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Final Thesis

# Translating the poetry of Patrizia Cavalli: field notes, challenges and language experiments


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## Abstract

This study analyses the poetry of contemporary Italian writer Patrizia Cavalli. Working from the perspective of translation studies and with the support and guidance of research on literary translation, this work will also provide a translation from Italian into English of a selection of poems within the author's body of work, with a focus on compositions that are especially relevant from a linguistic and stylistic point of view. A section of this thesis is devoted to the description of the issues and challenges encountered during the translation process, highlighting the peculiarities of both collaborative and solo poetry translation.



## Keywords

Italian poetry; poetry translation; Patrizia Cavalli.

*To my family*

*I would have chosen you anyway*

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## Introduction

Poetry is important. Reading poetry is important. Consequently, translating poetry is also important because it allows a wider readership to access poems originally written in a language they might not speak, read or understand. The aim of language learning and translation is, among other things, to bridge the gap between different people, places and cultures. Poetry translation is one of the most challenging yet powerful bridges that can be built but also crossed. That is why translators and linguists who want to try their hand at translating poetry not only have a demanding task ahead of themselves but also a very delicate one, as translating poetry is at once a responsibility and a privilege, an immense pleasure and an onerous endeavour. Across the centuries, from Dante to Leopardi, Italian poetry has been translated numerous times and translations of major Italian poems are available in countless versions.

Patrizia Cavalli is one of the most beloved Italian poets of the 20th and 21st centuries. Over the decades, her verses have gathered a large following both in Italy and abroad, and her epigrammatical compositions have made their way from the 1970s Einaudi minimalist collections to present-day Instagram pages, without losing any of their relevance and poignancy. But, as Robert J. Rodini states in his essay on Patrizia Cavalli, "relatively little critical attention has been paid Cavalli's poetry in spite of a general recognition of her importance".[1] This thesis aims to contribute to filling the gaps in the literary criticism, analysis and translation of Cavalli's works, which are much cherished but at times overlooked.

The first chapter of this thesis will trace a portrait of author Patrizia Cavalli, starting from her biographical background and including a brief survey of her artistic production, which will take into consideration the thematic, linguistic and formal choices she makes in her writing. The main sources for this chapter were newspaper articles and interviews with Patrizia Cavalli herself and the people close to her.

The second chapter traces a short history of poetry translation as an artistic and creative practice, drawing on translation studies and theories

[1] Robert J. Rodini, ""…avaro seme di donna": Patrizia Cavalli's Transgressive Discourse," *Romanic Review* 89, no. 2 (March 1998): 270.

spanning from the mid-20th century to the present. In addition to analysing solo poetry translation – which is the most traditionally recognised method of translating – a section of this chapter is dedicated to the practice of collaborative translation.

The third and final chapter contains an outline of the translation method chosen for Cavalli's poems, the strategies that were employed and some of the challenges that were encountered along the translation process, including some examples taken from the translated poems. Thirty poems were selected from Cavalli's two last published collections, *Datura* (2013) and *Vita meravigliosa* (2020), of which no published English translations exist to date.

## CHAPTER 1

## *The All Mine Singular I*

Patrizia Cavalli was born in Todi, a town in the municipality of Perugia – the capital city of Umbria, a landlocked region of central Italy – on 17 April 1947 and died in Rome (where she had been living since her twenties) on 21 June 2022.[2]

Patrizia Cavalli photographed by Dino Ignani in Rome in the 1980s (https://www.dinoignani.net/)

In an interview with Annalena Benini, Cavalli stated that she started writing poems in elementary school, after seeing Kim Novak's performance in William Holden's 1955 film *Picnic*.[3] Cavalli spent her adolescence between Umbria and the Marche region, where her father had to relocate for work, before moving to Rome in 1968 to study philosophy, graduating with a thesis on the aesthetics of music. In 1972, she rented a room in a big, labyrinthine house with other students near Campo de' Fiori, a square at the border between two

[2] "Patrizia Cavalli e Elsa Morante," *Rai Cultura*, https://www.raicultura.it/letteratura/articoli/2018/12/Patrizia-Cavalli-il-mio-incontro-con-Elsa-Morante-c516be76-6d3e-4cff-bfac-8e66197a8560.html.

[3] Annalena Benini, "If Kim Novak Were to Die: A Conversation with Patrizia Cavalli," translated by Miranda Popkey and Oriana Ullman, *The Paris Review*, 5 August 2022, https://www.theparisreview.org/blog/2022/08/05/if-kim-novak-were-to-die-a-conversation-with-patrizia-cavalli/.

Roman neighbourhoods (*rione* Parione and *rione* Regola) and famous for having the best outdoor market in the city. Eventually, Cavalli bought that house for herself, living and working (and hosting countless and very memorable lunches and dinners for her many friends) there until her death.[4] In Rome, she met and became friends with writer Elsa Morante: though Cavalli had been writing poetry most of her life, it was Morante who – after asking her: "So you, what do you do?" and requesting to read some of her works[5] – first "legitimised" her work and called her a poet. In doing so, Morante used the word "poeta" (the Italian word for male poets, a masculine noun) instead of "poetessa" (the feminine noun used for female poets), and Cavalli insisted on being called "poeta" for the rest of her life, stating that the female equivalent "almost sounds like a mockery".[6] Cavalli's dear friend Elsa Morante, together with Umberto Saba and Sandro Penna, will also be among the main poetic points of reference for Cavalli's writing from the very beginning of her career. Their influence is especially noticeable in the favouring of daily and simple atmospheres and themes, essential aesthetic forms and a language that though plain, bare and occasionally even raw, does not refrain from employing elegant yet subtle stylistic structures rooted in more traditional and classic artistic and poetic forms.[7]

Patrizia Cavalli was also known and appreciated for her (oftentimes sold-out) public readings in theatres and halls – the events at Renzo Piano's Auditorium Parco della Musica[8] and the Basilica of Maxentius and Constantine[9] in Rome were especially memorable – all across Italy and, at times, even abroad, as is the case of the musical reading events at Casa Italiana Zerilli-

[4] Marella Chia Caracciolo, "Lady of the Lamps," *World of Interiors*, 21 February 2023. https://www.worldofinteriors.com/story/patrizia-cavalli-rome-apartment.
[5] Benini, "Kim Novak."
[6] Roberta Scorranese, "Patrizia Cavalli: «Vivo senza amore da anni. Non chiamatemi poetessa, sono poeta»," *Corriere della Sera*, 29 August 2020, https://www.corriere.it/cultura/trend-topic/notizie/patrizia-cavalli-vivo-senza-amore-anni-non-chiamatemi-poetessa-sono-poeta-8ab8c83e-e935-11ea-a9ca-79a6b2bfb572.shtml.
[7] Ambra Zorat, "La poesia femminile italiana dagli anni Settanta a oggi. Percorsi di analisi testuale," (PhD diss., Université Paris IV Sorbonne and Università degli Studi di Trieste, 2009), 275.
[8] Giulia Ronchi, "È morta a 75 anni Patrizia Cavalli, tra le più grandi della poesia italiana," *Artribune*, 21 giugno 2022. https://www.artribune.com/editoria/2022/06/morta-patrizia-cavalli-poesia-italiana/.
[9] Gini Alhadeff, afterword to *My Poems Won't Change the World*, by Patrizia Cavalli. (London: Penguin Books, 2018), 141.

