



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



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).