The spoken language, apart from a foreign accent and some mispronunciations here and there, also opens with relative ease. The written language, certainly the most formidable door, remains ajar. Since I started thinking and writing in Italian only at the age of forty-five, I knocked on this door quite late, and it creaks a little. Although it welcomes me, it keeps odd hours, and is rather unpredictable.

The more I write in Italian, the more I feel in turmoil, suspended between my old knowledge of English and the new door in front of me. I'm forced to acknowledge that there is a distance between me and both languages. Sometimes I fear that the next door will be boarded up. Writing in another language reactivates the grief of being between two worlds, of being on the outside. Of feeling alone and excluded.

In *In Other Words*, I refer to a door as well: it's the door of our first home in Rome that, one evening, our second evening in Rome, refused to open. It was an absurd moment, a nightmare with a significance perhaps too obvious, but which took time to fully understand.

Each door has a dual nature, a contradictory role. It functions as a barrier on the one hand; as a point of entry on the other.

The doors keep urging me forward. Each leads me to a new discovery, a new challenge, a new possibility. How wonderful that, in Italian, the etymology of the word for door, *porta*, comes from the verb to bring, *portare*, which also means to raise, *sollevare*, 'because Romulus, in mapping out the walls of the city with a plow, raised them in the very place where the gates [*porte*] would be constructed'.[2] Although a door remains something inanimate and concrete, the word's root conveys a decisive and dynamic act.

Confronting a foreign language as an adult is a considerable challenge. And yet, the many doors I've had to open in Italian have flung wide, giving onto a sweeping, splendid view. The Italian language did not simply change my life; it gave me a second life, an extra life.

Reading, writing, and living in Italian, I feel like a reader, a writer, a person who is more attentive, active, and curious. Each new word encountered, learned, and listed in my notebook constitutes a small door. My Italian dictionary, meanwhile, serves as a doorway. I think of the books I read, the sentences I write, and the texts I finish all as doors, along with every conversation with an Italian friend, each occasion to express myself.

Italian, in my opinion, is a door more inclusive than exclusive. Otherwise, it wouldn't have been possible for me to write *In Other Words*. That said, even today, when I write in Italian, I feel guilty for having broken open a door I shouldn't have. This new language has turned me into a burglar. That is the strange effect of the question, *Why do you know, speak, and write in our language?* The use of the possessive adjective, our, underlines the fact, banal but painful, that Italian is not mine. The process of writing and publishing a book in Italian involved opening another series of doors: all the people with whom I worked, discussed, corrected, and cleaned up the text. I asked of each person, *May I write this sentence, use these words, combine them like this? That is: May I cross the border between me and Italian? May I come in?*

After the book was published, the doors that stood before me were my readers. It was their turn to open the cover, to read it. Some would accept my words, some would welcome me. Others, not. This uncertain destiny, for any book, is normal, even right. Each volume, once published, written in whatever language, finds itself on this threshold. To read means, literally, to open a book, and at the same time, to open a part of one's self.

I don't wish to live, or write, in a world without doors. An unconditional opening, without complications or obstacles, doesn't stimulate me. Such a landscape, without closed spaces, without secrets, without the presence of the unknown, would have no significance or enchantment for me.

Jhumpa Lahiri

1. 'La porta non è ancora chiusa, però sta per chiudersi. Uno dei battenti, alto e massiccio, ricade lentamente sull'altro. Corro e riesco a passare. Di là c'è un'altra porta, uguale alla prima. Anche questa è sul punto di chiudersi; anche questa volta, correndo, riesco a passare. Ce n'è ancora un'altra, poi un'altra. Occorre molta prontezza per arrivare in tempo. Tuttavia spero che potrò sempre passare, dal momento che nessuna porta è chiusa. Ma bisogna continuare a correre, e io sono sempre più stanca: comincio a perdere le forze. Le porte si presentano, una dopo l'altra, tutte uguali. Posso ancora passare; ma è inutile. Ci sarà sempre ancora una porta.'

2. 'perché Romolo, nel tracciare le mura della città con un aratro, lo sollevava proprio nel luogo dove sarebbero state costruite le porte.' *Dizionario etimologico* (Santarcangelo di Romagna: Rusconi Libri, 2012).

LALLA ROMANO

THE LADY ('La Signora')
By Lalla Romano (1906-2001), written in 1948
Translated by Jhumpa Lahiri in 2019

From *The Penguin Book of Italian Short Stories*
Edited by Jhumpa Lahiri

In the hotel dining room, the lady started to observe the gentleman seated at the table across from her, and upon preliminary inspection, surmised that he was interesting.

The essential thing – that is to say, the hands – were perfect. The lady never gave a second thought to men who had rough, neglected hands. The man at the opposite table took excellent care of his hands. They were slender, anxious hands, and the noble curve of the nails was free of impurities. His hair was smooth, grey at the temples, and moulded to his round, rather small head. As the lady factored each new element into her analysis, approval mounted in her heart, and her whole being was poised for happiness.

The gentleman had finished lunch without raising his head, so the lady hadn't been able to catch his eye. He got up and left the room, not only without glancing at the lady, but without even a nod. For a moment the morsel of food that the lady had just swallowed stuck in her throat, but she hastened to think that maybe she'd been mistaken, and then she abandoned herself to pleasant daydreams, looking out of the window at the slope of the mountain where small fields of rye seemed to be fleeing below steady gusts of wind.

The lady was irked that she'd written, on her part, 'set-designer' – she gave advice to her architect husband – so she now replaced it with 'painter', which struck her as less odd.

Someone brought the lady a note. The lady had been waiting for it, because she hadn't seen Nicola Rossi when she'd arrived on the morning coach. Nicola Rossi apologised for not being there, and invited the lady to come up to his hotel. Nicola Rossi was a music critic and a friend of the lady's husband. The whole afternoon,

Nicola Rossi talked about the stomach ailment that had kept him from coming to meet her.

It was the altitude that gave him this trouble, and unfortunately the pharmacy in town didn't carry effective remedies. Nicola Rossi talked about nothing else all afternoon, and in the evening the lady was grateful to the man at the opposite table for being there.

After three days, the lady had only managed to make eye contact with the man two or three times, though she hadn't been able to hold his gaze for even an instant. Later, questioning herself about that look, which had made a distinct impression on her, the lady tried to discern some warmth in it, a flash of kindness or sensuality, but she doubted this had been the case. A certain restlessness began to take root in the lady's spirit. But it was still linked to a subtle joy, owed in part to the sheer difficulty of the undertaking. And yet the lady realised that this particular joy or, rather, pleasant excitement, was growing much less spontaneous, so that she had to seek it out, provoke it; and so the joy was turning less vivid, maybe even a little insincere and false.

On previous occasions, a unique quality of this joy was that the lady felt it precisely when she exchanged more or less neutral glances or words with the new individual in question. This time, though, the strangest thing was that she couldn't feel joy in the gentleman's presence. Meanwhile she fell prey to an inexplicable embarrassment that could only be called shyness. That was the strangest thing. The lady was certain, however, that she would regain full control once she could speak.

At this point the lady burned with curiosity to know who the man was, and what his profession might be. His anxious hands suggested a pianist, or a surgeon.

Inventing an excuse, the lady asked to see the hotel register, but all she learned was that the gentleman was forty years old. The box for profession was left blank. The lady was irked that she'd written, on her part, 'set-designer' – she gave advice to her architect husband – so she now replaced it with 'painter', which struck her as less odd. She also regretted having put down her exact age, but she didn't dare correct it. Besides, compared to the gentleman, the lady was still quite young.

Lalla Romano
Translated by Jhumpa Lahiri

The Penguin Book of Italian Short Stories, *edited by Jhumpha Lahiri, is published by Penguin Classics*

THE PENGUIN BOOK OF ITALIAN SHORT STORIES

EDITED BY JHUMPA LAHIRI
TRANSLATED BY JHUMPA LAHIRI, AND OTHERS
PENGUIN CLASSICS, 2019

REVIEWED BY JONATHAN GIBBS

It's been wonderful to see the re-emergence of country-specific anthologies of short fiction from around the world, courtesy of Penguin Classics, one of which is *The Penguin Book of Italian Short Stories*. This is brilliantly edited – and in part translated – by Jhumpa Lahiri, who famously switched to writing her books in Italian after teaching herself the language (see the exclusive interview with Lahiri in this magazine). In her introduction, Lahiri admits to some personal tendencies to her selection, including a tilting towards forgotten and female authors over the supposedly canonical, though the forty authors included here certainly give a broad and generous view of Italian literature over the past century or so, ranging from realism to avant-garde experiment.

Lahiri focuses on the twentieth century, and although she drifts into the twenty-first she excludes living authors. All the big names you would expect to find are here, though not always with an obvious story. So we get 'The Siren' by Tomasi di Lampedusa, while for Italo Calvino we get a posthumously published offcut from a novel – thankfully, 'Dialogue with a Tortoise' is an entirely characteristic piece of absurdist philosophical rumination. There is also Primo Levi, Elsa Morante, Italo Svevo, Antonio Tabucchi and Alberto Moravia.

One disappointment, considering her recent resurgence in the English-reading world, was Natalia Ginzburg's 'My Husband'. I was bowled over by the expansive insight of her essay collection *The Little Virtues*, but found this early Chekhovian story about an unhappy country marriage rather limited. Daunt Books haven't yet given us a collection of her stories,

so there may be better ones out there. For a brighter, funnier tale, turn to Ennio Flaiano's satirical 'A Martian in Rome', which sees the astounding arrival of a space visitor who all too soon is absorbed into the quotidian experience of the city:

> 'Today the Martian suddenly agreed to be part of a jury of artists and writers for the crowning of Miss Vie Nuove. When they pointed out to him that the jury was made up of leftist artists and writers, the Martian showed a certain disappointment: but he had already given his word.'

That Flaiano wrote the screenplays for Fellini's *8½* and *La Dolce Vita* comes as no surprise.

'A Martian in Rome' turned up in the all-Italian edition of *A Personal Anthology* (the online short fiction project I curate), which was put together by the organisers of the 2019 FILL, Festival of Italian Literature in London. This also introduced me to Anna Maria Ortese's powerful 'A Pair of Eyeglasses' (also included here), in which a young girl's receipt of an expensive pair of glasses only reveals the ugliness of the poverty she lives in, and to Goffredo Parise, whose 'Sillabari' are a series of miniscule 'virtual novels'. I adore the example we get here, 'Melancholy', and am now itching to see the whole collection brought back into print in English. It's one of the risks of an anthology like this that the pleasures it gives are often drastically foreshortened when you realise that the story by a writer you have discovered is the only piece of their writing you're likely to be able to get your hands on. So, to read more by Flaiano – or Luce d'Eramo or Alba de Céspedes; both brilliant – I'll have to wait for more translations or, like Lahiri, do the hard work and learn the language myself.

Jonathan Gibbs

DOMENICO STARNONE

TRUST

TRANSLATED BY JHUMPA LAHIRI
EUROPA EDITIONS, 2021

REVIEWED BY REIN RAUD

Domenico Starnone definitely knows how to tell a story. The tension that quickly builds over the first few pages of his books continues throughout until the very last pages, in fact the very last sentences. Objectively one could perhaps say that nothing world-shattering happens across the narrative, and yet the book is comparable to a fast-paced thriller where no one is safe and nothing is what it seems.

All of this applies to *Trust*. It is the story of two people, Pietro and Teresa, teacher and student. Pietro first falls for Teresa when she is a student in his class, and when they meet again a year after her graduation, they become lovers. It is a turbulent affair with a lot of ups and downs (about which we do not hear too much), as well as breakups and makeups: 'It was as if our boundless admiration for each other only served to ascertain that we loathed each other, and vice versa,' Pietro reminisces; and the feeling seems mutual.

Finally, in order to tie themselves together inextricably, they decide to confide to each other a most terrible secret that would, without question, destroy their respective reputations if it ever came to light. A complete, no-holds-barred opening up to another person would surely create an unbreakable bond. Or so it might seem. In fact, they leave each other for good just a few days after their confessions. And this is where the story really begins. Although the narrative takes up a mere 147 pages, we follow the characters over several decades to see what they do to each other, to their loved ones and to themselves, after this effort to stay united forever. Because in

a sense, they actually do remain united.

Structurally, *Trust* consists of three stories, each with a different narrator. The first and longest is told by Pietro and presents us with his account of what happened, as well as his fears, hopes and struggles. The second is by Pietro's daughter; and the final part is contributed by Teresa, who has evolved into a brilliant scientist of international repute. As is often the case with such polyphony, the narratives contradict each other, sometimes with facts (or their omissions), but mostly with interpretations. Starnone plays masterfully with our expectations and with the conflicting ways in which people appear to others, so that as we learn of the characters' shortcomings and blind spots, we grow to understand and empathise with them more, not less.

All this probably leaves the impression that the book is about a chaotic bundle of strong emotions – and, indeed it is, but primarily it is a story about learning and growing as you learn. Pietro's career takes off as he starts to criticise the conservative Italian school system and becomes a pedagogical theorist, someone whose efforts might help rebuild the educational system. But all the while his own education continues, until the final examination, which is taken on the last pages. I will leave it to the reader to find out whether he passes or fails.

Rein Raud

THE RIVETER
POSTCARDS

POSTCARD FROM NAPLES

By Cristiano de Majo
Translated by Max Easterman

Naples, to judge from its traditional songs – such as 'O Sole Mio' – is a city of sunshine, and people who have never been there, or who haven't lived there, imagine a city of eternal light, of eternal blue skies and eternal heat. Such a view is certainly possible, but not the only one. As it happens, some time ago a friend of mine from Milan was somewhat surprised when I told him that, in reality, Naples is one of the cities with the highest rainfall in Italy: between seven hundred and one thousand millimetres a year. So, Naples is sunshine but also rain; and when it rains, it's real rain: it pelts down and it floods. There are two books that exemplify this duality. The first of these is Ferito a morte *('The Mortal Wound', 1961) by Raffaele La Capria, a masterpiece of Italian modernism that identifies how Naples (and life) deceives you with the promise of its 'beautiful days', from which you must nevertheless escape. The second book, by contrast, is Nicola Pugliese's* Malacqua, *which tells the story of four days of rain, ruin and collapse amid many bizarre events that befall the city. Radiance and gloom, promise and mystery are the cardinal points on the compass of the literary traveller. You may try not to get lost, but this is no simple undertaking.*

WOMEN'S WRITING IN ITALY TODAY

by MARIA TERESA CARBONE

The Italian publisher Loescher, which specialises in school textbooks, has just this year published an anthology for secondary school students, entitled *Controcanone*. The editor, Johnny Bertolio, a young academic who divides his time between Italy and Canada, describes it in this way: 'The first history book that traces the lives and works of Italian women authors from the thirteenth century to the present day, highlighting the long and painful journey of emancipation: arranged marriages, forced sex, physical and psychological violence, together with proposals for social and political reform.'

Starting with the title, *Counter-Canon/Alternative Canon*, the book is interesting because it confirms how the Italian publishing industry today feels the need to give a new visibility to women's writing, not only by proposing new authors, but also by promoting the rediscovery of voices unfairly neglected for so long. It is precisely with this objective in mind that specialist publishing houses are being established. This is the case of the tiny Rina of Rome, which in its publicity manifesto promises to 'rediscover "forgotten" figures, bringing to light the experience and contribution of those courageous women excluded from the literary canon'. Its catalogue contains books by authors who were once very well-known, from the great Matilde Serao, novelist and journalist (1826-1927, the first woman in Italy to edit a daily newspaper, among many other things) to novelist Carolina Invernizio (1851-1916), arguably the most popular pulp fiction writer of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; alongside them are other writers of remarkable originality, such as Paola Masino (1908-1989), dismissed by fascist critics as 'a scribbler' and today recognised as one of the twentieth century's greatest fiction writers.

It is not only the small publishing houses that are bringing back to light the literary jewels of the past: in 2019 Feltrinelli published Paola Masino's most famous and controversial novel *Nascita e morte della massaia* ('Birth and Death of the Housewife'), while the daring and gifted Cuban-Italian writer Alba de Céspedes (1911-1997) was published again in 2011 in the famous Meridiani Mondadori series, which confers the status of 'classic' on any author, demonstrating that the 'Ferrante effect' and its positive effect on publishing Italian women's writing merely consolidated a trend that was already under way in Italy. For more than twenty years, in fact, female critics, journalists and essayists, flanked by a small army of

admirable male academics, have been tirelessly digging in the field of Italian literature. Among the latter we should mention Federico Sanguineti, whose *La storia letteraria in poche righe* ('Literary History in a Few Lines'), published by Il Nuovo Melangolo in 2018, punches at the traditional canon. The foundation in 1995 of the Italian Society of Women Writers and two years later of the independent women's magazine *Leggendaria* prove that the focus on the work of Italian women writers is neither a recent nor a passing phenomenon.

And what about today's women authors? If we take Italy's most important literary prizes as a barometer of the situation, the picture is more contradictory. In the last ten years, the best-known award in the field of fiction, the Strega Prize, has been won by only one woman, Helena Janeczek in 2018 with *La ragazza con la Leica* ('The Girl with the Leica'), while its most direct competitor, the Campiello, has had four female winners: Simona Vinci with *La prima verità* in 2016; Donatella Di Pietrantonio with *L'Arminuta* in 2017; Rosella Postorino with *Le assaggiatrici* in 2018, and finally, in 2021, the young Giulia Caminito, author of *L'acqua del lago non è mai dolce*, who not surprisingly dedicated the prize 'to women, so that they will always have the opportunity to read and write anywhere'.

However, the feeling – and this is certainly influenced by the spirit of the times – is that things are changing, that when evaluating a book, in Italy as elsewhere, publishers and critics are increasingly taking into account the identity of the person who wrote it: it is a paradigm shift that will certainly have consequences for the way we read, and perhaps write. What those consequences will be, it is too early to say.

Maria Teresa Carbone

FERRANTE STUDIES: A NEW DISCIPLINE

by ENRICA MARIA FERRARA

Readers of Elena Ferrante will happily tell you how the books have given them endless pleasure. However, Ferrante's gift to the lonely world of women academics is priceless: a treasure trove of literary texts over which they can sharpen their analytical tools, compare notes, disagree, and formulate new theories about mother-daughter relationships, the dynamics of patriarchal oppression and strategies for emancipation. Ferrante's books are a meeting point and a shelter for female scholars, where we can convene and collaborate, like the two brilliant friends of the 'Neapolitan Quartet', Elena and Lila, who empower each other to unleash their respective creative potential. Naturally, men are welcome too – if they are willing to share.

It all began in 2015, when US scholars Grace Russo Bullaro and Stephanie Love called for papers for the first collection of academic essays dedicated to Ferrante. I still remember the email Grace sent us all: 'Friends', she wrote, ' you are the pioneers'.

The excitement we felt then lasts to this day. It was there, in the pages of *The Works of Elena Ferrante: Reconfiguring the Margins*[1], published by Palgrave in December 2016, that the new discipline of Ferrante studies was officially born. Today, teaching Ferrante constitutes part of my coursework on Italian literature at Trinity College, Dublin; but the process has been under way for a while, in the form of conference panels and seminars on Ferrante in Harvard, Oxford, Leeds and other reputable venues, mainly outside Italy. In her home country, where 'a portion of the Italian cultural world is closed off to women writers' and their 'anti-hierarchical viewpoint', as stated by Tiziana de Rogatis (author of *Elena Ferrante's Key Words*[2]), the uptake of Ferrante studies has been slower.

But it was in Italy, my native Naples in fact, where my first encounter with Ferrante's work took place, back in my student days. It was February 1996. As I was browsing a book fair with Silvio Perrella (now a famous Italian writer), he suggested we attend a round table on Ferrante's first novel, *L'amore molesto* (1992; 'Troubling Love', 2006), which had just been turned into a film by Mario Martone. 'Both the novel and the film are exceptional,' he said. I had already tried to read the book. I agreed that, yes, Ferrante's style was unique, but I found Ferrante's account of the disturbed relationship between Delia and her mother Amalia, a suicide victim, unsettling. I could not finish the book. It was as if this author's

voice were alive and seeped through my subconscious. Today I understand that Delia's urge to leave Naples and run away from an oppressive, patriarchal society was also my own. Fast forward ten years, by which time I'm living in Dublin and working at Trinity College, and I heard Ferrante mentioned again. 'Are you an expert in Italian literature?' I was asked, and expected the usual questions on Pasolini, Eco, Calvino. But no, it was Ferrante everyone in the anglophone world longed to hear about.

This is how I picked up Ferrante's second novel, *The Days of Abandonment* (2002 in Italian, 2005 in Ann Goldstein's extraordinary translation): the gut-wrenching story of Olga, a woman abandoned by her husband, who becomes semi-deranged, crushed by a sense of loss that makes her lose control over space, time, language. We are swept along by Ferrante's vertiginous stream of consciousness and are devastated too, shattered into tiny fragments, before becoming whole again. When I stayed up all night reading that novel, I knew I was on to something powerful. I had found my next project by which, soon, I became consumed. I noticed the importance Ferrante's characters attached to everything 'non-human', such as plants, animals, technology, objects (doors, dolls, garments) in order to acquire knowledge of themselves and the world. The power, or agency, of the 'non-human', sustains Ferrante's feminist stance against patriarchal values. Women are vulnerable and have been oppressed and dehumanised for centuries, like much of nature and the non-human world. Ferrante is restoring agency to both. This is how I later pioneered that specific strand of Ferrante studies that we call posthumanist or neo-materialist.

In 2012 I read the first volume of the Quartet, *My Brilliant Friend*, the story of Elena and Lila, who grow up in an obscure Neapolitan neighbourhood and whose lives remain intertwined for over sixty years. This was when worldwide Ferrante fever struck people of diverse nationalities, ages and cultural backgrounds. Speculation about the author's identity became a staple at dinner parties, while, in the academic arena, linguists began to compare the style of several writers in the hope of unmasking Ferrante using scientific, philological techniques. The truth is, whatever the gender of the author (or authors) in real life, Ferrante says it loud and clear that she identifies as a woman writer. This is all we should be concerned about.

In the meantime, the 'Neapolitan Quartet' drew to a close with *The Story of the Lost Child* (2014; 2015 in English). After selecting two of Ferrante's novels for the book club I moderate at the

Italian Cultural Institute in Dublin and drafting scholarly essays on her work for various journals, I had the pleasure to interview Ann Goldstein in public. It was September 2015. As I prepared for our chat and compared Ann's English translation to the original, I wondered how she had been able to replicate not just the content but the vehement, unrelenting, emotional flow of Ferrante's voice. No wonder several people believed Ann herself to be Elena Ferrante. As my colleague Stiliana Milkova (author of *Elena Ferrante as World Literature*) writes so perceptively, 'Elena Ferrante's invisibility has enabled the translator's visibility': a tribute long overdue after centuries of indifference towards a profession that allows seminal works of literature to travel across international borders.

In Durham, UK, where the first international conference on Ferrante was held in 2019, I was finally able to meet my brilliant Ferrante studies colleagues in person: Tiziana de Rogatis, Adalgisa Giorgio, Stiliana Milkova, Serena Todesco, Katrin Wehling-Giorgi, to name but a few. And in spite of the pandemic, we continue our collaborations as we analyse the global phenomenon of Ferrante's storytelling, the books, the theatre, the films and TV series. Ferrante studies are embedded in my university work, with a conference planned later in 2022, and, in 2023, a journal dedicated to her work. Ferrante studies is a gift that keeps on giving.

Enrica Maria Ferrarte

1. https://link.springer.com/book/10.1057/978-1-137-57580-7
2. https://www.europaeditions.com/book/9781609455637/elena-ferrante-s-key-words
3. https://www.bloomsbury.com/uk/elena-ferrante-as-world-literature-9781501357541

SOME PERSPECTIVES ON ELENA FERRANTE

by ANN GOLDSTEIN

Elena Ferrante, with the publication of her first book, *Troubling Love* in 1992, announced to her publisher that she would do nothing to promote the book – that she would not be present for any sort of publicity or presentation. ('I've already done enough for this long story: I wrote it.') She has steadfastly kept to that decision, and in 2015, when an interviewer wanted to know 'Who is Elena Ferrante?' she could answer: 'Thirteen letters, no more or less.'

Over the years, however, while remaining absent, she has revealed quite a lot about herself, in interviews and essays – not about her personal life but about her intellectual life. In particular, around the time the 'Neapolitan Quartet' began to gain popularity, there was a greater demand for Elena Ferrante as a presence; this led to numerous interviews, which, as in the past, she agreed to do but only in written form. She also then started writing short essays and articles, such as an introduction to an edition of *Sense and Sensibility*, and a yearlong series of columns in the *Guardian* on a range of subjects, from exclamation points to jealousy.

My own first encounter with Ferrante – or with her words – took place in 2004, when I was asked to do a sample translation of *The Days of Abandonment*, her second novel, but first to be published in English. I knew nothing about her, but as soon as I read the first sentence of that book I was gripped. I went on to translate it, and since then I have translated not only her novels – four, plus the four 'Neapolitan Novels' – but the collection of interviews and letters entitled *Frantumaglia*, and many other interviews, essays and articles, most recently the four essays of *In the Margins*.

The prose in Ferrante's novels is dense; she can use a lot of words, not in a redundant way but in order to get at the precise truth of, say, an emotion, and she is often describing emotional states. The shorter, non-fiction writing can also be dense, but the sentences are compacted rather than expansive, they compress rather than dig – or excavate, as she puts it. In the novels this can be tricky to preserve within an English syntax and without losing the meaning, the intensity and the momentum created by the pileup of words; in the non-fiction, sentences have to be unpacked; unwound, so to speak. Also, in a novel, even a short novel, there is time and space to get used to a rhythm, and a vocabulary, which is not available in a short non-fiction piece.

As the translator, I am most intimately engaged with the text on the level of words: how the words fit together into the sentence, the sentence into the paragraph. In a novel, I'm involved in the social and emotional lives of the characters, and my work is to make them vivid and colloquial. Translating Ferrante's non-fiction has allowed me to step back and see the fiction from a broader perspective. In *In the Margins* Ferrante talks a lot about writers and writings that have influenced her. Translating it – reading it – was literally to see the work that has gone into the fiction, including the lifetime of reading that sustains it. Not that one makes specific connections, but I've been able to see common elements, structures, bigger pictures. For example, I hadn't thought cohesively about the fact that there aren't a lot of detailed physical descriptions of people or places in Ferrante's novels until I worked on the essay 'Aquamarine', from *In the Margins*, in which she talks about how she practised descriptions, trying to 'tell things as they are', and what, ultimately, she learned from that.

Translating the screenplays for the TV series *My Brilliant Friend* has provided another angle from which to view Ferrante's work. In a screenplay the story has to be conveyed within a limited frame; events, both physical and emotional, have to be dramatised, which sometimes means condensing and sometimes expanding. Some scenes could be taken almost directly from the books; at other times two or three scenes in the book could be made into one; sometimes something narrated had to be made active. It's like another shake of the kaleidoscope, in which you see patterns and colours that were not visible before.

My own, eighteen-year relationship with the thirteen letters of Elena Ferrante has been filtered through the publishers. When I have questions, I ask them, and they will ask Ferrante. In my life as a translator I've worked with a lot of dead authors, so I'm used to the author who is present not as a physical person but as the mind or brain or consciousness that has put the words on the page.

Ann Goldstein

DONATELLA DI PIETRANTONIO

A SISTER'S STORY

TRANSLATED BY ANN GOLDSTEIN
EUROPA EDITIONS, 2022

REVIEWED BY DARCY HURFORD

Family secrets, a doorbell ringing in the dead of night, a funeral, a curse, an unhappy marriage, and a daughter who succeeds academically, moves up socially and ends up working as a university lecturer in France. *Spaghetti alla chitarra*, *cornetti*, *pastini*, *arrosticini* and *crespelle in brodo*. And quite a bit of violence, including the particularly grim and unresolved did-he-or-didn't-he incident that gets the story going.

A Sister's Story is Di Pietrantonio's fourth novel, and revisits places and characters from her earlier work, *A Girl Returned* (published in English by Europa Editions in 2019). Set in Abruzzo, a region east of Rome, it moves backwards and forwards in time to tell the story of the (nameless) narrator and her sister, Adriana. The novel starts in the present, when the now single narrator, who is working as a lecturer in Grenoble, receives a phone call summoning her urgently back to Abruzzo. We then shift back in time to her youth and marriage to Pietro, her family and her sister. It offers the whole spectrum of human emotion, and enough drama to fill an *Eastenders* omnibus.

Although it's a short novel, it is densely packed and, at times, quite hard to follow (presumably reading *A Girl Returned* would help), for the narrative only really clicks into place around halfway through. There is a choppiness to the language that doesn't help either: many long sentences punctuated mainly by a comma, which leads to a certain flatness in the rhythm of the sentences. Conversations are related in hindsight, and with all the different voices, and movement back and forth in time, it can feel unclear what is being referred to, such as in

this description of Adriana by her boyfriend's mother: did this actually happen; is this the boyfriend's mother's view, or the narrator's?

> 'Maybe they'd all three have lunch together, then she'd go to the neighbour's for a few hours to leave them alone, and on her return she found Adriana still there, who didn't even ask if she had to go home. She seemed an orphan.'

Events are described hastily and sometime almost elliptically, as here:

> '"There's no wine or did you forget it?" our father asked at a certain point. I got up, there was the remains of a bottle behind the curtain under the sink. I poured the red into a glass and then there was none left.'

There is an obvious point of comparison to another Italian novelist (the one with a brilliant friend, Naples, and shoes), although that possibly says more about how little Italian fiction appears in English translation. Despite the similarities, Di Pietrantonio's novel is much more compact in time and subject matter, and more intensely focussed on fewer characters. It takes quite a while to warm to Adriana, although it becomes clear that she is not having an easy time of it. The ending of the story is a positive one for her, yet open-ended for the narrator – and possibly for a sequel?

Darcy Hurford

THE RIVETER
POSTCARDS

POSTCARD FROM ROME

By Clarissa Botsford

Romans 'have always been quite sure about the precise location where God placed the point of a compass to design the world', says Marco Lodoli (Islands-New Islands, *tr. H. Campbell Gustafson, Fontanella Press, 2019). It is the tiny stage in the middle of Piazza Venezia from where a traffic policeman, 'a very poor symbol of all mysterious authority, made his strange gestures, tried to bring order to chaos, and, in exchange, got insults and obscenities'.*

All roads lead to Rome, they say, and for millennia, people have come and gone: popes and pilgrims, slaves and newly minted citizens, nobles, martyrs, Grand Tour aesthetes, soldiers, writers, artists. Stendhal Syndrome nowadays, though, is not so much an affliction caused by great beauty as a sense of betrayal. The eternal city is in a permanent state of flux: the traffic island at the centre of the world has been dismantled, leaving Rome to its habitual anarchy.

It is a city of paradoxes. A writer from abroad may find 'freedom and joy' in 'living and walking every day through Rome, and feeling so at home and alive there' (The New Yorker, *8 February 2021). Yet 12% of the population – from more than a hundred different countries at the last count, many of whom were born here – still struggle to be considered Italians.*

Meanwhile, other more exotic populations have come to stay and won't be leaving anytime soon: the trees screech with brilliant green parakeets; millions of starlings draw dramatic pictures in the sky, abandoning their migration paths of old; wild pigs delve into the piles of uncollected rubbish; and giant seagulls reign supreme, feasting on the smorgasbord of waste, devouring unwary pigeons and even – once caught on camera midflight – a newly released dove during the Pope's Angelus.

NADEESHA UYANGODA

From THE ONLY BLACK PERSON IN THE ROOM: THE TRUTH ABOUT RACISM IN ITALY

Translated by Simone Lai

**This extract contains offensive language.*

What makes a person of colour Italian is a question that is approached in two different ways: the racist approach and the anti-racist approach taken by progressives. The unconscious racism often denounced by the latter is – take this opinion with a grain of salt – a minor evil. What is unconscious racism? It's a question like the one I'm often asked: 'Do you ever think of going back to Sri Lanka?'

I am, like many children of immigrants in Italy, a person with a pretty stable life. Sure, I don't know how my life will be ten years from now, so I can't completely exclude the possibility that one day I might migrate elsewhere. But it is reasonable to presume that I will always stay in the West. Still, this is a frequent question, one of a series of other questions that Italians of colour are often asked.

'How come you speak Italian so well?' 'How do you say "dad" in your language?' 'Are your parents cleaners?' The kind of sentences that range from badly expressed compliments to stereotypes and provocations. We perceive them all as micro-aggressions.

But I'm sure the dishwasher who was beaten up after work 'because he's a nigger' doesn't care that your neighbour old you that you speak Italian very well. The problem for the graduate who can't teach because he doesn't have citizenship, despite living in Genoa since he was two years old, is not being asked if he is Italian; the problem is because he is not *yet* Italian.

Pointing the finger at unwitting racism is like putting a basin under a leaky ceiling when the roof has already rotted away. By 'lesser evil', I don't mean 'marginal', but it is not the original evil. The unwitting racist is usually a person who leads an almost one-colour life. His friends are white, as are his colleagues, and the same can be said of his family; he rarely interacts with people of colour, and when he does, he does so on a very superficial level.

The unwitting racist has no idea what racism is. Because it's racist, you say. Yes, of course, but in a very similar way to

your Black friend who says he would only date a woman of African descent if she has fair skin. I think this type of racism is somehow comparable to the problem of colourism in ethnic communities: it is internalised, sometimes made up of involuntary actions and languages.

I'm not saying we should tolerate it, I'm saying that we should refrain from only pointing the finger …

You will agree with me in believing that there is an abyss between someone who says that there are no Black Italians and someone who publishes a photo of a white volunteer in an Indian orphanage, repeating the stereotype known in English as 'the white saviour'. When Silvia Romano (an Italian aid worker kidnapped in Kenya in 2018) was released, of the photos published in the newspapers, I was impressed by the one in which she was surrounded by a crowd of African children. Should we say that Silvia Romano is a racist?

I think that whoever finds himself perpetrating involuntary racism is in turn a victim of history, a victim of mental structures that are the result of centuries of inequality between white people and persons of colour. I'm not saying we should tolerate it, I'm saying that we should refrain from only pointing the finger and we should contribute to the dismantling of those mental structures, because not even the most anti-racist of us is immune from them.

Nadeesha Uyangoda
Translated by Simone Lai

This is an extract from L'unica persona nera nella stanza *by Nadeesha Uyangoda, published by 66thand2nd, 2021. This article first appeared on Open Democracy (www.opendemocracy.net) in July 2021. Republished with permission.*

NEW ITALIAN VOICES

by CLARISSA BOTSFORD

'New Italians', 'blended Italians', 'migrant literature' – quite rightly, these categories are rejected by writers placed within them. There is no one-size-fits-all definition for a remarkable array of authors who, for one reason or another, have intersected with Italian culture and write in Italian.

In her 'non-preface' to the novel *È la vita, dolcezza*, by the Indian-Italian writer Gabriella Kuruvilla, the Somali-Italian writer Igiaba Scego states her position clearly (my translation):

> 'We've always been pigeonholed under that hateful label "migrant literature". But, listen up folks, "migrant literature" doesn't exist. Literature exists. We exist within it, with our writing in Italian that needn't necessarily reflect our back-and-forth existence.'

Nevertheless, for Igiaba Scego and Cristina Ali Farah, the two authors I will be looking at, the impact on second- and third-generation Somali-Italians of Italy's disastrous colonial past has become a central issue. Simone Bruni, quoted by Kelsey McFaul in the *Los Angeles Review of Books*, puts it well:

> 'Hyphenated identities like Somali-Italian do not link two comparable entities but rather define a specific cultural encounter shaped by uneven power relations brought about by colonialism.'

The power relationship is inescapable, as Scego describes in an article in *World Literature Today* ('Not One Less', tr. Aaron Robertson):

> 'As the Italian-born daughter of Somalis, my country's colonial endeavour is a burden I've always shouldered … There was no way I could ignore this history. I bore its scars on my skin, including that species of Italian racism born of colonialist thinking.'

In a conversation with Cristina Ali Farah for BBC Africa, Ismail Einashe examines how adopting another language has given voice and agency to Somali women authors in the diaspora:

> 'It is unusual for Somali women to be the primary storytellers, yet they are now the ones taking on that mantle in the diaspora. … This is because they have "more space" outside Somalia to pursue their literary ambitions – unshackled as they are from the cultural expectations placed upon them in a male-dominated society. Their freedom to write comes from fact that they are finding their voice in a colonial language, such as Italian and English, that they have made their own.'