Marimò at the New York University in 2013[10] and at the Centre Culturel Italien in Paris in 2007.[11]

### *1.1 And you, books, don't be such books!*

Patrizia Cavalli's first published poems appeared in Roberto Longhi and Anna Banti's magazine *Paragone* in August 1973 and then in Alberto Carocci and Alberto Moravia's *Nuovi argomenti* in February 1974. Cavalli published most of her poetry with the publishing house Einaudi, founded by Giulio Einaudi in Turin in 1933 and famous, among other things, for its poetry series, nicknamed "la bianca" for its minimal white covers. Cavalli's first three collections, *Le mie poesie non cambieranno il mondo* (1974, dedicated to Elsa Morante, who came up with the title for the collection),[12] *Il Cielo* (1981) and *L'io singolare proprio mio* (1992) were merged into *Poesie (1974-1992)*, published in 1992, again by Einaudi. Other poetry collections followed: *Sempre aperto teatro* in 1999, *Pigre divinità e pigra sorte* in 2006, *Datura* in 2013, and *Vita meravigliosa* in 2020. In 2012, she collaborated with Italian singer-songwriter Diana Tejera on a hybrid collection of poems and songs titled *Al cuore fa bene far le scale*, and in 2017, for the publishing house Quodlibet, Cavalli published a bilingual collection of poems on fashion with the title *Flighty Matters*. Her only published prose work (a collection of short miscellaneous texts) is called *Con passi giapponesi* [With Japanese Steps] and came out with Einaudi in 2019.

Cavalli was not only a poet and a prose writer, she was also a translator. She translated Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Othello* and *Twelfth Night* from English into Italian and Molière's *Amphitryon* from French into Italian. A collection of her translations of Shakespeare's plays was published in 2016 by nottetempo with the title *Shakespeare in scena*.

In addition to poetry, prose and translations, Cavalli wrote two audio

[10] Monica Straniero, "La poesia indie di Diana Tejera e Patrizia Cavalli a New York," *La Voce di New York*, 28 September 2014, https://lavocedinewyork.com/arts/musica/2014/09/28/la-poesia-indie-di-diana-tejera-e-patrizia-cavalli-a-new-york/.

[11] Istituto Italiano di Cultura di Parigi, "#IICChezVous littérature de nos archives – la poésie de Patrizia Cavalli," accessed 14 June 2023, https://iicparigi.esteri.it/fr/gli_eventi/calendario/iicchezvous-letteratura-la-poesia-2/.

[12] Camilla Valletti, "Il tempo della valigia. Intervista a Patrizia Cavalli," *L'indice dei libri del mese* 11, (November 2006).

dramas for RAI (the Italian national public broadcasting company), titled *La bella addormentata* [Sleeping Beauty] and *Il guardiano dei porci* [The Swineherd].[13]

A selection of Cavalli's translated poems – titled *My Poems Won't Change the World* – edited by Gini Alhadeff was first published in 1998 by Farrar, Straus and Giroux (followed by several reprints) and then by Penguin Modern Classics in 2018. It includes a total of 111 poems from the author's first six collections, published from 1974 to 2006, and contains translations by Gini Alhadeff, Judith Baumel, Geoffrey Brock, Moira Egan, Damiano Abeni, Jonathan Galassi, Jorie Graham, Kenneth Koch, J. D. McClatchy, David Shapiro, Susan Stewart, Brunella Antomarini, Mark Strand and Rosanna Warren. To date, there are no published translations of any of the poems from her last two published collections, *Datura* (2013) and *Vita meravigliosa* (2020).

On September 6, 2023, a short documentary film by French director Céline Sciamma and titled *This Is How a Child Becomes a Poet* premiered at the 80th edition of the Cinema Biennale in Venice.[14] The short film was filmed in Cavalli's home in Rome shortly after her death, and it is the director's homage to the poet's legacy and friendship. A second, longer documentary film on Cavalli's life and work, titled *Le mie poesie non cambieranno il mondo*, written and directed by Annalena Benini and Francesco Piccolo, came out in Italian cinemas on September 14th, 2023.[15]

### 1.2 Her poems won't change the world (but they contain it)

Cavalli's poetry manages to be at once incredibly universal and extremely individual, welcoming and excluding, rarefied and tangible. As Alberto Asor Rosa has noted, Cavalli is a poet of great ambivalence and many contradictions, and she is never "one or the other […], but one and the other,

[13] Elisa Mauro, "Patrizia Cavalli, la poetessa che non lasciamo andare via," *L'Auditoriu*, 22 June 2022, https://lauditoriu.com/2022/06/22/patrizia-cavalli-la-poetessa-che-non-lasciamo-andare-via/.
[14] La Biennale di Venezia, "This Is How a Child Becomes a Poet," https://www.labiennale.org/en/cinema/2023/program-cinema-2023-public/how-child-becomes-poet-2023-09-06-11-00.
[15] Fandango, "Le mie poesie non cambieranno il mondo," https://www.fandango.it/film/le-mie-poesie-non-cambieranno-il-mondo/.

with extraordinary contemporaneity and interpenetration."[16] Though her verses and aesthetics are clearly recognisable, Cavalli is also an author who is unbound by form and themes. Attempting to assess the scope of her work, Rodini wrote that "Cavalli's verse moves between the *hic* and *nunc* of everyday experience and the wider reaches of infinite meaninglessness […], between often claustrophobic enclosure and the din and chaos of an urbanscape."[17] This double, all-encompassing nature also shines through the broad variety of themes addressed in her poems, of which Barbara Marras makes a playful list:

> her house, the dust around the chairs, the scattered clothes, the cups on the bedside table, the dimness of certain corners, golden specks of dust, the light through the shutters, the view from the window, the sky above the roofs and between the chimneys, the muffled or violent noises of the world, the distance between the bed and the table, between the armchair and the windowsill, the time enclosed in that distance, in the position of objects, in their oblivion, the past and the future embedded in matter and form.[18]

Cavalli's poems make the most minute and mundane facts appear crucial and massive: every single, little thing is granted the same dignity as poetry's universal and ever-present themes, such as love, life and death, and each word is given weight and importance. Idleness and movement are equally deserving of being portrayed and immortalised through her verses. Her poetry is "simple, direct, energetic, and sometimes wild (…), a poetry far from the great events, founded on the candour of individual confession, and the intensification of the everyday."[19] Nothing is ever deemed too insignificant, and everything deserves

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[16] Alberto Asor Rosa, "Il ritmo di Patrizia Cavalli," *la Repubblica*, 22 July 2006. https://ricerca.repubblica.it/repubblica/archivio/repubblica/2006/07/22/il-ritmo-di-patrizia-cavalli.html.

