



Photo Credit: Alessandra Capodacqua

Da *L'invasione dei granchi giganti*  
from *The Invasion of the Giant Crabs*  
(Marietti, 2010)

The New Language  
to Karin Birmele

A new vocabulary, a language of *eggplants*  
and *carrots* was what you wanted,  
without ks or diereses, stressed,  
above all grave, where being accelerates  
towards the Orient on the third person  
(at times there's an *it*, I know, no joke,

the neutral is a serious thing  
even if it's ectoplasm in my lungs).

Then came the simple and the imperfect, but I wasn't aware  
of your grammarian leap, I gave no explanations  
for the future and in legions the agendas  
hedged, your replies in the past, confusion  
between the continuous and drifts from the perfect.  
I can't even remember the pronoun  
yet suddenly they were all there  
the datives *give me*  
*the grapefruit*, the accusatives, *put your clothes on*,  
the dominatives, *I want some more!*

I remember the semantic evolution, the idiomatic  
duel about *break a leg*,  
the metaphorical resistance to fact,  
the answer in the optative  
(yes, almost like the *baguette* in Brittany),  
the first exchange of rage  
and the philological peace:  
think in the language and not for the language.

Lexical relationship, ours, my *pomegranate*,  
my *octopus*, culinary, you always did love  
a certain stove-like alchemy.

Hypotactic communication, ternary  
discipline, Indo-European.

When I finally  
entered your language, misunderstanding  
was sweeter than ever.

I submitted to an equestrian verb, warlike,  
that could be divided, disjointed  
in the main clause, comprehend everything

in an embrace of root  
and prefix, subordinating  
the altars of subject and the pastures of complement.

With you I took up smoking, with you, new and selfsame language, I smoked them all, to the point of  
nocturnal burning under the larynges, to the point  
of vertical scratching.

I breathed them in  
to release the life of the phonetic bacterium  
to arouse the rājā, rex, rīx of my forefathers,  
the Sarmatian archer and the Vedic charioteer  
still wandering through the catacombs of my lungs.

\* \* \*

#### Postscript for Josif Brodskij

I was born and bred among Piedmont's paddies  
where minute waves mottle  
the perfection of the rectangles and trapezoids:  
from this derives the scarcity of rhymes,  
the starchy voice that constantly hides  
the fragile bubble of emotion.

The plain is not infinite, a lesson of clear weather:  
from the Romentino bridge, the Alps and Mount Rosa  
confirm the possibility of myth,  
of exuberance, beyond the everyday.  
Since I was not schooled by the plain,  
but by the brow of the mountains,

educated in the veneration of mammoths.  
Flake of ice surviving the Pleistocene age,  
this I who is an aquatic we,  
wiggles below the borders,  
like Ticino the smuggler  
from the Swiss Hyperuranion to Po Valley expiation.

*Da L'impronta*  
from *The Mark*  
(Aragno, 2014)

Ajax is Dead

If truth be told, it's just that I'm a bit tired.  
I breath through my nose, following the burden  
of bronchial tubes with almost clinical attention.

I sit on a wooden bench, to the right  
of the river, where bikes and heliotropic  
bodies streak the peace,

while shuttlecocks patrol the greenery  
— pensile topography  
of a Sunday placid and fragile.

Ajax is dead. It's been five summers  
now that I've been dead.  
How the empty bottles  
disappear in the hands of the last

gatherers ...

I'll miss the stones - the obtuse

resistance of flint on the bed  
of the Scamander - and the frugal roasts  
that come before victories or debacles.

But there's no more room for those who blush  
at pinpricks of pride: ours is the time  
of justifications, of alibis.

If truth be told, I'm calm and breathing  
through my nose. Scent of grass and sun  
cream: Ajax is dead.

\* \* \*

Between Oranges and Philosophers

In our sea-bleached blood  
in our Sephardic knees  
in the boreal destiny of the foot

in the living archive of your bequest  
in the enthusiasm of my index finger  
in the scent of Zambia and aftershave

in the intuition of my brothers, in the eyes

of my daughters I see you again father  
at your ease in contemplation and smiles

in those dissembled after-dinner  
exegeses, between oranges and philosophers,  
when for restless adolescents you peeled

the future code:  
be exact in spirit, imperfect  
in endorsing, bold in waiting.