Ali Farah's *Little Mother* (Indiana University Press, 2011, tr. Giovanna Bellesia-Contuzzi and Victoria Offredi Poletto) tells the story of two cousins who are forced to flee their homeland and who find one another in Europe. The style mimics the predominantly oral and sensory tradition of poetry and storytelling. The protagonist of her *The River Captain* (seeking a publisher in English) is a troubled teenage boy who grew up a misfit in Italy and yearns for an absent father who takes on almost mythical qualities in his imagination. In her new book, *Le stazioni della luna* ('Phases of the Moon') a rural nomadic shepherd teaches his young daughter the traditional art – forbidden to women – of reading stars and divining the future, but this knowledge doesn't help her avoid an arranged marriage. Escape, first to the capital, where she ends up equally subjugated to men, and then further afield, is her only alternative.

Igiaba Scego's first novel, *La mia case è dove sono* ('My Home Is Where I Am' – the quotes here are from Aaron Robertson's translation, published in 2021 in *Words without Borders*) – is recommended reading in Italian middle schools. It is a memoir of sorts, a hymn to her origins, where:

> 'When evening fell at my aunt's, stories were told about wild hyenas and ingenious women, brave men and magic tricks. Adults and children sat together listening to and recounting tales. The word itself occupied the seat of honour. We practised using it wisely.'

It also describes the universal process of linguistic assimilation imposed by every education system across the world:

> 'This changed when I had to go to school, where they told me, "You're not talking, it's monkey babble. You don't know anything. You're all freaks, gorillas." … That's not what I wanted to be. After checking that my black skin couldn't be changed, now I had to deal with this. At least language was something I could work on. … I wanted to assimilate, to become one with the snow-white masses. Renouncing my mother tongue became my unorthodox way of saying, Love me. No one did.'

In *Adua*, (tr. Jamie Richards, New Vessel Press, 2017), Scego highlights the cultural alienation and split identities of Somalis living in Italy. Adua's perhaps naïve dream of becoming a film star in Italy takes an ugly turn when she is trafficked to an Italian film-producer couple and exploited for pornography. In a brutal scene, the husband rips open her infibulated vagina with scissors in order to rape

her, while the wife watches. Scego explores African sexual clichés and how they appeal to Western Oriental fantasies. And yet, unsettlingly for the reader, knowledge of the harrowing rape makes the jungle-inspired porn scenes seem mild in comparison.

In Scego's *Beyond Babylon* (tr. Aaron Robertson, Two Lines Press, 2019), as Ali Farah points out: 'the writing mimics the melodic, syncopated rhythms of jazz, Bossa nova, Somali hello, and salsa … High Italian and slang are deftly interspersed with Somali, Spanish, Arabic, and English'. Mar, Zuhra and Miranda head out to Tunisia to study Arabic and thus reverse the typical migrant path, leaving behind the country so many lose their lives at sea to reach. In her review of the book, Kelsey McFaul says,

> 'Part of this discovery is her own blackness, or how that blackness is coded differently in Italy and on the continent of her father's birth. Scego complicates the ways racialisation is mapped onto geography: the sisters are hyper-aware of their positionality as black Italians who have voluntarily left a country many aspire to enter. But they also feel out of place on the continent: "'I'm not familiar with Africa," Zuhra says. "And to think that black blood courses through my veins, that I was born there. It's not like knowing it, fundamentally. It really isn't the same thing."'

The good news, and much of it is down to the efforts of these and many other writers with 'hyphenated-identities', is that a virtuous cycle has been set in motion (following a typical pattern of global power relations): more of their work is translated into English, the language of the dominant culture, which triggers increased interest in the Italian publishing world for their stories, which creates greater cultural awareness in Italy. An awareness that, until very recently, has been sorely lacking.

Clarissa Botsford

FUTURE. IL DOMANI NARRATO DALLE VOCI DI OGGI

('Futures: Tomorrow Narrated by the Voices of Today')

EDITED BY IGIABA SCEGO
EFFEQUE, 2019

REVIEWED BY BARBARA RICCI

SOON TO APPEAR IN TRANSLATION BY BARBARA OFOSU-SOMUAH

A prolific author, journalist and academic, born in Rome to Somali parents, Igiaba Scego writes about blackness, history, literature, art and Italy. When asked by the publishing house Effeque to curate an anthology on migration for its series Rondini, Igiaba came up with an original idea: a collective project that tackles converging issues of race and gender.

Published in Italy in 2019, *Future. Il domani narrato dalle voci di oggi*, is the first anthology by black Italian women and contributes to the Italian literary panorama by shedding new light on a diverse contemporary society that is rapidly and constantly evolving. The eleven authors, different in age, origins and cultural backgrounds, use their writing, not easily classifiable into a single genre, to reflect collectively upon the historical and intergenerational experiences of racism and sexism in Italian society.

As Scego explains in her introduction, the anthology is a contemporary *J'accuse* aimed at Italy's unwillingness to acknowledge its diversity and the racial legacies of colonialism. In fact, the imperialist aspirations of Italian fascism in Ethiopia, Somalia, Libya, Egypt, Eritrea and Tunisia have shaped contemporary Italian society, even though Italy's colonial past is almost absent from public debate and rarely challenged.

Marie Moïse opens the collection with 'Abbiamo pianto un fiume

di risate' ('We Cried a River of Laughter'):

> 'I spent my youth seeking to recover my roots, which were severed by migration from one shore of the Atlantic to the other – from Haiti to Italy. I investigated, interrogated, and sought to understand. From the time of my birth, I have suffered a strange nostalgia for the pain of a journey I have never taken. It seems like my family's psyches were divided in the course of that journey, with half their minds here and the other half there.'
> (Translation by Barbara Ofosu-Somuah.)

Throughout the anthology we are taken on a journey, travelling back and forth, crossing barriers of space and time, finally landing in a bleak future without diversity, in Espérance Hakuzwimana Ripanti's story.

All the authors share the experience of living between two cultures and they narrate a rich tapestry of life. Past accounts of colonisation (as in 'There's No Hope Whatsoever' by Angelica Pesarini) and more recent acts of violence erupt through the various narratives, exposing a racism that is systemic and institutional in Italy. The stories by the younger authors, meanwhile, ('My Name' by Djarah Kan, 'Nassan Tenga' by Laeticia Ouedraogo, and 'The Marathon Continues', by Addes Tesfamariam) reveal the point of view of those born in Italy to migrant parents who feel Italian but still experience discrimination.

Overall, the anthology beautifully challenges the preconception of a white Italian identity by offering the reader a diversity of voices. It is unmissable for all those wanting to fully understand the ways that modern Italy is changing.

Barbara Ricci

The authors included in the anthology are: Leila El Houssi, Lucia Ghebreghiorges, Espérance Hakuzwimana Ripanti, Alesa Herero, Djarah Kan, Ndack Mbaye, Marie Moïse, Laetitia Ouedraogo, Angelica Pesarini, Addes Tesfamariam, Wii.

SABRYNEX
(SABRINA EFIONAY)
N'OVERDOSE DI TE. OVER
('OVER: AN OVERDOSE OF YOU')

RIZZOLI LIBRI, 2016

REVIEWED BY BARBARA RICCI

An Italian writer of Nigerian origins, Sabrina Efionay made herself known with the nickname Sabrynex at the tender age of fourteen, writing her first novel in instalments on Wattpad, one of the largest online communities of writers and readers.

In just a few months, *Over: An Overdose of You* won over millions of teenagers, and attracted the interest of Rizzoli, who published the novel in January 2016, and its sequel, *Over2: We Walk in the Wind*, in the summer of the same year.

Strongly characterised as a young-adult series, due to its themes, style and graphics, *Over* takes its cue from the dynamics of soap operas, with elements of a modern fairy tale, telling the passionate and tormented love story of Cher and Hunter.

'I'm Cher, I'm eighteen and I think we all need something to depend on, to go crazy for. I didn't know it until a few months ago, when I met Hunter. We are the opposite: black and white, good and evil, we cannot exist without each other. He bears the same scars on his skin, the same past, we support each other, but Hunter hurts anyone who comes near him, and he did it to me too. It's my fault, I know: I lost my mind to a boy who lost himself.'

The writing shows surprising maturity and craftsmanship, considering the author's age. Full of suspense, the story unravels through car races, fighting, drugs, sex and alcohol, and has a quite unexpected ending. Though it's set in the suburbs of London, the location might just as easily have been inspired by Scampia in Naples or Castel Volturno (the setting of the film *Gommorah* by Matteo Garrone), where Sabrina was born and lives.

Narrated from a fresh point of view – that of Sabrina's generation – the novel exposes all the fragilities of her cohort: the first to grow up on social media, always under the pressure to perform, constantly in the spotlight and often exposed to risks and addictions.

There are no bad kids, as such, in the novel, just bad choices; and even if at first the two protagonists might seem quite predictable, they never are.

Now twenty-one, Sabrina is apparently working on a novel about her eighteen-year-old mother's journey from Nigeria to Italy: a personal subject and, no doubt, a book to look forward to.

Barbara Ricci

AMARA LAKHOUS

CLASH OF CIVILISATIONS OVER AN ELEVATOR IN PIAZZA VITTORIO

TRANSLATED BY ANN GOLDSTEIN
EUROPA EDITIONS, 2008

REVIEWED BY FIONA GRAHAM

This lively polyphonic novella is not so much the 'whodunit' the blurb suggests as a 'who is he?' and a 'where is he?'. Who and where is Amedeo, the friendly but mysterious man 'from the south of the south' who goes missing from his apartment block in Rome just when the corpse of a delinquent tenant, nicknamed 'the Gladiator', is discovered in the lift? Ten other local residents, unreliable witnesses all, give their overlapping and conflicting versions of 'the truth' before an equally unreliable police detective reaches two contradictory conclusions about the murder.

The titular 'clash of civilisations' is, among other things, an ironic nod to Samuel Huntington's geopolitical theory of confrontations between world cultures, which he predicted would follow the end of the ideological divide between communism and capitalism. But if the non-Italian reader expects the main cultural clash to be between Catholic Italians and Muslim migrants, they are in for a surprise. True, nearly all the Italian characters exhibit gross ignorance and prejudice against foreigners,

particularly non-Europeans and Muslims. And some of the incomers are baffled by Italian mores and customs – like Iranian Parviz, disgusted by the sight of a girl eating a pizza 'as big as an umbrella' on the metro. But one of the biggest cultural conflicts is among Italians themselves: between the self-styled diligent northerner, Professor Marini, and the more laid-back denizens of Rome, for instance, or between the petit-bourgeois Roman widow, Elisabetta, and the folksy Neapolitan concierge, Benedetta. Indeed, Professor Marini goes as far as to question whether Italy should ever have been unified.

The building's lift is the epicentre of conflict. Lorenzo, 'the Gladiator', vandalises it. Elisabetta's spoilt dog, Valentino, piddles in it. Benedetta vainly tries to keep it clean, the hapless Peruvian maid, Maria Cristina, is debarred from entering on grounds of obesity, and snooty Professor Marini demands that Bangladeshi grocer Iqbal show ID before letting him use it for his deliveries. The lift is almost a microcosm of contemporary Italian society, with the more privileged residents seeking to monopolise what Professor Marini reveres as the benefits of 'civilisation' for their own selfish ends, while the have-nots struggle to gain access, and the anti-social trash public property.

All this casts light on the other sense of 'civilisation'. While the title primarily suggests contrasting cultures, 'civilisation' also refers to positive human qualities like those Amedeo displays: he helps his needier neighbours in their battles with the authorities, protects the weak, and at the same time amazes those around him with his knowledge of literature, history and philosophy, and his cultivated use of the Italian language. Indeed, the enigmatic Amedeo appears to be the most civilised person in the whole cast of characters.

This satirical portrait of multicultural Italian society is an entertaining read with an underlying tension that makes it a real page-turner. *Clash of Civilisations* holds up a mirror both to Italy and to other Western societies with significant foreign-born populations. It is as timely now as when it first appeared.

Fiona Graham

Lala Hu's short book, Semi di tè *('Tea Seeds'), was a timely arrival on the Italian literary scene when it was published in August 2020, as Covid-19 had struck, left its deathly mark and seemed to be slowly receding. Focussing on the actions and stories of first- and second-generation Chinese-Italians during the first waves of the pandemic in Italy, Hu chronicles the layered anxieties and resolutions of one of the migrant communities most targeted over 2019-2021, both in Europe and North America. Her protagonists are herself, doctor Wen, tea taster and seller Wudi, artist Ningyuan, and Yang, an actor; their stories weave into each other's and into those of Italian 'Chinatowns' from Bologna, to Milan, via Prato, Naples and Padua.*

LALA HU

SEMI DI TÈ

People, 2020

Introduced and translated by Alex Valente

After the 2011 pedestrianisation of the main road (Via Paolo Sarpi) and the opening of new metro stations, the entire neighbourhood had undergone a wide-ranging revitalisation. A few Chinese wholesale shops remained open – their presence had been the cause of tensions with local Italian residents, leading to a handful of protests led by Chinese business owners in 2007 – but many others changed their main activity. Trendy new shops and businesses appeared, opened by both Italian and second-generation entrepreneurs; they sold soft drinks, dumplings, noodles, and dishes more elaborate than traditional Chinese cuisine, but usually associated with cheap prices and poor quality.

You could find vendors with small crates of snacks or traditional products along the street. Among them was a man who'd carry his wares around on his bicycle. At the weekend or over the holidays, when I was home, I'd often hear him ride by and ring his bell, yelling: 'Fresh corn! Zongzi! Liangpi!'[1]. I bumped into him a couple of times: a forty-year-old man, with a small moustache and a cap. More than by his products, I was

fascinated by meeting the man whose voice I could hear from the window. I never bought anything, but I did greet him a couple of times – he always looked at me in confusion, unsure whether we actually knew each other or not.

The neighbourhood, by then, had become a culinary destination and an area popular for leisurely strolls, even earning, in recent years, the praise of the media, who spoke of its vibrant colours and peaceful multicultural coexistence. Admittedly, there was no full integration between Chinese and Italians, and what there was was mainly on a business level, but the tensions of 2007 were far behind everyone. The urban revitalisation of Paolo Sarpi also came, however, with negative effects: house prices had risen, threatening to force out the neighbourhood's historical residents, both Italian and Chinese.

The biggest event of the year, which brought the largest crowd – from Milan and several other cities – was the Lunar New Year celebration. In 2020, the main celebration should have taken place on Sunday 2 February. Preparations had been going on for weeks, and Via Paolo Sarpi had been adorned with red lanterns since Christmas. With the epidemic exploding in China, however, fear was already making its way through the city; people were starting to avoid the Chinese neighbourhood. The event organisers thought that, given the virus was at its peak in China, it would be best to cancel the celebrations in solidarity with the Chinese population. All the lanterns were taken down.

The neighbourhood fell into a surreal silence. It almost felt as though the relaxed, lively vibe that had been created over the years had suddenly been put on pause: a suspended atmosphere, in which the Chinese shops closed and the main street emptied completely. I no longer heard the street vendor's voice from my window.

Lala Hu
Translated by Alex Valente

1. Traditional Chinese snacks. Zongzi *are glutinous rice snacks, while* liangpi *are cold noodles.*

VALERIA PARRELLA
ALMARINA

TRANSLATED BY ALEX VALENTE
JOHN MURRAY, 2021

REVIEWED BY ROSIE EYRE

Opening the cover of *Almarina* – which bears the image of a cobalt-blue sea seen from a lush shoreline and the strapline 'Finding freedom in the most unlikely place' – to find an epigraph from Antonio Gramsci's *Letters from Prison*, I had my first inkling of why, on the edge of this apparent idyll, freedom might not be so near at hand. A couple of paragraphs into the prologue, as the narrator, Elisabetta Maiorano, introduces herself as a teacher at Nisida youth detention centre, everything clicked into place.

Once inside Nisida, the centre's metonym, derived from the tiny island off Cape Posillipo on which it is located, we turn our backs on the ocean vista to plunge into Elisabetta's life as a prison maths teacher, and as a fifty-year-old widow struggling to come to terms with the loss of her husband. In contrast to the clean lines and rigorous logic of her discipline, the contours of Elisabetta's mind follow an erratic course, her attention ricocheting from daily reality at the centre to jumbled vignettes from years gone by – a panic attack in Paris as a student, a childhood row with her mother, her failed attempts to conceive. Instead of pushing towards a new horizon, she seems to be struggling against a tide of unwieldy memories, staring into the past with regret and at her own reflection with misrecognition. In Elisabetta's words, all she now meets in the mirror is 'an old tired woman with a raging hangover … unable to hold the mascara because crying comes more naturally to her than make-up'.

The turning point comes with the arrival of Almarina. A sixteen-year-old refugee from Romania, Almarina escaped to Italy in a lorry with her little brother to flee their abusive father and has ended up in Nisida after stealing a mobile phone. Slight and shaven-headed, she wears the scars of her turbulent upbringing on her disfigured body and in her struggles with basic sums, yet she also rallies her teammates to victory on the volleyball pitch, marvels with childlike wonder at pizza dough

rising, and dreams of becoming a perfumer and being reunited with her brother. Through this capacity to dream, and to savour the scraps of joy in a life that has offered her precious little, she also wins Elisabetta's heart, and instils her with a new sense of maternal purpose. When Almarina's sentence at Nisida comes to an end, and Elisabetta is faced with the prospect that Almarina will vanish into the blue 'like all the othersI never saw again', she finally finds the impetus to wrest herself from the countercurrent of the past and push herself towards an alternative future.

Nisida youth detention centre is a real place. In a visit there in September 2021, Italian President Sergio Mattarella stated that detention should not be regarded as an 'indelible stain' on those who pass through Nisida, but rather as 'a scar that disappears'.

In *Almarina*, Valeria Parrella suggestively repositions Nisida not as a blemish to be washed away, but as the source of the healing process, and shows that its lessons in how to live again, and live better, can work in both directions. In truth Almarina is just as much a teacher as Elisabetta. The one who, in turning up so visibly in need of a life raft, unwittingly provides Elisabetta with the means to stay afloat too.

Rosie Eyre

EVELINA SANTANGELO
FROM ANOTHER WORLD

TRANSLATED BY RUTH CLARKE
GRANTA, 2021

REVIEWED BY ROSIE GOLDSMITH

Evelina Santangelo is a well-known novelist in Italy and winner of several major prizes, which makes the publication of her first novel in English a long overdue pleasure. Sincere thanks to translator Ruth Clarke and publisher Granta, as *From Another World* is a substantial gift to readers.

'The book arose from a question that struck me as extremely urgent', Santangelo explains in her 'Author's Note'. 'What does it mean to produce literature in dark times?' The topic of the book is indeed one of the darkest of our times – the refugee crisis in Europe – and to tackle it the author combines facts and real events with fiction, ghosts, horror and fertile imaginings. It is a sizzling mix, gripping, beautifully written and deeply troubling. In the same way I turn away from a film if it is too shocking, I had to turn away from certain passages of this novel, where the depiction of human suffering and cruelty were too much. But *From Another World* is our world, and this novel is important because it gives shape to individual stories of 'illegals' or 'waves of migrants' – those lazy euphemisms and labels that we use every day and that Santangelo herself only refers to in quotation marks.

The time is now. The setting is Europe. The two individuals in this novel whose stories run parallel are thirteen-year-old Khaled, who arrived with his little brother, Nadir, in Sicily on a refugee ship three years before from an unnamed Middle Eastern country; and Karolina, a white middle-aged Belgian woman whose teenage son Andreas has disappeared, possibly to join a radical right-wing terror group. Khaled and Karolina are the two innocents of the novel who both undergo gruelling journeys – geographically, physically and psychologically. They meet only once, in a discount shop in Brussels, where Khaled, hungry and on the run after the death of his brother,

meets Karolina by chance; she spontaneously and selflessly buys him food, clothing and the red suitcase he clearly covets. After her life unravels, after her husband and son have left, after she discovers her son's dark secrets, Karolina recalls that the boy with the red suitcase was 'the last person who made her feel like she could do something for someone'. Her selfless act backfires badly, fuelled by the kind of fear-mongering, rumours and fake news to which we are all susceptible, and which are described by Santangelo so perceptively. Khaled and Karolina's lives spiral out of control, and soon the locations of the novel spread beyond Palermo and Brussels until there is a Europe-wide media and police hunt for an innocent boy and naïve housewife.

Khaled drags the red suitcase with him everywhere, from city to city, from stinking sewer to railway station, from the backs of lorries to building sites. His beloved mother's and grandmother's many positive sayings from his childhood spur him on: 'The rope of life is short!'; 'Happiness … will always attract something good!' He and his brother had come to Europe to seek a better life but, 'He didn't know where exactly this Europe began … He'd imagined a long journey in the lorry they boarded not far from home, and, after a few days, Europe, where there was someone to give them a job on a building site'. Is there something in the suitcase, we ask, or is it a metaphor? Is it one of the many flights of imagination that burst into the narrative? Khaled often doesn't know if he is alive or dead, and in a story also populated by ghosts, you might question your own grasp on reality.

Karolina's journey is shorter geographically, in the search for her son, but, you could argue, much further in search of herself. For a woman whose previous life was clouded by comfort and gullibility, when she finds herself browsing videos of jihadist and neo-Nazi propaganda, she soon touches her own baseline of self-hatred and loneliness. At that moment she is able to imagine herself in her son's shoes. That the novel is not only a magnificent act of empathy on Santangelo's part, but also the result of extensive research, is clear when you read the 'Afterword'.

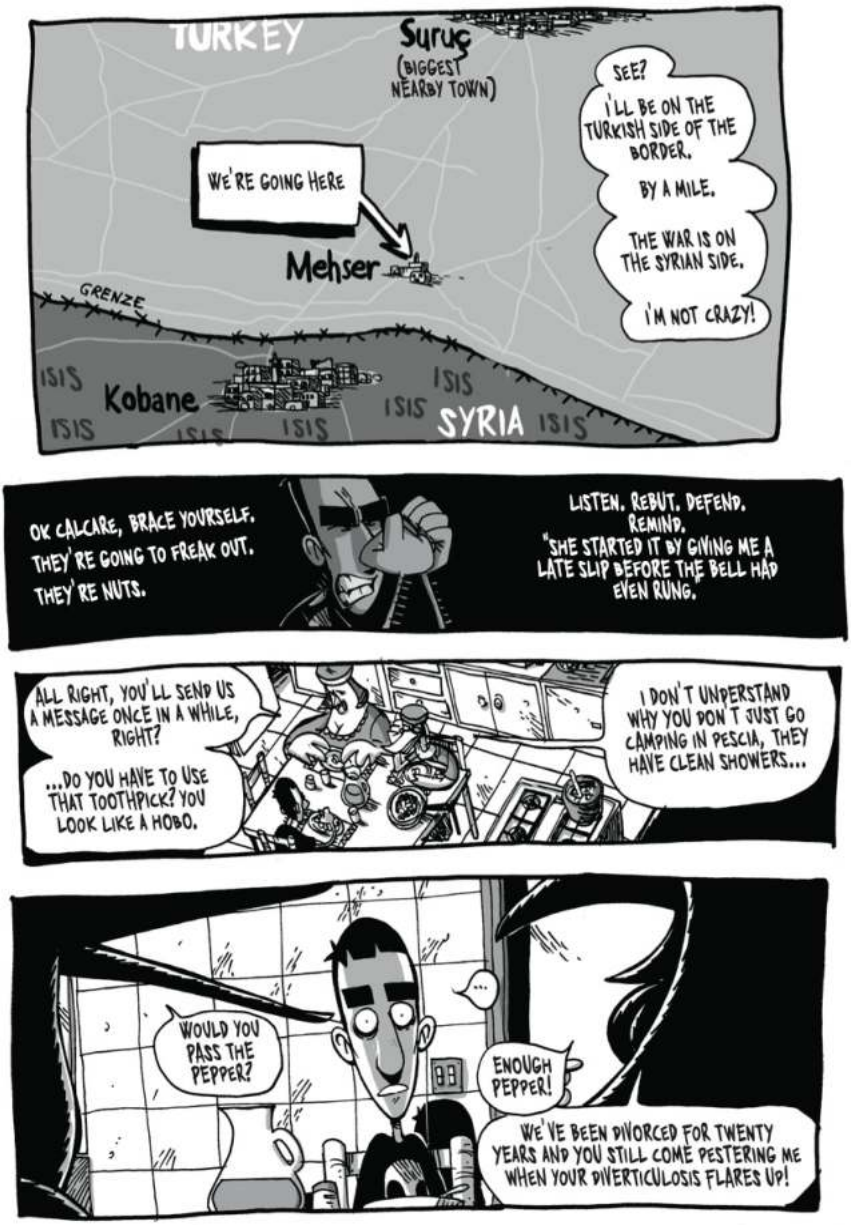
Khaled and Karolina are both 'insignificant specks of nothing in front of something vast' – individuals who also represent a vast reality. Their stories are devastating, but there is also love, kindness and beauty. *From Another World* is an electrifying novel of great power, imagination and lyrical splendour. Even if all the many characters and plotlines do not ultimately coalesce, the beauty of this novel is in how Evelina Santangelo draws us in and shows us our responsibility for a world that we imperfect humans have helped create.

Rosie Goldsmith

ZEROCALCARE

From KOBANE CALLING: GREETINGS FROM NORTHERN SYRIA

Translated by Jamie Richards
The Lion Forge, 2017



Kobane Calling *by Zerocalcare was originally published in Italian by BAO Publishing, 2016.*


OUTWARD REACTION:
INWARD REACTION:
OMIFUCKINGGOD!
YOU GET ON MY ASS WHEN I DRIVE IN THE RAIN 'CAUSE IT'S SO SLIPPERY AND DANGEROUS BUT NOW I'M GOING TO KOBANE AND YOU DON'T GIVE A SHIT?
HEY YOU KNOW THAT THEY KIDNAP WESTERNERS THERE!
THEY DECAPITATE THEM!
DO YOU NOT WATCH TV OR WHAT?
THIS IS SETTING OFF ADOLESCENT RESPONSES I THOUGHT I WAS OVER.
LIKE MY COUSIN WHO INTENTIONALLY GOT CAUGHT STEALING LIPSTICK WHEN SHE WAS 14 TO GET MY AUNT'S ATTENTION.
YOU RECORDING, MAN?
GOOD.
BYE, MA.
REMEMBER WHEN YOU WERE ARGUING ABOUT PEPPER INSTEAD OF WORRYING ABOUT ME...
WHAT SHOULD WE DO WITH THIS ONE?
HE NEEDS TO BE PUNISHED.
NO SCOOTER OR CELL PHONE FOR A WEEK.
BUT ACTUALLY, COME TO THINK OF IT, WHAT ARE THEY SUPPOSED TO SAY? I'M 31. YOU'RE AN ADULT AT 31. YOU KNOW WHAT YOU'RE DOING. NO ONE CAN MAKE YOU DO OR KEEP YOU FROM DOING ANYTHING.
COME ON, I CAN'T LOOK AT YOU WITH THAT TOOTHPICK...
(IN FACT, THAT'S THE REASON I SKIPPED MY GASTROSCOPY.)

POSTCARD FROM MILAN

By Nadeesha Uyangoda

The pandemic and the city have changed the way I write. I used to live in a small town, but ever since I have moved to Nolo, the rapidly gentrifying neighbourhood I'm now obsessed with, it has reshaped my writing.

Whenever I'm short of words, I take little things here and there from Nolo: from the black man outside the local supermarket, from the Wednesday street market, from the migrants sleeping under the central railway station and the elderly people who own houses I could never afford to buy. Power dynamics spread throughout the city.

Nolo is split in two by Viale Monza, a busy road. The artsy side, where I share a balcony-less attic with my boyfriend, is populated by hipster cafés, and it gets crowded whenever Milan Fashion Week is back on the runway. Whereas, at the foot of the solemn yet decadent buildings on the other side, ethnic food stores lean out on every other corner and people walk by, shouting into their mobile phones in a language I haven't heard in public since my childhood.

They all navigate the two sides, and it's as if I'm the only one who notices the border.

MARCO MISSIROLI
FIDELITY

TRANSLATED BY ALEX VALENTE
WEIDENFELD & NICOLSON, 2021

REVIEWED BY ROSIE GOLDSMITH

Fidelity appeared in English in 2021 already festooned with praise from Italian readers. It quickly attracted tributes from a broad range of English-language admirers: from writers, such as Jonathan Safran Foer, who described it as 'thrilling' and 'brilliant', to the broadsheets – 'gripping' – and the tabloids, who called it a 'bonkbuster' and 'an absolute scorcher'. It is also being made into a Netflix series – high praise indeed, and what I imagine most novelists secretly hope for. Suffice to say, before I started reading _Fidelity_ I was both anxious (would I be disappointed after this build-up?) and excited (I rarely get to review bonkbusters!). _Fidelity_ is all of the above but much more nuanced. It is a wise novel of subtleties and ambiguities.

We meet all five of the main characters in the first few pages: married couple Carlo and Margherita; their respective 'infidelities', Sofia and Andrea; as well as Anna, Margherita's mother, the emotional anchor of the whole novel. The five share the narrative viewpoint, which shifts continually, sometimes mid-paragraph. It shouldn't work as a technique, but it does, seamlessly, each observation and character quietly illuminating the previous one. We are even presented with the main facts of the infidelities in the first few pages, or 'the misunder-standing' as Carlo and Margherita call it. What we don't yet know is why this loving, happy young couple are unfaithful to each other, and the impact that their infidelities have on their lives and on the lives of those close to them.

Carlo is a university professor of creative writing, and Margherita an architect turned estate agent. Books and writing are significant and interesting components of this story. She is a voracious reader, and he is a failed novelist. They live in Milan – richly described throughout. They love each other deeply and enjoy great sex – also richly described! Nevertheless, on the opening page, we see Carlo lusting after his writing student Sofia and, soon,

Margherita after her physiotherapist, Andrea. Neither of them initially understands their betrayals, but admit they brought them happiness. The novel explores the ambiguities of their relationship – and by extension also our relationships: the white lies and half-truths we tell one another, often unwittingly, in order to survive, in order to nurture stable friendships and marriages. All this takes place against a backdrop of reassuring normality. Everyone in the novel eats, drinks, reads books, listens to music, takes buses or taxis, tries to find meaningful employment. Whether teaching, managing property, massaging, waitressing, dressmaking or shopkeeping, we never doubt that Missiroli knows what he is talking about.

Carlo and Margherita's inner struggles intensify. He believes he's 'done nothing wrong' in pursuing Sofia, as his marriage is still intact; he is simply a 'male stereotype incarnate'. But 'his hunger for Sofia was becoming an uneasiness that the family hearth prevented him from living fully, half of himself fighting the other half'. The betrayal for both husband and wife was, they each conclude, nothing more than giving in to the joy, discovering a sense of abandon and liberation within themselves, ultimately strengthening their marriage.

These fine lines and moral ambiguities are explored in equal measure through the stories of Sofia and Andrea, who are by no means portrayed as victims but active participants and fully rounded, complicated human beings. Ten years later these four people – plus Margherita's wonderful mother, Anna, a woman of profound grace and emotional intelligence – are still dancing round each other.

A novel that sets itself up from the start to examine the nature of betrayal and the truth about relationships does set the bar high and does raise expectations in the reader, and Marco Missiroli is successful, but not in the way you might expect. His skill is not to draw grand conclusions or deliver judgements about love and marriage – and certainly not to create a salacious bonkbuster – but rather to allow us to observe the intimate thoughts of his female and male protagonists in order to experience them as equally flawed, complex and in pursuit of fulfilment.

Rosie Goldsmith

TIM PARKS
interviewed by Rosie Goldsmith

You've lived forty years in Italy, most of your life, do you feel Italian?

I certainly feel very much at home here now, after all these years. Sometimes people don't realise I'm a foreigner. Which always cheers me up. But after a few minutes there's usually a bit of an accent that gives you away. I probably spend two or three weeks in the UK every year between book presentations and holidays. The rest of the time I'm in Milan.

When and how did your relationship with Italy begin?

I went to the States to do a PhD and fell in love with an Italian woman who became my wife. Soon enough I gave up on my PhD, we did a year in London, then thought we'd try Italy. I certainly never envisaged living here, nor did we initially plan to stay for long.

How hard was it early on fitting in in Italy and learning the language?

Hard. I was twenty-five. I didn't feel particularly gifted for languages. We had no money and so I had to work from day one, teaching English at first. I would spend all my spare time between lessons in the public library in central Verona, reading novel after novel, writing down every word I didn't know. Conversations were difficult. Italians knew a lot less English then. You had to speak Italian or you were simply excluded. It was a couple of years before I felt confident as a speaker, and many more before I felt I had really arrived in the language. Now, obviously, I'm grateful that I went through that. Today it's all too easy to live in English here. To follow English media, live a virtual life. That wasn't possible in the 1980s.

How long did it take you before you felt you could write about Italy?

I'd been here almost ten years before someone asked me to write what became my book *Italian Neighbours*. Even then it was a process of discovery, thinking over all my experience of the country in those years. It makes me smile when people write about another country after just a year or two.

You've written several books of non-fiction about Italy – they seem to chart your journey through Italian life: do you agree?

For sure. I wrote about neighbours. I wrote about children, the whole young family scene. About football fandom. About my endless train travels to and from Milan to teach and elsewhere. Finally I found a formula to write about the world inside an Italian organisation like a university, where a libel case looms over every sentence. And about walking from Rome to Cesenatico, following Garibaldi. I've always been very aware that the country is at once hugely seductive and, for many, desperately cruel, in some respects wonderfully lively and stylish and in others profoundly gloomy and rigidly conformist. My fascination has always been to

understand the connections between the society's various manifestations. And the connections between ordinary life and the country's literature, which I've written about regularly too. In the end, it's a package deal. I love the place, but don't gush. There is much to hate too. Obviously when I write about Italy now I'm very aware that the book will be read and judged in Italy. I'm maniacally attentive to the Italian editions!

There is such range in your writing about Italy: what guides you in choosing your subjects?

I suppose I just realise that there's an area of my experience, the train travel, the stadium-going, that could be used to open up Italy *tout court*. I don't have the impression of choosing subjects, but of suddenly realising there's something I'd be excited to write about. Perhaps instinctively I go where I feel life is intense, where I will find energy. *A Season with Verona*, for example, the football fan book, was one of the best things I've written about people in general. It was so extraordinary travelling week after week with those wild young men.

Your book *Literary Tour of Italy* is marvellous: how did you approach discovering Italy's literature?

I was lucky. Out of the blue the *New York Review of Books* started asking me for essays on Italian authors. Saba, Montale, Verga, Nievo, Morante, Boccaccio. Many, many others. I quickly realised it was a way of deepening my knowledge of the country, of understanding the connection between a people's history and their literature. I always like to think of each author I tackle as one in a chorus of voices, somebody whose individuality depends on the particular way they react to circumstances and themes that are common to the others as well.

Which Italian authors did you read first?

Natalia Ginzburg is probably the easiest novelist for a learner to tackle. Then Moravia. I read all the novelists of the thirties and forties. Morante, Pavese, Calvino. Then slowly back in time, Verga, Manzoni, Nievo, Leopardi, Foscolo, on and on to the fountainhead, Dante. I'd probably been here ten years before I could read him with any confidence.

Do you get upset at how little Italian literature we read in English? Is that changing?

No. There is such a rich English-language literature. And the world is vast. French literature, German, Spanish. Many, many others. One can't read everything. Italian seems to get a reasonable amount of attention. It's a mistake I think to abandon one's own literature to read mostly foreign literature. Our own literature and writers should be precious to us. It's our grounding in our own literature which then allows us to savour the foreignness of others.

You've written eighteen novels, a few set in Italy, but not all: how far does Italy define and influence you as a fiction writer?

Interesting subject. My first vocation was as a novelist, working initially in a British tradition for a British or English-speaking public. Then slowly, through the nineties that shifted, inevitably. Now to my surprise I find I've become my own creature, for better or worse, bringing my own particular range of experience to the party. Probably the recent book *Italian Life*, half memoir, half fiction, was the closest I've got to presenting a fictional Italian world in English.

You are one of our best-known translators from Italian, how long did it take before you felt you could translate from Italian?

I started working as a commercial translator quite soon, after a couple of years in Italy, translating more or less everything, technical manuals, art catalogues, tourist brochures. That was extremely useful. You pick up so many words, learn what's standard Italian and what isn't. I was offered my first literary translation at thirty, after five years in the country. But really one goes on learning year after year, even now, and I'd be a little anxious going back to check the work I did then.

As readers (or reviewers!), how should we read translations from Italian if we don't know the original?