[17] Rodini, "Transgressive Discourse," 271.

[18] "(…) la sua casa, la polvere attorno alle sedie, gli indumenti sparsi, le tazze sul comodino, la penombra di certi angoli, il pulviscolo dorato, la luce attraverso le persiane, la vista dalla finestra, il cielo di sopra i tetti e tra i comignoli, i rumori del mondo che giungono attutiti o violenti, la distanza fra il letto e il tavolo, fra la poltrona e il davanzale, il tempo racchiuso in quella distanza, nella posizione degli oggetti, nel loro oblio, il passato ed il futuro impliciti nella materia e nella forma."
Barbara Marras, "Le sue poesie mi cambiano il mondo. Fraintendimenti e derive. Appunti incerti sulla poesia di Patrizia Cavalli," *Biblioteca Flavio Beninati*, 24 June 2021, https://biblioteca.flaviobeninati.net/le-poesie-di-patrizia-cavalli/. All translations are mine unless otherwise stated.

[19] Gianluidi Simonetti, "Italian Poetry Today: New Ways to Break the Line," *Poetry* 191, no. 3

to be noticed and consecrated in a poem, an ode, a song, a thank-you note, a eulogy. Life for Patrizia Cavalli is an excuse to use words, play with them, build with them, do somersaults and cartwheels, invent new worlds and deconstruct existing ones. For her, there is no boundary, no middle ground between life and literature,[20] experience is also the representation of experience.[21] Every word has "an intrinsic power"[22] and the most important thing in poetry is "to leave words their liberty"[23] because "there are no beautiful or ugly words, they are all wonderful, as long as they are real and relevant."[24] In an interview, Cavalli even said: "I don't have a soul, I have only feelings and words."[25] She uses these words to talk about

> absences, desire, nostalgia, hasty departures and temporary returns, laborious and difficult awakenings, escapes and retreats, surrenders, defeats, real and fake victories, heartfelt attempts (…), faces, looks, conversations, dinners and walks (…), friends, mothers, sisters, aunts [who] shake their heads, comfort, forgive, welcome, understand and misunderstand, answer the phone, drain the pasta, ask for clarifications and justifications, get bored, get lost, die, comment, wait patiently.[26]

Other recurring themes and figures in her poetry are cats, the city, the sky, bars and restaurants, the self, the body – in all its shapes and conditions: her own, that of others, sick, healthy, big, tiny, experiencing pleasure and pain – and

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(December 2007): 237.
[20] Enrico Palandri, "Patrizia Cavalli: dove arriva la poesia," *Doppiozero*, 22 June 2022, https://www.doppiozero.com/patrizia-cavalli-dove-arriva-la-poesia.
[21] Filippo Andrea Rossi, "Oltre io, corpo, oggetto. Proposte per una critica pragmatica a partire da Patrizia Cavalli," *Enthymea* 25 (2020): 467.
[22] Scorranese, "Patrizia Cavalli."
[23] Benini, "A Conversation."
[24] "Non ci sono parole belle o brutte. Tutte sono stupende. Purché siano reali e rilevanti." Leonetta Bentivoglio, "Patrizia Cavalli: "Io, la malattia e le mie pene d'amor perdute"," *la Repubblica*, 7 September 2016, https://www.repubblica.it/cultura/2016/09/07/news/patrizia_cavalli_io_la_malattia_e_le_mie_pene_d_amor_perdute_-147331659/.
[25] Benini, "A Conversation."
[26] "(…) assenze, desiderio, nostalgia, partenze frettolose e ritorni provvisori, risvegli laboriosi e difficili, fughe e ritirate, rese, disfatte, vittorie vere e false, tentativi volenterosi (…), i visi, gli sguardi, le conversazioni, le cene e le passeggiate (…), gli amici, le mamme, le sorelle, le zie: scuotono il capo, consolano, perdonano, accolgono, capiscono e non capiscono, rispondono al telefono, scolano la pasta, richiedono chiarimenti e giustificazioni, annoiano, si perdono, muoiono, commentano, attendono pazienti
Marras, "Appunti incerti."

love. Cavalli's sharp gaze on life and the world make for witty and even playful compositions that speak to each of her readers on a visceral level. Another key trope of Cavalli's poetry is the metalinguistic and metapoetic reflection, which occupies a central place in her production. Cavalli's first public collection, whose title *My Poems Won't Change the World* is a particularly telling manifesto of poetics, underlines "the impossibility of poetry interfering with the public sphere"[27] and influencing reality, with a dramatic awareness of the limitations of art that still did not hinder in the slightest the complete devotion of the poet to her art throughout her life.

### 1.3 *Keeper of words*

When it comes to wording, Cavalli skilfully weaves more old-fashioned expressions and vocabulary with daily language, operating "a choice of vocabulary and syntax modelled on contemporary everyday speech and craftily reproduced using the classic measures of the Italian poetic tradition, at times revisited or subtly retouched with uncommon mastery."[28] Mira Rosenthal defined Cavalli's poetry as pervaded by "languor and airy tenderness"[29] and her language has been labelled as "familiar, everyday and contemporary" with a "classical echo."[30] Cavalli's ability to blend poetic structures and words deemed more traditional with simpler and plainer ones contributed to making her minimalist poetry beloved by a wide readership, both in Italy and abroad, throughout the decades. Cavalli was not afraid of banality, or even repetition, as demonstrated by this poem dedicated to the concepts of house and home:

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[27] Zorat, "La poesia femminile italiana," 280.
[28] Antonello Borra, "Roman Piazzas: Civic Poetry in a Text by Patrizia Cavalli," *Annali d'italianistica* 28, (2010): 403.
[29] Mira Rosenthal, "The Languor and Airy Tenderness of Patrizia Cavalli's *My Poems Won't Change the World*," *The Kenyon Review*, 2015. https://kenyonreview.org/kr-online-issue/2015-fall/selections/my-poems-wont-change-the-world-by-patrizia-cavalli-738439/.
[30] Cultura Bologna, "Una installazione con i versi di Patrizia Cavalli nella Sala del Consiglio comunale," 17 April 2023. https://www.culturabologna.it/news/una-installazione-con-i-versi-di-patrizia-cavalli-nella-sala-del-consiglio-comunale.