\* \* \*

Tel Aviv

I woke up to the scent of shampoo and iodine  
invading the veranda with the incomplete  
shadow of clothespins and geraniums.

In a café on Bograshov Street  
I visited my palate  
and in a premature taxi I met

my hand. Between the red  
neon of a nightclub and a giant  
menorah I heard it all:

your genealogies,

your franco-allemande consonants  
your legends of kings and instructors,

your stories of sores and sinks  
until you unveiled for me  
the secret cavity of the city.

### *From A Perfect Exile, Selected Poems 2000-2015*

#### A Perfect Exile

I remember a fever north of Lyon  
where the hills turn shoulders  
of milk and emerald towards the Gulf,  
a car door (which afforded little  
solitude) and a timber-framed cottage  
on the ridge of a platonic mound.

When we passed through the gate to the yard,  
a people of ancient hands and voices  
like a psalm took the devastated  
margins of our souls into care.  
We were the image of a perfect exile  
and our home a cell of eternity.

\* \* \*

## Himalaya

And so a new day begins, another  
fabulous flight from the night's  
damages, with the light translated  
by the curtains on your relaxed face,  
the quilts rumped like Himalaya  
snowy between the India of your body

and the desert of my indecision:  
then the sweeter life  
climbs both of us, insinuates itself, asks  
for consideration and breakfast  
and a quicker step towards the parquet  
of the new day, the new fable.

## New Poems (2015-2019)

### Other People's Houses

I wasn't afraid of other people's houses  
as a child. The half-open door  
of a bathroom, the dim light

of a dinette, the unpredictable smells  
of kitchens in afternoon stand-by,  
the cliffs of light,

the alien ambushes of cast-off tights,



or the vague outline of lace-leaf –  
everything was arranged

cartographically in the foretaste  
of future adventure, everything was part  
of the map of hidden treasures.

I wasn't afraid of other people's houses  
as a child, but now  
their ghosts come to haunt me:

the pink slippers  
attentively watching  
the disconnected distractions of play

the parabolic curve  
of a Polistil track, heinous  
regulator of affections and tensions

or the darkness of a wardrobe,  
in back of unknown clothes,  
where I lost the oxygen missing now to the count.

\* \* \*

Postcard

I'm writing you from a place I don't know,

where the winds seems to regenerate  
in the corners of houses and the moon  
is an insect-covered headlight,  
a place lacking any priority,  
where the postage stamp is of my design,  
the plain a stylistic invention  
and the anguish a cartographic concept.  
If you were here now, you'd be furious  
because I allowed a place  
like this to exist, but don't worry  
I'll get out of this postcard, too:  
on the back I've found the map  
that leads to another dimension.

Translated by Brenda Porster

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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### Federico Italiano

Federico Italiano was born in Galliate (Novara) in 1976 and lives now in Vienna, where he works as a senior researcher at the Austrian Academy of Sciences. He teaches Comparative Literature at the LMU Munich. Italiano is a poet, essayist, critic, editor and translator of German, English and

Spanish poetry into Italian. His poems have been translated into German, Spanish, English, French, Hebrew, Albanian and Romanian and are included in various anthologies, in Italy and abroad. After his debut collection of poems, *Nella costanza* (Atelier 2003), he published *L'invasione dei granchi giganti* (Marietti 2010), *L'impronta* (Aragno 2014) and a collection of selected poems *Un esilio perfetto. Poesie scelte 2000-2015* (Feltrinelli 2015). He has also published essays on poetry and literary theory, including *Translation and Geography* (Routledge 2016), and edited anthologies and collective volumes, including an anthology of Italian poetry in German translation (with Michael Krüger, Hanser 2013) and an anthology of the young European poetry, *Grand Tour. Reisen durch die junge Lyrik Europas* (with Jan Wagner, Hanser 2019).