You bring to the book what you have, in terms of language and context. What else can you do? As a reviewer, it's worth staying alert to the internal coherence of the writing, which is often where translations slip up. As a general reader, just enjoy!

You can read the whole interview with Tim Parks online at eurolitnetwork.com.

CESARE PAVESE

THE HOUSE ON THE HILL
THE MOON AND THE BONFIRES

TRANSLATED AND WITH INTRODUCTIONS BY TIM PARKS
PENGUIN CLASSICS, 2021

REVIEWED BY JONATHAN LEVI

In 1954, the literary critic *terrible* Leslie Fiedler called Cesare Pavese 'the best of recent Italian novelists ... and the most poetic'. Although Natalia Ginzburg and Primo Levi had yet to write their greatest work, Fiedler ranked Pavese above the better-known and more successful Alberto Moravia and others who had survived to write in the renaissance following the Second World War.

Born in the vineyards just outside Turin long before the invasion of foreign gourmands chasing wine and truffles, Pavese wrote his thesis on Walt Whitman then joined the new publishing house of Einaudi, where, as a translator and editor, he introduced Italians to dozens of English-language classics, including Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist*, Melville's *Moby Dick*, and, more unfortunately, Edgar Lee Masters' *Spoon River Anthology*, which has become a cloying staple of Italian high schools and amateur theatricals.

Pavese struggled to place himself in an Italy that itself had trouble figuring out its own identity. Although he had joined the Fascist Party in 1933 in order to secure a teaching post, he spent a year in internal exile when he was found holding letters for an anti-fascist girlfriend. In the vertiginous autumn of 1943, when the Allies landed on the mainland, the Italian king surrendered and the new German enemy invaded Turin, Pavese found himself with an uncomfortable choice – either to join the fascists of the nearby Republic of Salò under the rehabilitated Mussolini, or to hide in the hills outside the city with the communist partisans. In the event, Pavese did neither. He found refuge in a monastery and hid until the end of the war.

He was as aware of his prevarication as any Hamlet and regretted it for the few remaining

years of his life. As unsettled in his affairs of the heart, Pavese committed suicide in 1950 at age forty-one, in the ashes of several failed romances, most famously with the American actress Constance Dowling, who inspired his best-loved poem 'Verrà la morte ed avrà i tuoi occhi', which translates approximately as 'Death shall come and she shall have your eyes'.

Confused by life, Pavese looked to literature for guidance. He was drawn not only to the myths and superstitions of the peasants of the hills of his youth, but also to the America of his literary imagination, a land of reinvention that he never had a chance to visit, and to the struggles of great loners like Ahab and Stephen Dedalus.

The heroes of his novel *The House on the Hill* and his masterpiece *The Moon and the Bonfires*, newly published by Penguin Classics in fresh translations by Tim Parks, are two such confused young men. The Corrado of *The House on the Hill* teaches in a school in the city of Turin by day (thanks to his Fascist Party card). At night, Corrado bunks in a house on a hill in 'the country of childhood … of bonfires and larks and fooling around'. There, he finds himself drawn to the dark warmth of a local farmhouse, where he discovers Cate, his girlfriend from a decade before, and her young son. Looking for proof that young Dino is also his son, Corrado dithers between town and hill, and loses his chance to join Cate and her partisan friends, 'like a boy playing hide-and-seek who creeps into the bushes and likes it in there, watches the sky from under the leaves and forgets ever to come out'.

If the hero of *The Moon and the Bonfires*, nicknamed 'Eel' in Parks' translation, is more Dante than Hamlet, he is no less a man in crisis. An orphan, Eel returns after the war, *nel mezzo del cammin* of his *vita*, to the peasant countryside of his barefoot youth after a couple of decades of successful escape to America, seeking a piece of land on which to build the paradise he couldn't afford as a boy. His Virgil is his childhood hero Nuto, a carpenter and clarinet player, a man who had initiated him in legends and superstitions, in the prophecy of the moon and in the restorative power of fire. As he travels through the memories of his youthful privation and of his longing for the daughters and the comforts of his old padrone, he sees at first-hand how the war has done little for the continuing misery of the peasants. Gradually Nuto begins to fill in the gaps Eel has missed while making his fortune in America, and spreads before him the full horror of that autumn of 1943 and the war, whose bonfires restored nothing.

The English-born writer and translator of both these books, Tim

Parks, translated himself to Italy in 1981, where he has written in fiction and essay about Italian politics, football and the attempts of others to make accessible both the country and its literature. For Parks, the landscape of Pavese's novels with its 'big blackened stones, the gnarled fig tree … nothing but maize stubble' recalls not the Piedmont of modern-day wine tours and truffle hunts, but the bleakest reaches of Thomas Hardy's Wessex. Yet travelling back with Pavese to a not-so-distant civil war is a reminder that the decline and fall of any country divided as brutally as Italy was in that autumn of 1943 may come at any moment, and, like Death in Pavese's poem, it will come with your eyes.

Jonathan Levi

THE RIVETER
REVIEW DIGEST

NATALIA GINZBURG

VOICES IN THE EVENING, TR. D. M. LOW
FAMILY LEXICON, TR. JENNY MCPHEE
THE ROAD TO THE CITY, TR. FRANCES FRENAYE
THE DRY HEART, TR. FRANCES FRENAYE
THE LITTLE VIRTUES, TR. DICK DAVIS
HAPPINESS AS SUCH, TR. MINNA ZALLMAN PROCTOR
DAUNT BOOKS, 2019, 2018, 2021, 2021, 2018, 2019

REVIEWED BY WEST CAMEL

In *Voices in the Evening*, Natalia Ginzburg's 1961 novel concerning, among other things, an ill-fated love affair, our protagonist, Elsa, describes the lovers' twice-weekly assignations:

'We always did the same things: we changed the book at the "Selecta" library, bought some oatcakes, bought also for my mother fifteen centimetres of black grosgrain.'

Over the course of the affair, it seems, Elsa's mother ends up with a large number of rather short pieces of ribbon. This might sound like too-fine a point, but it illustrates a technique Ginzburg uses time and again in her writing: she presents an incident or utterance both as a regular occurrence – 'we always did the same things'; and as what must be a specific, one-off moment: buying a short piece of ribbon. This doesn't create a contradiction necessarily, but through repeated use, it builds a tension into the narrative, the reader pulled between comprehending each of these moments as something general or something specific.

Ginzburg's most famous book, *Family Lexicon*, is built from these

tensions. A memoir, or autobiographical novel, it is a history of Ginzburg's liberal and left-wing family and friends, as they negotiate the rise and fall of fascism before and after the Second World War. Focussing, as the title suggests, on the family's argot – its origins in their shared experiences and memories, and the greater meanings each phrase or neologism has – Ginzburg describes the scenes in which a character utters the word or phrase both as a specific moment and one of many such moments. Her father regularly wakes in the middle of the night to yell at her mother about his worries, and describes his offspring as 'jackasses' and their activities as 'nitwitteries', Ginzburg sliding effortlessly between the generalised – 'My father would then take offence. "What a jackass!" he'd say' – and the specific: '"I'm worried about Alberto!" he said waking up in the night.'

Ginzburg's brevity is often cited as her trademark – but I think it is the combination of her concision and this 'generalised specificity' that characterises her work. It is through this technique that, in *Family Lexicon*, Ginzburg creates a portrait built from many layers, from glimpses and shades of colours, rather than a history told in a linear fashion – despite carrying us from the 1930s of her childhood to the 1950s of her young adulthood.

Her brevity is most evident in her earliest published fiction: the novellas, *The Road to the City* and *The Dry Heart*, which I reviewed for the European Literature Network's online *#RivetingReviews* in 2021. In my review of *The Dry Heart*, I describe Ginzburg's simplicity as a puzzle she sets the reader: how to move past the clearly presented, naked facts of the story? *The Dry Heart* tells the tale of a woman who kills her husband after their child dies in infancy; but beyond that it is an exploration of the destructive effects of the imagination. And in *The Road to the City*, I see in a seventeen-year-old's journey from rural abjection to a comfortable existence a tale of socioeconomics, examining the limited routes out of the confines of gender and poverty.

In the essay 'My Vocation', part of the collection, *The Little Virtues*, Ginzburg discusses her career to the date of writing (1949), and cites a Damascene moment, when she realised her inclination towards simplicity was a problem. Seeing a 'greenish resplendent' mirror conveyed along a street by hand-cart, she pocketed the image, ready to use later; but rather than use it, she found the memory of it moved something in her about her approach to fiction:

'I always concentrated on grey, squalid people and things,

> I sought out a contemptible kind of reality lacking in glory … [a] taste I had at the time for finding minute details, an avid mean desire for little things … The mirror on the handcart seemed to offer me new possibilities, perhaps the ability to look at a more glorious and splendid kind of reality which did not require minute descriptions and cleverly noticed details but which could be conveyed in one resplendent, felicitous image.'

She goes on to describe her propensity to mark each of her characters 'with some grotesque detail' as part of the 'irony and nastiness' that she needed to write like a man; at the time she 'had a horror of anyone realising from what I wrote that I was a woman'. But then she has children, and undergoes a great struggle between motherhood and her vocation, which ends in her writing her first novel:

> 'Now I no longer wanted to write like a man, because I had had children and I thought I knew a great many things about tomato sauce and even if I didn't put them into my story it helped my vocation that I knew them.'

This seems to me to be the point at which Ginzburg starts to develop her characteristic style. She claims to eschew her focus on 'minute descriptions', but in fact she now uses them to expand rather than diminish her characters. Each utterance, each event she describes, presents with two sides: its specific moment and its general meaning, elevating her simplicity from 'contemptible' to ' resplendent and felicitous'.

In a much later novel, *Happiness as Such*, first published in 1973, we see Ginzburg's characteristic style at work on a narrative level. At least half the book is written as letters, each of which acts as the kind of brief utterance we see in *Family Lexicon* – both specific to the plot and chronology of the book, but also with a generalised message about the family at the novel's centre. Michele has left Rome for a life in England; whether he's done so to escape fatherhood, his entanglement with terrorists or his own ailing father, is unclear. His mother and sisters write to him, and he replies – with Ginzburgian brevity. But the most intriguing character is Mara – his one-time girlfriend and mother of a child who may or may not be his. Moving from friend to acquaintance to random stranger, with her baby in tow, Mara seems to take advantage of everyone she meets, argues with them and moves on, bemoaning her misfortune, apparently unaware of her ingratitude and ruthlessness. One

acquaintance, who's taken her in as a maid, writes to Michele's sister, Angelica:

> 'Mara has too many problems to dedicate herself to housework, which requires patience, constancy and goodwill. But neither I nor my husband have the heart to turn her out onto the street.'

We sense that this particular instance is part of a greater pattern that began long before the book started and will continue long after it's over.

I believe that Ginzburg's technique, as I've described it, goes a long way to explaining her renewed popularity in the past few years – between them, New York Review of Books and Daunt Books have published nine of her books since 2017. Many of us drilled in, and fans of, Lish/Carveresque 'show don't tell', 'keep it simple stupid' creative writing will lap up the powerful brevity; but for me it is the development of this simplicity into a 'glorious and splendid kind of reality', through a technique I'm not sure I've witnessed in any other author, that makes Natalia Ginzburg a leading light of twentieth-century Italian writing.

West Camel

RIPE FOR REDISCOVERY: LOST ITALIAN CLASSICS

by HOWARD CURTIS

I recently was asked by the Italian Cultural Institute in London to edit an anthology of translated extracts from works by neglected twentieth-century Italian writers, particularly books that had never before been translated into English.[1]

In choosing what would be included, I put together a list of some thirty or forty Italian writers who seemed to fit the bill. But in researching these writers, I would find time and time again that books of theirs (often the very ones I had hoped to include) had in fact already been translated into English, often many decades ago, in editions that are now long out of print. In other words, there is a long tradition of translation from Italian in the British and American publishing world, a tradition which, my research suggested, reached its peak in the 1950s and 1960s, when there was something like a mini-boom in Italian books appearing in English.

Translators such as Archibald Colquhoun, Angus Davidson, Frances Frenaye, Stuart Hood and a handful of others were kept busy in those days, translating a great swathe of Italian literature, from major figures such as Ignazio Silone, Vasco Pratolini, Dino Buzzati and Cesare Pavese to the humorous *Don Camillo* books of Giovanni Guareschi. Alongside these big names, room was found for translations of a great many writers who are now almost completely forgotten outside Italy: Riccardo Bacchelli, Francesco Jovine, Raffaele La Capria, Ugo Pirro, Goffredo Parise, to cite a few at random. Conspicuous by its absence, from a twenty-first-century perspective, was any large representation of women writers: Natalia Ginzburg, Elsa Morante and Anna Maria Ortese did occasionally appear in translation, but it would take more recent decades for them to be rediscovered.

Few of these translations are likely to have been bestsellers, with occasional exceptions: Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa's *The Leopard* caused a stir on its publication in 1958, and the novels of Alberto Moravia, easily the most famous Italian writer of the time, presumably sold well, the translations being widely available in paperback editions, sometimes with lurid covers to emphasise their 'sexy' content.

I would surmise that part of the reason for this mini-boom, as I have called it, may lie in the general interest in all things Italian that prevailed at the time. Thanks to the post-war growth in European tourism, more British and American people were discovering Italy. Italian fashion, and Italian design in general, were sweeping the world. Italian food was

becoming increasingly familiar. Italian cinema was then at a creative zenith: directors such as De Sica, Visconti and Fellini were at the height of their powers, stars like Mastroianni and Loren were world-famous, and a certain number of Italian films were widely distributed in the UK and US.

Whatever the reasons, my (admittedly limited) research suggests that the mini-boom gradually faded from the 1970s onwards, although important titles continued to appear, such as the influential work of Italo Calvino, and there have been occasional bestsellers, like Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose*, a worldwide sensation in the early 1980s. Today, of course, we have the phenomenal success of Elena Ferrante – though it should be noted that Ferrante only really began to take off in the English-speaking world some seven years after she first appeared in English translation. Is it too much to hope that this success will lead to increased curiosity about what is being produced in Italy today, or will publishers' tendency to jump on bandwagons have them anxiously searching the horizon for a putative 'second Elena Ferrante'?

If the latter is the case, they may miss out on the true range and variety of the current Italian literary scene. They would also do well to take a second look at that amazing legacy from the twentieth century: a good many of the writers so profusely translated decades ago are ripe for rediscovery.

Howard Curtis

1. The resulting anthology is available at: https://iiclondra.esteri.it/IIC_londra/it/gli_eventi/italian-literature-in-translation.html

MARCO BELPOLITI
PRIMO LEVI: AN IDENTIKIT

TRANSLATED BY CLARISSA BOTSFORD
SEAGULL BOOKS, 2022

REVIEWED BY JOHANNE ELSTER HANSON

How to write about a man best known for telling his own story? Today, Primo Levi is viewed as one of our most important witnesses of Nazi atrocities. Writing in what Philip Roth described as 'lucid, unpretentious prose', the Italian chemist's books on his incarceration in Auschwitz and the concentration camp structure have earned him a rightful place among the greatest writers of the twentieth century.

A book on Levi should therefore make generous use of his fiction and non-fiction, both of which were clearly autobiographical. From Ian Thomson's definitive English-language biography *Primo Levi: Elements of a Life* (2002), via Carole Angier's *The Double Bond* (2002) and Sam Magavern's *Primo Levi's Universe* (2009), this has been the way to approach Levi. With *Primo Levi: An Identikit*, Italian author Marco Belpoliti takes this one step further by devoting his chapters entirely to Levi's various works, using these as starting points to write about other aspects of his life, and piecing together the eponymous identikit.

The result is a wide-ranging mosaic. Belpoliti also includes 'lemmas' after each chapter, where various related terms such as 'Holocaust', 'Lager' and 'Muselmänner' are glossed, and traits and stylistic features of Levi's writing are discussed. *Primo Levi: An Identikit*, therefore, does not follow its subject from cradle to crematorium. Instead, the brick-sized volume opens with Levi's writing of *If This Is a Man* – undoubtedly his most important work. In the years following his return from Auschwitz, Levi wrote about his experiences with fervent compulsion, during his lunch breaks at work and in the quiet dormitory of the Piedmont factory where he found employment, while his future wife, Lucia Morpurgo, served as his editor.

Here Belpoliti's meticulous analysis, where various drafts of the book are compared and contrasted, demonstrates how Levi's masterpiece evolved through the process of

endless rewrites. He initially struggled to find a publisher for his debut book, as 'the Shoah was not a dominant paradigm between the 1950s and the 1970s'. Belpoliti then traces Levi's life through his short stories, journalistic articles, novels, non-fiction (including a curious interlude entitled 'Levi's Alphabet of Animals'), as well as hybrid works such as *The Periodic Table*, a humanist manifesto as much as a book about the elements.

Primo Levi: An Identikit has been marketed as 'the definitive book on Primo Levi' and should therefore not be read as a biography. Instead, Belpoliti's book presents itself more as a companion to Levi's body of work, built around an impressive (albeit rather dry) close reading of various drafts, notes and interviews from Levi's long career as a writer. There's the occasional photograph, which Belpoliti analyses in similar fashion – Levi as a baby in his mother's arms (the infant already displaying 'a hint of that perplexed amazement' that would become characteristic of the man); Levi as an adult gazing intently into an early computer screen; and finally a photo of the stairwell at 75 Corso Re Umberto where he chose to end his own life on 11 April 1987.

Belpoliti, a professor of Italian literature at the University of Bergamo, has spent twenty years researching Primo Levi, and previously edited a collection of his works on Auschwitz. While his knowledge of Levi's works is remarkable, *Primo Levi: An Identikit* bears the distinct marks of being written by an academic prone to guiding the reader's attention with a heavy hand: 'The following two sections will deal with …'; 'let us take a few steps back in time …'; 'we will limit our analysis to a few significant points'. At one point, he even takes an absurd detour into Freudian territory, drawing on the idea of the Ego and the Id when analysing Levi's student portrait:

> 'In this identity-card sized photo, there is an identity that would not vanish, but which would become one of the many layers of stratified personality where nothing of the past was lost but where every experience accumulated into a plural identity.'

Unfortunately, Belpoliti's minute investigations into Levi's publication history do not unearth a deeper truth about the man himself. Clarissa Botsford does a fine job of the translation, preserving Belpoliti's and Levi's individual voices, but cannot salvage a project that seems to be pulling in all directions. *Primo Levi: An Identikit* works excellently as a learned reader's companion, but as a literary portrait it ends up being too meandering in its descriptions of a man who always strived for clarity.

Johanne Elster Hanson

A GENRE THAT CANNOT BE IGNORED: THE ITALIAN HISTORICAL NOVEL

by KATHERINE GREGOR

Although many Anglophone readers will associate twenty-first-century Italian literature with crime novels and gritty social commentary, there is a highly successful genre that mustn't be overlooked and which, sadly, hasn't made it into English translation quite as much as it deserves: the historical novel. These Italian historical novels often fictionalise the lives of real-life individuals – or else create original characters – against the backdrop of very thorough historical research and extraordinarily vivid details. Below I round up a selection of recent examples that illustrate the importance of the historical novel in contemporary Italian literature, several still awaiting a translator.

Probably the most successful novel of this genre, in recent years, is Stefania Auci's two-part saga about the world-famous Sicilian dynasty of the Florios: *I leoni di Sicilia*, which I had the pleasure to translate for HarperVia as *The Florios of Sicily* in 2020, and *L'inverno dei leoni* (English title to be confirmed). *I leoni di Sicilia* was at the top of the Italian bestseller list for months, and is the rags-to-riches story of a dynasty most Italians are familiar with.

In 2019, to mark Leonardo Da Vinci's quincentenary, Tuscan humourist Marco Malvaldi wrote *La misura dell'uomo* (*The Measure of a Man*, Europa Editions): a less than reverent and enormously funny account of Da Vinci's struggles in carrying out the commission of an equestrian statue by the Duke of Milan.

I am very grateful to novelist Roberto Tiraboschi for introducing me to a twelfth-century Venetia that's a far cry from the sophisticated Serenissima we always picture when we think of Venice. His trilogy *La pietra degli occhi*, *La bottega dello speziale* and *L'angelo del mare fangoso* (the first two were published in English by Europa Editions as *The Eye Stone* and *The Apothecary's Shop*) follow the adventures of Edgardo D'Arduino, a cleric and a professional copyist, and his encounters with formidable characters that range from master glass blowers (his descriptions of early Venetian glassmaking are a revelation), to apothecaries and physicians who practise early forms of modern medicine.

Igiaba Scego's *La linea del colore* deals with race relations in late nineteenth-century Italy, and one of her principal characters, mixed-race American Lafanu, is a combination of two real-life women: the sculptress

Edmonia Lewis and the activist and abolitionist campaigner Sarah Parker Remond.

Another award-winning novel is Melania Mazzucco's *L'architettrice*, set in the seventeenth-century Rome of Caravaggio and the splendour of Baroque art. The architect of the title is based on the life of Plautilla Bricci, the only female architect of her day.

Few people would know about *le portartici carniche*, the women who, in 1915, carried food, post and ammunitions up to the soldiers stranded on the mountain peaks on the Austrian border, without Ilaria Tuti's magnificent novel *Fiore di roccia*.

Ritanna Armeni's *Mara* explores the fascist period from a girl's, then a woman's, perspective, and explores a little-known side to that dark time in Italian history.

Another recent success is Giorgio Fontana's *Prima di noi* (an extract from which appears in this magazine), a gripping novel of 800+ pages about the Sartori family, which goes from 1917 to 2012, and is written with striking sensitivity, depth and humanity.

Katherine Gregor

Could this be the Great Italian Novel?

Possibly not since Riccardo Bacchelli (a now largely forgotten writer whose epic trilogy 'The Mill on the Po' (1938-40) traced the fortunes of a family from the Napoleonic Wars to the First World War) has an Italian novelist taken on quite such a large chunk of his nation's history. Giorgio Fontana's Prima Di Noi*, published in 2020 after a decade's research and writing, begins more or less where Bacchelli left off, in 1917. A soldier deserts the Italian army, meets a girl from a farming family and gets her pregnant. The generations that follow from this initial union are depicted through a century of social and political change, all the way to 2012. What is remarkable is that none of the historical background feels shoe-horned in; the emphasis throughout is on the characters, all of whom are given equal weight and are brought vividly to life in a direct, accessible, occasionally visceral style. The nine hundred pages fly by. At a time when family sagas are far from uncommon in Italian fiction,* Prima Di Noi *is something very special, an overwhelming portrait, not only of a family but of a country.*

GIORGIO FONTANA

PRIMA DI NOI ('Before Us')
Sellerio, 2020
Introduced and translated by Howard Curtis

Hoisting himself onto the tank for a moment, Private Maurizio Sartori looked at the mass of men advancing along the road. A wounded man next to him spat and pulled his helmet down over his face, while a dog barked at the tank, running with its tongue dangling. Abandoned cannons lay in the grey light. Three fellow soldiers returned to the column blind drunk, waving sacks of flour and salami stolen from the farmhouses, and with lumps of cheese on the tips of their bayonets, crying, 'Look at this feast!' Further on, as far as the eye could see, the plain was endless and blurred in the rain, and smoke whirled up from burnt-out storehouses.

Every kilometre they went, groups of civilians tried to join them and were thrown back to the sides of the road or along the sodden fields. The women had jute sacks over their

shoulders and packages under their arms, while thin, dirty children threw balls of earth, excited to have left home. People latched on to them, elbowing each other and cursing, together with their oxen, sheep and hens.

Maurizio jumped down, and Ballarin grabbed him by the arm.

'Are you in, then?' he whispered. 'As soon as we can, with the Calabrian?'

The copper cross was dangling outside his uniform, and his eyes glistened, as if stunned, two pebbles in a stream. He was drunk too. Maurizio nodded.

Soon afterwards they crossed the Tagliamento. The column had thinned down to fit the narrow path, and the tanks and horses made marching difficult. Everyone pushed, urging each other to hurry, because very soon the sappers would be blowing up the bridge. The mass was impenetrable now, and Maurizio felt suddenly short of breath; he leaned over the parapet to look for a moment at the dark, turbulent, overflowing water of the river that would protect them. He was thinking, unwittingly, of the dead. Almost immediately, the dead stop resembling us. He had seen so many of them and none looked like the living; they were as dumb and inscrutable as wild animals or stones. He felt the breath go out of him.

When at last he got to the other side, he wiped the sweat from his forehead and Ballarin kissed his copper cross. 'Good,' he said. 'This time it's really over.'

Within a few minutes, the explosions started. Maurizio turned, along with thousands of others, and saw a central section of the bridge bend, crumble and end up in the river. The men who were still on the structure bustled about and a dark cloud of dust spread into the distance. After a moment's silence, everyone yelled for joy.

Giorgio Fontana
Translated by Howard Curtis

Shortlisted for the 2019 Premio Campiello and set in seventeenth-century Lombardy, this novel is written in the style of an epic poem. It's a tale of rebellion, of freedom, and of courageous women who defy the convention of their times.

In a land abused by the nobility and pillaged by foreign soldiers, a charismatic rebel preaches the Gospel in an unorthodox way. Naturally, the secular powers and the Inquisition plot to destroy him …

Twenty years later, the storyteller Pùlvara wanders across the same moorland, where pagan beliefs are sometimes stronger than Church teachings, trading tales for bed and board, recounting the feats of the legendary rebel. As the day when the wall between the world of the living and the world of the dead is thinned draws nearer and Pùlvara approaches her true destination, she is finally able to find an old friend and set the spirit of a tormented body free.

Instead of holding a dystopian future up as a mirror to our society, Laura Pariani uses a historical past as the canvas on which every event she describes has happened and is happening in our own century.

LAURA PARIANI

IL GIOCO DI SANTA OCA ('The Game of the Holy Goose')
La nave di Teseo, 2019
Introduced and translated by Katherine Gregor

She pushes the leafless branches of a hawthorn aside and ventures through nettles, belly-high; her long skirt hinders her somewhat and to save it from getting muddy she pulls it up to her knees. She pricks up her ears and listens to the life of the moorland throbbing around her: trees falling, branches rotting on the ground amid soaked leaves; the mist bestows the same caress upon the leech and the fern, and makes no difference between the hornbeam and the briar. She sniffs the air, which smells of rotting timber, and peers beyond the English oaks. The sense that a hundred eyes are following her down this silent path sends a shudder through her: smelling her, the hare springs into a run; the fox crouches down in the heather; the boar stops schooling its offspring for a moment then, without rushing, disappears deep into the heart

of the forest; the kite watches her while flying high above; the nightjar counts the sins Pùlvara carries on her back, then opens its beak as though about to snatch her soul.

Heedless of them, Pùlvara stubbornly keeps going. She once knew this familiar land's end, she travelled down and across it many times twenty years ago, which is why she picks up on many details of the moorland with her heart and her memory.

She stretches her back, a heavy bag weighing down her shoulders. It's a long way to the river, and the days are growing shorter, so she must make haste. That's when she hears a mysterious, worrying sound in the distance. Is it a horn? It rises, like a lament, to the darkening sky.

Pùlvara's hand rushes to the gypsy knife she wears at her belt; her fist also clenches around the knotty stick: she wasn't born yesterday and, if need be, could defend herself.

[...]

The moorland seems to be holding its breath now, while the horn keeps calling. A sound in the thick of the trees. Pùlvara feels a pang of anxiety in her chest, the hated companion of a walk across a moorland which, from one moment to the next, can turn into a place of spells. She turns abruptly and briefly glimpses two dark faces and eyes glistening above shaggy beards. Truth or a trick of the imagination? Blink and they've gone, as the horn is sounded again. Two forest divinities and two sounds of the horn? Number four, tied to the moon cycle that rules over childhood. What does the number four remind you of, Pùlvara? Your infancy in Milan, the shrill voices of your four siblings squatting on the bank of the Naviglio, watching barges entering the city, the opportunity to savour the taste of a joyfully adventurous freedom at the horse market past Porta Ticinese or in Vico delle Oche outside San Vittùr, back in the days of once upon a time and there didn't used to be, before the scourge of the plague wiped out your family ... Number four, the year of the sun in the Game of the Goose, which is so much like life itself. Step forth, Pùlvara. Use your judgement and have faith: because as the ancients knew, the goose is the Lady of the Animals. So be guided by her.

After all, in the beginning there is always a feathered creature.

Laura Pariani
Translated by Katherine Gregor

LIA LEVI
TONIGHT IS ALREADY TOMORROW

TRANSLATED BY CLARISSA BOTSFORD
EUROPA EDITIONS, 2021

REVIEWED BY VALERIA VESCINA

***Tonight is Already Tomorrow* immerses you in one of the darkest periods of Italian, and world, history. The novel owes its power to Lia Levi's steadfast focus on the lives of an ordinary Jewish family: 'The Rimons were nothing special. They were a good family, but they were not particularly observant; tepid at best.'**

Their story is filtered mostly through the eyes of Alessandro, whom we first encounter in 1935 as a precocious eight-year-old. He and his parents, Marc and Emilia, surrounded by a cast of extended family and friends, move within a physical and social world meticulously conjured up by the author. When the fascist regime passes the infamous racial laws of 1938, most of the Rimons' kin do not believe that measures against the Jews will be implemented or that they will apply to them, even when restrictions escalate. '"Discrimination isn't the same as persecution," pure propaganda would never become reality, it would be too difficult to put these laws into practice', some of them say, while those who want to abandon Italy discover that other nations will not welcome them.

Early on, Alessandro's cosmopolitan father, who holds a British passport, suggests emigrating to England with his wife and son. Young Alessandro 'knew exactly what needed to be done. The Italian Jews had to leave. "We have to go, at least those of us who can," he said'. But Emilia, resentful towards the boy, who has frustrated her desire for him to be a prodigy, opposes the idea. '"England? I have no idea what it's like. You always come up with these crackbrained ideas,'" she says to Marc. And so, they stay. By the time the horror of what is happening to Jews in Italy and elsewhere sinks in, the escape route to Britain has closed and the one still open – to Switzerland – is fraught with danger.

The narrative pace starts out leisurely, wrapping us in the ambience of the period and the everyday life of parents, children, relatives and friends in Genoa before 1938. It quickens steadily, mirroring the increasingly

grave situations faced by the protagonists' reactions as they happen. There are references to global developments, but the attention is unwaveringly on the main characters. Their decision to stay for too long in Italy makes us want to urge them to flee – but those who lived through these horrific times did not have foreknowledge of history.

Levi's chronicling of life as it unfolded makes an indelible impression and shows how decisions may depend on imperceptible factors, including character and emotion. The fact that the novel is inspired by the true story of the author's husband, Luciano Tas, adds yet more poignancy and force to it. An excellent read, and a necessary one for humanity's collective memory.

Valeria Vescina

MARCO BALZANO
I'M STAYING HERE

TRANSLATED BY JILL FOULSTON
OTHER PRESS, 2020

REVIEWED BY ALICE BANKS

Nestled on the banks of the Adige River near the meeting point of Switzerland, Austria, and Italy, is the village of Curon. Part of an autonomous Italian province in the northern mountains, this small community of German-speaking farmers has always been tight-knit; however, this all changed when Mussolini became prime minister of Italy in 1922 and his fascist rule saw the area flooded with carabinieri, and Italian become the rigidly enforced language. The village divides into those who conform and those who don't.

Years later, when Hitler and his Nazi regime gain power, the villagers are further divided, between those who stay, and those who leave for the nearby German-speaking countries.

I'm Staying Here was my introduction to this part of Italy and its fascinating and devastating history. As Balzano writes in his author's note, while the novel's characters and their stories are fictional, what happened in the small village of Curon is very real. But fascism and war are not the only things threatening

this community: the construction of a dam that would flood the village and force out its inhabitants looms over the the novel.

Curon's story is told by a woman who stays despite everything. We read of Trina's life in Curon as she writes to her daughter, Marica, who has fled to Austria with her aunt and uncle when it was annexed by Germany and Mussolini's power in Italy was at its height. Trina tells Marica of life before she was born, of how the Italian language was enforced, and of how Trina and her friends – recently qualified teachers – gave clandestine German classes in attics and barns. Language holds a very important place throughout the story, with Balzano drawing on the idea of language as a weapon, but also as a form of revolt and defiance.

Trina goes on to tell her daughter of her marriage to Erich (Marica's father), of her and her brother's births, and of the years of strife the family faced under Mussolini. But when we reach the point at which Marica disappears with her aunt and uncle, we see a shift in Trina's character. Up to this point she has proved to be strong and defiant, fighting for what she thinks is right even if it put her life at risk. However, with Marica's disappearance, Trina becomes extremely inward, fighting her own emotions in order to remain strong. Her passion fades, and she becomes incredibly stoic. In fact, Erich and Trina find it so difficult to express their emotions regarding Marica, that the pair vow never to mention her again. But while Marica is erased from their day-to-day conversations, her absence plagues the novel, and like Trina, we wonder if and when we may see her again.

As the novel progresses, war begins to impact the village in a variety of ways, but language remains the key weapon. Trina notes that 'languages had become racial markers. The dictators had turned them into weapons and declarations of war'. However, while Balzano makes this idea of language as a weapon very clear throughout the novel, it never consumes the story.

What does keep us turning the pages are the stories of Marica's absence and the dam construction. Balzano gives readers tiny facts and titbits about the works on the dam, as well as occasional musings on Marica's whereabouts, cleverly offering readers delicate threads of stories yet never allowing us to fully indulge in the details of the two most powerful storylines which form the greatest weight of the book.

I'm Staying Here is a fascinating glimpse into life in Curon, and a beautifully and expertly written novel of division and loss. Most of all though, it's about resilience, as after all, throughout everything, Trina stays.

Alice Banks

CLAUDIA DURASTANTI
STRANGERS I KNOW

TRANSLATED BY ELIZABETH HARRIS
FITZCARRALDO EDITIONS, 2022

REVIEWED BY GURMEET SINGH

The original Italian title of Claudia Durastanti's novel is a lot less ingenious than its English one, but much more in keeping with the intriguing text therein. The title *La straniera* ('The Foreigner') seems to be far more fitting. After all, it's a book entirely about being foreign to, or outside of, experience. 'Strangers I Know' as a title seems overthought, but it's a small point, quickly forgotten.

So what is this book about? It's a combination of personal mythology and family history with an exploration of migration and a playful gaming-out of the basic problem we all encounter in our lives but choose to ignore: that we don't know other people, no matter how close they are to us.

Durastanti shuffles a deck of categories to play the game, each section of the book given titles which are either loaded ('Childhood'), theatrical ('The Girl Absent for Heartbreak'), whimsical ('The Language of Dreams'), or, finally, Italian ('Ciao Straniera'). And within this game's non-linear structure, she tells the stories of how her parents met and fell in love (ostensibly), their marriage, her family's various migrations between Italy and Brooklyn, and the narrator's own romantic and writing life.

These various threads would lead to a messy novel in the hands of a less capable, and less decisive writer, but Durastanti is highly talented. Like Eliot Weinberger, she explores a subject in depth, from different perspectives, without ever encouraging the reader to believe that any single point of view is authoritative. The original story of how her parents met, for example, is told twice in the opening section of the novel: once according to her mother, and then again according to her father. The stories differ wildly, and this immediately sets the tone for the central problem of any intimate personal life. Put simply, we experience different things, and tell

ourselves different storiesm even when we go through the same things as one another.

In this way *Strangers I Know* brings you into the hall of mirrors that is experience. Or rather, a hall of mirrors where every mirror appears cracked, but there's no way of telling which ones actually are. To understand yourself and your personal history, you need to understand the stories of the people who came before you. The trouble is, those people are simply human, and therefore unreliable. You're a foreigner not just in different places, but to different people, as they are to you.

Mapping out her family's history across Rome, Brooklyn, London and elsewhere, Durastanti wants the reader to reflect about what they know, or rather, what they think they know, about their own lives, romances, languages and loved ones. A brilliant book, and one which will come to be read like Julio Cortázar's *Hopscotch*, more like a beautiful game than a novel.

Gurmeet Singh

MICHELA MURGIA
HOW TO BE A FASCIST

TRANSLATED BY ALEX VALENTE
PUSHKIN PRESS, 2020

REVIEWED BY JENNIFER SARHA

'I write against democracy', begins Michela Murgia, which rather grabs you by the throat as beginnings go. What follows is, technically, a guide to fascism with insights both pragmatic and conceptual: how to manoeuvre politics and populism within Western democracies; and how to understand and adhere to the philosophical premises of fascism.

But the book can also be read as a pitiless interrogation of our Western democracies as they currently stand, and the laziness and corruption that enable fascism to grow.