*[La casa. Beato chi è padrone della casa,]*

La casa. Beato chi è padrone della casa,
non dico della casa catastale, ma della casa,
della casa reale. Per quindici anni
io sono stata ospite della mia casa,
un'ospite indesiderata. Buio,
più lampadine metto e più fa buio.
Beato chi non vede le curve, gli spigoli,
le ombre, beato chi, vero proprietario,
usa e abusa di quello che gli è dato.
Io sono in soggezione dei rigidi cuscini,
dei libri aperti, dei corridoi inutili
e feroci, dei quadri appesi, dei cimiteri
di camicie e sciarpe che in ogni stanza
io stessa ho seminato. [31]

*[The house. Blessed be the master of the house,]*

The house. Blessed be the master of the house,
not of the cadastral house, but of the house,
of the real house. For fifteen years
I have been a guest in my own house,
an unwelcome guest. Darkness,
the more lightbulbs I put up, the darker it gets.
Blessed be those who do not see the curves, the edges,
the shadows, blessed be those who, true owners,
use and abuse what they are given.
I am in awe of the stiff cushions,
of the open books, of the useless and fierce
corridors, of the hanging pictures, of the cemeteries
of shirts and shoes that in every room
I myself have sown.

[31] Patrizia Cavalli, *Poesie (1974-1992)* (Torino: Einaudi, 1992), 189.

In this fourteen-verse poem, there are several repetitions: “casa” [house] is mentioned six times, “beato chi” [blessed be] and “io” [I] three times, “ospite” [guest] and “buio” [darkness] are each mentioned twice. Still, this does not denote a lack of care or attention in the composition, or even a scarcity of synonyms and alternative expressions available in the poet’s vocabulary. It is simply that whenever there is a direct and straightforward way of calling things, of expressing feelings, of describing situations, that is the one Cavalli will choose to get her point across with her verses, making the “everyday explode between the lines, an everyday that she observes and puts into poetry, bringing together many of us.”[32] As she revealed in an interview, for her the main ingredients for producing poetry are “certainly silence, idleness, stillness, helpless attention, wonder, and a precarious I.”[33] Poetry is both a conscious, intentional activity, and an unconscious, spontaneous and uncontrollable one. Some poems encapsulate the “fanatic, pedantic and biting”[34] labouring of the poet’s wilful, thorough and well-calculated expressive endeavour, whereas other compositions (especially shorter ones), as Cavalli herself admitted, “are ready-made, they are formed without my knowledge, they arrive all cheerful, catching me by surprise, they knock and I open, I just have to transcribe them, without any effort.”[35]

Another distinguishing feature of Cavalli’s poetry is the unapologetic self-referentiality of her verses: everything happens in relation with and to the writing “I” of the author – her self, her “amorous” and “always thinking body, a body perceiving itself through eye and fingertip, heart, vagus nerve, lymph node all with pens at their disposal”[36] – which filters the world around itself and is the master of all its own actions and interactions, even those involving other beings. When asked about her frequent poetic self-portraits, Cavalli replied:

> It’s a misunderstanding. I have no special predilection for Patrizia Cavalli. In my eyes I am nothing more than an object of investigation that arouses

[32] Anna Toscano, “Le epifanie della vita: le opere di Patrizia Cavalli e Lisetta Carmi,” *Balthazar* 4, (2022): 56.
[33] Lisa Ginzburg, “Le parole che suonano,” *L’Unità*, 3 June 2002.
[34] Giorgio Agamben, “Per Patrizia Cavalli,” *Quodlibet*, 29 August 2022. https://www.quodlibet.it/giorgio-agamben-per-patrizia-cavalli.
[35] Ginzburg, “Le parole che suonano.”
[36] Alhadeff, afterword, 139-140.

> feelings and considerations in me, as anyone else could. The difference is that since I have me around day and night, I have become an expert on myself and have perhaps grown a little fond of me. That's all.[37]

One of the compositions in her first collection, *Poesie (1974-1992)*, perfectly exemplifies Cavalli's use of repetition coupled with the almost obsessively recurring theme of the body:

*[Pessimo esempio, pessimo riposo]*

Pessimo esempio, pessimo riposo
pessimo pessimo è il dormire
finto accanto al corpo
inusuale e variopinto.
Pessimamente hai fatto
l'arduo manufatto
del penetrare il corpo
misero assuefatto al rituale.[38]

*[Bad example, bad rest]*

Bad example, bad rest
bad, bad is the fake sleep
next to the body
unusual and colourful.
Badly have you done
the arduous artefact
of penetrating the miserable body
inured to the ritual.

The supremacy of the self is also openly manifested in the title of the third book that makes up *Poesie (1974-1992)*, which is *L'io singolare proprio mio* [The All

[37] Ginzburg, "Le parole che suonano."
[38] Cavalli, *Poesie*, 155.

Mine Singular I]. The poet's self rules over every verse, every perception, it is "theatralised,"[39] and uses the Other as nothing more than a mirror to admire its reflected image.[40] The justification, the price paid for this insolent narcissism is the poem itself which, through each of its verses, obliterates and expiates its sinful self-centredness by bestowing upon the readers an account of its adventures in the world.[41] The self-consciousness of the poet generates a "self-awareness" in the poems, too, which "interact, in the most varied ways, with the fact itself of being poetry."[42] The only thing that can bridge the gap between the self and the Other is love,[43] the love Cavalli has looked for, sung, cursed, caressed and that, in a 2020 interview with Roberta Scorranese, she admits she has been living without for years, unable to accept even just the thought of a potential rejection.[44]

The inner workings of the body and of the mind dominate Cavalli's entire production. As Gini Alhadeff, one of the translators and the editor of the English edition of *My Poems Won't Change the World* underlined in the afterword of the collection, "her mental rumblings – psychology – are as loud as her physical ones – physiology – and demand equal amounts of attention."[45] In many cases, these two domains are often conflated in a single composition, as is the case of this poem which merges the ever-present themes of love and of the body, presenting "Physiological Love" as an utterly loveless, persecuting character that tortures and enslaves the body of the author:

*[Incapace d'amore, Amore Fisiologico]*

Incapace d'amore, Amore Fisiologico
con i più bassi mezzi mi tortura.
Ha a sua disposizione la vastità del corpo

[39] Sabrina Stroppa, "Negli anni Ottanta: luoghi e modi della giovane poesia contemporanea," *Configurazioni* 1, no. 1 (2022): 27.
[40] Maddalena Bergamin, "Il soggetto contemporaneo nella poesia di Anedda, Cavalli e Gualtieri. Appunti per un rinnovamento dello sguardo critico," *Ticontre, Teoria Testo Traduzione* 8 (November 2017): 119-123.
[41] Bergamin, "Il soggetto contemporaneo," 119.
[42] Filippo Andrea Rossi, "Oltre io, corpo, oggetto," 481.
[43] Rosenthal, "Languor and Airy Tenderness."
[44] Scorranese, "Patrizia Cavalli."
[45] Alhadeff, aftterword, 139.

reso ancora più vasto dal dolore.
Il sangue raspa e preme contro vene
e arterie e l'osso sterno che ripara
il cuore si sbriciola in acri trafitture.
Un sodalizio di lacrime e languore
si addensa nella zona occipitale
mentre una lama attraversa la cervice
e scende lunga quanto la dorsale.
Filo spinato elettrificato
penetra il manto della pia madre
e sparge scariche nel lobo temporale.
Il nervo vago ormai terrorizzato
lascia le redini e imbizzarrisce il cuore.
La linfa senza ordini e governo
non riesce più a fare il suo viaggio
si ferma sui binari dove capita
o ingorga le situazioni ghiandolari.
Solo terrore c'è e solo smarrimento.
E tutto questo per farmi confessare
che io non sono in nessun modo mai spirituale.[46]

*[Incapable of love, Physiological Love]*

Incapable of love, Physiological Love
tortures me by the basest of means.
It has at its disposal the vastness of the body
rendered even vaster by pain.
Blood rushes and presses against veins
and arteries, and the sternum that shelters
the heart shatters into sharp spurs.
A sodality of tears and languor
gathers in the occipital zone

[46] Patrizia Cavalli, *Pigre divinità e pigra sorte* (Torino: Einaudi, 2006), 89.

while a blade pierces the cervix
and descends all down the backbone.
Barbed wire electrified
penetrates the mantle of the pia mater
and sends shocks into the temporal lobe.
The vagus nerve by now terrorized
drops the reins and frenzies the heart
Lymph without orders, ungoverned,
no longer can make its journey
stops along the tracks wherever
or jams the glandular terminals.
Nothing but terror is there and dismay.
And all this just to make me admit
that I am in no way ever spiritual.[47]

As Sara Bresciani wrote, in Cavalli's production "the fake bourgeois tragedy of the movements of the spirit is desacralised and translated onto the body, where falling in love is a stomachache and depression is a migraine."[48] Everything happening in the mind has an exact (and, oftentimes, quite painful) correspondence in the body. In describing the symptoms afflicting both psyche and flesh, Cavalli is precise, sharp and medical, without sparing the readers frequent references to her excruciating headaches and being as detailed about the state of her digestive system as she is with the contents of an Italian dinner table at Christmastime:

*[Mal di testa, mal di testa, dov'è il furore?]*

*Mal di testa mal di testa, dov'è il furore?*
*Noi discutiamo tra le pastasciutte*
*complimentiamo i cuochi, noi ci portiamo*
*fino alla nuova notte e al panettone*

[47] Patrizia Cavalli, *My Poems Won't Change the World* (London: Penguin Books, 2018), 106, translated by Gini Alhadeff.
[48] Sara Bresciani, "Patrizia Cavalli, requiem per un peso piuma," *Esquire*, 28 June 2022. https://www.esquire.com/it/cultura/libri/a40432942/patrizia-cavalli-requiem-per-un-peso-piuma/.

*smollicando uvette, ma che ci dica insomma*
*qual è la strada dritta della festa,*
*dove ci condurrà la digestione, e che la smetta*
*di offrire le solite parole ricucite,*
*che insomma basta con questo via vai*
*con queste false entrate e queste vere uscite.* [49]

*[Headache, headache, where is the fury?]*

*Headache, headache, where is the fury?*
*We discuss among the pasta*
*we compliment the chefs, we carry ourselves*
*until the new night and the panettone*
*nibbling on raisins, but tell us in short*
*which is the straight way to the party*
*where digestion will lead us, and stop*
*offering the usual stitched-up words,*
*enough of this coming and going*
*of these false arrivals and real departures.*

For Patrizia Cavalli, the aim of poetry is "to take something and remove what is superfluous to make it shine,"[50] and a poem can only be considered accomplished "when it moves", since every poem "needs to cross a territory (…), something must happen, there has to be a surprise in the thought, eros in the words."[51] By writing about herself, Cavalli narrated the "universal, luminous banality of being human,"[52] earning the title of "the poet of narcissistic depression but also of joyful nihilism."[53] In fact, her narcissistic discourse is paradoxically much more a form of self-destruction and self-annihilation than an egotistic celebration.[54] Roberto Binetti analysed this feature in detail in his

[49] Cavalli, *Poesie (1974-1992)*, 184.
[50] Scorranese, "Patrizia Cavalli."
[51] Scorranese, "Patrizia Cavalli."
[52] Bresciani, "Requiem."
[53] Bresciani, "Requiem."
[54] Rodini, "…avaro seme di donna."

essay on female self-elegy in Italian poetry, where he writes that "the aporia of self-elegy lies in its making possible what is not envisionable as possible: a mourning when its object and subject are the same."[55] Loneliness, death and oblivion are all present across Cavalli's production, but especially in her last published collection, *Vita meravigliosa*, where the transience of human life is a predominant topic, arguably also because of Cavalli's ongoing struggle with cancer at the time of writing.

### 1.4 *Each one the master of its form*

As far as form and technique are concerned, Cavalli experimented with a variety of approaches and methods, both visually and metrically, at times drawing from classical traditions and at times from freer and more disruptive contemporary metres and formats. In fact, Geoffrey Brock, one of Cavalli's main translators into English, wrote that "her contemporary voice so often makes use of and thereby revitalizes certain traditional techniques."[56] In fact, several scholars have noted the influence of centuries-old literary currents on Cavalli's "neo-Petrarchist modulations,"[57] and Rodini wrote that her poetry "is attracted to human imperfection, almost reprising the baroque dialectic with Petrarchan tradition and its fascination with the macabre and with decay."[58] The influence of Petrarch (and even Dante) on Cavalli's poetry also shines through in the self-elegiac form of her writings.[59] Her predilection, however, has always been for epigrammatic and minimalistic compositions, such as this one:

*[again, again, again]*

again again again[60]
fallo di nuovo[61]

[55] Roberto Binetti, "Posthumous Selves. Transnationalizing Italian Women's Self-Elegy," *Journal of World Literature* 8 (2023): 81.
[56] Geoffrey Brock, quoted in Gini Alhadeff, afterword, 137.
[57] Borra, "Roman Piazzas," 403.
[58] Rodini, "Transgressive Discourse," 273.
[59] Roberto Binetti, "Posthumous Selves," 82-83.
[60] In English in the original.
[61] Cavalli, *Poesia (1974-1992)*, 43.