Murgia is an Italian writer, critic and journalist, also known for her radio and TV appearances and her political activism, particularly in relation to gender equality, anti-

fascism, and Sardinian independence. Her previous works include a satirical novel on telemarketing operatives, and a novel about euthanasia in 1950s Sardinia.

How to be a Fascist is a short book structured as a thematic guide. It covers how to manage committees: keep them talking so that nothing happens, and then inform the population that since nothing gets done, what you need is a strong man to cut through the red tape. How to manage gender politics: tell women that they are special and need extra support – especially women living in poverty or precarious circumstances, who might need access to food programmes or social services; keep them grateful and busy, not troubling themselves about equality. Among the many strengths of Murgia's book are the connections she draws between the political methodologies of fascism on the one hand, and on the other the cultural norms they promote. Indeed, the return to normativity – of the traditional family, of gender relations, of social and political hierarchies – and the alleged naturalness of this normativity, are shown to lurk beneath the most basic of political activisms.

Any respectable *Guardian* reader may of course recognise many of the ideas presented here, and that will give them a certain amount of satisfaction. Yet other, more careful readers will also note the challenges the book delivers: we are all opposed to fascism, but are we so strongly opposed that we would be willing to create an alternative, to engineer and maintain a complex social structure? What if we had to discuss ideas, on the grand scale, with strangers or colleagues or family members – could we do that? Could we bear the potential embarrassment of that? What if we had to present ourselves as people who take politics seriously? Sadly, the book does not offer guidance on this.

Jennifer Sarha

PINOCCHIO FOR ADULTS

by JOHN HOOPER
and ANNA KRACZYNA

The Adventures of Pinocchio vies with *Le Petit Prince* for the title of the world's most-translated book after the Bible. So any new version, like the one we have produced for Penguin Classics, needs a justification. Ours is that, in an extensive introduction and almost 180 endnotes, we have attempted to show that *The Adventures* is a far more complex and sophisticated work than is realised outside Italy, and that it contains a profusion of disguised messages and subtle allusions.

At the most obvious level it is, of course, a children's story – written in instalments between 1881 and 1883 and published in a newspaper for children, *Il Giornale per i bambini*, as a cautionary tale. But not really one about lying. That was central to Walt Disney's 1940 cartoon movie, but in the original narrative Pinocchio's nose only grows twice when he tells a lie. And not at all in the first run of instalments. The story had finished where Collodi intended it to end, but the instalments resumed after an outcry from the young readers of *Il Giornale per i bambini*, without which we would have no Pinocchio emoji for a fib, no Pinocchios awarded by the fact-checkers at the *Washington Post*, and Piers Morgan would not be able to brand Meghan Markle as 'Princess Pinocchio'.

The crucial mutation in *The Adventures*, signalled from an early stage in the tale, is Pinocchio's transformation into a donkey. In Italian, the word for donkey (*asino/asina*) is applied both to those who fail at school – not necessarily because they are stupid, but because they refuse to study – and to those who are worked to the point of exhaustion, or even death. Collodi's message to the children of his time was that being a donkey at school leads to working like a donkey afterwards.

Yet, right at the beginning of his story, Collodi drops a broad hint that he plans to write something more than just a fable. Like all good writers, he was allergic to cliché. Yet he began his story with the most hackneyed fairy-tale cliché of them all: 'Once upon a time …'. Why?

Collodi's principal literary enterprise, writing under his real name of Carlo Lorenzini, was satirical journalism. And 'Once upon a time … ' was an in-joke among the satirists in his circle. It was a phrase they often used to start articles that were apparently fairy tales, but which were actually social or political satires. Collodi himself was quoted in the journal *La Lente* in 1856 as having said: 'Hey! Have you mistaken us for a bunch of kids with that "Once upon a time"? … No. No. Hold on … I'm not telling

you a fairy tale as would seem to be the case …'

The Adventures is itself full of satire. Pinocchio goes to court to report the Cat and the Fox for having stolen his money, and the judge, who is an ape, sends Pinocchio to jail instead. And why? For being gullible. A few months later, there is an amnesty – as sooner or later there always is in Italy – but, since Pinocchio hasn't broken the law, it doesn't apply to him. So he protests that he too is a crook and is set free.

Collodi's masterpiece reflects – and takes digs at – other aspects of Italian life that are as pervasive today as they were in the late nineteenth century: the obsession with *bella figura* (making a good impression), the love of good food, the prevalence of *tangenti* (kickbacks) and the way *furbizia* (craftiness) coexists with genuine, spontaneous kind-heartedness.

The Adventures can also be viewed as a Bildungsroman – a remarkably subtle account of how a child gradually sheds his infantile egocentricity to acquire a sense of responsibility towards others. Or it can even be seen as a work of social denunciation in the great nineteenth-century literary tradition. Most unusually for a fairy tale, *The Adventures* is set in a world in which most of the characters are desperately poor. Hunger runs through *The Adventures* like a trickle of bile.

This was a world Collodi knew only too well: his father was a cook; his mother a seamstress. And young Carlo was born into one of the darkest, dankest streets in Florence, Via Taddea. The reason why his parents sent him to spend part of his childhood in Collodi, his mother's hometown and the one that inspired his *nom de plume*, was to get him away from the appallingly unhealthy conditions that claimed the lives of no fewer than five of his nine siblings, who all died before reaching the age of seven.

The longest-lived, Marianna Seconda, was six years younger than the future author and it is hard to resist the conclusion that memories of her death are to be found in the darkest passage in *The Adventures*, when Pinocchio is running away from the mysterious hooded figures who want to rob and murder him. He dashes to a little white house in the woods and knocks desperately at the door until a little girl looks out of the window.

> 'Her eyes were closed and her hands were crossed on her chest. Without moving her lips at all, she said, in a tiny, feeble voice that seemed to come from the after-world:
>
> "No one lives in this house. Everyone is dead."
>
> "At least you could open the door for me!" shouted Pinocchio, weeping and pleading for her help.
>
> "I'm dead too."

"Dead?" Then what are you doing there at the window?"

"I'm waiting for my coffin to come take me away."

As soon as she had said these words, the little girl disappeared, and the window closed without a sound.'

Kid's stuff it is not.

John Hooper and Anna Kraczyna

THE RIVETER
POSTCARDS

POSTCARD FROM TUSCANY *By Alex Valente*

If you're driving this way (though I'd recommend a train for the full experience – missed and late connections are great to catch up on reading), Florence is inevitable. Vanni will show you around dungeons and the underground scenes, and include some contemporary takes on Dante and Ariosto. Alessandro may also be in the area, Karma willing. After that, though, head a smidge north on the bus, to Fiesole, for Dacia and her incredible life of stories; you can then keep going northwest along the hills, and grab a fantastical reading from Francesca if you can; her tarots are like no one else's. Roll into the piana *for some old-school puppets in Collodi (Carlo chose the name for a reason). When you get to the coast, drop south by Alberto and his hybridised language workers for a laugh and some hard truths – he's been all over the UK too. If you can, keep following the coast south towards Orbetello and Teresa's spiky writing. An acquired taste, perhaps, but, boy, does she know how to land a punch.*

If I can meet you for a coffee, I'll be back north, just outside of Florence. We have poets too, and a river …

GLORIOUS, FLUID, COLORATURA JOY: TRANSLATING ITALIAN

by SHAUN WHITESIDE

I came to Italian relatively late; some pleasures are worth deferring, or at least that's what I tell myself. In 1985 I was on a trip with a friend to Florence, and the flood of sensory experiences – the morning smell of coffee and pastries, the marble staircase in the dark hallway of the guesthouse, the murmur of voices on the piazza, and yes, the Ghirlandaio and Gozzoli frescoes in the Duomo in San Gimignano (art history is hard to avoid there) – made me think that possibly I'd been missing out on something. That and the sheer glorious, fluid, coloratura joy of the spoken language.

So I took evening classes, read voraciously and travelled to Italy whenever I could, sometimes for leisure and often for work. I had already been translating from French and German for some time – both languages I loved in their different ways, both associated with the lecture theatre in a way that Italian was not – when I was asked by Granta to translate a book, *Denti e spie* ('Teeth and Spies'), by Giorgio (originally György) Pressburger, a Hungarian-born Italian novelist and short-story writer. This novel, like the collection that followed, *Neve e colpa* ('Snow and Guilt'), was a gnomic parable of East and West, of memory and exile. I visited Giorgio – the nicest, gentlest, wittiest man imaginable – first in Trieste, where he was then based, and later in Budapest, where he ran the Italian Cultural Institute. The Trieste visit coincided with a cultural festival that he co-organised, Mittelfest, in the picturesque town of Cividale, not far from the Austrian and Slovenian borders, and precisely where the Romance, Germanic and Slavic languages meet.

It was a wonderful and illuminating experience. I particularly remember a performance by a Croatian brass band during a thunderstorm, in the course of which the roof of the stage blew away and everyone had to run for cover. More importantly, perhaps, Giorgio was immensely patient and helpful, and talked me through any mistakes and difficulties in my translation: in an early draft, for example, I had mistaken *ceco*, 'Czech', for *cieco*, 'blind', which made the rest of the story extremely puzzling. I was very sad when I learned that Giorgio died in 2017 – he was wonderful company.

One of the next books that I was asked to translate was Salvatore Niffoi's *La Leggenda di Redenta Tìrìa*. I translated it as *The Legend of Redenta Tiria*, but now wonder whether a snappier title mightn't have helped it along a little. A teacher and potter from Orani in Sardinia, Niffoi is a keen advocate of Sardinian writing (like Grazia Deledda, who won the Nobel Prize for Literature

in 1926), and writes in a mixture of Sardinian dialect and standard Italian. The book is a piece of magical realism, looking at small lives in a small Sardinian town and the possibility – as the title suggests – of redemption, not least through the power of literature. Again, a trip to Sardinia was called for, to sample delicacies such as *pistiddus*, *papasinnus*, *aranzada* and *sanguinaccio*, the latter a sausage made of blood and chocolate. Salvatore, who speaks not a word of English, was again very generous in showing me around, and I'm convinced that a brief immersion in village life was enormously valuable to the finished translation.

Some challenges arose in the translation of books by the Bologna writers' collective known as Luther Blissett, now 'Wu Ming'. *Manituana*, for example, set during the American Revolutionary War, called for the invention of an eighteenth-century street slang employed by a gang called the 'Mohocks', which needed to sound convincing in English. This involved trawling through Eric Partridge's *Dictionary of Historical Slang*. One conversation I had with Wu Ming 1 (in theory, at least, the collective's members like to retain their anonymity) sticks in my mind: in the novel *54*, a partisan recalls looking up in the middle of a battle to see his mother striding through the forest to bring him a bowl of zabaglione. Why, Wu Ming 1 wanted to know, had I not called it an egg cream? We agreed in the end that if the joke was to work, it had to be zabaglione – for the extravagance of the word and the image of the Italian *mamma* braving the bullets.

For my translation of *Malacqua* by Nicola Pugliese (published by And Other Stories) we kept the original Italian title, and I think we were right to do so. The novel deals with four days of torrential rain in Naples, leading to terrible and often fantastical scenes of destruction, which the author combines with a satire on local government. Again the meaning is both specific and suggestive, an obvious portmanteau of *male* and *acqua* – so 'evil water' – but the Neapolitan setting is so important and so pervasive that the title presented itself as the only real option, not least as a way of preserving the sense of place that is often so important in Italian writing.

I think it's probably the local – in terms of dialect, mood and colour – that's most challenging to the translator, and at the same time is one of the most attractive and important features of Italian literature. I should add that I've been helped throughout all these translations by the community of Italian translators – both Italian to English and vice versa – who are the cleverest, warmest, sparkiest colleagues anyone could wish for. That long-ago trip to Florence was one of the best things I ever did.

Shaun Whiteside

GIUSEPPE LUPO

From BREVE STORIA DEL MIO SILENZIO
('A Short History of My Silence')
Marsilio, 2019
Translated by Shaun Whiteside

To find those millions of words, I had to cross the threshold of the broom cupboard that my father insisted on calling a 'study': a little room about a couple of metres square, suffocated by books piled up on the floor or on shelves so full that the walls resembled the dome of a church. In the evening I went to sleep by the light that came through the frosted-glass panel in the door that marked the boundary between me and him. My father worked at night. He spent his time at a desk built with his own hands in the workshop of his carpenter brother: a board and four feet, then a chest of drawers that didn't work. On this little table there was room, more or less, for a small lamp, which lent a conspiratorial air to everything, but it was a sign that I wasn't alone in the world, that someone was keeping watch over me as I slept on the couch, and as soon as I slipped under the covers I was aware of that same someone's thoughts from the faint scratch of pen on paper: *scritch, scritch, scritch* ...

> So as not to disturb me, my father wrote by hand rather than typing, and his ideas had the sound of a woodworm burrowing into wood, they kept company with the light before emerging into the open, into the whirl of night. Every now and again, when he wasn't around, I would approach his pages like a thief determined to steal the future of the man who brought him into the world: 'Mountain communities should be set up and organised around the valleys, and the valleys should unite the mountain tops.' That was what my father wrote. I didn't think about it much at the time, but now I do: utopias are born in the mountains, because that's where the sunset takes longest to die.
>
> I looked around. I studied the covers of the books, the dates, the colours. I imagined the mountains I would see if I appeared at the window opposite the table, and I felt as if I was not in a room of nocturnal writings, but in a room of light, of ideas, the room where, with platforms and scaffolding, the man who had brought me into the world constructed history.

Giuseppe Lupo
Translated by Shaun Whiteside

SANDRO VERONESI
THE HUMMINGBIRD

TRANSLATED BY ELENA PALA
WEIDENFELD & NICOLSON, 2021

REVIEWED BY ROSIE GOLDSMITH
(RIVETING REVIEWS, JULY 2021)

'Hummingbird' is the nickname given to this novel's protagonist, Marco Carrera, by his mother when he was a small, beautiful and agile child. Marco was born in Florence in 1959, the same year and city as his creator, Sandro Veronesi. Over the course of the novel we meet Marco's parents, Probo and Laetizia, his siblings, Umberto and Irene, his lover, Luisa, then his wife, Marina, and daughter Adele, as well as her daughter, Miraijin; plus his friends, their friends, various therapists. The novel is replete with people, places and events, with death, love, grief and breakdown. It is a compendium of the lives flocking round Marco and a homage to many of the world's great writers, thinkers and ideas. Passages on the Aztecs, Japanese culture, poetry, even model railways, are scattered across its pages.

To form a complete picture of someone's life, Veronesi seems to be saying, one must examine how real people live: they eat, go to school, the beach, have furniture they don't like; someone phones them out of the blue, or they read something interesting in the paper that influences their actions. Events are also given context by referring to the news of the day – the Haiti earthquake, the Red Brigades, for example; timecodes, dates and years often introduce chapters.

Sandro Veronesi is a gracious, generous and mature writer, and under his guidance the many narrative devices and chronological leaps back and forth (also into the future) grow and mature into a remarkable novel. This piecemeal approach shouldn't work, but Maestro Veronesi is in control: it's a clever structure and the plot twists and turns and thunders along. 'Il Colibrì' won the 2019 Premio Strega, Italy's top literary prize, and thanks to Elena Pala (who was obviously born to translate this novel) it has become *The Hummingbird*. It is Veronesi's ninth novel and his second Strega. If you don't yet know the work of one of Europe's finest writers, start here.

Author and protagonist share the storytelling. Everything we read is filtered through the first-person narrative of the Italian ophthalmologist Marco Carrera, but also through the lens of the all-knowing, benevolent third-person narrator with his regular conversational asides to the reader: 'Let that sink in' or 'one might say' or 'and now what?'. A postcard from 1998 forms chapter two; chapter three is a phone call between Marco and his wife's therapist. Through this ingenious method we are thrown into Marco's inner life.

Marco is an average man with a hero complex and an eventful life. As a child his idol, his older sister Irene, threatens to kill herself and he believes it is his task to save 'his incredibly smart and incredibly tormented sister'. His parents are clearly incompatible and pass their misery on to their children. His brother disappears to the US, but Marco keeps writing to him – letters of longing. Marco then meanders into marriage, not to the on-off love of his life, Luisa, but after seeing his wife-to-be Marina on the TV news. They struggle to make marriage work, but eventually their lies and betrayals bring tragedy. Marina 'was not the person she fought hard to be'. Marina and their daughter Adele develop severe mental health problems and a fascinating strand of psychotherapy is introduced, although it is Marco's own insights and 'flashes of clarity' that add depth: 'All my life I've been surrounded by psychotherapists, and in spite of that everyone around me was still in so much pain.'

The novel movingly reflects the fullness and complexity of Marco's life, the pain and 'howling desperation' of his many losses and responsibilities. He nurses his difficult parents before they both die from cancer. He is flawed, his heroism is often blind and naïve, but he is a kind and caring man who battles on regardless:

> 'He saw everything, but that vision was so unbearable … that he immediately erased it from his memory and went on living as though it had never happened.'

The joy Marco experiences in caring for his daughter and granddaughter elevates his life above the pain and mundane, and, as readers, the lasting emotion we feel, as we close the pages of this beautiful novel, is love.

Rosie Goldsmith

POSTCARD FROM TURIN

By Giuseppe Culicchia

Whenever I think about Italian literature from my hometown of Turin, I'm faced with some legendary figures. The city's most famous writers in the last century were, of course, Italo Calvino and Primo Levi, both appreciated for different reasons (not only in Italy but also abroad) and their legacy remains very strong. However, it's impossible to forget the magical pairing of Carlo Fruttero and Franco Lucentini, who in La donna della domenica *depicted our town as it was in the 1970s, together with an underworld full of unforgettable characters that has now almost disappeared.*

I should also point out the best book concerning Turin when it was our country's 'Motown'. Written by a poet and a writer who lived and worked here – at Olivetti and Fiat – but who was born and raised in Urbino, Le mosche del capitale *by Paolo Volponi remains a real masterpiece.*

From more recent years, I must mention Luca Rastello and his novel Piove all'insù*, probably the best book ever written about terrorism and the beginning of the social changes that have occurred in Italy.*

PAOLO GIORDANO
HEAVEN AND EARTH

TRANSLATED BY ANNE MILANO APPEL
WEIDENFELD & NICOLSON, 2020

REVIEWED BY ROSIE GOLDSMITH
(RIVETING REVIEWS, JANUARY 2021)

Whenever an author has already made their mark with an impressive, prize-winning novel, you dread their subsequent books, out of fear that the new one simply won't match up. This is the case for me with the Italian author Paolo Giordano, one of Turin's famous literary sons. He was a superstar aged twenty-six with his first novel *The Solitude of Prime Numbers*, a tightly plotted and highly original bestseller. He's now nearly forty, and after two more successful novels, *Like Family* and *The Human Body*, in 2020 he notched up an HBO/Netflix series *We Are Who We Are*, as well as an important non-fiction exploration of the Covid-19 pandemic, *How Contagion Works*, and the publication of his latest novel *Heaven and Earth*, in the translation by Anne Milano Appel. I had postponed reading it up to now out of fear that it would disappoint. It does not.

Divorare il cielo, its 2018 Italian title, means 'devour the sky' but I much prefer the English title, *Heaven and Earth*, which immediately reminds me of Shakespeare and *Hamlet*, when Hamlet suggests to Horatio that human knowledge is limited: 'There are more things in heaven and Earth, Horatio, / Than are dreamt of in your philosophy.'

Paolo Giordano is a scientist turned writer. His novels address both the ambition and grandeur of human endeavour and emotion as well as the facts and limitations. The four main characters, Teresa and the three half-brothers Tommaso, Nicola and Bern, meet one hot summer as young teenagers in Puglia in southern Italy. The boys live with their guardian, Cesare, on his ecologically run smallholding next door to Teresa's grandmother's home. Intrigued by their closeness and strangeness, Teresa spends more and more time with the boys, swimming, observing their work on the farm, their prayer meetings and lessons with Cesare and his wife

Floriana. Far from being a creepy cult leader, Cesare appears wise and kind in his care of the troubled boys. Teresa is intrigued by their conversations about ethics, religion, bees, frogs and the transmigration of souls. Cesare is guiding them towards a better life, beyond the city, capitalism and consumerism (which Teresa knows all too well, as she is from Turin) and through them she glimpses another way to live, a world of ideas, faith – and love. Over the next few summers the four teenagers develop an exhilarating, if competitive, friendship – 'The intricate tangle of attractions that bound us as kids' – but Bern and Teresa go further. They fall in love and have sex, sealing their destiny, happily and tragically, for the next couple of decades.

Teresa's grandmother warns her 'we never fully know someone', and this is possibly the motto of the novel. The utopian project pursued by Cesare, adopted later by Teresa and the friends as young adults, fails as cracks in their personalities and ideals are exposed. They all have secrets and backstories, which, triggered by temptation or radical idealism, become destiny.

Paolo Giordano is a courageous and elegant writer, unafraid of creating complex characters and moral dilemmas. He's also a marvellous storyteller, giving us a well-paced plot with some quite breathless, heart-stopping moments. The Italian setting is attractive but never over-romanticised (so tempting when you are writing about Italy), and cleverly addresses the familiar issues of Italy's city-country, north-south divides. Teresa is the first-person narrator and the story is driven by her love for the fanatical Bern, around whom everything revolves. Maybe the motto of the novel should actually be 'the frightening immensity of … love'.

Rosie Goldsmith

Two years ago, a month after the Covid pandemic reached Italy, Paolo Giordano, author of How Contagion Works, *wrote the following article. It was a response to a situation that now feels dismally familiar, but back then was new and unnerving, and, even for those of us outside Italy, watching the virus overwhelm their country's health service, downright terrifying.*

Now, with vaccines against the virus, medications and methods to treat it and, as each new wave breaks over us, the growing feeling that we know what to do, a piece written at the beginning of the pandemic might seem redundant. Not so with Paolo's article. Every item on his list of things he wants to remember from that time feels relevant and important – giving the list as a whole a prescience only a writer capable of thinking beyond his current situation can achieve.

We hope and believe Paolo hasn't forgotten any of these things – and take his list as a reminder that we shouldn't either.

Riveter Editors

THE RIVETER
FEATURES

THINGS I DON'T WANT TO FORGET

by PAOLO GIORDANO translated by FEDERICO ANDORNINO

It's been a month since the unthinkable broke into our lives. Just like the virus – burrowing into our lungs – the unthinkable is already manifested in every fold of our daily existence. We never thought we would need a permit just to throw away the rubbish. We never thought we would schedule our lives around the daily briefings of the Civil Protection Agency. We never imagined that someone could die without their loved ones around them. Stuff like that doesn't happen here, to us.

And yet.

On 21 February 2020, the front page of the *Corriere della Sera* – one of Italy's most widely read newspapers – was devoted to a meeting between our prime minister and the leader of one of the many parties that prop up his government. I swear I don't remember what the meeting was supposed to be about. And then, just after 1.00 a.m., it was announced that the first official case of Covid-19 in Italy had been recorded in the small town of Codogno, Lombardy. There was just enough time to add it to the last edition of the paper, in a short column on the right of the front page.

The following day, the coronavirus became the main headline, splashed across every newspaper. It's still there today.

Looking back, you get the feeling of a very fast approach. The contagion was in China, then in Italy, then in our region, our city, our neighbourhood. Then someone famous tested positive, then

a friend of a friend, then one of our loved ones. Then someone from our building was taken to hospital.

Thirty days. Every single step – although statistically plausible – was met with disbelief: moving in the domain of the unthinkable has been the advantage of the virus from the very beginning. We started with 'It's never going to happen here', and now we are stuck inside, printing out the official form from the Ministry of Interior so that we can show it to the police patrolling the streets when we go grocery shopping.

There are now more official deaths in Italy than in China. By now, we should have understood that the relentless advance of the unthinkable will not end today: it will not end in a couple of weeks or when the lockdown is finally lifted. The unthinkable has just begun and it's here to stay. Perhaps it will be the defining trait of this era.

There is a phrase by Marguerite Duras that has come back to me in recent days: 'Peace is coming. It's like a big darkness falling. It is the beginning of oblivion.' After a war, everyone hastens to forget, and something similar happens with diseases: suffering forces us to confront otherwise blurred truths, to re-think our priorities; it encourages us to give new meaning to the present. But as soon as the healing begins, that sense of enlightenment disappears.

So I'm compiling a list of everything I don't want to forget. It gets a little longer every day, and I think everyone should have their own, so that we can take them out and compare them, see if there's anything in common, if it's possible to do something about it together. Mine goes like this.

- I don't want to forget all the times that – in the first few weeks and in the face of the initial, cautious measures – I heard people say, 'They are crazy.' Years of dismissing experts have produced an instinctive and widespread distrust that finally materialised in those three words: 'They are crazy.' A mistrust that led to delays. Delays that caused casualties.
- I don't want to forget that I didn't cancel a plane ticket until the very last minute, even when it became clear that taking that flight would be beyond reason. Only because I really wanted to go. Stubbornness mixed with selfishness.
- I don't want to forget the fickle, contradictory, sensationalistic, emotional and borderline inaccurate information that accompanied the initial unfolding of the contagion – perhaps the most obvious failure of all. In an epidemic, clear information is a vital form of prophylaxis.
- I don't want to forget the moment when – all of a sudden – the political chatter was turned down to zero: it felt like my ears had popped after that flight I couldn't take. That background noise – constant and self-referential – which filled every moment of our lives had suddenly vanished.

- I don't want to forget how the emergency made us ignore the fact that we are a composite multitude, with different needs, different issues. When we claimed we were speaking to everyone, we were actually speaking to everyone who has a good knowledge of Italian, owns a computer and knows how to use it.
- I don't want to forget that Europe was too late – always too late – and that no one thought to show, together with the national curves of the contagion, a European curve, a graph that would make us feel united across borders in this misadventure.
- I don't want to forget that the origin of the pandemic is not in a secret military experiment but in our compromised relationship with nature, in the destruction of forests, in the recklessness of our consumption.
- I don't want to forget that the pandemic has found us largely technically unprepared and scientifically lacking.
- I don't want to forget that I didn't manage to be heroic, or strong as I tried to keep my family safe and together. That when my help was most needed, I couldn't cheer anyone up – myself included.

The curve of new cases will flatten – that curve whose existence we ignored until a few weeks ago and which now rules over us. It will reach its coveted peak and then start its descent. It's not wishful thinking, it's the direct consequence of our discipline right now. We need to be aware that the descent may be slower than the ascent and that there may be new spikes, perhaps other temporary closures, other emergencies, and that some restrictions will have to stay in place for a while. But, at some point, it will come to an end and the reconstruction will begin.

It will be the moment for the congratulatory handshakes among the people ruling over us, praising each other for their readiness and seriousness and self-denial. While we, distracted by our newly found freedom, will just want to finally shake it all off. The great darkness that falls. The beginning of oblivion. Unless we dare to reflect now on the things we know must change, unless we take a moment to think – on our own and then together. I don't know how to make our monstrous capitalism a little less monstrous, how to change an economic system, how we can rebuild our pact with the environment. I'm not even sure I can change my own behaviour. But I know for a fact that you can't do any of these things if you didn't dare to think of them before.

Let us stay indoors for as long as necessary. Let us take care of the sick. Let us cry and bury the dead. But let's also imagine what comes after, starting now, so that the unthinkable won't catch us, once again, by surprise.

Paolo Giordano

Translated by Federico Andornino

Published in agreement with Mala Testa Lit. Ag. © Paolo Giordano, 'Quello che non voglio scordare, dopo il Coronavirus', originally published in the Italian newspaper Il Corriere della Sera on 20 March 2020. This English translation first published by Tortoise Media, 17 April 2020 (tortoisemedia.com).

Antonio Moresco wrote Il Canto degli alberi *during the first months of lockdown in 2020. Its narrator finds himself in the Italian city of Mantua, where he was born and spent his adolescence, a place he would prefer not to have returned to. On his lone walks around the empty city, he encounters trees growing in abandoned gardens, sprouting from walls, rooted into houses, as well as trees of a kind no one has seen before, multi-coloured trees, upside-down trees, musical trees, hybrid species he can talk to, that introduce him to new truths, in a series of transcendental dialogues about a world in which humanity has been toppled from its position of supremacy.*

ANTONIO MORESCO

CANTO DEGLI ALBERI ('Song of the Trees')
Aboca, 2020
Introduced and translated by Richard Dixon

I left the house, walked past the end of Vicolo Deserto, turned the corner and felt a sudden thrill on seeing the stone flank of Leon Battista Alberti's Basilica of Sant'Andrea, the same building that Dickens had seen from the window of the room where he was staying. 'How strange, how strange … ' I think. 'The whole of human life is under siege, held in check by this invisible invader that is tearing down the empty certainties and frameworks on which it is founded, and yet this marvellous mineral barrier, shaped many centuries ago by a dreamer and by a thousand arms and by a thousand outstretched hands, on wooden scaffolds bound with ropes, is still there, immobile, imperturbable, silent, fearing no contagion. And it will survive like this for a long time, while the human flock will scatter. It fears no viruses, no global warming, has no concern about epidemics, about financial storms that sweep away foolish men and their horizontal economies. And when we have gone it will still be here, with its fossilised dream, over which a thousand minuscule seeds carried by the wind will take root among its stones and will bring life at first to tiny shrubs and then to saplings clinging to that mineral thought, and no more hands will be there to pull them out. This whole temple cavity in the form of a church will gradually be

enveloped by more and more walled trees that will cling to it and hug it and will transform it, too, into one walled tree, into a walled vegetal dream.'

Yesterday evening the whole of Italy became a red zone. So now we are sixty million walled trees.

During my long night wanderings across the phantom city, as I walk along the deserted alleys and past untended gardens and abandoned areas invaded by foliage, when I pass close to walled saplings that sprout from houses, putting my face and my mouth near to those mineral and vegetal gashes that know nothing, I try asking once more: 'And you, rooted so deep in the walls of people's homes, do you see anything, do you hear anything?'

'And then, because we are there inside the walls of those houses, we too become good roots and bad roots ... '

And then, little by little, their roots start to relax, and they begin to reply.

Dialogue with the roots

'We see everything, we hear everything!'

'Even when we would prefer not to see, not to hear!' another voice interrupts on top of the first.

'When we penetrate as far as the rooms where people live, their bedrooms, kitchens ... '

'Little by little we split the plaster of their walls with our tender apical extremities that emit a damp lubricant and are continually reproducing in order to push onward through the hard mineral material.'

'Why don't you want to see or hear?' I venture to ask.

'Because sometimes what we see and what we hear is lovely, sometimes horrible ... '

'Sometimes it fills us with wonder, sometimes it scares us, sickens us ... '

'Because there are good houses and bad houses ... '

'And then, because we are there inside the walls of those houses, we too become good roots and bad roots ... '

Their voices overlap each other more and more, continually finishing what the other says.

'And you, for example, what root are you?' I ask the root of a small tree embedded in the wall of a dark house with one, single unlit window on the first floor.

It remains silent for a while before answering.

Antonio Moresco
Translated by Richard Dixon

A SHAPSHOT OF THE ITALIAN CULTURAL MIND

by DIEGO MARANI

Italian culture seems to oscillate between a great openness – the universal spirit of its tradition – and a withdrawal into itself, aroused by the provincial spirit that is also part of the country's history.

Applying this to Italian literature and looking at the cultural pages of today's Italian newspapers, and at the bestseller lists and the catalogues of the main publishing houses, it appears that Italy translates a lot, and that the Italian reader has a solid knowledge of international literature and culture. But looking at things more closely, one sees that the reality is different; the most widely read foreign authors are the usual global bestsellers. There is nothing particularly original in this focus on translation, no proof of the country's great internationality; instead, it demonstrates a kind of cultural colonisation.

The reverse of this coin is the realisation that some of the Italian authors most widely read in Italy would be impossible to translate into any other language, they are so buried in localism and so unable to express universal values. Because, like many European cultures, Italy has become self-referential; it sees only its own little world. And this now seems to be the destiny of continental Europe as a whole – a place that, until fifty years ago, shared a solid cultural canon: that of classical culture, which represented a common substratum of references recognised by all, from the North Cape to Sicily, in spite of their linguistic diversity.

Today, even in Italy, classical culture has been sacrificed for scientific culture, which is considered more modern, and more apt to keep the country in the mainstream of economic prosperity. But doing so ignores the fact that one culture nourishes the other. The ability to think outside the box, so much appreciated by the world of scientific and technological research today, emerges precisely from the originality of thought that comes from a universal and eclectic culture – not specialised but wide-ranging.

Galileo, for example, studied the classical culture of the Greeks and Romans, and practised scientific thought in the logical gym of Latin. Today, far from being part of a united culture, the majority of European intellectuals are recognised as such only in their own countries, and few have the ability to attract an international audience. Europeans, the custodians of Western culture, have lost sight of what they have in common and prefer to dig into the microscopic worlds of their most tribal identities.

Thus, Italy is now rediscovering dialects; and there would be nothing wrong with that, if it were an honest recovery of a cultural past. On the

contrary: dialects are the underground vein that has nourished the Italian language for centuries; they are direct emanations of Latin and not, as many believe, degenerations of Italian. But they are used today to divide and separate, to distance local cultures from the once-inclusive national one. Thus, a literature has flourished that often introduces dialect in an artificial way, with a nostalgia for a past imagined as peaceful and harmonious, a refuge of rural happiness. The past of dialectal Italy was in fact made up of poverty and ignorance, backwardness and social discomfort. The Italian writer Alberto Savinio wrote: 'The dialect narrows life, shrinks it, makes it infantile.'

The new Italian localism revives regional languages and teaches them in schools, claiming to make new generations aware of their true origins and to fortify the weak Italian spirit, which has become unable to protect the pure, Italian native from the multitudes of foreigners and their awkward cultures brought in by globalisation. Too many Italians do not realise that Italy was born out of diversity and that its origins have never been univocal. Italy is a country of a thousand cultures, and its very nature is in this multiplicity. Reverting to dialects with this spirit is anti-modern and profoundly wrong. Dialects should be left where they belong and used as repositories of past and memory, handed down from one generation to another in a spontaneous way and not turned into some kind of identity trap. If they die it means that they no longer play any role, that they have nothing more to say, and therefore their disappearance will not be a loss. Instead of shutting themselves away, Italians should move towards diversity in an assertive and not a dismissive way, in the spirit of exchange and mutual enrichment.

While dedicating themselves to learning dying dialects and artificially exhumed local languages, Italians do not learn foreign languages, not even the obvious English, which all Europeans, even the French, now read and speak with some competence. Italians do not know English, and the little they know they use in a distorted way, filling their language with English words used out of context. This is especially evident in the press: many journalists cram their articles with an English lexicon that is incomprehensible to many of their readers. This is an all-Italian anomaly practised by those who pretend to know English and therefore belong to a cultured caste, and by doing so distance themselves from the common citizen, who understands the ruling class and the intellectual elite less and less.
Last winter, in some vaccination centres in northern Italy, old-age

pensioners lining up to get the jab scrutinised perplexing signs bearing the words 'bike through'. Why English? Wouldn't a sign in Italian have been more obvious? This is a symptom of cultural colonisation: many Italians perceive English as more cool, casual, modern and effective than their own language. Covid also brought the neologism 'caregivers', which many Italians with little English misunderstood to mean something to do with a car. With modern concepts, the use of English can often be justified by the lack of an Italian equivalent, but a language is only alive when it is capable of creating its own neologisms, without having to resort to words that are foreign to it. This is not linguistic chauvinism. Loans and exchanges between languages have always existed and are legitimate when they do not come at the expense of consistency and understanding.

Italy seems to be afflicted by an innate provincialism that prevents many Italians from seeing beyond its borders. Italian culture, however, has a great attraction for neighbouring countries, such as the Balkans, where Italian is often spoken. It is in Italy's national interest to become acquainted with these cultures and to encourage these peoples' passion for our language and culture, and – why not? – it would help in terms of Italy's regional influence, and to spread European values. But Italy seems to ignore these neighbouring countries, as if they were insignificant or very distant. The average Italian does not even distinguish them from one another. This, too, is an effect of self-referentiality and the undying belief that our country is the centre of the world. Without noticing it, Rome, and perhaps all of Europe, are experiencing, in this century, a slow decline that looks very much like that of the Roman Empire.

In these times of profound change, Italy again is divided in two. One part, young and enterprising, looks to the future, speaks languages, travels, and is able, in the true Italian spirit, to renew the tradition of inventiveness and creativity. The other part remains surprisingly impervious to the appeal of diversity and cultural variety, despite the fact that different languages and cultures are so much more accessible now than they were in the past. Too many Italians, in particular from the south and the countryside, are scared by modern times, and adopt an attitude of insularity and isolation, as if they wanted to protect themselves from the new and the different.

Italy has been a land of emigration for centuries. Poor, illiterate peasants fled the country in search of work. Today Italy has become a destination for migrants who are looking for a better future

on our shores. But Italians have not stopped emigrating. Those who emigrate today are the most educated: academics, scientists, but also artists, artisans, cooks, entrepreneurs. Here we call it the brain drain. But an escape it is not. Because in one way or another, Italians always remain tied to something greater than their country: Italianness, which is a way of living, a vision of things, carrying on a tradition of universality that belonged to the classical world and which in one way or another remains deep in the nation's soul.

Diego Marani

DIEGO MARANI

LA CITTÀ CELESTE

La nave di Teseo, 2021
Translated by Barbara Ricci

The first time I arrived in Trieste was on a bright October morning. After a long journey through the greyness of the plain, the train burst out of the fog, and the sea appeared below us. It sparkled, motionless, in the distance the smoky silhouette of a ship passing.

The sheer cliff above the railway was reddened with autumn foliage, which spread through dense woods as the cliff opened onto the plateau.

In the narrowest passages the train whistled to announce itself and the rattle of wagons grew in intensity.

The limpid sky made the outlines of the landscape clearer and, at each curve, a new vision of the approaching city appeared before us.

I was left in the compartment with just an elderly gentleman, who had a restless gaze, and had done nothing but stare impatiently out of the window for the whole journey from Venezia Mestre station, where he had got on. He was wearing a crumpled, old-fashioned suit, grey, just like the long overcoat he had never taken off.

When the first houses began to parade in front of the windows, he pulled his large suitcase from the luggage rack and headed towards the exit. I followed him, hauling my backpack on to my shoulders. Only then did I notice that he was crying.

At times, he hid his face, but he couldn't stop looking at the city, which was opening below us, street after street. He glanced around him, his eyes shiny and anxious.

Soon the other passengers waiting to get off also realised he was crying, and everyone looked away.

It is unsettling when a man cries. It doesn't arouse pity as it does when it's a woman or a child. A man's cry is more like a whim, a weakness. Instead of consoling him, one would rather punish him.

'For thirty years I have not been back! For thirty years I have not seen my Trieste,' he murmured, with a broken voice, twisting and rubbing his hands. They were rough, worn hands, with the stubby fingers of a labourer.

Once he got off, he vanished into the crowd of the station, leaving a trail of sadness in the joyful light of that arrival, which for me was instead a landing place, a dizzying start.

That scene stuck in my mind, and today, after such a long time, I still recall it with a shiver.

In that man's eyes there was the immensity of destiny, the regret for a life already spent, and that morning's sun was its last glimmer.

I didn't think one could cry for a city. But back then I didn't know that cities are like women: one can fall in love with them and never forget them.

I didn't think one could cry for a city. But back then I didn't know that cities are like women: one can fall in love with them and never forget them.

Diego Marani
Translated by Barbara Ricci

POSTCARD FROM TRIESTE

By Lily-Amber Laila Wadia

I arrived at the train station in Trieste with a quote, an anecdote and a warning in mind.

The quote was the title of Welsh writer Jan Morris's novel: Trieste and the Meaning of Nowhere. *A staunch believer that my home is the world, not the place of birth stamped on my passport, I was intrigued to visit a Nowhere.*

The anecdote related to one of my favourite writers – expat, exiled and exhilarated, like myself. Someone who had walked the streets of this Nowhere to produce one of the world's greatest masterpieces. So excited was he to explore the city of Trieste, that James Joyce, in search of a hotel, forgot his wife and his luggage at the train station for half a day. In my mind's eye I saw Nora waiting patiently, hoping that he had found a nice room somewhere instead of chatting away with Umberto Saba or Italo Svevo.

The warning hit me with a force I had underestimated: the Bora wind blowing at 130 kph. Trieste sweeps you off your feet literally and literarily.

I walked, or maybe flew, past Piazza Oberdan, another writer's words buzzing in my head: Boris Pahor of Trieste's Slovene community and his Second World War memoir closely connected with the piazza in question.

The Bora wind certainly seemed to come from nowhere, wild and unpredictable, but having lived here for over thirty years I realise its prime purpose is to carry the words of its chroniclers – from Magris to Covacich to Heinichen – everywhere.

Le Quattro Ragazze Wieselberger *is an autobiographical novel documenting a century of family history. The first part, from which this extract is taken, is an engaging account of the family's fortunes, led by a passionately irredentist and music-loving patriarch, living in nineteenth-century Trieste, then still part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire (it would become part of Italy again after the First World War). It details the fates of the eponymous sisters: the tragically premature death of Adele (the beauty of the family) and the unhappy marriages of Alice and Elsa to philandering men, while Alba remains single. The subsequent parts of the novel follow the fortunes of Elsa and her children – Fausta and her brother Renato – in the twentieth century, which include tragic loss in war, separation and voluntary exile from Italy under fascism.*

The novel holds historical appeal as a portrait of life in a culturally divided Trieste in the late 1800s, and the evolution of the new Italian nation over a century. However, the themes and experiences throughout have a universal relevance and contemporary relatability for readers who have lived in another country, struggled to build a career (particularly as women), or experienced personal loss or marital breakdown – in other words, anyone and everyone.

FAUSTA CIALENTE

LE QUATTRO RAGAZZE WIESELBERGER

('The Four Wieselberger Sisters')

Mondadori, 1976; Reissued by La Tartaruga, 2018
Introduced and translated by Ailsa Wood Azzaro

This is how a sensible, well-to-do family from Trieste lived towards the end of the century. They could reside in a nice apartment in the city and own a large house in the country with a garden, vegetable plot and vineyard, the pantries of both bursting with all sorts of good things. Guests might arrive at any moment without causing any disturbance: the wardrobes were stocked with dozens of monogrammed damask-linen sheets, lace-trimmed, embroidered and pleated by hand, as well as hundreds of pillowcases, towels and cloths. The seamstress was a permanent fixture in the apartment and villa, with four girls to

dress, each requiring a trousseau, regardless of whether any of them eventually ended up an old maid. Nevertheless, it was thought better to raise them believing that they were not wealthy, though the carriage and horses at the front door might have led them to think otherwise. The good Micél, growing older in the meantime, was therefore a long-term arrangement, the remnant of implied power.

The windows of the house in which the fourth sister was born (and perhaps some of the others too) overlooked Piazza del Ponte Rosso, but the entrance was on the side, in Via Genova, then called Via del Campanile, near the church of Sant'Antonio Nuovo. From the windows you could glimpse the splendid canal built on the old salt flats, which still penetrates the square, boats and barges floating on it, crossed halfway by the bridge. By leaning out a little from the balconies you could also see the sea, and in any case the scent of it was carried on the breeze. In the morning there was a large fruit-and-vegetable market in the square with seasonal produce: piles of cherries and plums from the Karst region, figs, grapes and peaches from Istria, oranges and lemons brought up from Sicily – that is, from the longed-for kingdom of Italy – and heaps of beautiful, transparent redcurrants shining fire-red on the scales. The women who sold them were called *venderìgole*, while the gum-arabic and coffee huskers who sat on the steps of the church, waiting to be offered a day's work or more, were called *sessolote*. The song they sang was well-known: '*Sessolote lavoré – trenta soldi ciaparé – ventiquatro per la sala – quel che resta pel café*' ('I'll do a husker's work, I'll get thirty soldi, twenty-four for the hall, and the rest for a coffee'). The *sala* meant the dance hall. They were famous for other songs too, harmonised in three or even four voices. All these women heroically endured the beating sun, the lashing rain and the harsh gusts of the Bora, and those who could shelter under the frenetic flapping of the awnings counted themselves lucky. Nearby was Piazza della Legna (formerly Piazza San Lazzaro), renamed by the people because the wood market was held there, and piles of kindling and dry, seasoned wood were permanently stored amongst the poor hovels, which, had they caught fire, would have vanished in a swift, savage blaze; and this was why the first fire station was installed there.

Fausta Cialente
Translated by Ailsa Wood Azzaro

THE RIVETER
FEATURES

DARK SKIES OVER THE MEDITERRANEAN: ITALIAN CRIME FICTION

by BARRY FORSHAW

The sun beats down, and cold-hearted murder is done. The very individual, and more laid-back, approach to crime fiction in Italy, that most Latin of countries – with its image (true or false) of endemic political and religious corruption – is fertile territory for crime fiction, not least for the way its deceptive languor is shot through with the ever-present influence of the Mafia. When I took part in a BBC programme on Italian crime fiction in 2011 (still viewable on YouTube as *Time Shift: Italian Noir*), it was an opportunity to revisit the work of many of the key writers from that country, which I'd covered for such newspapers as the *Financial Times* and the *Guardian*. But why doesn't crime fiction from Italy – while certainly celebrated – enjoy quite the international appeal of several other European countries?

It is notable, and perhaps regrettable, that, as yet, many of the remarkable and idiosyncratic talents of this Mediterranean branch of the crime fiction genre have not made their mark in the same way the Scandinavians have, at least as long as a decade or so ago, which is when the following essay (with some exceptions) extends to. But enthusiasm among non-Italian speaking readers is growing. The attentive reader will take on board the sometimes subtle, sometimes direct political insights and historical contexts freighted into the work of traditional crime writers such as Leonardo Sciascia, Carlo Lucarelli and, of course, Andrea Camilleri. But along with these better-known names, much light may be thrown on the achievements of other writers yet to break through. New readers, however, should be aware that sheer narrative pleasure is the key element of most Italian crime fiction, rather than, generally speaking, the more astringent sociopolitical fare from other countries. Italy, of course, has produced one of the most ambitious historical crime novels ever written: Umberto Eco's sprawling, phantasmagorical, philosophical

The Name of the Rose (1980), a book graced with one of the most celebrated translations ever accorded a non-English language novel, courtesy of William Weaver.

Latin Temperaments: ANDREA CAMILLERI

Italy's crime fiction is gradually coming to terms with a fractured political situation and a long series of political scandals. The doyen of Italian crime writers, Andrea Camilleri (who died in 2019), rarely engaged directly with politics or social issues. Although, during the massively controversial Silvio Berlusconi era, he did quote Dante: 'The country has the wrong helmsman.' While his books accept endemic corruption as part of the fabric of Italian society, they are elegantly written, escapist fare. The seal of the best foreign crime writing is as much the stylish prose as it is the unfamiliar settings readers are transported to. When both ingredients are presented with the expertise that is Camilleri's hallmark, Mr Micawber's words are à propos: 'result, happiness'. Camilleri has familiarised us with his Sicilian copper Salvo Montalbano – a laser-sharp mind, and a gourmet whose mind frequently strays to food. Most of all, we know his stomping ground: the beautiful, sleepy territory of Vigata. And the heat. In *August Heat* (published in English in 2009) – a key book – it is omnipresent and crushing.

The Godfather: LEONARDO SCIASCIA

The immensely influential Leonardo Sciascia (who was born in Racalmuto, Sicily, in 1921 and died in 1989 in Palermo) is one of the most comprehensively significant of Italian writers, celebrated for his swingeing examination of political corruption and the corrosive concomitants of power. His work is shot through with intellectual rigour. Sciascia made his living teaching even when writing (much like the Swedish novelist Håkan Nesser), and only decided to write full time in 1968. His political commitment was well known: he was a Communist Party representative on Palermo's city council, and followed this with a stint working for the Radical Party in the Italian Parliament. From Sciascia's early work in 1950 onwards (*Fables of the Dictatorship*, with its critique of fascism), political engagement was always on the writer's agenda. His first crime-related novel appeared in 1961, the brilliantly written *The Day of the Owl*, with its sharply drawn picture of the Mafia, consolidated in later books. His influence on the many writers who succeeded him is incalculable.

The Italian Lee Child: GIANRICO CAROFIGLIO

The elegant Gianrico Carofiglio is very much his own man. When he

talks about the fact that he is regarded by feminine admirers as something of a surrogate for his fictional protagonist, lawyer Guido Guerrieri, it's hard not to think: 'Gianrico Carofiglio is the Italian Lee Child!' And if his hero, Guido, is a more thoughtful, less two-fisted character than the brawling Jack Reacher, he is as much a favourite with female readers as Lee Child's maverick troubleshooter. The author Carofiglio is a brave man: he was an anti-Mafia judge in Puglia, taking on the powerful and (lethal) corruption that is endemic in Italy. His novel *Involuntary Witness* (2010), followed since by other, well-received books, begins with the discovery of a child's body in a well at a southern Italian beach resort. A Senegalese peddler is arraigned for sexual assault and murder, but Defence Counsel Guido Guerrieri realises that the truth is more complex. A tangled skein of racism and judicial corruption confronts Guerrieri.

The Multi-Tasking GIORGIO FALETTI

Giorgio Faletti is a man clearly not content with just one career. Over the years, he has been a lawyer, TV comedian, film actor (e.g. *Cinema Paradiso*) and singer/songwriter – and, what's more, he has enjoyed considerable success in each of these careers. His blockbuster thriller, *I Kill* (Italian: 2002), had already sold over five million copies worldwide before its UK appearance in 2010. While most Italian crime fiction is deliberately parochial, Faletti paints his exuberant narrative on the largest of canvases. The template here is very much the grand scale – the international thriller as practised by American and British writers – and he knows exactly what he's doing. The setting is Monte Carlo, playground of the rich and bolthole for the criminal. In *I Kill*, the more upscale residents are being targeted by an implacable serial killer who calls himself 'No One' (shades of Homer's Odyssey). A radio talk show host allows him to announce each killing against a soundtrack that indicates who the next victim will be. And at the scene of each crime are the words 'I Kill' scrawled in the victim's blood. The killer's nemeses are FBI agent Frank Ottobre, struggling to come to terms with the death of his wife, and Police Commissioner Nicholas Hulot. The book is long – over five hundred pages – but the tension is maintained throughout with genuine skill.

Hunting Monsters: MICHELE GIUTTARI

Is the author Michele Giuttari actually more interesting than his books? Many crime authors are troglodyte creatures who wisely shun the light of day, as their unprepossessing appearances

might remind readers how far they are from their charismatic protagonists, but Michele Giuttari (as I found when I met him for an event at the Harrogate crime writers festival) is almost a stereotypical Latin charmer, handsome in standard middle-aged Italian fashion. More than that, he is the Real Deal in the crime-fighting stakes. A Sicilian-born inspector of police, he took on the Cosa Nostra. His elite anti-Mafia squad in Florence investigated the serial killer known as 'the Monster of Florence', who claimed fourteen lives and was an inspiration for Thomas Harris's Hannibal Lecter books. The fact that the killer did not appear to work alone, as Giuttari discovered, uncovered the murky layers of conspiracy that are meat and drink to a crime writer, and Giuttari made the decision to move from police work, where his life had been placed at risk on several occasions, to the more sedate profession of writer. His debut novel, *A Florentine Death* (2008, a massive seller in Italy), is a transmutation of the author's previous life: Chief Superintendent Michele Ferrara shares his creator's first name, stylish grey-flecked locks and Sicilian turn of phrase (not to mention a German wife). And Giuttari can actually deliver the literary goods.

The Years of Lead and *Romanzo criminale*

The immense success of Giancarlo De Cataldo's novel *Romanzo criminale*, about three close friends who hijack the organised-crime scene in Rome, moved into the territory of non-literary phenomenon. The book, complex and heavily peopled, was famously inspired by real-life events. As well as being a compelling crime narrative, it is a chronicle of the 'Years of Lead', the time of socio-political upheaval that extended from the 1960s to the 1980s in Rome, with organised crime and political corruption going hand-in-hand. From a vividly realised 1960, with the joyriding principals already on their way to becoming ruthless criminals, through the bloody battles of the 1970s (including encounters with terrorists, the Mafia and the security services), the period detail is impeccable, with the stark and unvarnished presentation of the characters paying dividends in terms of verisimilitude.

Hiding from the Mob: The Legacy of *Gomorrah*

The incendiary, lid-blowing book *Gomorrah* (2006 in Italian) drove its author, Roberto Saviano, into hiding, angering his targets by his truthful portrait of the Neapolitan Mafia. The Camorra work with a cocktail of drugs and violence –

both utilising and trading in the former. But their activities also extend to the toxic disposal of waste (which, of course, is not actually disposed of at all, but simply dumped) and the procurement of designer goods. This is not to take into account such vicious sidelines as people trafficking. Saviano offers a picture of the day-to-day life and activity of the mob, often crushingly banal, its protagonists stupid and brutal, with the book making no concessions to the romanticising of the subject so often channelled by other writers. Roberto Saviano may have paid a price for his bravery, but his literary legacy is assured with this remarkable document.

Sex, Blood and BARBARA BARALDI

Barbara Baraldi's *The Girl with Crystal Eyes* (2010), sets its dark, *giallo*-influenced narrative in Bologna, painting the city's time-worn network of dark streets, through which a serial killer moves, blood red. A child's discarded teddy bear opens the curtain on a grim investigation conducted by the unrelenting Inspector Marconi, who probes every stratum of the city – high and low. Barbara Baraldi is something different from her compatriots; she has said that her templates are filmic rather than literary (Dario Argento rather than Andrea Camilleri), with a strong and heady infusion of punk sensibility – and, crucially, a heavy dose of eroticism. Sexuality totally infuses the book, and desire – both male and female – is foregrounded. It's edgy, disturbing stuff.

Fascist Memories: CARLO LUCARELLI'S Commissario de Luca Trilogy

While working on his thesis on the history of law enforcement during the fascist period in Italy, Carlo Lucarelli interviewed a man who had been an officer in the Italian police force for forty years. He had started as a member of the fascist political police but, towards the end of the Second World War, when the fascists were on the run, he answered to partisan formations then in control of the country. His job? To investigate the fascist hierarchy, his former employers. After the war, when regular elections were held and a government formed, he was employed by the Italian Republic. Part of his job was again to investigate and arrest his former employers, this time the partisans. Carlo Lucarelli, however, never finished his doctoral thesis. Instead, Commissario De Luca was born, and overnight his creator became one of Italy's most acclaimed crime authors.

The De Luca trilogy begins with *Carte Blanche*, set in April 1945, the final frenetic days of the Salò Republic. A brutal murder on the good side of town lands Commissario

De Luca in the middle of a hornet's nest where the rich and powerful mix drugs, sex, money, and murder. This was followed by *The Damned Season* in which De Luca is on the run under an assumed identity to avoid reprisals for the role he played during the fascist dictatorship. Blackmailed by a member of the partisan police, De Luca is obliged to investigate a series of murders, becoming a reluctant player in Italy's post-war power struggle. The final novel, *Via delle Oche*, was set in 1948, with the country's fate soon to be decided in bitterly contested national elections. A corpse surfaces in a brothel at the heart of Bologna's red light district, and De Luca finds himself unwilling to look the other way when evidence in the murder points to prominent local power brokers. The novels (whose tone often veers alarmingly between the sardonic and the massively cynical) are built around one key thesis: the deforming effect of Italy's compromised, slippery politics on every individual, not least the pragmatic but beleaguered De Luca.

Recent writers

The current state of the genre? Healthy, if not over-populated with newer names. There are impressive recent novels by Nicolò Ammaniti, Cristina Cassar Scalia, Antonio Manzini and Donato Carrisi. But whether there are more infusions of new blood or not, Italian crime fiction is here to stay.

Barry Forshaw

LUCA D'ANDREA

THE WANDERER

Translated by Katherine Gregor
MacLehose Press, 2022

Nine

1.

On June 8, while Kreuzwirt was filling with the BMWs and Mercedes of South Tyrol's bigwigs, Sibylle had allowed herself a lie-in, since Oskar had decided to keep The Black Hat closed as a sign of mourning.

When she left home, meaning to go for a ride on her Yamaha, she saw the letter. The envelope was sealed. No sender. A shy admirer, perhaps?

If only.

Sibylle knew she was quite attractive. The ogling, handsy maniacs at The Black Hat had not taught her anything she did not already know. Except that no sooner had she opened up a little with the young men who passed the First Glance Exam (and subsequent Pillock Test) – cute enough to arouse her interest and not so stupid that she would refuse to go to bed with them for the sake of a little exercise – than they would scurry away. *I'm not ready for you yet. It's me, I … Surely you can see that*. Sib had heard it all.

The problem was that Sibylle was a complicated girl in a part of the world that loved order. The young men who courted her were simple. They wanted a girl who would marry them in the Church of Sand in Taufers and commit to churning out two or three brats in succession and spending the rest of her life cooking, ironing and making sure she was ready and willing on Saturday nights. Really not the kind of future Sib had in mind.

Sure enough, the envelope contained no passionate declaration of love, but a black-and-white photograph. An impossible photograph. Erika lying by the lake, wearing her Maturaball dress, her hair caked in mud, her face turned towards the dawn.

And a symbol traced next to her body.

2.

Tony turned white.

'What's that doodle?'

'Evidence that Erika was killed.'

It wasn't there.

The symbol drawn in the mud right next to Erika's body wasn't there in 1999. He hadn't seen it when Milani had flung him headfirst down the hill, and nobody had mentioned it during the police briefings.

I think Horst found Erika's body and didn't see the hummingbird smile at first. Understandably. It was night-time.

Therefore ...

Sibylle pre-empted his objection.

'It's not a photomontage. I had it analysed by a nerd in Bruneck. He thought it was a still from a film. The camera film is from the period. The light suggests it was shot a few minutes after dawn. It's authentic.' Sib drew a breath and began rummaging through the box. 'Spooky Erika could read the future. Did you know that?'

Tony recalled that the Spooky Erika business had surfaced very quickly in '99, but little else had come to light. A daydreamer. Few friends. An extra boost, Milani had remarked with bitterness, for the suicide theory. No murder. No post-mortem rape. *Say goodbye to your scoop, newbie.*

Sibylle showed him a deck of tarot cards. 'These were Erika's. Do you know how they work?'

'Why? *Do* they work?'

'Everyone has a different way of laying them out. Some people arrange them in a circle or a triangle, others in groups of three or four. Everyone has their own system. This is how Erika did it.'

Sib began to arrange the tarots on the coffee table. Two parallel vertical lines of three cards each, very close to each other. She added two more at the base, creating a kind of arrowhead. Then two more higher up, so as to form ...

'It looks like a serpent's head.'

'Erika used to call it "the hummingbird smile". Can you picture it?' The pattern of cards on the coffee table was identical to the symbol drawn in the mud next to Erika's body.

Fuck.

'Now look at the photo carefully,' Sibylle said. 'See the serial number? The one I found in the letterbox was the first one taken at the scene of Erika's death. The others are here.' A thin file bearing the stamp of the Bolzano court. 'I got it from the public prosecutor's office. It has the statements of the carabinieri, the photographs taken that morning and the autopsy report on Erika. Notice anything strange?'

It stood out like a clown at a funeral. The serial numbers of the pictures in the file went from seven to fifty. Moreover, the light in these images wasn't the same as in the missing photographs, as though they had been taken later in the morning. Erika's body was positioned differently and, just as Tony remembered, there was no symbol next to her.

'I think the hummingbird smile would have led to questions, but since someone made it disappear, everything was straightforward. On the twenty-first, Erika killed herself by drowning in the lake. On the twenty-second, the autopsy was carried out, and confirmed death by drowning. Suicide. On the twenty-third, the body was cremated. Look at the signature of the doctor appointed by the court to write the report.'

The handwriting was untidy but legible. Doctor Josef Horst. The man who had discovered Erika's body at 4.00 a.m. on March 22, 1999.

Tony wiped his forehead with his hand. He was sweating.

'So, in your opinion, Horst kills Erika and draws the symbol in the mud, but when the carabinieri arrive he regrets it, wipes it out without them noticing, and somehow makes the pictures they had already taken disappear. Then he falsifies the autopsy. It doesn't add up.'

'No, it doesn't. I think Horst found Erika's body and didn't see the hummingbird smile at first. Understandably. It was night-time. It was dark. He was upset. He noticed it only at dawn, when the carabinieri had already taken pictures one to six. That's when he erased it. Then—'

'He silenced the carabinieri?' Tony said. 'Made the pictures disappear? Don't you think it's a bit … far-fetched?'

Sib studied Tony's expression.

Perplexed, frightened. Incredulous.

Luca D'Andrea
Translated by Katherine Gregor

MARCELLO FOIS
VALSE TRISTE

TRANSLATED BY RICHARD DIXON
MACLEHOSE PRESS, 2021

REVIEWED BY DYMPHNA FLYNN

V*alse triste* ('Sad Waltz') is a haunting but short orchestral piece by the Finnish composer Jean Sibelius that comforts two of the characters in Marcello Fois's crime novel of the same name. Fois is a Sardinian writer with a talent for esoteric nature writing, and combining this with a thriller element makes for an unusual book.

Set in the north of Italy one snowy January, a local priest calls the police after coming across the parents of an eleven-year-old autistic boy who has suddenly disappeared during a comfort break at the side of a road. The novel is in four parts, each named for and influenced by the elements, earth, fire, air and water, which are illustrated by events in the story, such as an explosion, a feigned drowning, a disturbingly windy night.

A police procedural like *Valse triste* depends on the strength and charisma of the investigator, and Commissario Sergio Striggio is indeed a complex character who, he says, came to his vocation through vengeance and because 'more than anything else, he hated to admit any personal weakness'. The appeal of the novel is that it's as much about his personal story as the crime he's trying to solve.

While Striggio is trying to uncover what has happened to the boy, Michelangelo, he's preoccupied with the impending visit of his father Pietro and what that means for him and his lover, Leo. Striggio is determined to finally come out to his father, but is hindered by the revelation that Pietro has a terminal illness. Once more the moment isn't quite right. Yet without Leo and Pietro the investigation would stall. Leo, a primary school teacher, reprehends Striggio for being slow to question the priest, and his father shares surprising information that will unravel the mystery of the missing boy.

This sensitively written novel has, therefore, all the elements of a fast-paced, puzzling crime story,

with cliffhangers, reveals and red-herrings, but they sit alongside an exploration of how we communicate with our loved ones. As Sergio Striggio navigates a rapprochement with his father in his hospital room, he recalls therapy sessions as a teenager, his early attempts at writing stories and his love of myth. But he also faces struggles within the macho environment of the Italian commissariat, with his female sidekick, who has a crush on him, as well as in his relationship with Leo.

Marcello Fois's reputation as a gifted writer who explores his homeland's cultural roots (as noted in the book's blurb) interests me, as its mixture of literary story, fable and thriller make this book hard to pin down. I would guess that translator Richard Dixon found the poetic language a challenge to translate at times, but overall he has produced a forceful version of an unconventional, layered and gripping story.

Dymphna Flynn

Set in a remote Piedmont valley, Linda Tugnoli's Le colpe degli altri *has an unusual protagonist. Guido, now a solitary gardener, has returned to his native region after experiencing a severe trauma in Paris, where he was a highly paid 'nose' for a prestigious perfume house. But he doesn't just have an acute sense of smell; Guido's other senses are also highly tuned and, fuelled by a rich imagination, his mind works overtime, sometimes at vertiginous speed, meaning his view of the world is conditioned by his above-average perceptiveness.*

It's this perceptiveness – as well as his knowledge as a gardener – that makes him the only person to notice an apparently insignificant detail next to the body of a murdered young woman: a gingko biloba leaf that has no place there. In spite of himself, Guido becomes embroiled in the investigation, much to the annoyance of the police inspector, a Sicilian a long way away from the blazing sun, plentiful food and ancient civilisation of his native island, who struggles with the cold, foggy climate and, by his own admission, cannot 'read' the taciturn locals.

LINDA TUGNOLI

LE COLPE DEGLI ALTRI ('The Faults of Others')

Nord, 2020

Introduced and translated by Katherine Gregor

About that, Guido didn't have a moment's hesitation: the young woman was quite dead. There was a pool of blood spreading under her head. Her dark-blue eyes were open wide, staring at the sky of the same colour between the pillars.

He took a step back and looked around. A sudden gust of wind froze the sweat on him.

Why had a young woman dressed like that come to this abandoned garden? The villa was uninhabited, he'd been told that the owners lived in Kenya. They were property developers or engineers and, like many descendants of the *picapère* – stonecutters from these valleys – only came here three weeks a year, in August, to enjoy the coolness of the Alpine foothills before going back to building roads under the African sun.

He looked in the direction of the house; now the gust of wind had passed nothing was stirring, not even the leaves on

the trees. Suddenly, the silence felt unnatural to him. He focussed again on the young woman wearing that evening dress, lying on the ground. Parties with long evening gowns hadn't been seen for at least half a century around these parts. The tennis club further down the valley had closed decades ago, and its Art Nouveau porticos, mirrored in the water, were crumbling with understated elegance, the fields overlooking the stream now overrun by weeds. By an association of ideas, his mind created the image of thousands of tennis balls carried away by the current and fished out by somebody downstream, someone who had perhaps started a collection. He dismissed that absurd idea; this was no time to get lost, as usual, in hare-brained reveries – he had to call someone, notify the police.

Finding an inhabited house in the area was impossible, let alone a phone box, the villa was completely isolated.

The only thing he could do was go back down towards the town and stop off at the first café on the road. He looked back one more time before setting off, and a white hand against a black background suddenly flashed before him, holding a rose. But not a freshly picked rose. The ghost of a rose that had been left to dry for years between the pages of a book.

*

'Is everything the way you left it an hour ago?'

The inspector, more or less the same age as him, had asked to be taken to the gazebo. He had a strong southern accent, but there was another police officer, younger and shy, who was from Guido's part of the world.

'Yes, I think so … '

With an abrupt gesture, he stopped him at the edge of the open area surrounded by pillars, so they wouldn't tread on the large number of footprints with mud and leaves. He hadn't noticed them earlier, but now a special torch standing on the ground cast a harsh beam of blueish light over everything.

'Earlier on, did you come in or stay outside?'

Sicilian. The accent sounded Sicilian. How come he'd ended up fifteen hundred kilometres away from home? 'No, I didn't come in.'

'Sorry – why not?'

'It's not like there was anything I could have done for the young woman … '

Linda Tugnoli
Translated by Katherine Gregor

ANDREA CAMILLERI
RICCARDINO

TRANSLATED BY STEPHEN SARTARELLI
PAN MACMILLAM, 2021

REVIEWED BY MAX EASTERMAN

By the time he died in 2019, Sicily's great crime writer had produced twenty-eight Inspector Salvo Montalbano mysteries, which were adapted into thirty-six dramas by RAI television (I devoured all of them!), turning Luca Zingaretti into one of Italy's best-known and most sought-after actors. *Riccardino*, though, is probably the least typical of the series. Camilleri always intended it to be the last of the novels, although he wrote it in 2005, many years and many more Montalbano novels before he actually died. He delivered *Riccardino* to his publishers with a note instructing them to lock it away until after he was gone. It's not difficult to understand why: Montalbano's swansong is not only a disturbing story but also a somewhat unsettling metafiction, with Camilleri, in the guise of 'the author' persistently interfering via phone calls and emails with the inspector's attempts to solve the mystery, criticising his deductions and offering alternative scenarios.

I say 'unsettling' because I'm not sure they work to the story's advantage: although they no doubt reflect Camilleri's own musings and rewrites, they were for me distracting. The exchanges between Montalbano and his author become increasingly tetchy, as the former reflects ruefully that his TV alter ego will always have the upper hand: 'He knows what will happen next, while you are always forced to improvise.' The author, however, asserts, when the inspector asks him who informed him about the *Riccardino* case, that Montalbano is effectively a puppet: 'Salvo, it's me who informs you … this story about Riccardino, I'm writing it as you live it. It's as simple as that.'

It's not hard to understand Montalbano's frustration with this meddling, as I also felt frustrated at the way it held up the narrative. Moreover, from the outset, Montalbano is showing his age and world-weariness:

> '… the years [were] now weighing on his shoulders … the truth of the

matter was that for a while now he'd no longer felt like it … he'd come to the realisation that there was no one more brain-dead than someone for whom the solution to any problem was murder.'

However, once a detective, always a detective, and Montalbano willingly casts off his 'black dog', unleashes his investigative instincts and is soon up to all his old tricks: refusing to do it 'by the book', ignoring his superiors and their orders, and disappearing when they attempt to bring him to heel, while always finding time to eat substantial lunches in his favourite restaurant.

The story hooks you straight-away. A man calling himself Riccardino phones Montalbano out of the blue at 5.00 a.m., demanding to know why he's late for their appointment with some friends at a local bar. Piqued at being woken by a wrong number, Montalbano tells him he's on his way and goes straight back to bed – only to be called again an hour later to be told there's been a murder in broad daylight outside the very same bar mentioned in the first phone call. The victim is Riccardo Lopresti, alias Riccardino.

What follows is a classic Montalbano investigation, with all the well-known characters. As always, bar the continued meddling of the author inter alia, Montalbano digs deep and uncovers a fetid brew of adultery, graft and stolen diesel behind Riccardino's murder, which neither the police commissioner nor the local bishop nor the prosecutor – nor indeed the distant but powerful figure of the under-secretary at the Ministry of Justice – want revealed. All of whose wishes and demands Montalbano duly ignores in his determination to deliver the solution to this final case, his swansong. As ever with Camilleri, the last few pages are a revelation, though not the one you might have expected. Montalbano's frustrations boil over and, ignoring his creator, he takes the final decision into his own hands: the last word is his alone.

Max Easterman

POSTCARD FROM PUGLIA

By Valeria Vescina

Puglia is a land rich in variety and contradictions. The modern and the ancient – layer upon layer of history's traces in the landscape and the people – coexist and sometimes clash. The region's contemporary literary landscape is therefore unsurprisingly diverse. Several authors born in Puglia live elsewhere and vice versa. In some of their novels, the region is a character in its own right, while in others it's the point of departure in stories of migration to northern Italy and beyond. Genres and themes vary widely, too, ranging from gritty stories of criminality and political corruption to magical realism. Anglophone readers will already be familiar with some of these writers, including Gianrico Carofiglio, Donato Carrisi, Giancarlo De Cataldo, Francesco Dimitri and Nicola Lagioia.

Another author whose work I would love to see available in English is Raffaele Nigro. Born in Basilicata, he has lived and worked in Puglia most of his life. His novels, which have been awarded major literary prizes, fuse reality and dream. They dive deep into the waters of southern Italian – and more generally Mediterranean – culture and history, and Puglia features in several of them. Nigro's highly distinctive, entrancing voice and stylistic inventiveness are guaranteed to keep you gripped from start to finish.

GIANRICO and FRANCESCO CAROFIGLIO
interviewed by West Camel

'I have always thought of my activities as the tributaries of a single creative river,' says Francesco Carofiglio at one point in the discussion with me and his brother, conducted for this magazine, in pandemic-honoured tradition, via Zoom, in December 2021.

His comment is apt: between them the Carofiglio brothers have written, individually and in cooperation, fiction and non-fiction, literary and crime, memoir, and even scripts and graphic novels. Not only that, their mother was also a writer – the novelist Enza Buono. But in what way her creativity has flowed on into her sons', is somewhat unclear. 'I have always loved my mother's novels', says Francesco. 'I love the elegance of her language and the intimate characters of her stories. I don't know if any of this has filtered into my writing, but if it has, I would be happy.'

Gianrico is more sure: 'The idea of writing that you feel when you read my mother's novels is completely different from mine. I think we can find something of our mother's writing in Francesco's writing, but I have a completely different idea of language, words, the feeling of words and the act of writing.'

There's another key difference between the brothers' approaches to their work. Francesco says he 'loves the act of writing', while Gianrico, even though he always wanted to be a writer, says: 'I hate it. I find it very painful.' Perhaps this is part of why he started his writing career by focussing on a world he knows a lot about: the Italian legal system. Gianrico was, famously, an anti-Mafia prosecutor. I ask what prompted him to fictionalise the world he worked in.

'Fear', he replies. 'When you begin to write your first novel, it's scary. Because it will be a long trip and you don't know if you will make it, so you seek help, and one way to get this is through an environment that you know very well – characters that you know very well.'

There are pitfalls to 'writing what you know', however, particularly when the world you know is an intricate and recondite one. You get over this, Gianrico believes, with empathy – 'the ability to put yourself in the reader's shoes ... being aware that there are things that they don't know and you do. You have to fill the gap between you and them.'

Francesco's work, as an artist, architect, actor and director, has influenced his writing in a completely different way: 'I like to tell stories, and I try to do it through writing novels, painting, designing spaces, performances, acting. Sometimes it is not so easy to reconcile all this ... But it is my only way of seeing the creative process: I contaminate the disciplines, bringing one into the other. When I write, I am an architect; when I do theatre, I am an illustrator.'