*[again, again, again]*

again again again
do it again

Filippo Andrea Rossi states that this poem ironically voices the erotic euphoria of the writer-subject and labels it "a definition of poetry" that offers the reader this composition as the minimum form a poem can take.[62] This extreme brevity can elicit endless different reactions from readers: it can be reassuring, puzzling, disorienting, comical or even infuriating. Cavalli's verbal, expressive and figurative strength strikes harder in her more concise compositions than in her longer ones, managing to enclose, convey and portray the themes and tropes dearest to the author in a handful of skilfully-crafted lines. The brevity of these compositions gives them an oxymoronic playful solemnity, a lightness that relieves some of the heaviness intrinsic in some of the themes they address, such as mortality and the evanescence of human life:

*[Che tristezza un'ossatura rumorosa!]*

*Che tristezza un'ossatura rumorosa!*
*Ricordarsi ogni momento dello scheletro*
*che la carne, finché può, copre pietosa.* [63]

*[How sad to have loud bones!]*

*How sad to have loud bones!*
*Being reminded every moment of the skeleton*
*that the flesh, while it can, pitifully covers.*

Here, once again, the body and its parts are at the centre of the focus of both

[62] Rossi, "Oltre io," 471.
[63] Patrizia Cavalli, *Sempre aperto teatro* (Torino: Einaudi, 1999), 64.

poet and poem: the bones and the flesh enveloping them are a constant reminder of the lyric subject's (and more generally, all humans') ephemeral nature, its fragility and mortality. People are essentially nothing more than souls with fragile shells, animals with the ability to write poems about themselves.

*[Essere animale per la grazia]*

*Essere animale per la grazia*
*di essere animale nel tuo cuore.*
*Mi scorge amore, mi scorge quando dormo.*
*Per questo io dormo. Di solito io dormo.* [64]

*[Being animal for the grace]*

*Being animal for the grace*
*of being animal in your heart.*
*Love sees me, it sees me when I sleep.*
*That is why I sleep. I usually sleep.*

This poem intertwines many of the distinguishing features of Patrizia Cavalli's poetry: the incessant use of repetition meets the self-centredness of the author in the last verse of this composition. It is relevant to remember that, in Italian, the personal pronoun often is omitted and implied, as the conjugation of the verb makes it explicit. In fact, in the third verse of the original text, the author simply writes "quando dormo", whereas in the last verse, she repeats twice "io dormo," thus highlighting the first-person pronoun. Still, the writing subject permeates even the spaces where it is not explicitly stated. In fact, as Roberto Binetti writes, "it is not fundamental that the poet always says "I"; that "I" is so expanded, so elastic to the point of including everything in its language, so long as it exists and lives."[65]

Cavalli's minimalist expressive aesthetics has been at times quite harshly

[64] Patrizia Cavalli, *Pigre divinità e pigra sorte* (Torino: Einaudi, 2006), 117.
[65] Binetti, "Posthumous Selves," 100.

criticized for being "too integral to appear crucial or interesting,"[66] but more often praised for its efficient brevity, clarity and sharpness in delivering a whole worldview in a few short verses "which captivate by combining passion and coolness."[67] The bareness of some of her compositions is perceived as irritating and even a display of conceit by some critics, but it might instead be the mark of something else, something quite opposed to this externally-diagnosed self-importance. In fact, in an interview with Lisa Ginzburg, Cavalli explained that "in brevity, there are fewer risks, I gave the least amount of information possible."[68] In this sense, brevity is employed by the poet as a sort of defence mechanism in order to avoid appearing too vulnerable and open.

As far as sound is concerned, Cavalli makes use of rhymes – especially internal ones, but also coupled and alternate rhymes – as "involuntary accidents"[69] that, together with enjambements, contribute to the creation of the musicality and the "melodic quality" that characterises her poetry.[70] Rhythm is essential to the creation and the understanding of Cavalli's poems.[71] The musical substance of the verses is a constant concern for the poet.[72] Cavalli said that she believed that poetry

> is something very mysterious, […] it comes from a certain area of the brain somewhere between that of music and that of speech. Because it resonates. It is a sounding word. But in its own way that doesn't really have to do with music, it's a different kind of sound.[73]

In poetry, words, sounds, ideas and music merge into an autonomous being, something different, something more than the sum of its elements. For Cavalli, poetry is music that entertains, the "sole essential thing that removes the

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[66] Stefano Verdino, "La poesia in Italia 1971-2001. Appunti cronologici ed editoriali," *Italianistica: Rivista di letteratura italiana* 31, no. 2/3 (2002): 371.
[67] Berlin International Festival, "Patrizia Cavalli," accessed 13 June 2023, https://literaturfestival.com/en/authors/patrizia-cavalli/.
[68] Lisa Ginzburg, "Le parole che suonano."
[69] Gianluigi Simonetti, "Gianluigi Simonetti su *Vita meravigliosa* di Patrizia Cavalli," *Claudio Giunta*, accessed 15 June 2023. https://claudiogiunta.it/2020/09/su-vita-meravigliosa-di-patrizia-cavalli/.
[70] Berlin International Festival, "Patrizia Cavalli."
[71] Asor Rosa, "Il ritmo."
[72] Zorat, "La poesia femminile italiana," 272.
[73] Ginzburg, "Le parole che suonano."

subject from the nonsense of the world."[74] Writing also implies listening, keeping an ear out for the noises words make in the mind and in the world.

[74] Zorat, "La poesia femminile italiana," 283.

# CHAPTER 2

## *Poetry translation*

Translating poetry can feel like a daunting and intimidating task. Cavalli herself defined the work of translation as "verbal gymnastics,"[75] because a translator "has to pass through the hell of artifice to conquer the appearance of naturalness."[76] As Gini Alhadeff, the editor and one of the translators of *My Poems Won't Change the World*, wrote in the afterword of the collection, translating poetry "is one of the tortures a poet submits to, a slightly preferable one to not being translated."[77] For many scholars and language professionals, poetry translation is as much a challenging activity as it is a fulfilling and motivating one, since, as Clare Sullivan noted, "the constraints of form can bring out the spark of creativity in a translator."[78] Translation as a general discipline is indeed a creative and artistic endeavour, not merely a mechanical and mathematical one.[79] Translation students learn early on in their academic career that there is no such thing as a "perfect translation" and, as poet and researcher Botao Wu highlights, "[i]n translation, something always gets lost."[80] Poetry translation can have different objectives and cover several linguistic and cultural roles which, consequently, results in a wide variety of approaches and methods. Whatever the aim of any specific translation might be, the goal will most likely not be that of producing a 1:1 literal rendering of the source text in the target language, but rather that of enriching and enlivening the target culture or the community that speaks and/or understands the target language.[81] This chapter will present the state of the art concerning poetry translation, analysing some of the most relevant theories, methods and approaches of several scholars and researchers from the second half of the 20th century until the

[75] Benini, "A Conversation."
[76] Scorranese, "Patrizia Cavalli."
[77] Alhadeff, afterword, 141.
[78] Clare Sullivan, "Poetry," in *The Routledge Handbook of Literary Translation*, ed. Kelly Washbourne and Ben Van Wyke (Abingdon: Routledge, 2019), 278.
[79] Jean Boase-Beier, "Poetry translation," *The Routledge Handbook of Translation Studies*, ed. Carmen Millán and Francesca Bartrina (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), 482-483.
[80] Botao Wu, "Composing and Translating Poetry: Learning From Scholarly and Daily Activities," *LEARNing Landscapes* 15, no. 1 (2022): 34, https://doi.org/10.36510/learnland.v15i1.1084.
[81] Boase-Beier, "Poetry translation," 475.

present day, taking into consideration the work of translation theorists and researchers such as Roman Jakobson, James Holmes, Robert Bly, Francis R. Jones, Susan Bassnett and Jean Boase-Beier. Drawing on theoretical studies and research but also on practical applications of translation theories, methods and techniques, this chapter will also consider the potential of collaborative poetry translation and the role of writers and poets as translators of their own work and/or that of other authors.

### 2.1 Poetry translation: (re)read before use

Can any translator translate poetry? Can any poet translate poetry? Can any bilingual reader of poetry translate poetry? Why should poetry be translated at all? Is it even possible to translate poetry? These (and so many more) interrogatives populate the section of translation studies dedicated to poetry translation, and the subject of research and study – poetry itself – does not really help to resolve most of these questions. So much of poetry and of the poetic world is open to absolutely subjective interpretation that translating poetry could seem like a pointless undertaking right from the start.[82] It is a job that creates many more questions than it does answer, and it keeps doing so more and more as the translation process progresses. French scholar Franck Miroux, though, answered at least one of the questions mentioned above – and by no means the most irrelevant of them – "Why should poetry be translated?", arguing that

> Poetry should be translated to make more and more poems accessible to a non-multilingual readership. Poetry should be translated in order to share the emotion, the vibration of a poem with friends and relatives. It should be translated purely for the sake of the intellectual and physiological pleasure one experiences when helping a poem cross the divide and the threshold between two languages and two cultures. Poetry should be translated, at last, to echo the poet's voice, [their] poetic voice which reaches far beyond the limits of language. Poetry should be translated, in fact, as if we were the

[82] Boase-Beier, "Poetry translation," 478.

> poet [themselves], to lend [them] our own voice.[83]

Poetry translation requires the interaction of a series of "players" (as Francis R. Jones, borrowing from the work of sociologist Erving Goffman, defines the actors involved in the process of poetry translation, including but not limited to the writer, the translator, the target language audience, editors and publishers),[84] and a purpose.[85] For any translator approaching poetry translation, it is crucial to understand what are the elements that characterise the genre itself, paying close attention to the uniqueness and the peculiarity of poetry as a literary, expressive and communicative form. It is interesting to notice how poetry easily escapes precise definitions and categorisations, so much so that these often resort to saying what poetry is *not* or enumerate all the ways in which it differs from prose, rather than straightforwardly explaining what it is. Over the centuries, countless definitions of poetry have been elaborated or attempted, from concise and technical ones to more extended and theoretical ones. For example, the *Encyclopedia Britannica* defines poetry quite abstractly and – no pun intended – poetically, as

> literature that evokes a concentrated imaginative awareness of experience or a specific emotional response through language chosen and arranged for its meaning, sound and rhythm (…) a vast subject, as old as history and older, present wherever religion is present, possibly – under some definitions – the primal and primary form of languages themselves.[86]

There is an added contextually-situated complexity to the already elaborate task of defining poetry, which is the fact that "what users see as typifying poetry as a genre may well vary across time and place."[87] However, Francis R. Jones also argues that there is a more or less "fixed" set of characteristics that identify

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[83] Franck Miroux, "Translating Poetry: Decoding Meaning or Recomposing Harmony?," *Other Words*, no. 36 (December 2010): 108.
[84] Francis R. Jones, *Poetry Translation as Expert Action* (Amsterdam/Philadelphia: Jon Benjamins Publishing Company, 2011), 4.
[85] Sonia Colina, "Evaluation/Assessment," in *Handbook of Translation Studies: Volume 2*, ed. Yves Gambler and Luc van Doorslaer (Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2011), 43.
[86] "poetry," Encyclopedia Britannica, accessed 4 August 2023, https://www.britannica.com/art/poetry.
[87] Jones, *Expert Action*, 29.

poetry (but can also help identify other literary genres) and that transcends time, space and culture. This group of features includes: intrinsic form, namely the language structures used within a certain text, such as rhythm, metre, sound features, themes, figurative language and stylistic devices; function (whenever applicable and identifiable, as poetic texts does not always have or need a specific functional role), which goes beyond the meaning of the verses themselves; and ex-intrinsic framing, which is made up of the elements external to the text and that help readers identify a given text as a poetic one (e.g. book covers, text alignment or design).[88] Jones also expanded this definition by adding that

> poetry typically communicates meaning not only through surface semantics, but also by using out-of-the-ordinary language, non-literal imagery, resonance and suggestions to give fresh, "defamiliarized" perception and convey more than propositional content; among its specific techniques are linguistic patterning (e.g. rhyme or alliteration), word association, wordplay, ambiguity, and/or reactivating an idiom's literal meanings. (…) The communicative function of poetry is rarely informative or persuasive, but rather to entertain or to give heightened emotional or intellectual experience. Though usually written, sound's centrality to poetry often gives it an oral performance element (henceforward, therefore, 'readers' also implies 'listeners').[89]

All these elements that make up poetry as a textual and literary genre must be taken into account by linguists, translators and translation students alike, also because, as Boase-Beier argues, each of these features elicits a corresponding psychological effect on readers.[90] Reading and, therefore, translating poetry is "a valued experience"[91] which allows readers and translators to explore "voices from beyond the boundary fence of our own language."[92] In this sense, "the poetry translator's work (…) is complex and wide-ranging, and can have rich

[88] Jones, *Expert Action*, 29-30.
[89] Francis R. Jones, "Poetry Translation," in *Handbook of Translation Studies: Volume 2*, ed. Yves Gambler and Luc van Doorslaer (Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2011), 117.
[90] Boase-Beier, "Poetry translation," 478.
[91] Jones, *Expert Action*, 7.
[92] Jones, *Expert Action*, 7.

real-world effect,"[93] contributing not only to the enrichment of a literary canon but also to the broadening of the cultural horizons of the target-language readership.