This feeling is echoed in the way both men approach their writing. Gianrico is now generally seen, in the UK at least, as a crime fiction writer. But his oeuvre encompasses a lot more than that. When his first novel, *Involuntary Witness*, was published, he thought he'd written 'a special kind of coming-of-age novel', so he was surprised by the label it was given: 'I really didn't know I had written a legal thriller. But a very respected and important Italian journalist wrote that this was the best legal thriller published in Italy. I was flattered, but at the same time I was a little disappointed … after a few weeks, I could see how the label worked and became more flexible.'

We discuss the labels 'literary' and 'genre', and it seems that Italy is similar to the English-speaking world in the ways these are used for commercial purposes rather than artistic ones.

'I only distinguish between good and bad novels,' says Francesco. 'I have never loved classifications. And I believe that some authors categorised as genre writers are great storytellers … I need to tell different stories, so my novels do not all look alike, and I move comfortably between different genres … I always think writing is like entering a mysterious playroom, in which you can find everything.'

With a long, and lengthening writing career behind him now, does Gianrico see his 'genre' and 'literary' books differently? No, he says: 'I just write, and it has always been the same, there is no difference.' And he agrees with his brother about good and bad writing:

'There is a good technique to understanding if a novel is literary or not literary, even if it is about crime or something else, and this is to do with something that happens or doesn't happen after reading the book … with a good novel or short story, the characters remain inside your soul and your brain. They are walking with you as you wonder "why?" and "what?" … You were sure about things, but after finishing the book, you are not sure anymore. This is a good thing and it can happen with a so-called "mainstream" or "genre" novel.'

Gianrico famously writes about Bari in his Guerrieri novels, whereas Francesco is more peripatetic: 'When I write I have the feeling of putting new roots in different places in the world every time.' So I ask whether there's another classification they might disagree with; a peculiarly Italian one: *campanilismo* – the very localised patriotism felt for your city or region. Francesco is strident: 'I think that the history of Italian literature, from Dante to today, is dotted with great writers that are absolutely not attributable to the concept of *campanilismo* – once again we are faced with preconceptions that for me are useless and harmful. Shakespeare has Hamlet say: "I could be bound in a nutshell and count myself a king of infinite space." I believe that writing stories even set in small, remote places can do this.'

Gianrico is more qualified, and unwittingly raises once again the image of tributaries to a single creative river:

'I think we have an Italian literature. There are regional literatures and there is a mainstream literature, novels that are not local and regional. Generally speaking, I would say this national Italian literature has got to do

with a feeling of discontent; it is a metropolitan literature, talking about this unease among modern, urban people. So, together with the regional literatures, Italian literature offers some interesting experiences.'

The brothers have recorded their own 'interesting experiences' by writing a memoir together. But, typically for them it doesn't sit neatly within the form:

'I was talking with a publisher, and they wanted a memoir about food,' says Gianrico. 'I really didn't think that I could write that book, so I asked my brother, why don't we write it together? We can make it a memoir about our family, our childhood, our parents and our mythical holidays … It is a strange book, because it is many things together: it's a memoir, it's fiction – there are many parts that are absolute fiction. It's a melting pot: it's about food and its connection with memory and feelings.'

I ask how it felt to write together, and typically for these brothers – and for most siblings, I think – they both agree and disagree on the same events. Gianrico refers again to the pain he experiences when writing: 'I have to say that writing the book was a nightmare. I wouldn't want to write a book with a guy like me, so I can understand what my brother had to go through.'

Francesco takes the opposite view: 'It was a lot simpler than you can imagine; we shared our memories and took notes. I think the story was built naturally without any particular artifices of narrative or fiction … It was like a game.'

After an hour spent in the company of these two writers, I think that game must have been a very enjoyable one.

FRANCESCO CAROFIGLIO

L'ESTATE DELL'INCANTO **('Spellbound Summer')**
Mondadori, 2019
Translated by Elena Cantoni

We went to my grandfather's. My father's father.

He lived alone on a farm, on the edge of the woods. Grandma had died when she was very young, leaving my father to be brought up by his nanny and the help. A motherless, almost fatherless child. Grandpa Ugo was incredibly tall, with a thick white moustache that made him unapproachable. Minding the place was Elda, the housekeeper. She was short, wiry, with a weathered face. As busy as a bee, always intent on some chore, fussing with housework.

My mother never loved grandpa, I think, and my father had kept his distance after he got married. But I didn't know it back then. Father was a socialist, grandpa an old anarchist, though he came from aristocratic stock. I still keep a photograph of the two of them together, standing side by side, before I was born. Grandpa is wearing a three-piece suit, my father is in shirtsleeves, without a tie. Their expressions reveal no trace of a smile, of familiarity. Grandpa towers over my dad, with the farm in the background. I think that was the last time my father had been there.

Villa Ada was beautiful and austere, at the top of a ridge in the hills surrounding Pistoia, a few kilometres from Calamecca, a medieval town in Valdiforfora. The names of those places sound straight out of a Rabelais novel, both playful and mysterious.

The farmhouse itself was a squat building, a clear-cut shape against the backdrop of sunsets that set the valley ablaze. The lawn all around it was hedged in by well-tended shrubbery, and beyond that was the courtyard, the chicken coop and the stables, with Aldo, an old Maremmano horse. Next to the barn a lean-to housed the buggy and grandfather's car. The sheep and pigs were long gone.

Grandpa Ugo was a painter. He had been a pupil of Gordigiani and a friend of Alfredo Müller. At the turn of the century he had been to Paris with Müller and was introduced to Cézanne, Pissarro, Toulouse-Lautrec. But he hadn't been as successful as his friend, and had returned to Tuscany.

His studio faced the valley; it was flooded with light streaming in from the huge windows, and it was cold. Grandpa painted all

day long and was not to be disturbed, ever. The air inside the studio was heavy with the smell of oils, turpentine and the humidity that traced ever-changing landscapes of mould on the walls. The longer side of the room was crowded with canvases stacked against the wall, tied up with string and covered with cloth, while huge easels stood along the shorter side. Some of grandfather's paintings were as wide as the wall itself.

*

We arrived at the farm on a Sunday in June. Getting off the train at the station in Pistoia we were met by Ottone, a farmhand deeply devoted to my grandfather, who had come to pick us up in a truck reeking of manure. It took us two hours to get to Villa Ada. The heavy rains had turned the roads to mud. Yet I loved that journey. I had never been outside Florence before, never visited grandfather in the country.

Through the trees I thought I saw the magical shapes of animals that for years had lived in my bedtime stories. The grey owl, the silvery fox, the blue hare. I was excited and happy.

Great oaks flanked the road on both sides as we reached the valley. Gazing through the truck window, buffeted by the drumbeat of potholes, I followed the dizzying procession of trunks, a curtain becoming denser and thicker as we rode up the hill. The cool air from the wood brought a smell of resin, mitigating the stink of manure. Through the trees I thought I saw the magical shapes of animals that for years had lived in my bedtime stories. The grey owl, the silvery fox, the blue hare. I was excited and happy.

After yet another hairpin bend, the landscape opened onto a cheerful sunlit meadow, and the farmhouse appeared at the top of the hill. I recognised the blunt shape from a picture that hung in our living room in Florence. I turned to look at my mother and she smiled at me.

'Almost there.'

Ottone, who hadn't said a word all the way from the station, spoke those two words in a croaky voice, exhaling a whiff of salami.

After a few more minutes, with the truck making its slow way through the mud, we finally reached a wrought-iron gate and entered the dirt road to the courtyard. Ottone honked the horn and the dogs started barking.

Francesco Carofiglio
Translated by Elena Cantoni

GIANRICO CAROFIGLIO

THE MEASURE OF TIME

Translated by Howard Curtis
Bitter Lemon Press, 2021

In my early years in the profession I liked going into prisons. Around the age of thirty, it gave me the feeling I was someone who was dealing with serious things. Someone on whose work serious things depended. Which, to an extent, was true. But what interested me was the vain, even narcissistic aspect of the matter, even though I wouldn't admit it even to myself. So I spoke about going into prisons, having to go there, as if it were an unpleasant duty. But actually, going through those gates that opened and closed behind me gave me an unhealthy sense of gratification. I could access that mysterious, forbidden place whenever I wanted, meet the creatures who were kept there, and leave whenever I wanted.

With the passing of the years, the gratification gradually faded and turned into routine. That opening and closing and more opening and closing of gates, that creaking of hinges and noise of bolts, those measured steps of men and women in uniform became components of a larger rhythm, regular and repetitive, along with the mornings at the courthouse, filled with hearings and bureaucracy, and the afternoons in the office, filled with clients and case files.

Finally I went beyond the monotony of routine, and going into a prison became increasingly unbearable. Because of the prison population. I'm not making a theoretical observation, or being what they call a bleeding-heart liberal. I simply find it harder to bear the idea of people confined behind bars. It's unavoidable, in many cases, but knowing that doesn't help. The name of the sergeant who walked me to the lawyers' room was Smaldino. He was a kind man, kind to the prisoners, too. He was from a village somewhere inland, and I knew that his hobby was breeding and training dogs. We hadn't seen each other in a while.

'How long have you and I known each other, Avvocato Guerrieri?'

'At least twenty years, I'm sorry to say. Maybe a bit more.'

'I arrived in Bari twenty-three years ago. I came here from Rebibbia and before that I was in Sardinia. You were one of the first lawyers I met. You were a boy then. So we've known each other for twenty-three years.'

'Not long till your pension now.'

'Two more years and I'll be able to devote myself to my dogs full-time.'

We were walking side by side, the rhythm of our footsteps alternating, and looking ahead of us as we talked. That's why I didn't immediately see the grimace that had just passed across Smaldino's face, but I sensed it from an imperceptible change of tone.

'Do you remember D'Ippolito?'

'The inspector with the moustache? Of course I remember him.'

'He retired last year. And three weeks later he had a stroke. Luckily they didn't manage to save him, he would have been a vegetable. Ever since it happened, I've been scared it could happen to me too. You wait so long for that time of life, you think you'll be young enough to devote yourself to the things you like. Instead, you die.'

He had light brown, almost blond hair, and his face was marked with acne scars. His expression was evasive, his eyes half-closed as if he'd only just woken up. Overall, he aroused an immediate antipathy in me.

'Damn, I'm sorry about poor D'Ippolito.' I really was sorry. He was another of those prison officers I'd got on well with. Even the prisoners had spoken well of him. No abuse, no violence.

'Right. Life's really absurd.'

We got to the lawyers' room.

'I'll send you your client now. I'm sorry if I told you a story that's made you sad.'

'One day I'd like to come and see your dogs,' I said by way of goodbye.

His face lit up. 'It would be an honour.'

Gianrico Carofiglio
Translated by Howard Curtis

GIANRICO CAROFIGLIO

***INVOLUNTARY WITNESS*, TR. PATRICK CREAGH**
***REASONABLE DOUBTS*, TR. HOWARD CURTIS**
***A FINE LINE*, TR. HOWARD CURTIS**
***THE COLD SUMMER*, TR. HOWARD CURTIS**
***THE MEASURE OF TIME*, TR. HOWARD CURTIS**
BITTER LEMON PRESS, 2010; 2012; 2016; 2018; 2021

REVIEWED BY MAX EASTERMAN

Gianrico Carofiglio is best known in the UK for his series of six legal thrillers featuring the indomitable defence lawyer Guido Guerrieri. These are more than mere crime stories: Guerrieri's cases unfold against a background of profound reflection on the human condition and the role of the legal system. It's reasonable to assume Guerrieri' s outlook and attitudes reflect Carofiglio's own concerns about the law – the way it works, the role of judges, juries and the relationship between lawyer and client. The books are set in Puglia, where Carofiglio was an anti-Mafia prosecutor in Bari before turning his hand to writing, which he does supremely well: his books are rarely less than literary *tours de force*, infused with a striking, gritty realism.

In *Involuntary Witness*, the first book in the series, Guerrieri is on the cusp of the mid-life crisis that gradually subsumes him over the next five: his marriage has collapsed, he has insomnia and panic attacks, and a disastrous one-night stand, and is only 'rescued' from this morass by his own decision to defend what seems the undefendable: a Senegalese immigrant accused of murdering a young boy. The case is tainted by racism, and the evidence is considerable but entirely circumstantial. Unlike many fictional lawyers, he does not become a sleuth himself but uses the law and legal process to undermine the circumstantial evidence that could have resulted in a miscarriage of justice.

Reasonable Doubts – the third in the series – finds Guerrieri again faced with a difficult decision: to defend or not to defend in an appeal case. The appellant, it becomes clear, has been set up – but he's also a former fascist thug and he gave Guerrieri a beating when he was a teenager. He has, though, a beautiful wife (who ends up in bed with Guerrieri) and it's also clear his original counsel was less concerned with getting his client

off than protecting some well-connected person or other. Once again, Guerrieri eschews becoming a detective and relies on his ability to exploit legal procedure to get his result. But the real meat of the book lies in Guerrieri's moral doubts and philosophising: knowing he's doing the right thing but for the wrong reasons. His doubts and reservations about his own life but also, more importantly, about the role of lawyers and the legal system are a leitmotiv of the novels: can the law and its practitioners really determine what is truth?

In *A Fine Line* (which I reviewed for Riveting Reviews in May 2016) Guerrieri is settling uncomfortably into high middle age, tormented by thoughts about his missed opportunities and whether, in spite of his achievements, it was all worth it. 'My future', he reflects, 'is sunk in the past'. He has also had a medical scare and a period of painful introspection thereafter: 'The thought that in a short while, not in some remote, abstract future, you'll cease to exit. The world will cease to exist.' In hands other than Carofiglio's such musings could easily have descended into banality. It's a false alarm, but one that brings Guerrieri up short with this mid-life reality check; and into this maelstrom of emotion steps the figure of Judge Pierluigi Larocca, head of the Appeal Court, who, as Guerrieri surmises, turns out to be 'a flashing red sign saying Danger Ahead'. Larocca is accused of taking backhanders; he and Guerrieri were students together and only the lawyer's conviction that the judge is straight as a die convinces him to take the case. But Larocca, it seems, has links to the Mafia and defending him is an error of judgement. Carofiglio deftly turns his protagonist's discomfiture into a fascinating, gripping exploration of the relationship between defendant and counsel, of the meaning of 'justice' and of the shortcomings of the Italian legal system – except that, as we read, we realise that this is all about legal systems everywhere, morality everywhere, ethics in everyone's life and work. The ultimate legal dilemma is distilled in this relationship between Guerrieri and Larocca: 'If that man continues to be a judge, how can I continue to be a lawyer?'

In *The Measure of Time*, the final story so far (which I reviewed for Riveting Reviews in April 2021) Guerrieri asks a group of trainee magistrates how it can be that we give jurists the power to decide the freedom and destiny of another man when this implies 'an element of terrible brutality'. Do they, he wonders, realise that 'there is not just one answer to human dilemmas. [They] are inevitably ambiguous'. Which of our present-day beliefs, he asks, will be rejected as untenable by future generations: 'we need to be aware that the ability to find answers and solutions to conflicts is based on our ability to live with uncertainty, with the opaqueness of

reality.' So much then for the solemn pronouncement of 'guilty' or 'not guilty' by an Italian magistrate or indeed a British jury foreperson. For Guerrieri, though, faced with a client who just 'knows' her son is not guilty, the dilemma is that he must argue from that point of view, even though he knows there's an evens chance it's the wrong one: 'If we always believed the nearest and dearest, the crime of homicide … would vanish from the statistics.'

Roughly halfway through the Guerrieri series, Carofiglio introduced a new series of books with a new protagonist: Pietro Fenoglio, a marshal of the Bari carabinieri. Moreover, these are very much *romans policiers*, with a strong investigative thread. The second of these stories, *The Cold Summer* (reviewed for Riveting Reviews in February 2019), is based on real events that took place in 1992 in what was in fact a very cold summer in Puglia. Fenoglio faces a double challenge: gang wars and his wife, who has walked out on him, leaving him in a professional as well as a personal limbo.

> 'They had almost never talked about his investigations, but whenever they had, [she] had always had a few ideas … casual observations. He felt something like a sense of breathlessness at the awareness of his loss.'

Carofiglio draws together the criss-cross of threads of this complex story about the abduction of the only son of a Bari mafia 'don' with his usual masterful dexterity. He writes a thrilling page-turner, while allowing his characters to indulge in a series of philosophical and psychological discussions, which are so fascinating, so insightful, that they never hold up the pace of the narrative. Thus Fenoglio quotes Italo Calvino on why police transcripts always use inflated language, in which, for example, bottles of wine become 'oenological products'. 'Calvino calls [it] semantic terror … Anti-language … a language far from meaning and far from life.' And yet, there are more down-to-earth home truths as well:

> ' … you're told about some poor guy being tortured, beaten to a pulp, killed like a dog and burnt … [and] all you're thinking about is the inquiries you'll have to conduct … [the] evidence you'll have to find. If you don't have that functioning system of defences, you'll just go crazy.'

Such reflections serve only to push the action onwards and to give it an intellectual thrust that is the basis of all fine literature: this is Carofiglio's genius, of writing fiction against such a strong factual background that it's hard not believe the narrative is real life and indeed quite impossible not to believe that his protagonists, with all their foibles and weaknesses, fears and convictions, are not real people.

Max Easterman

POSTCARD FROM SICILY

By Simonetta Agnello Hornby

Emperor Frederick II, son of the queen of Sicily, Costanza d'Altavilla, and patron of the arts, died in 1250, having founded the Sicilian School of Poetry, which gave birth to the sonnet, as was recognised by Dante. Had his dynasty survived the thirteenth century, the Italian language of today might be based on Sicilian rather than Tuscan.

In 1860, Sicily, conquered by Garibaldi, became part of Italy, and Sicilians felt the need to explain themselves to the Italians through novels. It began in Catania with Giovanni Verga, Federico De Roberto, Luigi Capuana and Ercole Patti; and then writers from all over the island started to write, such as Vitaliano Brancati and Geraldo Bufalino. After the Second World War, Leonardo Sciascia, Vincenzo Consolo and Andrea Camilleri (a great novelist, not just the father of Montalbano) have seen success.

After the double whammy of Gattopardo *('The Leopard') by Tomasi di Lampedusa – as a book and as a film – the way was opened to a huge number of Sicilian writers, male and female. The latter have surpassed the men: Maria Attanasio (in my opinion the greatest Sicilian female writer), Silvana Grasso, Silvana La Spina, Goliarda Sapienza, Stefania Auci, Alessia Gazzola, Nadia Terranova and Cristina Cassar Scalia. They dominate the bestseller list, and I'm proud of them.*

Finally, I recommend reading Good Girls Don't Wear Trousers *by Lara Cardella, a nineteen-year-old girl from Licata, who in 1989 wrote this little masterpiece 'against Sicily's male-dominated society'. It sold two million copies.*

THE RIVETER
ITALIAN POETRY

THE RIVETER
FEATURES

ITALIAN POETRY IN ENGLISH

by ANNA BLASIAK

Italian poetry, like pretty much everything else Italian, has a long history, and goes back as far as Roman times. In the Renaissance period it produced names we all learned about at school, such as Dante or Petrarch. It didn't stop there, of course. Combine this long poetry tradition with the fact that Italy was, and still is, a vast country with strong regional dialects, and you have fertile ground for contemporary poetry.

The twentieth century was a prolific period for Italian poetry, perhaps its most prolific. Many contemporary Italian poets were also translators, but this didn't necessarily mean they were themselves translated into other languages, especially into notoriously resistant English. There's been a change though in our century, and now both twentieth- and twenty-first-century Italian poets are finding their way into English. Take, for example, the names of Eugenio Montale, Cesare Pavese, Giovanni Pascoli, Giuseppe Ungaretti, Mario Luzi, Giorgio Caproni, Sandro Penna, Patrizia Cavalli, Valerio Magrelli, Fabio Pusterla, Gabriele Frasca, Pierluigi Capello, Antonella Anedda, Luciano Erba, Vittorio Sereni, Franca Mancinelli, Laura Fusco and Milo De Angelis. And there are many, many more.

Working on this selection of contemporary Italian poetry translated (or in the process of being translated) into English for *The Italian Riveter* was an exciting journey of discovery. I am the first to admit that I didn't know much about modern Italian poetry before I boarded this train, and I am a poet who prides myself on reading widely. What you are about to read is an incomplete and highly subjective selection, although informed by the wonderful advocates of Italian verse in this country, Cristina Viti and Stephen Watts, to whom many thanks. Together we have tried to create a fair, if personal, portrait (with sample morsels) of what is happening in Italian poetry. So we would like to invite you to join us in our imaginary festival piazza to hear some contemporary Italian poets reading their verse. Our festival guest list includes: a poet writing in dialect, Fabio Franzin; poets

for whom Italian is not their first language, Ribka Sibhatu, Gëzim Hajdari; and a slam poet, Dome Bulfaro. We also have strong female representation, as well as some queer writing from Sandro Penna, and we cover poetry on topical subjects, such as immigration and the refugee crisis, from Ribka Sibhatu, or climate change, Tiziano Fratus.

Lello Voce, the poet, performer and member of Gruppo 93, when asked to draft a 'map' of new Italian poetry, included not only geographical divisions, but also some significant poetry movements: neo-Hermeticism, neo-Orphic poetry and the experimentalist, expressionist new avantgarde. What also struck me the most and filled me with deepest admiration are the strong influences of twentieth-century movements such as Futurism and Hermeticism, with their reduction to the basics, poetry without punctuation, concise compositions, sometimes as short as only two or three lines.

Italian poetry is going strong, that's clear after my reading for this magazine, and I sincerely hope that more of it makes it into English. As Paulo Febbraro wrote in his article on poetry for *newitalianbooks*:

> 'There is no doubt that, culturally speaking, Italy is a transnational phenomenon and so increasingly is its poetry. In terms of the number of countries in which Italian poetry is read and the many references made to it, today's Italian poets fear no competition, capitalising on the innovation and deprovincialisation carried out by their predecessors.'

Anna Blasiak

SORRY BY FABIO FRANZIN

From *Corpo dea realtà – Corpo della realtà*
Puntoacapo, 2019
Translated by Cristina Viti

Yesterday, my Kosovar workmate
asked me could I lend him fifty euros –
looking down at his feet

working up the courage to say those words
mulled over who knows how long –
he knows I've two kids & the mortgage

& all the rest – & for sure also knew
my answer already, 'cause he didn't
get mad, yes, yes, he said, I understand

shaking his head as we made our way
to the shop floor, clutching our gloves.
But me, I could not recognize

the guy who found himself having to say sorry
just as the siren started off,
with not even any time left for shame.

Fabio Franzin
Translated by Cristina Viti

TWO POEMS BY DOME BULFARO

From *Ossa Carne*
Le Voci della Luna, 2011
Translated by Cristina Viti

Fleshing.
Contact no. 0

Never imagined never I'd never the nose
would one day offend the eye, the eye
paralyze its own tics in the void
never imagined I'd never those teeth
could snarl at their own hand, the right hand
one day take a knife to its own left
never imagined I'd never my own soul would end
up slip-shelling its own head, the head
one day crash into the knees
never & yet it's happened everyone's body would
hoist itself onto the cross with its own veins, the blue
veins of each man vote their own collapse!
the blue veins of each man vote their own
collapse! the blue of each man vote: collapse!

Spinning Head Heel.
Contact no. 25 (part right)

How to swallow the sea whole make of it the heap
that I am? How to cram each voice into the tip
of the pencil? How to clot carousels
hospital wards & into the same heel
accommodate you & the father of your surname? To sing
that's the only blood the poet can give
consonant after vowel bleeding oneself into a napkin
in a bar writing – poems belong to those who drink them up—
poems push you to face the precipice of pulse
for this I sing that no one in the choir
ever be extinguished in the throat for when I sing I dream I'm fleshing
the one language I sing so as not to dance with dying
thunder, I sing for when I sing I'm nothing but singing

Dome Bulfaro
Translated by Cristina Viti

NOTES ON SIBERIAN MACROECONOMICS

BY TIZIANO FRATUS

From *Double Skin: New Poetic Voices from Italy and Singapore*
Translated by Gail McDowell
Ethos Books, 2009

I pull down your stockings with my teeth
you stare at me expressionless glacial
arching your upper lip
the smell of cinnamon apple tea tempers
your body which is posed as though by god's hands
on the black background of the sheet that replicates a nervous system
you murmur to me as I sleep
that not only elongated women
with hair like fish bones and transparent forearms
migrate from siberia
muscovite anthropologists disinter mammoth tusks
using old army vehicles
that survived the wars in afghanistan and the soviet empire
cut sectioned packaged and sold to merchants from hong kong
objects that will end up in the luxury homes of the nouveau riche
or some up-and-coming politician
you tell me about a chessboard carved in mammoth ivory
a chessboard that carries a dowry of a few thousand years
you interrupt your tale laughing over a nuance of the language that escapes me
you resume making love to my body
captured in the western segment of our small lunar sea
the polar night begins to fall
refreezing the remains of those creatures
as an ivory queen alights among stifled sighs
on the belly of an albino mermaid

Tiziano Fratus
Translated by Gail McDowell

ADORATION TO THE WORD 1

BY MARIANGELA GUALTIERI

From *Opening Voice (A Sound Ritual)*
Venice Biennale Teatro, 2020
Translated by Cristina Viti

I love you word
sign, sound of our human self
placed inside a throat that so very slowly
was formed for you
to speak a thing exactly
to speak water, bread, grass,
earth – all of the world's names.
And also the unseen:
fear, dream,
nostalgia, abandon.

Down so many eras, in the tight knot
of the animal a sound was struggling
through grunt, through breath, death rattle, drool.
How it reared
this strange form that we were
how it strained
to finally come to say: 'I love',
'I forgive you', 'I think', 'I am',
to speak the entire world
from crevice to star.

I love you word.
Out of a lust for you,
for you, to speak you, all of the face
burst through the snout
and was made clear field
was made countenance and lips, and the breath
the delicate bellows to support you
and blow you out into the world's wide open,
where you fully become what you are, and fly,
ring out, and never stay but go free.

I love you word.
I don't know if you are human invention
or if it's us who come from you.
I don't know if you hold the call
the priming of a world beyond the world.
I don't know if it's true that you sing the universe
that you support it.

You are crowned in your silence.
You are the most perilous of all gifts.

Mariangela Gualtieri
Translated by Cristina Viti

A POEM BY GIOVANNA CRISTINA VIVINETTO

From *Dolore minimo*
Translated by Cristina Viti

I've no visible wounds. My
dilemmas are nestled well beyond the flesh.
Yet those who would define me point their finger at the body as the
sole possible dimension.
As if the fault lay entirely
between the legs or in the voice's timbre,
in a chromosome destined
to remain ever equal to itself.
It proves more difficult to uncover
where the mind's wanting,
to exactly determine
which ideas govern identity,
mood, the love that keeps us on our feet.
But the body won't lie, won't deny
its own earthy concreteness,
won't allude or misconstrue, it is there
it exposes itself, gives material substance.
The body is alone and therefore exact, circumstantial, hence corruptible.
Therein lies its flaw
and its cortical power.
Besieged, subdued, cast down
is the only whole form I have left.

Giovanna Cristina Vivinetto
Translated by Cristina Viti

TWO POEMS BY GËZIM HAJDARI

From *Stigmata*
Translated by Cristina Viti
Shearsman Books, 2016

*

I heard you're adding up
my years in work for my old-age pension:
1 year a labourer for a drainage company,
2 years a soldier with former convicts,
3 years an accountant in the farming industry,
3 years a labourer & field guard
on a tomato farm,
9 months as a book warehouse man,
2 years a lang&lit teacher in a high school,
7 years as a hand labourer in the Ciociarìa,
2 years on the black market,
3 years with stamps
& the rest back on the black market.
Amen.

*

For you men of Europe who scrape by each day,
for you women of the East who scrub floors or walk
the old people of the West around the block for fresh air,
for you immigrants who sleep on benches & wake up
immeasurably homesick,
for you dossers who'll have no bosses
& live in peace with the universe,
for you prostitutes who offer your sex to
black men white men yellow men
up to blood-point,
for you blind people forsaken in deepest eternal dark,
for you sick & out of work as solidarity & mercy,
for you missionaries comforting the weak before death,
for you peasants who graze your herds & plough
the fields from north to south,
for you mad people who give us free tuition in madness,
for you who are alone & fugitive like me
I write these verses in Italian
& torment myself in Albanian.

Gëzim Hajdari
Translated by Cristina Viti

TWO POEMS BY RIBKA SIBHATU

From *Aulò! Aulò! Aulò!*
Translated by André Naffis-Sahely
Poetry Translation Centre, 2020

African Grandmothers

Lacking the wings
of an eagle,
resigned, she admires
the distant moon,
cuddling cats and dogs
no longer asking them
where our neighbours have gone.
She spends all her time
at home and school, reading
or asking how the earth was made.

Unable to find
the stairs to the stars,
and seeing that God
won't answer
her questions, Sara
wants me to give her
the names and
the surnames
of our African grandmothers
whom Darwin declined
to mention in his book.

Eclipses

There are people who starve to death,
others who sleep rough in the winter,
and then there are those who fly
from one end of the earth to the other
to gape at eclipses.

Ribka Sibhatu
Translated by André Naffis-Sahely

TWO POEMS BY LUIGI DI RUSCIO

From *Selected Poems*
Translated by Cristina Viti
Forthcoming from Seagull Books

*

Fifty square yards of floor & we danced
to bass drum & trumpet rhythms & the women were unstoppable
we were rough & ready with all the latest hits
speaking words full of love to one another
with each dance the women would line up together on the sides
& wait for us no man felt shy
no woman was left without a man
the women were hard some others light & easily led
some others had firm thighs some soft as those who have known love
the men were in good spirits the women beatific taking their fun
some had fallen into a man's arms for the first time
some had held a woman for the first time.

*

Lay all of your rage into the rhythm
to speak with ferocious calm
each verse I've been able to write
to put a chasm between me & them
or to read as if utopia
had remained only in my verses
to act obscene in front of the whole audience
have a good time anyway
poetry is like universal blood
we can give it to anyone
but any other blood
places us in mortal danger

Luigi Di Ruscio
Translated by Cristina Viti

SANDRO PENNA

WITHIN THE SWEET NOISE OF LIFE: SELECTED POEMS

TRANSLATED BY ALEXANDER BOOTH
SEAGULL BOOKS, 2021

REVIEWED BY ANNA BLASIAK

Sandro Penna (1906-1977) was openly gay and his poems reflect that. He is led by Eros, his poems full of young men presented to remind us of ancient Greece ('O the ancient / And gilded boys'). Which does not mean that there is no mention of pissoirs and other meeting places for gay men, of the struggle resulting from being gay in a traditional society and the abuse and repression that comes with it, including gay-bashing.

'I was going home. A stream of blood
Smirked in the dust of my face

Now I am not going home. In the dust
My soul's been trampled, and with
it my smile'

Penna's poetry is always filled with light, the incomparable Italian sun, the warmth of it, but also with the hum of the shimmering sea or a river. But Penna, though born and raised in Perugia, spent most his life in Rome. And the city – its outdoor cafés, sunlit evenings in tavernas and osterias, train stations and cemeteries, everyday urban life – also has a strong presence in his verse.

'Drowsy autumn arrives. Sparkling
Behind shining glass two
Shining eyes'

His is a very light hand, elegant and precise. His poems, often as short as just two lines, are deceptively simple, almost aphoristic at times, sometimes mysteriously sphinx-like. They are little snippets, fleeting moments captured with a masterful skill. Moreover, Penna's poems often have the clarity of popular songs, but again, that straightforwardness can be misleading. These are not loud, shouty poems, they are soft-spoken and intimate, as if whispered.

'Awash in light the bike awaits
The dishevelled boy without a voice'

Penna is also very conscious of form. There is not a word that could be spared here, everything is perfectly balanced. He also dabbles in traditional prosody, there is

some rhyming and a lot of striking alliteration.

'Lullabied I'd like to live
Within the sweet noise of life'

This is one of many translations of Penna's work in English: *This Strange Joy* (Ohio State University Press, 1982), *Confused Dream* (Hanuman Books, 1988), *Remember Me, God of Love* (Carcanet, 1993) and *A Boy Asleep Under the Sun: Versions of Sandro Penna* (punctum books, 2014). *Within the Sweet Noise of Life* is a selection from the poet's complete oeuvre, spanning the his whole life – the earliest poems taken from *Poesie 1927–1938* and the most recent from Penna's posthumous collection *Il viaggiatore insonne* from 1977.

The Italian novelist Natalia Ginzburg said: 'I believe that one day, in another age, if there is another age, the poetry of Sandro Penna will be read by all and his greatness recognised by all.' Well, this reader can only agree with Ginzburg. Sandro Penna deserves a prominent place in the pantheon of twentieth-century Italian poetry. And more translations into English.

Anna Blasiak

LAURA FUSCO
LIMINAL and *NADIR*

TRANSLATED BY CAROLINE MALDONADO
SMOKESTACK BOOKS, 2020; 2022

REVIEWED BY JOSEPH DANCE

According to the UN Refugee Agency there are currently eighty-two million refugees traversing the globe*. Almost half of these refugees are children under the age of eighteen. Every year, two to three hundred thousand children are born to displaced families. Those fortunate enough to give birth in a camp will have access to baseline medical care and drinking water; however, for many this will be luxury beyond imagination. The life of a refugee is one of deprivation, uncertainty, alienation and political derision.

Faced with this unimaginable level of suffering, artistic depictions of the refugee crisis can often be problematic: stories can be appropriated, experiences truncated, voices neutered. How then do we attempt to represent the most significant humanitarian crisis of our times without losing sight of the agency of the individuals and communities at the centre of this tragedy? With the publication of *Liminal* and *Nadir* Laura Fusco has perhaps found a way. In these two tremendous volumes of poetry, Fusco, an Italian poet, activist and theatre director sensitively attempts to provide a space for the voices of these marginalised, 'liminal' individuals as they are forced to flee their home countries due to war, abuses of rights, and climate change, and navigate often perilous journeys across borders in search of personal and political sanctuary.

In *Liminal*, Fusco centres on the experiences of refugees, especially women, trying to survive in refugee camps and temporary accommodation across France. The poems in this first collection, quarried from the conversations and relationships Fusco struck up with individuals during her visits, are unsentimental and immediate in their imagery and depictions of the refugee experience. Fusco is a compassionate yet honest observer, never shying away from showing complex human behaviours. People steal, lie, and cheat, but they also show tremendous patience and love for one another in incredibly difficult situations. A real strength is that the poems not only contain

a record of these refugees' experiences, conversations, anxieties, hopes and pleasures, but also of the environment of the camps themselves: their signs, smells, sounds, graffiti and placards. Fusco never lets us forget that the camps are sites of memory where transient communities attempt to record their own history through songs, storytelling and the written word. The mix of spoken and written registers running through the collection lends a documentary, cinematic feel to the work and is often disarmingly affecting:

> *'Every time he queues for the toilet he passes some writing:*
> We just want to go to England
> PLEASE!'

In *Nadir*, her latest collection, Fusco turns her attention to the plight of refugee children. In his foreword poem the French playwright Philippe Claudel warns us, 'Laura Fusco's poetry is not likeable / It is not pretty / It is not gentle', and one is bound to agree. It is easy to see the titular 'Nadir' as the point Western society has reached in its treatment of the most vulnerable casualties of the global refugee crisis. As in her earlier work, in poems such as 'Night' and 'Photo 1' Fusco uses biographical details to tell an unflinching story of children forced to grow up too fast, of lost innocence and fragile resilience. Where this collection diverges from, and indeed complements *Liminal*, is in Fusco's additional focus on the labyrinthine networks of international laws and bureaucracies that often work to dehumanise and place in limbo those they profess to help. 'Children's Charter of Rights' perfectly captures this paradox, demonstrating how the codification of a child's inalienable human rights can lead, perversely, to those same rights being negotiated away by equivocating lawmakers and politicians. Fusco's critique of the distant, obtrusive state can also be read as a condemnation of the ignorance and complacency of wider society, and indeed of our own. As Claudel rightly says, *Nadir* aims to confront us with 'our silences, our broken promises, / our turned backs'.

It is not unsurprising that Caroline Maldonado received an English PEN award for her translation of *Liminal*, and her vital and energetic prose in *Nadir* deserves similar praise. Let us hope we see more from this talented partnership soon.

Joseph Dance

**This article was written before the war in Ukraine.*

FRANCA MANCINELLI

THE LITTLE BOOK OF PASSAGE and *AT AN HOUR'S SLEEP FROM HERE: POEMS (2007-2019)*

TRANSLATED BY JOHN TAYLOR
BITTER OLEANDER PRESS, 2018; 2019

REVIEWED BY ANNA BLASIAK

Franca Mancinelli, born 1981, has so far published four poetry books, *Mala kruna* (2007), *Pasta madre* (2013), *Tutti gli occhi che ho aperto* (2020) and a collection of prose poems, *Libretto di transit* (2018). The last was translated into English in the same year by John Taylor as *The Little Book of Passage*. John Taylor has also translated Mancinelli's first two books (plus some additional poems, originally intended to be part of *Pasta madre*) as *At an Hour's Sleep from Here*, published in 2019 and, two years later, her collection of prose, *The Butterfly Cemetery*.

Mancinelli has established herself as a compelling voice in Italian contemporary literature. She is interested in issues of otherness and the other, of searching for self, of origins. She always looks for a twist, for a surprising turn, for a shimmering fault line which offers a glimpse of another perspective.

The Little Book of Passage consists of thirty-three prose poems about transiting, travel and transforming. Mancinelli's tiny prose poems are packed to the brim, very vivid and very good at capturing the attention of the reader. The tropes linked to travel are heavily present: suitcases, packing, trains, buses.

'Traveling without knowing what brings me to you. I know you're going beyond the limits of the sheet of paper, of the cultivated fields. It's your way of coming face to face with me: like water in its course, branching off. Looking out the window, I kept reading into your face until light came.'

The scenes the poet creates are often placed somewhere on the blurry border between sleep and wakefulness. There is something surreal about them.

'No one soothes the squealing. There's nothing to be tossed out as

a treat. One can't sleep alongside those who beg for food, scratch with beak and nail, in their broken flight, dirtying everything. In the morning the streets and their insatiable squealing. The big bowl of the square.'

There is a lot of silence here too, a lot of things broken, sometimes broken off, fragmentary. One of the inscriptions in the book is from Emily Dickinson: 'To fill a Gap / Insert the Thing that caused it'. Indeed, gaps, or 'fault lines', as Mancinelli likes to call them, are a very important theme here.

'There is a small fault line in your chest. When I hug your chest or place my head on it there is this puff of air. It has a woodsy moistness and an earthy smell to it. The nearby mountains with their frozen torrents. Ever since I have heard it, I cannot help but recognise it. Even when high-soaring birds fly one after the other through your voice, marking out a route in the clear sky.'

At an Hour's Sleep from Here presents Mancinelli's earlier poetic output. The book is divided into three parts. The images resonating strongly in *Mala kruna* are those of sharp objects (thorns, sharpened pencils, needles, nails):

'a thread of light from
windowpane to door
is taut enough to make me speak
from a needle at the beginning of
my body.'

In *Pasta madre* ('Mother Dough'), the second part of *At an Hour's Sleep from Here*, the imagery changes to something more domestic and often more primal. We have food and cutlery, but also architecture, homes, sometimes ruins; there are bedbugs and ants. The important trope here is motherhood, both in its biological and metaphorical sense.

Most of the pieces in this extensive volume are short or even very short, but they are precise, open and packed with ideas. Mancinelli often strips her poems to the bare bones, valuing the white space around the text. This, as the translator John Taylor points out, brings to mind the twentieth-century French poet René Daumal and his *poésie blanche* – poetry of few words gained through a process of 'purification'. I find this brevity – letting the silence speak – a refreshing approach in contemporary poetry, which is often so overcrowded with words.

Anna Blasiak

PATRIZIA CAVALLI

MY POEMS WON'T CHANGE THE WORLD

EDITED BY GINI ALHADEFF
TRANSLATED BY GINI ALHADEFF, DAVID SHAPIRO, SUSAN STEWART, JORIE GRAHAM AND OTHERS
PENGUIN MODERN CLASSICS, 2018

REVIEWED BY JOSEPH DANCE

Patrizia Cavalli is a poet, translator and playwright, whose work commands rapturous attention in her native Italy. Limited translation of her poetry to date has meant Cavalli is not as well known to an international readership as she should be, but it is hoped that the publication of this slim but important volume will go some way to remedying this injustice. Edited by Egyptian-Italian author Gini Alhadeff and including translations from notable names from the world of contemporary poetry, including David Shapiro, Jorie Graham, and Susan Stewart, *My Poems Won't Change the World* is a selection of work from five of Cavalli's six collections of poetry published over the last forty years.

Opening with work from her first collection of poems, published in 1972, we find Cavalli tackling subjects as varied as loss, desire, mutability and the limitations of knowledge. Delivered in her already characteristically nonchalant voice, these short, epigrammatic poems, often with structures that mirror syllogisms, aphorisms and other philosophical forms, come across as much the work of a budding meta-physician as that of a poet:

'Together eternity and death
threaten me:
Neither of the two do I know;
Neither of the two will I know.'

Indeed, referring to her direct, analytical voice and unsentimental approach to life's big questions, Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben said of Cavalli that she had written 'the most intensely ethical poetry in Italian literature of the twentieth century'. But it is Cavalli's talent as a poet and her ability to ground the cerebral within the domestic that means no matter how grand her subject matter her poems always succeed in speaking

humorously and intimately to the reader. More than many other poets, to read Cavalli is to feel very keenly that one is being confided in.

Poems from later collections – *The Forever Open Theatre* ('Sempre aperto teatro') and *Lazy Gods, Lazy Fate* ('Pigre divinità e pigra sorte') originally published from the early eighties to the early noughties – go on to draw out possibly Cavalli's most pressing personal and poetic preoccupation: romantic love. Often decorated with the title of 'love poet', Cavalli might be considered closer to John Donne than Pablo Neruda when it comes to expressing matters of the heart. Although undeniably optimistic at times, her poetry embraces the contradictory delights and disappointments of being in love, offering a pragmatic and honest view of the imperfect, messy variant that most of us must suffer and enjoy during our short lives. For Cavalli, love is both a salve and a wound:

'I was at peace and now I am doomed
Because I suspect that love has bloomed.'

Alhadeff has done a very commendable job editing this volume, providing many of the translations herself in addition to assembling an impressive line-up of co-translators. Alhadeff's end note touching on her friendship with Cavalli adds a nice bit of biographical colour, and the translators' commentaries provide some interesting insights into the process of bringing this significant body of work into the orbit of the anglophone poetry world. We can only hope Cavalli's complete collected works is just around the corner.

Joseph Dance

THE RIVETER
ITALIAN CHILDREN

THE RIVETER
FEATURES

ITALIAN CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

by DENISE MUIR

My relationship with Italian children's books started back in the early 2000s when, as a young mother, I was looking for books to read to my newborn daughter in our small village in Italy. This relationship with the literature deepened as my daughter went through primary school and I joined her class regularly as a parent storyteller. Those experiences – the books I read, and the authors I met along the way – cemented my desire to become a literary translator. Some of the things we read in class were just so special that I couldn't wait to share them with my English-speaking friends and their children.

However, the relationship was not always a smooth one. I might have eventually become an enthusiast, but my first impressions of the books I sourced in Italian were not good. I'm happy to say, though, that those very characteristics – the childish covers outside, the dense texts within; the apparent seriousness and high register; the feeling that they were a little too teachy – are now the things I value.

Why did I change my mind?

Children's books in Italy, I learned, were not just for entertaining, they could be precious learning moments; times for hearts and minds to come together and reflect on something outside of a child's personal experience, a way of encouraging them to think more broadly from the earliest age. While this may seem didactic, I think it's what makes Italian children's literature so inclusive. Everything – be it board books, illustrations, early readers or YA – touches on themes big and small: identity, disability, race, even global political issues like migration or troubling ones like child prostitution. So texts that initially feel a bit serious, a bit too deep, actually open conversations about diversity, about being marginalised, about society in general.

My journey into these kinds of books started with publisher uovonero (www.uovonero.com/chi-siamo) and their classic fairy tales that use augmentative and alternative communication methods for children with

processing difficulties to get them working, drawing, reciting and creating in a cooperative way.

A book that particularly touched my heart, because it taught me something, was the quiet but very powerful *La pasticceria Zitti* by R. Tiziana Bruno. It tells the story, in a series of captivating and unusual illustrations, of a deaf chef who puts his special ingredient – silence – into his pastries, restoring peace and calm to a noisy town in which people have stopped listening to each other. In a school for deaf children it provided a wonderful stimulus for a cooking project, in which we placed our silent wishes into the food we made. In mainstream schools it helped us reflect on how we often stop listening to each other in the 'vroom-vroom' of everyday life. It is an iconic Italian solution: a tray of Zitti's pastries offers the perfect opportunity for a timeout away from it all. A bit of quiet. With cake!

Another book in this vein that has been the source of many a conversation is *Il pentolino di Antonino* (known in English as 'Lorenzo's Saucepan'), by Isabelle Carrier. In a series of simple black, white and red illustrations it tells the story of a little boy who drags a tiny saucepan around with him; it makes him angry, gets him into trouble, gets in the way. A disability? That interpretation is left to the reader. Happily, someone shows little Antonino how to get along with his saucepan, tuck it into a satchel, stand on it to see over walls, and other unimagined benefits that he eventually learns to appreciate. Deep? Yes. Serious? Yes. Teachy? Also. But as I worked with books like this and saw how children responded to them, I began to appreciate that they help you engage with young people on a deeper level – as they are surprised by a new word, a new expression, a new idea.

Moving away from picture books, the very first author I met in Italy was Andrea Bouchard and his book *Acqua dolce*, which was read aloud then re-enacted in my daughter's primary school. This sweet, magical tale, about a young girl who has a desert-island adventure and finds her voice again after years of living as a mute, addresses in a natural way the kind of diversity that is now being asked for in children's books in the UK.

At this point, I can't not mention the great Angela Nanetti, a doyenne of literary fiction for children, whose gentle and exquisitely written story of rural Italian village life, *Mio nonno era un ciliegio* ('My Grandfather Was a Cherry Tree') tells of a boy going through a series of personal issues who then has to cope with the grief of losing his beloved grandfather. Another potentially weighty theme dealt with weightlessly and joyfully. Italians, after all, are known for their ability to celebrate life, even when life is no more.

Reading these works allayed all of my concerns that the language was too complex and the themes too deep; I was simply transported by the storytelling, engaged by the thoughts and was learning all the time. If they worked such wonders for my own Italian in those days, then they can only be recommended for young learners, working on doing the same.

Another important area in Italian children's literature is the 'epic journey' or historical novel. *The Greatest* ('La più grande') by Davide Morosinotto, *Hoopdriver* by Pierdomenico Baccalario, and *I'isola del Muto* ('Island of the Mute') by Strega winner Guido Sgardoli, are all so meticulously researched and the stories so epically told, that the cultures and historical contexts they create stay with you long after you put them down. *L'isola del Muto* could be considered a mini *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, taking you through the vicissitudes of multiple generations of one family of lighthouse keepers, succeeding each other through a century and a half of Norway's history. Once more, the intention to inform readers, to introduce something perhaps never encountered, may seem didactic, but the quality of the storytelling is by far the dominant feature, the magic that cements everything else.

There are so many wonderful texts that have proved my first doubts wrong, that have shown me that children's picture books don't always have to be comical, written with a few chosen words on each page, in quirky fonts, in cute packaging or with clever punning. Italy also showed me that children's novels can be informative and fun, historical and fun, serious and fun. Most importantly, it is to be treasured that these books remain faithful to the political, social, pedagogical and highly literary tradition of writing for children demonstrated by Carlo Collodi, Gianni Rodari, Edmondo De Amicis and the wonderful Bianca Pitzorno.

Denise Muir

PAOLA VITALE
WHO WILL IT BE?: HOW EVOLUTION CONNECTS US ALL

ILLUSTRATED BY ROSSANA BOSSÙ
TRANSLATED BY DENISE MUIR
BLUE DOT KIDS PRESS, 2020

REVIEWED BY CLAIRE STOREY

The first thing that strikes me about this new non-fiction picture book from Blue Dot Kids Press is the colours. The cover displays bright circles that remind me of carrying out science experiments with ink and blotting paper, watching the colour creeping up the paper and mingling with other colours. These vibrant watercolour images continue into the book; I really enjoyed staring at some of the pages, almost hypnotised, and getting lost in the depth of the colours.

The book presents the topic of evolution to children aged five to eight. The first section presents simple, double-spread pages asking the reader to guess what the various elements depicted will develop into. We're given clues: 'It has gills', 'It loves water but has lungs'. These pages are great to use in discussions with children about different types of creatures – what is an amphibian? What is a mammal? – which also supports Key Stage 1 learning in the UK school system. We're led through various options before arriving at humans, where we are told that human beings are mammals, but also 'part fish, amphibian, reptile, bird'. At first, I did wonder whether this might not be a little confusing; however, the second section of the book really helps to explain what is meant by this.

The second section is much more factual, the font shrinks, and the images become more scientific, yet retain a beautiful watercolour quality. This section opens with an explanation of Charles Darwin's theories and how everything on earth has evolved from single cells, so ultimately, we all come from a common ancestor. I found this part fascinating, and Darwin's theories are presented in ways that are easily understood. I particularly liked the image of the hourglass showing the way embryos develop in different ways.

I also appreciated the way the book doesn't shy away from using scientific language: it isn't dumbed down for a younger audience, but rather has an

expectation that children can learn and use such language from an early age. The book could benefit from a glossary at the back – as much for the parents as the children! I have to admit that my eight-year-old's question – 'What's DNA?' – left me scrabbling to explain it in a way that made sense.

The book ends with confirmation of Darwin's idea, that we all share the DNA of the first vertebrates on Earth, a fact that even now, I still find mind-blowing!

Claire Storey

DAVIDE MOROSINOTTO
RED STARS

TRANSLATED BY DENISE MUIR
PUSHKIN PRESS, 2020

REVIEWED BY CLAIRE STOREY

Red Stars was one of the six books chosen for BookTrust's 'In Other Words' programme which ran from 2017 to 2019. This programme invited submissions from around the world and received nominations of over four hundred books. This was one of the six titles purchased by UK publishers, with Pushkin Press bringing this title to English-speaking readers in September 2020, demonstrating that it's a book worthy of attention.

Red Stars follows twelve-year-old twins Viktor and Nadya, who live in Leningrad, as Hitler's Germany declares war on the Soviet Union in 1941. Evacuated from their home, their parents give them one instruction: 'Whatever happens, stay together.' As might be expected from such an instruction, that does not happen, and in the chaos at the train station on the day of evacuation, the twins are separated. Throughout their subsequent adventures, at the back of their minds is the constant presence of their twin – they must find each other again.

One of the things I love about this book is the layout. It's a thick book, weighing in at 430 pages, yet it is presented in a really engaging way. There are various narratives to jump into and out of but they all work together to tell the story. The main plotline comes from a set of

notebooks written by Viktor (typeset in a red font) and by Nadya (in black). Included in the notebooks are maps, diagrams and photos printed in red and greyscale tones, which for this sort of book, particularly being so lengthy, is rather unusual.

Around the edges of these notebooks are handwritten comments left by Colonel Valery Gavrilowich Smirnov, into whose possession the notebooks have fallen. He is a Soviet official who is investigating the twins over the events that took place between June and November 1941. At intervals, we are also presented with typewritten reports by Smirnov dating from 1946, informing his superiors about his progress. I found this mix of narratives really interesting, and the use of the comments around the edge really keep in mind the idea that the children's every move is being watched, as were the lives of many citizens in the USSR throughout this period.

The children's adventures are both exciting and shocking – the realities of bombings, injury and death are prevalent throughout. But while there is horror and sadness, there are also moments of happiness and humour. I particularly enjoyed a scene where it begins snowing and the children 'ran outside, hugged and spent the morning playing in the snow'. Yet on the next page, they go on to explain that the joy also comes from knowing that the snow will help them in their plight. At the end of the book, Colonel Smirnov has to make a decision: are the twins guilty or innocent of the crimes they are alleged to have committed against the state? I'll leave that for you to find out!

Claire Storey

GIOVANNA ZOBOLI
A MOST MYSTERIOUS MOUSE

ILLUSTRATED BY LISA D'ANDREA
TRANSLATED BY ANTONY SHUGAAR
ENCHANTED LION BOOKS, 2016

REVIEWED BY JOHANNA MCCALMONT

'Once upon a time there was a cat. He was a handsome tabby cat, with a head full of mice. Indeed, he thought about mice all day long.'

A cat who spends all his time thinking about mice – surely there's nothing unusual about that? But this grey tabby has made himself a very ambitious promise: by his eighteenth birthday he shall have imagined one million different mice. In his head, he sees eighty-eight mice in checked jackets, one hundred and forty-four mice on a triple-decker bus, thirty-three mice dancing the polka – or little grey mice simply doing all manner of things on their own.

But there is one most mysterious mouse that he just can't seem to picture at all, no matter how hard he tries. Until one day, when all of a sudden there's a gentle *tap tap* at the door. The cat is overjoyed to finally see the little mouse he's been searching for. He treats his new friend to tea, takes him out to play, buys him a balloon and then eventually has to say goodbye. The ending is not a sad one though: with a new sense of hope, the happy tabby cat starts to go out with his own feline friends once more and even treats himself to a special pair of bright yellow rainboots.

Illustrated with detailed pencil drawings in soft shades of grey and the occasional burst of colour, *A Most Mysterious Mouse* is a gentle story that will entertain younger readers who enjoy counting and looking for different elements in the story each time. There is also space for children to add their own interpretation of the unusual friendship during the four 'silent' spreads depicting the mysterious mouse's visit. Spreads that also add to the cat's curious nature: has he just imagined the mouse, like all the others, or did that particular mouse really come to his house? Either way, Zoboli's charming story, D'Andrea's sweet illustrations and Shugaar's lively translation create the perfect tale that can easily be read again and again.

Johanna McCalmont

GIANNI RODARI
TELLING STORIES WRONG

ILLUSTRATED BY BEATRICE ALEMAGNA
TRANSLATED BY ANTONY SHUGAAR
ENCHANTED LION BOOKS, 2022

REVIEWED BY NANETTE MCGUINNESS

‘ “Once upon a time, there was a girl who was called Little Yellow Riding Hood.”
“No, Red!”
“Oh, right!” Little Red Riding Hood. Her mother called her one day and said, “Listen, Little Green Riding Hood …”
“No, Red!”
“Oh, right! Red.”
Her mother said: Now go to Aunt Hildegard’s house and take her this potato peel.”’

Telling Stories Wrong combines the subversive delight of turning familiar children’s stories on their head with the joy of a well carried-out running gag. In this charming, semi-fractured, fairytale picture book for ages four to eight, the grandfather never gets the details right, with the story growing sillier and sillier as it continues. His ever-suffering grand-daughter corrects him with increasing impatience each time he deviates from traditional fairytale orthodoxy, which, of course, is the point. For deviate he definitely does.

When Little Red Riding Hood meets a giraffe rather than a wolf (and later on, a horse), the reader chuckles. So, too, when the grandfather has the wolf ask Little Red Riding Hood to multiply six times eight. When the grandfather randomly changes her colour yet again, the chuckles change into giggles and guffaws in sympathy for both characters – and perhaps the fond remembrance of twisting a story or two ourselves:

> “‘Oh, right! And Little Black Riding Hood answered …”
> “It was Little Red Riding Hood! Red! Red! Red!’”

Beloved Italian journalist, teacher, and author Gianni Rodari (1920-1980) won the Hans Christian

Andersen Award in 1970 for his children's stories, including *Il romanze de Cipollino* ('Tale of Cipollino' – 'Little Onion') and *Favole al telefono* ('Telephone Tales'). With its combination of the absurd along with its imaginative creativity, *Telling Stories Wrong* (a single story extracted from *Telephone Tales*) is an excellent entry point for his writing. Lovingly executed illustrations by award-winning artist Beatrice Alemagna – who considers Rodari a 'spiritual father' – enhance the warmth of the story with great humour and a marvellous sense of play.

Is the grandfather hopelessly absent-minded? Potentially. Having fun playing with his grandchild and switching things around because he gets bored easily? Perhaps. Most likely, though, he is probably repeating a much-loved storytelling ritual that the two share in which each fresh reiteration grows increasingly wild and off base.

While the reader never finds out the whole truth for certain, the ending and the illustrations throughout strongly indicate the latter:

> '"And the wolf said: Take the number 75 bus, get off in front of the cathedral, turn right, and there you'll find three steps and a coin on the ground. Forget about the three steps, pick up the coin, and go buy yourself some bubble gum."
>
> "Grandpa, you really don't know how to tell a story. You get everything wrong. But all the same, can I have a quarter to buy some bubble gum?"
>
> "Sure you can. Here you go."
>
> And Grandpa went back to reading his newspaper.'

Giving his granddaughter a hug, the grandfather picks up his paper again, satisfied at another story wrongly – but well - told.

Nanette McGuinness

ROSSANA BOSSÙ
HOW BIG IS AN ELEPHANT?

ANNICK PRESS, 2018

REVIEWED BY MIA SPANGENBERG

How do you introduce concepts like ratio and relative size to the youngest children in a fun and engaging way? Rossana Bossù, a graphic designer and illustrator/author of children's books, has done just that with her picture book *How Big Is an Elephant?*. Bossù compares animals of different sizes, starting with the biggest, an elephant, and working her way down to the smallest, a flea.

The book opens with '1 polar bear is smaller than an elephant'. Presenting one as a figure and elephant as an illustration immediately invites children not yet reading to participate in the story and recall the names of the numbers and animals. On the facing page, an illustration shows how many polar bears are needed to make one elephant, which children can count up. (In case you're wondering: it's seven!) The subsequent spreads follow the same format, which builds excitement through familiarity.

And that's not all. The book leads to a crescendo by asking children to consider what animal is 'much, much, much bigger' even than an elephant. On the final spread, children learn that a whale is bigger than all of the other animals, and that it takes all of the animals in the book to make just one.

This is a wonderful book to spark curiosity and introduce maths concepts to the youngest children. It also makes for a fun story to read together at home or during story time. Not least, the whimsical illustrations of animals in costume – a polar bear wears an elephant's ears and trunks and alligators wear lion's manes – can lead to discussions about animal features and even lead to an animal costume ball.

Mia Spangenberg

ITALIAN CHILDREN'S PICTURE BOOKS

by ANTONELLA RANIERI

In the last twenty years, the Italian publishing industry has witnessed a flourishing of illustrated children's books. The publishing houses that have contributed to this process are undoubtedly Orecchio Acerbo, Topipittori and Babalibri, and their model has been followed by other fledgling houses, such as Camelozampa, ZOOlibri and Terre di Mezzo, each enriching the conversation about illustrated books with new examples, starting with books for the very youngest children.

Orecchio Acerbo and Topipittori deserve a special mention, as they are now synonymous with continuous development in terms of the text and imagery, always refining the graphic, typographic and compositional aspects of their books, down to the smallest details. Their products are aimed at a wide range of readers, but in many cases, they wink at adult tastes.

Italy has seen some small revolutions in the way younger children are addressed. The minibombo publishing house, for example, has made graphic and digital language its strong point, experimenting with new ways of approaching childhood; while the publishing house Camelozampa, in just a few years, has become known for its translations of masterpieces of international children's literature.

LupoGuido Edizioni also draws on foreign literature and has crowned its recent success with a new series, *The Illustrators*, on which it was advised by Quentin Blake. This demonstrates a desire among publishing houses to become distinctive, differentiating themselves in some way in order to attract the reader. Thus, for many of them, the style of illustration, the size of the format and the compositional choices are as decisive as the choice of text they publish.

There are also publishing houses that now pay particular attention to environmental themes, and to the emotional relationship between childhood and nature. Among these we find Hopi Edizioni, a small publishing house in Rome that does exactly that, also specifically in its choices of printing materials.

This burgeoning market has, however, led to an overproduction of books, which are not always of high quality. Many publishing houses, such as Topipittori, have therefore felt the need to support their editorial production with creative marketing and publicity strategies. Taking advantage of the potential of the internet, they have created blogs, Facebook pages and Instagram profiles, as well as organising promotional events with the support of independent bookstores, all in a bid to increase awareness among readers of the wealth of children's books now available in Italy.

Antonella Ranieri

THE RIVETER RECOMMENDS

VALENTINA PELLIZZONI and MIRIAM SERAFIN

AVVENTURE DI UN OTTENNE CON DUE FRATELLI PIÙ GRANDI

('The Adventures of an Eight-Year-Old and His Two Older Brothers')

EDIZIONI CORSARE

This short and funny story by new writer and bookseller, Valentina Pellizzoni, takes its inspiration from the antics of her three children.

The story is told in the first person by the youngest of the three, eight-year-old Gabi, who sees his two brothers, Edo and Nico, 'growing apart' and is curious about how they are maturing and about how they play together, leading to philosophical wonderings about the meaning of existence. Not surprisingly, Gabi is nicknamed 'The Philosopher'.

For Gabi the sofa is the stage on which he likes to show off his magic tricks, flex his imagination, cobble together shows, and to which he retreats for moments of solitude.

The freshness of the writing reflects the irrepressible flow of a child's thoughts: fast and free.

The figure of the grandfather, a discreet presence, almost a voiceover, reassures, softens and illuminates the various adventures of the three brothers.

THE RIVETER
FEATURES

ADVENTURES OF ITALIAN BOOKS ABROAD

by PAOLO GROSSI
Managing Editor
newitalianbooks

For about thirty years, I worked outside my native Italy – first as a teacher of Italian literature at the universities of Uppsala and Caen, then as a cultural attaché in Paris, Stockholm and Brussels. In all these posts I had a single objective: to make contemporary Italian literature – both that of the twenty-first century and that of the twentieth – better known. And I did this without a national institution delegated to the promotion of books standing behind me (I am thinking of those that exist in other countries, such as the French Bureau international de l'Edition française, the BIEF).

In each situation, I tried to implement different strategies, adapting to the context in which I was working. In Sweden, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, most local publishers did not have Italian-speaking editors, so they often relied on recommendations from translators and Italian teachers, and found it difficult to differentiate between the most popular current authors. As for older authors – the 'historical' ones from the twentieth century – they seemed to consider them as voices of the past, to be forgotten. To counter this rather bleak situation, I created a bilingual Italian/Swedish magazine, whose very name, *Cartaditalia*, announced its ambition to offer the Swedish public a map of contemporary Italian culture. The first issue was dedicated to the contemporary Italian novel and included texts by ten authors who had never been translated into Swedish (Roberto Alajmo, Franco Arminio, Andrea Bajani, Diego De Silva, Giulia Fazzi, Elena Ferrante, Valeria Parrella, Antonio Scurati, Vitaliano Trevisan, Sandro Veronesi). In the space of a couple of years, five of these authors had been published by Swedish publishers, large (Nordstedts) and small (Contempo, Astor). The

second issue was on contemporary Italian poetry, something almost unknown in Sweden, with texts by Giampiero Neri, Fabio Pusterla, Eugenio De Signoribus, Franco Buffoni, Luciano Cecchinel, Jolanda Insana, Patrizia Cavalli, Mariangela Gualtieri, Antonella Anedda, Maria Grazia Calandrone and Maria Luisa Vezzali.

All that was left to think about was the twentieth century, to which I decided to dedicate a series, 'I libri di Cartaditalia', of which I published twelve volumes in three years, with titles (unpublished in Sweden) by Pier Paolo Pasolini, Giuseppe Dessí, Antonio Tabucchi, Claudio Magris, Italo Calvino, Elsa Morante and Primo Levi.

When I launched this series in Stockholm, I already had the experience of starting a similar series in France, which is still in progress: the 'Cahiers de l'Hôtel de Galliffet', a series born in 2004 and now counting more than fifty titles. Created to publish the proceedings of Italianist conferences, the 'Cahiers' has for over ten years specialised in twentieth-century Italian writers who are little known or forgotten in France, and often in Italy too. The catalogue today includes authors such as Antonio Delfini, Nicola Chiaromonte, Aldo Capitini, Goffredo Parise, Luciano Bianciardi, Raffaele La Capria, Piero Jahier, Gesualdo Bufalino and Corrado Alvaro. And it devotes important attention to poetry, to Anna Maria Ortese, Giorgio Bassani, Eugenio De Signoribus and others. You can go to the 'Cahiers Galliffet' website to see this.

Sweden's *Cartaditalia* was later revived and expanded in Brussels in a quadrilingual edition and became the basis for the concept of a digital platform from which Italian publishing could reach the world. We launched the pilot scheme, www.booksinitaly.it, thanks to the support of the Mondadori Foundation, and it ran for three years between 2014 and 2017. Then, in 2019, the Istituto della Enciclopedia Treccani, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation as well as the Ministry of Culture jointly launched www.newitalianbooks.it. Initially bilingual Italian/English, the site has now been trilingual since mid-2021, thanks to a new version in French. Conceived with the aim of offering all Italian publishers a shopfront on the international market – free of charge and with no restriction on the number of titles – *newitalian-books* has been warmly welcomed by the Italian publishing industry. Today there are more than 1,700 book entries on the platform, uploaded by around 260 publishers. Publishers who register with *newitalianbooks* undertake to upload the information, including the details of the rights manager, about their titles in two languages,

Italian and English. Publishers can also upload translated sample texts. However, *newitalianbooks* also aims to be a more flexible tool, available to all those who work in the book industry – publishers and agents, of course, but also translators, booksellers and librarians. In short, we aim to provide insights into the Italian book situation for the whole world. Special attention should be paid to the 'In-depth' area, which includes surveys from the world of books and interviews with leading figures from publishing.

One section that is very important to me, and which is a feather in the platform's cap, is that dedicated to translation. This section is called 'In other languages' and is a collection of material dedicated to Italian authors in translation. Dozens and dozens of specialists, scattered all over the world, regularly send short reports of the translation situation for our most important Italian authors, from the classics to contemporary writers. These reports are extremely valuable, as they allow us to understand foreign publishers' relationships with Italian writing. This is a little explored field of study; in fact, there are no databases that systematically collect information on the sale of Italian authors' rights abroad, and on the translation of Italian works into various languages. The results, if read carefully, are often surprising, and can be of great help in guiding the Italian publishing industry's decision-making. Thus, *newitalianbooks* potentially offers a large resource for the study of the dissemination of Italian literature around the world.

Responses from publishers to *newitalianbooks* are comforting: many have told us that thanks to *newitalianbooks* they have attracted attention from publishers operating in countries with whom they had no previous dealings. This feedback is very important and encourages us to continue along the path we have taken. Our next step, after French, will be to further expand *newitalianbooks* with a German version, in anticipation of the 2024 Frankfurt Book Fair, where Italy will be the Guest of Honour country. From the second half of 2022 *newitalianbooks* will therefore be quadrilingual. A lot has changed since the beginning of the new century!

Paolo Grossi
www.newitalianbooks.it

ALBERTO PRUNETTI
DOWN AND OUT IN ENGLAND AND ITALY

TRANSLATED BY ELENA PALA
SCRIBE, 2021

REVIEWED BY CAROLINE WYATT

It's always dangerous for a writer to echo George Orwell; few can hope to equal the lucidity and power of Orwell's prose, and Alberto Prunetti doesn't. But his story of setting out as a young man from Italy to the UK to seek work is a poignant, sometimes funny and, by the end, deeply depressing tale of the precariat of our own age, in which the invisible but invaluable people – often young immigrants, as Prunetti was – who cook our pizzas, serve our burgers, and clean our filthy public lavatories, are given a voice and the chance to vent copious rage at a system that Prunetti shows to be too often stacked against them.

That is both the strength and the downfall of this sometimes uneven book, which veers from anger through slapstick to lyricism and back again. The fury is understandable, given the appalling and sometimes downright dangerous conditions in which Prunetti and his polyglot colleagues work for long hours for poor wages and usually without formal contracts.

But the self-sabotage of many of the characters we encounter through Prunetti sometimes made me want to weep. Poverty can lead people to do many things, but it isn't entirely surprising or reprehensible that the police might want a chat with someone about the car or the wallet they've stolen – or that outright rudeness to your boss tends to get you fired.

Prunetti's British colleagues at one school canteen where he works are, however, lovingly drawn. Fatty Boy, Tim, and the other members of the self-styled Stonebridge Kitchen Assistant Nasty Kommittee (SKANK for short), may appear unpalatable to the undiscerning outsider's eye, but on closer acquaintance he finds that they have the souls of poets and the talents of Shakespearian actors.

Despite the disclaimer that 'this is a work of autobiographical fiction', this is very much the memoir of a writer whose world view is dominated by class-consciousness, and coloured by the dilemma of what to do and who to be in a world in which most of the mid-twentieth century's certainties that underpinned Prunetti's father's working-

class pride and solidarity are fast disappearing.

His father's rules (which roughly come down to: don't be a scab, don't be a grass and don't trust those toffs) appear to Prunetti to prove as true in England as they apparently were for his father in Italy, where the solidly unionised Tuscan working classes of Livorno stuck up for one another – at least while the steel mills still existed.

In some of the more lyrical passages about his childhood (I would have liked to read much more on that), it's clear that the younger Prunetti often struggled with his place in the world. But, thanks to a love of books and a talent for words, he was no longer a good fit for the soon-to-vanish world of his manual-worker communist father, and it seemed impossible to find any other suitable work at home using his degree – leading to his decision to travel to the UK to find work.

He works as a pizza chef in a real Italian restaurant and as a greeter in a fake Italian restaurant run by Turks. He also learns how to clean public lavatories in Bristol; a lengthy description of how to unblock them appears to have lodged permanently in my mind.

It comes as little surprise when Prunetti finally decides to bid farewell to what he terms a life toiling for 'the infernal machine that blackmailed and oppressed workers under Britain's leaden skies'. Yet when he returns to Italy, the steel mill is gone, and his once-muscular father is wasting away from an industrial disease. It seems that there is no escape but to write, and nowhere to truly fit in except in the global fraternity of wordsmiths.

And in the writing of his experiences, Prunetti finally finds his salvation, offering his readers some deeply uncomfortable glimpses into a world that it's far cheerier not to contemplate too closely while tucking into that delicious pizza.

Caroline Wyatt

POSTCARD FROM LONDON

By Katia Pizzi
Director, Italian Cultural Institute London

'Die with memories, not dreams', is the motto etched on my favourite bench in Belgrave Square Garden, opposite the Italian Cultural Institute in London. Italians tend to think of London as a dynamic urban space, a city in perpetual motion. And yet, like all great cities, London is also a city paralysed and haunted by memory: memories layered, intersecting and overlapping continuously. The mysteries of the Roman city buried in the Temple of Mithras, the secret tidal force of Old Father Thames, the enigmas of its legendary (and long-gone) fogs, the sludge of Victorian workhouses, London's infamous serial killers. 'I had not thought death had undone so many', sings T. S. Eliot on London Bridge, watching a crowd flow into the City of London in 1922, clearly alluding to Dante's Inferno.

Dante would have recognised his Hellish and Heavenly cities in many parts of London, as did Blake and the pre-Raphaelites, headed by Dante Gabriel Rossetti. Giordano Bruno, Gerolamo Cardano, Giuseppe Mazzini, Anthony Panizzi and several other Italians sought refuge in London, fleeing religious and political persecution, weaving threads of italianità *into the fabric of this alien and yet also welcoming city.*

I applaud the rich urban angle of this Italian Riveter*, and its literary focus on a range of Italian cities which map so well, or diverge so surprisingly, from both the cultural memories and the tumultuous present of this great London Town.*

POSTCARD FROM EDINBURGH

By Chiara Avanzato
Director,
Italian Cultural Institute Edinburgh

'Are you from Vigata?' a lovely Scottish lady asked me the moment she heard about my Sicilian origins. Edinburgh was bathed in sunlight, and I had just received two special gifts: a wonderful sunny day and one of the most delightful questions I have been asked since I moved here. I was more than 2,100 miles away from the Leopardian hedge I had planted to enclose my plot of land (and as Quasimodo puts it, 'My hedge is Sicily') but nevertheless I did feel at home.

Indeed, I felt happy to be in Edinburgh and was increasingly enjoying my job here. What can be more inspiring than promoting Italian literature (and culture) in the world's first UNESCO City of Literature? I may have an answer: finding Italy in the pages of this city. For Edinburgh is to be read, like a book, page by page, and to wander through its streets is to discover its story.

Just a few steps from the Italian Institute of Culture, you can hear the voices of students discussing Italian literary texts as they come out of the lecture rooms of the University of Edinburgh. Or, if you are nearby during the summer, you might have the chance to meet contemporary Italian authors who appear every year at the Edinburgh International Book Festival.

As you 'leaf through' the city, you may find yourself in a library holding Italian manuscripts or in a bookshop displaying recent and classic Italian books on its shelves … To pick up a book from these shelves is to cross a border. These shelves are like bridges that rivet the UK audience to the Italian cultural scene. They are like doors left ajar by translators. For it is they who do the important job of saying ('almost', Umberto Eco would add) the same thing in two different languages and cultures, allowing us to fling these doors open wide.

So let me suggest some good resolutions for the rest of the year: reserve a place on your bookshelves for The Italian Riveter *and become a regular visitor to the Italian Institute of Culture in Edinburgh (find out more at iicedimburgo.esteri.it). It is my hope that you will stick to these resolutions this year and for many years to come!*

My warmest thanks to all those who are part of The Italian Riveter *project.*

POSTCARD FROM DUBLIN

By Marco Gioacchini
Director, Italian Cultural Institute Dublin

We celebrate Italian literature in Ireland in 2022 with two authors who both rode the twentieth century's wave of political and social changes, and who had similar preoccupations – yet produced extremely divergent literary work.

Pier Paolo Pasolini, born one hundred years ago in a rural part of northern Italy, described and exposed the waning of traditional values in society, using a hard, contemporary style. He moved from neorealistic representations to dystopic depictions, in work that ranges from novels to short stories, from poetry to cinema, from theatre to journalism, from works in Italian to others employing dialects. He openly criticised the hyper-modernisation of the fifties, which slowly enveloped the 'little world of the past' that characterised Italy at the time. Dino Buzzati was a generation older than Pasolini. He died fifty years ago, at the climax of his writing career, which began towards the end of the 1920s as a journalist. Perhaps it is precisely his membership of the 'lost' post-First World War generation that defined his literary work, which is mostly averse to political commitment and historical commentary and prone instead to a 'postmodern' flair. In his stories, any sign of the present and its contradictions was craftily camouflaged by metaphors and literary motifs: a peculiarity that often gained him comparisons to Kafka.

What can we gain by revisiting the life and work of these two great writers in 2022? Primarily their social engagement, which was a vital source of inspiration for both, mostly geared towards giving voice and worth to the forgotten and the exploited. Additionally, their re-evaluation of the roots of Italian popular culture and the deeds of everyday heroes, as well as the rediscovery of fantasy as an important feature of their work. In Buzzati, and further back in Pasolini, we relive our grandparents' ways of thinking and of living, the anxieties they had to face, the small rewards that made their existence joyful

I'm confident that, from this perspective, Italy and Ireland will find common ground, as these two countries might not share the great landmarks of History with a capital H, but they do share the historic struggles of their populations and the emotional challenges of history.

FAREWELL POSTCARD FROM WEST CAMEL

By West Camel
The Riveter Editor

When we asked our Italian writers and translators to send us their postcards from around Italy, we suggested they offer our readers some literary anecdote, some memory about books, or even recommendations of work connected to the city or region they were sending their messages from. Beyond that, we were not prescriptive. We gave them free rein. And the result was a grand variety of responses, from up-sums of cities' literary output, to personal experiences, to literary sketches; a diversity that beautifully reflects the current state of Italian literary culture – and the content of our Italian Riveter.

So that leaves my postcard – not from the village in Somerset with which I share a name, but from my experience of Italian literature, gained through commissioning and editing this magazine.

My first visit to Italy was to Venice – and I was very nearly left there. I was on a tour of northern Yugoslavia (as it was at that time) with a youth orchestra, and we took a daytrip to Venice, arriving in La Serenissima from the sea. After a day touring the city, we headed back to the quay, but my particular group was slowed down by a friend (a bassist) who'd hurt her foot. Fearing we'd miss the boat, another, strapping, bassist hoisted his deskmate onto his shoulders and ran for it, while I followed on with the bags – only to find the boat pulling away from the dock with the two bassists on it, while I stood on the quayside. Some shouts and some leaps (assisted by Italians and Croatians), and I was safely aboard. Someone had mischievously answered my name on the roll call.

My postcard, then, is from a West Camel of my imagination – who stayed on the quayside on the Riva degli Schiavoni and whose experiences I have to construct from my reading of this magazine.

The Italy that West Camel has discovered is one that – to some extent, at least – has laid to bed the upheavals of its twentieth century, and is now looking to the changes the twenty-first century is bringing. Italy's long and important history – and long and important literary history – is not ignored, of course, as we see from Katherine Gregor's musings about historical fiction, and from the wealth of books exploring historical topics. But my sense is that the decades of fascism and the transition to a modern democracy, as explored by Ginzburg and Pavese, for example, are themselves now being consigned to the historical shelves, and that Italy's new generations of writers are grappling with contemporary challenges, and looking to Italy's future.

These are women writers – carving out new spaces for themselves, but also looking back at the wealth of Italian female writing, as Maria Teresa Carbone discusses in her feature.

These are also 'New Italians': writers from immigrant backgrounds, such as Nadeesha Uyangoda and Cristina Ali Farah, who see Italy – its history and its culture – through new and different eyes.

These are children's writers, who, as translator Denise Muir discusses, are extending Italy's long tradition of children's literature and are now leading the world in terms of diversity and subject matter.

These are poets drawing on the grand twentieth-century movements in verse, and forging new trends focussing on contemporary global concerns.

And these are writers confronting our most immediate challenges, as Paolo Giordano does the Covid pandemic.

And that's not to mention the authors and commentators and publishers and translators who, within these pages, are exploring and expostulating and championing and interrogating contemporary Italian writing. Our thanks go to them all, for their enthusiasm, for their honesty, and their passion for this country's literary culture. They have made my trip to Italy a joy.

The weather and the food are great here too, by the way. And I don't wish you were here, because you've read this magazine, so you already are: in the Italy of Italian literature. I'm sure you'll agree that it's every bit as varied, vivid and vivacious as the brochure paints it.

Biographies

SIMONETTA AGNELLO HORNBY was born in Sicily. She is a lawyer and novelist and resident in the United Kingdom. Several of her novels, always written in Italian, have been translated into numerous languages and have been international bestsellers.

BEATRICE ALEMAGNA was born in Bologna. As a child her biggest heroes were Pippi Longstocking, Marcovaldo, Karlsson-on-the-roof, Silvester and Meffi. At eight she decided she wanted to become a 'painter and writer of novels'. Today, she creates books for children and adults.

GINI ALHADEFF is the author of a memoir, *The Sun at Midday: Tales Of a Mediterranean Family*, and a novel, *Diary of a Djinn*. She was born in Egypt, to Italian parents. She is currently writing *Magic Horn*, a novel about a Swiss-American psychiatrist and her therapeutic sculpture garden at Bellevue Hospital.

CRISTINA ALI FARAH is an Italian poet, novelist and playwright of Somali origin. She has published three novels, *Madre piccola* ('Little Mother'); *Il comandante del fiume* ('The Commander of the River'); and *Le stazioni della luna* ('The Stations of the Moon'). She is the recipient of the Lingua Madre and Vittorini Prizes.

FEDERICO ANDORNINO is a translator and the Editorial Director at Weidenfeld & Nicolson, the literary imprint of the Orion Publishing Group, where he commissions literary fiction with an edge, LGBTQ+ literature, graphic novels and fiction in translation.

CHIARA AVANZATO is a cultural attaché at the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation. She took up the post of Director of the Italian Institute of Culture in Edinburgh in July 2021. Previously she was an Arabic language and arts teacher for the Italian Ministry of Education, and in Dubai at the Italian Chamber of Commerce she was Projects and Communications Manager and in charge of the Italian National Tourist Board Desk.

MARCO BALZANO is an Italian writer. Born in Milan, he teaches literature and has written several acclaimed novels: *Il figlio del figlio, Pronti a tutte le partenze*, and *L'ultimo arrivato*.

ALICE BANKS is a literary translator from French and Spanish into English, based in Madrid. She is currently translating Ali Zamir's *Dérangé que je suis*, and also works for Fum d'Estampa Press. Alice is assistant editor at the European Literature Network.

MARCO BELPOLITI is an Italian writer, essayist and critic, who contributes regularly to *La Repubblica* and *L'Espresso*, and is currently a professor at the University of Bergamo. He is the author of many books and edited the Einaudi edition of the complete works of Primo Levi.

ANNA BLASIAK is a poet, writer, translator, journalist and managing editor of the European Literature Network. Recently she co-translated *Renia's Diary* by Renia Spiegel, published a bilingual poetry and photography book with Lisa Kalloo, *Kawiarnia przy St James's Wrena w porze lunchu / Café by Wren's St-James-in-the-Fields, Lunchtime*, and a book-length interview with a Holocaust survivor *Lili*.

ALEXANDER BOOTH is a poet and literary translator. His poetry and translations have appeared in numerous international print and online journals. After many years in Rome, he currently lives in Berlin.

ROSSANA BOSSÙ lives in Turin. She has produced illustrations for a number of children's books and won several awards. As a child, she always dreamed of being a painter. As an adult she graduated in graphics and editorial-advertising at the Albe Steiner Institute of Turin in 1990.

CLARISSA BOTSFORD studied Italian at Cambridge University and Comparative Education in London before moving to Rome. She currently teaches English and Translation Studies at Roma Tre University and translates contemporary Italian fiction and poetry.

DOME BULFARO is an award-winning poet, teacher, publisher and performer from Monza. He is founder and director of the Poesia Presente Festival, a school of poetry and performance, co-founder of LIPS (Lega Italiana Poetry Slam) and wrote about Italian slam in *Guida liquida al poetry slam*.

WEST CAMEL is a writer, reviewer and editor. He edited Dalkey Archive's *Best European Fiction 2015*, and is currently working for Orenda Books. He has written two novels, *Attend* and *Fall*. He is the editor of the *Riveter* magazine and the *#RivetingReviews* for the European Literature Network.

ANDREA CAMILLERI (1925-2019) was one of Italy's most popular writers, creating the Inspector Montalbano series set in Sicily. He wrote his first novel in 1978, *Il corso delle cose* ('The Way Things Go'), and completed a total of twenty-eight Montalbano novels, the final one, *Riccardino*, at his request, being locked away until after his death.

ELENA CANTONI is an Italian translator based in Lombardy. She translates between English and Italian. She has translated a number of English language writers into Italian, and is the English translator for Francesco Carofiglio.

MARIA TERESA CARBONE is an Italian journalist, academic and translator. She writes about books, photography and cinema for several major arts media in Italy. She teaches journalism at the University of Roma Tre and the University of California Education Abroad Program.

FRANCESCO CAROFIGLIO is an Italian architect, writer and director. His first novel *With or without you* (in Italian with an English title) was published in 2005. He has also written a number of plays, and continues to work as an architect alongside his writing career.

GIANRICO CAROFIGLIO is a novelist, essayist, former anti-Mafia prosecutor in the Italian city of Bari and well-known public figure. His debut novel, *Involuntary Witness*, was published in Italy in 2002, and in English in 2005 by Bitter Lemon Press, who have published all his novels.

PATRIZIA CAVALLI was born in Todi, Umbria, and lives in Rome. She has written six collections of poetry including *Le mie poesie non cambieranno il mondo* (*My Poems Won't Change the World*) and *Pigre divinità e pigra sorte* ('Lazy Gods, Lazy Fate'). She has also published translations of Shakespeare and Molière.

FAUSTA CIALENTE (1898-1994) had a strong family connection to Trieste, her mother's hometown and the city at the heart of her autobiographical novel, *Le quattro ragazze Wieselberger*. After marrying, Fausta lived in Egypt. She spoke in favour of the Resistance and against Italian fascism during the Second World War.

RUTH CLARKE is a translator working from Spanish, French and Italian into English. She studied Modern European Languages at Durham University and has an MA in Translation Studies from Sheffield. Ruth has translated work by authors from Mexico to Benin and has a particular passion for short stories.

PATRICK CREAGH (1930-2012) was a poet and translator. Creagh lived in Rome for a short period, before returning to the UK in the late 1960s. He has translated a number of Italian writers, among them, Marcello Fois, Gianrico Carofiglio, Antonio Tabbuchi and Flavio Conti.

GIUSEPPE CULICCHIA is an Italian writer whose works have been widely translated. His 1994 novel *Tutti giù per terra*, won him several prizes. He also writes for many magazines and newspapers, including *La Stampa*.

HOWARD CURTIS has translated over a hundred books from Italian, French and Spanish. Among his many Italian translations are works by Gianrico Carofiglio, Filippo Bologna, Marco Malvaldi and Gianfranco Calligarich. He edited an anthology of neglected 20th-century authors for the Italian Cultural Institute in London.

JOSEPH DANCE is an archivist, writer and poet. He previously worked as Head Archivist at the Marx Memorial Library and Workers' School and has a BA and MA from the University of Cambridge in English Literature. He is currently working on his first collection of poetry.

LISA D'ANDREA is an award-winning illustrator who lives and works in Padua. Her work has been selected for many awards and exhibitions. In 2016 she took part in the travelling collective exhibition for the 150th anniversary of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*.

LUCA D'ANDREA is a writer and teacher from Bolzano. He published the Young Adult fantasy triology, *Wunderkind*, under the pseudonym G.L. D'Andrea. His first thriller, *La sostanza del male*, was published in over thirty countries, in English as *The Mountain*.

DICK DAVIS is a poet, professor, and translator from Persian and Italian. Davis grew up in the Yorkshire and was the first member of his family to attend university. After graduating from Cambridge, he began teaching in Greece before moving on to teach in the University of Tehran. Upon his return to the United Kingdom, Davis decided to begin translating many of the greatest masterpieces of both ancient and modern Persian poetry into English.

DONATELLA DI PIETRANTONIO lives in Penne where she practises as a dentist. *My Mother Is a River* was her first novel, published in Italy in 2011, where it won the Tropea and the John Fante literary prizes. Her second book, *Bella Mia*, was published in 2014 and won the Brancati Prize.

LUIGI DI RUSCIO (1930-2011). Born in the Marche region, he emigrated to Norway in 1957. He published several poetry collections – noted for their uncompromising politics and fiery energy – while supporting a large family by working daily shifts in a factory. His commitment to culture and language won him great respect then, as it does now.

RICHARD DIXON lives in Italy and is a full-time translator from Italian to English. His translations include works by Roberto Calasso, Umberto Eco, Carlo Emilio Gadda, Giacomo Leopardi, and Antonio Moresco, as well as poetry by Franco Buffoni, Eugenio De Signoribus and others.

CLAUDIA DURASTANTI is an Italian writer and translator, author of four acclaimed novels. She co-founded the Italian Festival of Literaure in London. *Strangers I Know* (Fitzcarraldo, 2022) was shortlisted for the Strega Prize in Italian in 2019. She is the Italian translator of Joshua Cohen, Donna Haraway, Ocean Vuong, and the most recent edition of *The Great Gatsby*.

MAX EASTERMAN spent thirty-five years as a BBC broadcaster. He was a lecturer in journalism for seventeen years at Huddersfield University and is today a translator, media trainer with 'Sounds Right', jazz musician and reviewer.

SABRINA EFIONAY began writing as a teenager at school under the pen name 'Sabrynex'. Her novel, *Over, un'overdose di te*, (which she published on Wattpad) was discovered by Rizzoli Libri who have now published three of her novels.

JOHANNE ELSTER HANSON is a freelance journalist and translator who specialises in Norwegian literature and culture. She has written for the *Guardian*, and is a regular contributor to the European Literature Network's *#RivetingReviews*.

ROSIE EYRE is a literary translator from French and Spanish, and assistant editor at the European Literature Network. She was a National Centre for Writing Emerging Translator 2020-21, and won third place in the 2021 John Dryden translation competition. She is also Prize Co-ordinator for the Stephen Spender Trust.

ENRICA MARIA FERRARA is originally from Naples and lives in Dublin where she lectures in Italian Culture and Language at Trinity College. She has written widely about Elena Ferrante, Domenico Starnone and other leading Italian writers.

DYMPHNA FLYNN is producer at Pier Productions. She was a judge on the Costa Book Awards 2021, reviews new fiction on Instagram @dymphnaflynn, was a BBC arts producer for over twenty years, has a degree in French and Italian and divides her time between France and the UK.

MARCELLO FOIS is an Italian writer. He was born in Sardinia, and is member of the 'Group 13' of writers. His first novel *Ferro Recente* was published in 1989 and he has since written scripts for radio, TV, film, theatre and novels. He has won numerous prizes.

GIORGIO FONTANA was born in Saronno in 1981 and lives in Milan. He is the author of eight books, which have won a number of prestigious prizes. His latest novel is *Il mago di Riga* (Sellerio, 2022). He also writes comic strips and teaches creative writing.

BARRY FORSHAW is a writer, broadcaster and journalist specialising in crime writing. His books include *Euro Noir* and *Crime Fiction: A Reader's Guide*. He reviews for many newspapers and magazines, edits *Crime Time*, and is a 'talking head' for the ITV Crime Thriller author profiles.

JILL FOULSTON is a translator from Italian and a former commissioning editor for Virago, Little Brown and Penguin. She has worked with contemporary authors, such as Sarah Waters and Michelle Lovric, as well as classics such as Paul Bowles and Muriel Spark. She has translated Piero Chiara, Augusto De Angelis and Erri De Luca.

FABIO FRANZIN's poetry describes the experiences of factory work and unemployment, and the creation of spaces of beauty, solidarity and tenderness in the margins of society. His award-winning poetry collections are written in his own 'earthy, full-bodied' Trevigiano dialect.

TIZIANO FRATUS is an Italian writer, poet, publisher and traveller. He developed the concept of Homo radix ('root man'), the practice of alberography and dendrosophy, by which he lives today. His nature writing has been widely translated and included in several international anthologies.

FRANCES FRENAYE (1908-1996) was an American translator of French and Italian literature. Throughout her career she championed European writing and brought a wide range of French and Italian literature into the English language, translating the likes of Natalia Ginzburg, Balzac, Françoise Sagan, and Anna Maria Ortese.

LAURA FUSCO is a widely published Italian poet and stage director, who has performed internationally, including in the UK. Two of her poetry collections are available in English: *Liminal* (Smokestack Books, 2019), and *Nadir* (Smokestack Books, 2022).

JONATHAN GIBBS is a writer, critic and academic. He has published two novels, *Randall, or the Painted Grape* (Galley Beggar Press, 2014) and *The Large Door* (Boiler House Press, 2019). *Randall, or the Painted Grape* was longlisted for the Desmond Elliot Prize and shortlisted for the Figaro Prix du Livre de Voyage Urbain.

NATALIA GINZBURG (1916-1991) was an Italian author of novels, short stories and essays, on family life, women and postwar hardship. She was a prominent anti-fascist and friends with Calvino and Pavese. Revered in Italy, her work is finally being rediscovered in English.

MARCO GIOACCHINI is the Director of the Italian Cultural Institute in Dublin. Before this, he held positions at the diplomatic-consular offices in St. Petersburg and Paris and at the Directorate General for Cultural and Economic Promotion and Innovation of the Italian MFA in Rome.

PAOLO GIORDANO was born in Turin and studied physics. He caused a sensation when his first novel *The Solitude of Prime Numbers* won both the Premio Strega and Campiello (First Novel). He was 26. His non-fiction book *How Contagion Works* was one of the first to be written on the Covid-19 pandemic. His latest novel *Heaven and Earth* is also published in English.

ROSIE GOLDSMITH is director and founder of the European Literature Network and Editor-in-Chief of *The Riveter*. She was a BBC broadcaster for twenty years and is today an arts journalist and presenter. She was chair of the judges for the EBRD Literature Prize 2018-2020.

ANN GOLDSTEIN is an American editor and translator from Italian, best known for her translations of Elena Ferrante's work into English, including the famous 'Neapolitan Quartet'. Goldstein has translated a wide range of Italian authors. She was also head of the Copy Department for *The New Yorker* until 2017.

FIONA GRAHAM is a literary translator from French and German, and an editor. She is currently translating Elin Anna Labba's *Sirdolaccat: The Deportation of the Northern Sámi* (provisional title). She writes for *#RivetingReviews* and was reviews editor at the *Swedish Book Review*.

JORIE GRAHAM is an American poet. She was the first woman to be appointed to the position of Boylston Professor at Harvard, and won the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry (1996) for *The Dream of the Unified Field: Selected Poems 1974-1994*. She also won the 2013 International Nonino Prize in Italy. In 2017, Graham received the Wallace Stevens Award from the Academy of American Poets. Her most recent poetry collection, *Runaway*, was published in 2020.

KATHERINE GREGOR is a writer and translator from Italian and French. She was also an EFL teacher, theatrical agent, press agent and theatre director. Her Italian translations include: *The Wanderer* by Luca D'Andrea (MacLehose Press), *Cleopatra* by Alberto Angela (HarperVia) and *The Florios of Sicily* by Stefania Auci (HarperVia). She created and wrote *The Italianist* blog for eurolitnetwork.com.

PAOLO GROSSI has taught Italian literature at the universities of Uppsala, Sweden, and Caen, France. He was cultural attaché in Paris and directed the Italian Cultural Institutes in Stockholm and Brussels. He is the editor and manager of the new web portal *newitalianbooks* and editor of the series 'Cahiers de l'Hôtel de Galliffet' (Paris).

MARIANGELA GUALTIERI is an Italian author of several award-winning poetry collections, and co-founder and principal playwright of the Teatro della Valdoca. A selection of her poems in English translation, *Beast of Joy*, was published by Chelsea Editions in 2018.

GËZIM HAJDARI was born in 1957 in Hajdaraj, Albania, and is an honorary citizen of the Italian town of Frosinone, where he was exiled in 1992. Today he lives in Britain. He writes and translates in Albanian and Italian, and has published a number of award-winning collections and performed at many international festivals.

ELIZABETH HARRIS is an award-winning translator of Italian fiction, including books by Giulio Mozzi, and Antonio Tabucchi, Domenico Starnone and Marco Candida. Her translations have appeared in *Words Without Borders*, as well as Dalkey Archive Press's 'Best European Fiction' series.

JOHN HOOPER is *The Economist*'s correspondent for Italy and the Vatican. He also writes about art and archaeology for the *Wall Street Journal*. His book *The Italians* was a bestseller on both sides of the Atlantic. His latest book, with Anna Kraczyna, is an annotated translation for Penguin Classics of *The Adventures of Pinocchio*.

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AMARA LAKHOUS is an Italian author, journalist and anthropologist of Algerian origin who lives in New York. The English translation of his second novel, *Clash of Civilizations Over an Elevator in Piazza Vittorio* was published in 2014. Lakhous is the editor of Shark/Gharb, an imprint publishing Arabic translations of contemporary European works.

JONATHAN LEVI is an American writer and academic living in Rome. He co-founded *Granta* and writes short stories, essays, plays, opera libretti and novels, including *A Guide for the Perplexed* and *Septimania*.

LIA LEVI was born in Pisa. A writer and journalist, she is best known for her novels dealing with Jewish themes and the Holocaust, and as an author of children's books. Several of her novels are translated into English, including *The Jewish Husband* and *Tonight is Already Tomorrow*.

CARLO LORENZINI (1826-1890), better known by his pen name, Carlo Collodi, was an Italian author, humourist, and journalist, widely known for *The Adventures of Pinocchio*. In 1880 he began writing this famous story which was published weekly in *Giornale per i bambini*.

D.M. LOW (1890-1972) was a British translator of Italian literature and biographer of Edward Gibbon. He was the translator of Natalia Ginzburg's *Voices in the Evening*.

GIUSEPPE LUPO is a widely published Italian writer of both fiction and non-fiction. His books include *Gli anni del nostro incanto*, *Breve storia del mio silenzio* and *Viaggiatori di nuvole*. Lupo is also a lecturer in contemporary Italian literature.

CRISTIANO de MAJO is an Italian writer and journalist from Naples. He is the author of several short stories, and of two novels in Italian: *Vita e morte di un giovane impostore scritta da me, il suo miglior amico* (Ponte alle Grazie, 2010) and *Guarigione* (Ponte alle Grazie, 2014).

CAROLINE MALDONADO is a poet and translator living in London and Italy. Her work has appeared in many journals and anthologies. She has published the poetry pamphlet, *What they say in Avenale*, and three books with Smokestack Books. Her collection, *Faultlines*, is forthcoming in 2022.

FRANCA MANCINELLI was born in Fano, Italy. Her books of poetry, including *Mala kruna* (Manni, 2007), and *Pasta madre* (Nino Aragno Editore, 2013) have won several prizes. She works internationally and has been widely translated and published.

DIEGO MARANI is a prolific Italian writer of fiction and non-fiction, whose most famous novel, *New Finnish Grammar* ('Nuova grammatica finlandese'), has been translated into several languages. He is multilingual, invented the language Europanto and worked for decades in the European Commission. He is today Director of the Italian Cultural Institute in Paris.

JOHANNA McCALMONT is a Northern Irish translator and interpreter based in Brussels where she works from French, German, Dutch, and Italian. She is a regular contributor at World Kid Lit and her literary translations have appeared in *No Man's Land* and *New Books in German*.

GAIL McDOWELL, born in the United States, is a linguist, interpreter and translator. She has lived in Italy for several decades and translated numerous works, both literary and technical.

NANETTE McGUINNESS is an opera singer and translator of over seventy books and graphic novels for children and adults from French, occasionally Spanish, German and Italian, including the Geronimo Stilton graphic novels. Her translation of *Luisa: Now and Then* was a 2019 Stonewall Honor Book and a 2020 GLLI Translated YA Book Prize Honor Book.

JENNY McPHEE began her career in publishing before beginning to work as a translator from the Italian language. In 2001 she published her first novel *The Center of Things*.

ANNE MILANO APPEL is a literary translator between Italian and English. She has brought authors such as Claudio Magris, Paolo Giordano, Giovanni Arpino and Goliarda Sapienza into English. She was awarded the John Florio Prize in 2012 for her translation of Arpino's *Scent of a Woman*.

MARCO MISSIROLI was born in Rimini and lives in Milan where he works as a journalist and writer. He is the author of the prize-winning novels *Senza coda*, *Il buio addosso* and *Bianco*. His novel *Fidelity* was a bestseller in Italy, shortlisted for the Premio Strega and made into a Netflix series.

ANTONIO MORESCO was born in Mantua and lives in Milan. He published his first book aged 46 and today occupies a special place in Italian literature, likened to Don DeLillo and Thomas Pynchon, with his provocative and challenging ideas on experimentalism and postmodernism.

DAVIDE MOROSINOTTO was born in a small town in the hills of Northern Italy. He always wanted to be a writer, and spent his school days thinking up incredible adventures and imaginary worlds. Since then he's written twenty-seven books for children and young adults which have won numerous prizes and been translated into twenty-three languages.

DENISE MUIR is an Italian-English translator with a special interest in children's literature. Her translations have featured in guides to outstanding international children's fiction, and a recent children's novel was selected as an IBBY UK 2020 nominee in the translation category.

MICHELA MURGIA was born in Sardina. She is a columnist and award-winning writer of travel books, political non-fiction and novels, and a political activist. She has worked as a religious studies teacher, a timeshare saleswoman and an administrator in a power plant.

ANDRÉ NAFFIS-SAHELY is an author and translator from Abu Dhabi, born in Venice to an Iranian father and an Italian mother. He has published *The Promised Land: Poems from Itinerant Life* (Penguin, 2017) and *The Other Side of Nowhere* (Rough Trade Books, 2019). He is the editor of *The Heart of a Stranger: An Anthology of Exile Literature* (Pushkin Press, 2020) and has translated Honoré de Balzac, Émile Zola, Abdellatif Laâbi, Tahar Ben Jelloun and Frankétienne.

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ELENA PALA is a translator from Italian and French into English. Born and raised in Italy, she moved to the UK in 2008 to complete her studies at Cambridge University. Most recently she translated Sandro Veronesi's *The Hummingbird* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2021).

LAURA PARIANI is the award-winning author of numerous novels, as well as graphic novels, plays and screenplays. She is also a painter and literary translator from Spanish. Her novel, *Il gioco di Santa Oca* was shortlisted for the 2019 Campiello Prize.

TIM PARKS was born in Manchester, grew up in London and studied at Cambridge and Harvard. In 1981 he moved to Italy where he has lived ever since. He has written fourteen novels, several non-fiction accounts of life in Italy, teaches translation and has translated Moravia, Pavese, Calvino, Calasso, Machiavelli and Leopardi.

VALERIA PARRELLA is an Italian author, playwright and activist. In 2005, her collection of short stories *Per grazia ricevuta* ('For Grace Received') was shortlisted for the Premio Strega prize, and won the Premio Renato Fucini for the best short story collection. In 2020, she was shortlisted for the Premio Lattes Grinzane.

CESARE PAVESE (1908-1950) was one of Italy's foremost men of letters. Profoundly influenced by English-language literature, he translated Steinbeck, Melville, Faulkner, Joyce and many more, introducing them to the Italian public. Tim Parks' retranslation of two of Pavese's most famous works, *The Moon and the Bonfires* and *The House on the Hill*, were published in 2021.

VALENTINA PELLIZZONI is a writer of Italian children's literature. Her most recent publication is *Avventure di un ottenne con due fratelli più grandi*.

SANDRO PENNA (1906-1977) was an Italian poet. During his life, he was awarded two of Italy's most important literary awards, the Premio Viareggio and the Premio Bagutta. He's been translated into many languages, including English, and appeared in numerous anthologies of Italian poetry.

KATIA PIZZI is the Director of the Italian Cultural Institute London. Before this, she was Senior Lecturer in Italian at the University of London. Pizzi has also published a number of books, among these: *Cold War Cities: History, Culture and Memory*, *Pinocchio, Puppets and Modernity: The Mechanical Body*, and *City in Search of an Author: The Literary Identity of Trieste*.

ALBERTO PRUNETTI was born in Piombino, a Tuscan steel town in 1973. A former pizza chef, cleaner, and handyman, he is also the author of a trilogy of working-class novels and has translated works by George Orwell, Angela Davis, David Graeber, Bhaskar Sunkara and many others.

ANTONELLA RANIERI is an Italian writer. In 2001 she published *La scelta*.

REIN RAUD is an Estonian academic and author. Raud has published on a wide range of subjects from cultural theory to pre-modern Japanese literature and philosophy, as well as writing five collections of poetry, seven novels and several collections of short stories and plays.

MICHELE RECH, known as 'Zerocalcare', is an Italian cartoonist. Born in Italy, and raised in France and Rome, Rech began working as an illustrator for a number of Italian periodicals. He published his first graphic novel, *The Armadillo's Prophecy* in 2011. *Kobane Calling: Greetings from Northern Syria* is Rech's fourth graphic novel and was published in 2016. Most recently, Rech created an animated Italian series for Netflix called *Tear Along the Dotted Line*.

BARBARA RICCI is Italian and lives in Bristol, where she is a translator and interpreter. She has worked as an audiovisual translator and editor for TV, cinema and international film festivals (Venice, Cannes and Locarno), and as a translator of mainly non-fiction and children's literature.

JAMIE RICHARDS is a translator from the Italian language. Born and raised in Greater Los Angeles, California, she is now based in Milan. She is a 2021 NEA Literature Translation fellow, and currently works for the Balzan Foundation.

GIANNI RODARI (1920-1980) was a writer and journalist from Novara in Italy, regarded as the father of modern Italian children's literature, famous for creating the character Cipollino ('Little Onion'). He received the Hans Christian Andersen Medal in 1970. His work is published all over the world.

LALLA ROMANO (1906-2001) was an Italian novelist, poet, artist and journalist who was known for writings that drew on personal and family experiences. Romano painted throughout her life, and her former house in Milan has been converted into a museum to preserve her work.

EVELINA SANTANGELO is an author and translator. Winner of several major Italian literary prizes, she is the author of six novels, of which *From Another World* is the first to be published in English. She lives in Palermo, Sicily.

JENNIFER SARHA leads an exciting double life: a researcher of obscure European history by night, a wrangler of research funding applications by day. She is attempting to learn all the languages in the world and reviews regularly for the European Literature Network.

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IGIABA SCEGO is an Italian writer, journalist and activist of Somali origin, born in Rome. She writes for various magazines and newspapers on migrant and African literature. Her writing depicts the delicate balance between her two cultural realities, Italian and Somali. Two of her novels, *Adua* and *Beyond Babylon*, have been translated into English.

MIRIAM SERAFIN is an Italian illustrator and comic book artist. She has illustrated a wide range of Italian children's books, including *Avventure di un ottenne con due fratelli più grandi.*

DAVID SHAPIRO is an America poet, literary critic and art historian. He has written over twenty volumes of poetry, literary and art criticism. He is currently the William Paterson professor of art history at William Paterson University. He has also translated Rafael Alberti's poems, and collaborated on the translation of Patrizia Cavalli's poetry collection, *My Poems Won't Change the World.*

ANTONY SHUGAAR is a writer and a translator from Italian and French. He's translated dozens of articles for the *New York Review of Books* and close to forty novels for Europa Editions. He has translated TV series and movies for HBO, Netflix, and Amazon.

RIBKA SIBHATU is a poet, writer and human rights activist. Self-exiled from Eritrea since 1982, she has lived in Ethiopia, France and Italy. She works as a court interpreter in Rome. She published her first book of poems, *Aulò! Canto poesia dall'Eritrea* in 1993 and in 2011 a bilingual edition of Tigrinya folklore, *Il numero esatto delle stelle e altre fiabe eritree* (both with Sinnos).

GURMEET SINGH is a writer and editor from the UK, living in Berlin. He writes fiction, as well as essays on culture and politics. In 2021, he was longlisted for the Desperate Literature Short Fiction Prize and the 2021 Disquiet Fiction Prize.

MIA SPANGENBERG is a translator working from Finnish and German into English. She is a regular contributor to literary magazines and to World Kid Lit. She has a PhD in Scandinavian Studies from the University of Washington, Seattle, where she lives.

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CLAIRE STOREY is a literary translator from German and Spanish. With Ruth Ahmedzai Kemp, she is co-editor of World Kid Lit, a website dedicated to translated books for children and young adults. Claire also speaks in schools about languages and translation, and was named Outreach Champion 2021 by the Institute of Translation and Interpreting.

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ALEX VALENTE is half Tuscan, half Yorkshireman, born in Prato, and works as a translator of poetry and prose from Italian and French into English, and English and French into Italian. He's translated an impressive range of Italian authors and writes *The Italianist* column for the European Literature Network.

SANDRO VERONESI is an Italian novelist, essayist, and journalist from Florence. After studying architecture, he opted for a writing career in his mid twenties and published his first book at the age of 25. He has twice won the Premio Strega, once for his novel *The Hummingbird*.

VALERIA VESCINA is a novelist, critic, guest lecturer and director of the Hampstead Arts Festival's literary programme. A graduate of the Goldsmiths Creative Writing MA, she debuted with *That Summer in Puglia* (2018) and is working on a novel set in sixteenth-century Italy.

PAOLA VITALE is a teacher and also a children's writer who specialises in books on science and biology. She graduated in Biological Sciences in Padua and has a PhD in Biology of Development. She is the author of *Who Will It Be? How Evolution Connects Us All,* published in English in 2020.

CRISTINA VITI is a translator and poet working with Italian, English and French. Her most recent publication was a co-translation of poems by Anna Gréki (*The Streets of Algiers and Other Poems*, Smokestack Books, 2020). Her translation of Elsa Morante's *The World Saved by Kids and Other Epics* (Seagull Books, 2016) was shortlisted for the John Florio Prize.

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SHAUN WHITESIDE is a literary translator from German, French, Italian and Dutch. His translations from Italian include *Q*, *54*, *Manituana* and *Altai* by Luther Blissett/Wu Ming Foundation, *The Solitude of Prime Numbers* by Paolo Giordano and *Venice is a Fish* and *Stabat Mater* by Tiziano Scarpa.

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GIOVANNA ZOBOLI is a writer and publisher. In 2004, together with Paolo Canton, she founded Topipittori, a publisher of children and young adult picture books based in Milan where she is editor and art director. Her own books – over thirty titles – have been published in Italy and abroad.

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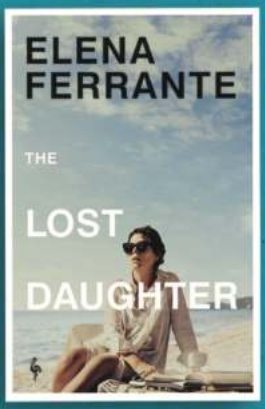

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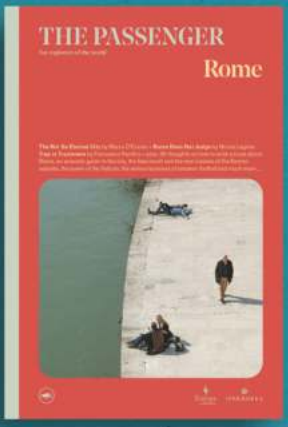

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