### 2.2 Roman Jakobson and the untranslatability of poetry

Román Ósipovič Jakobsòn (Рома́н О́сипович Якобсо́н, Moscow 1896 – Cambridge, 1982) was a Russian linguist, semiotician and translator who lived and worked in the US for much of his life. He was the founder of the Prague linguistic circle, a European movement that developed structural linguistics theories and methods.[94]

Jakobson believed there were essentially three kinds of translation: intralingual translation, interlingual translation and intersemiotic translation. Intralingual translation (also labelled "rewording") is the interpretation of a verbal sign in a certain language through the use of other signs that belong to the same language. Interlingual translation, known also as "translation proper," is the interpretation of verbal signs in a certain language by using signs belonging to another language. The last kind of translation proposed by Jakobson is intersemiotic translation (or "transmutation"), which is the interpretation of verbal signs through signs belonging to a nonverbal system.[95] Though all three kinds of translations could potentially be applied to poetry translation using more traditional but also quite unconventional techniques, the type of translation that this thesis considers is the second one, interlingual translation, which, as Jakobson explains, does not seek to attain "full equivalence" between the source text and the translation but still attempts to convey the core message of the source poem in the target language.[96]

In his famous 1959 essay *On Linguistic Aspects of Translation*, Jakobson claims that poetry, by its own definition, cannot be translated, and he argues that "both the practice and the theory of translation abound with intricacies, and

[93] Jones, *Expert Action*, 4.
[94] "Roman Jakobson," Encyclopedia Britannica, accessed 8 August 2023, https://www.britannica.com/biography/Roman-Jakobson.
[95] Roman Jakobson, "On Linguistic Aspects of Translation," in *On Translation*, ed. Reuber Arthur Brower (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1959), 260-266.
[96] Jakobson, "Linguistic Aspects," 261.

from time to time attempts are made to sever the Gordian knot by proclaiming the dogma of untranslatability."[97] But Jakobson does not leave an unbridgeable gap between source texts and all potential target audiences by ruling out any possibility for translation; instead, he claims that, in order to rework a poem into a different language than the original, "only creative transposition is possible."[98] According to Jakobson, this transposition can be executed following any of the three methods he lists in his essay: "intralingual transposition – from one poetic shape into another, or interlingual transposition – from one language into another, or finally intersemiotic transposition – from one system of signs into another, e.g., from verbal art into music, dance, cinema, or painting."[99] Jakobson considered poetry a "cross-cultural, intralingual phenomenon (…) subject to an almost limitless combination of circumstantial, geographical and cultural variations,"[100] but at the same time having a subversive potential, as it "undermines the secure contextual perspective of the addresser and the addressee."[101]

During a discussion with the students of the University of Cologne, later published with the title *On Poetic Intentions and Linguistic Devices in Poetry: A Discussion with Professors and Students at the University of Cologne*, Jakobson further develops the concept of "creative transposition", explaining that (as canonically accepted by most translation scholars) much of the meaning of the original text is lost during this process, but that the final product can be recognised and considered as a new and beautiful work of art in its own right. Jakobson also stresses the requirement for translators of poetry to either be poets themselves or to hold a great love for poetry, because "only if one loves poetry (and loves it with understanding), above all, only if one has some empathy, can one do this work."[102]

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[97] Jakobson, "Linguistic Aspects," 262.
[98] Jakobson, "Linguistic Aspects," 266.
[99] Jakobson, "Linguistic Aspects," 266.
[100] Richard Bradford, *Roman Jakobson: Life, Language, Art*, (London/New York: Routledge, 1994), 26.
[101] Bradford, *Roman Jakobson*, 34.
[102] Roman Jakobson and Susan Kitron, "On Poetic Intention and Linguistic Devices in Poetry: A Discussion with Professors and Students at the University of Cologne," *Poetics Today* 2, no. 1a (Autumn 1980): 87-96.

### 2.3 James S. Holmes' (meta)poetic betrayal

James Stratton Holmes (Collins, 1924 – Amsterdam, 1986) was an American poet, translator, editor and scholar.

In the first of his 1988 collection of essays *Translated! Papers on Literary Translation and Translation Studies*, Holmes defines poetry translation as "metapoetry", and thus the poetry translator is a "metapoet", a figure that is at once a literary critic and a poet:

> Linking together these two activities, the critical and the poetic, is an activity which is uniquely the metapoet's: the activity of organizing and resolving a confrontation between the norms and conventions of one linguistic system, literary tradition, and poetic sensibility (…) and the norms and conventions of another linguistic system, literary tradition, and poetic sensibility to be drawn on for the metapoem [they] hope to create.[103]

While trying to bridge the world of the source language and that of the target language, though, the translator/metapoet cannot count on perfect, clear-cut correspondences and equivalences, since every single word in every language belongs to a complex and dense semantic network which cannot easily be deciphered or untangled. That is why, as Holmes states, "on the ideal level, all translation is distortion, and all translators are traitors."[104] In addition to being called traitors, for Holmes translators need to possess "acumen as a critic, craftmanship as a poet and skill in the analysing and resolving of a confrontation of norms and conventions across linguistic and cultural barriers."[105]

Holmes contemplates four ways to convey the poetic form in translation: mimetic, analogical, content-derivative (or organic) and extraneous. When a translator uses the mimetic approach, they try to reproduce a target text that is as close as possible to the source text. The second approach, the analogical one, attempts to create a target text that performs a parallel function to the

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[103] James S. Holmes, "Poem and Metapoem: Poetry from Dutch to English," in *Translated! Papers on Literary Translation and Translation Studies*, 3rd ed. (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2005), 11.
[104] Holmes, "Poem and Metapoem," 9.
[105] Holmes, "Poem and Metapoem," 11.

source text within the target language's cultural system. The mimetic and analogical methods are form-derivative methods, as they focus on the shape and formal elements of poetry rather than its semantic or symbolic meanings. The organic approach, on the other hand, is also called "content-derivative", precisely because the translator prioritises the material of the poem rather than its shape. When translators employ the fourth type of translation, which Holmes calls "extraneous form", they create a text ex-novo, without trying to reproduce either the form or the content of the source poem.[106] On their own, each of these methods has advantages and disadvantages, e.g., the mimetic and analogical forms provide more structure for the translator to build their work on, whereas the extraneous form gives the translator greater flexibility, but Holmes concluded that the most popular approach for 20th-century translators up to that time was the organic form, which focuses on conveying the meaning and imagery of the source poem into the target language, giving formal elements a secondary status in the translation process.[107]

As many other scholars (for example, Francis R. Jones and Jean Boase-Beier, who are discussed later in this chapter) have also pointed out, Holmes stresses the fact that ambiguity is one of the defining characteristics of poetry, and poetry translators have to decide whether to work against it, around it or with it. Holmes eventually concludes that, through a complex and painstaking decision-making process, translators have to choose "one possible interpretation (out of many) of the original poem, re-emphasizing certain aspects at the cost of others."[108] That is why multiple translations and retranslations of a single poem are not only valuable but also needed, since, within a larger constellation of translations of one source poem, each individual and unique target text can shed light on one or more aspects of the original.

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[106] James S. Holmes, "Forms of Verse Translation and the Translation of Verse Form," in *Translated! Papers on Literary Translation and Translation Studies*, 3rd ed. (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2005), 26-27.
[107] Holmes, "Forms of Verse Translation," 28.
[108] James S. Holmes, "Rebuilding the Bridge at Bommel: Notes on the Limits of Translatability," in *Translated! Papers on Literary Translation and Translation Studies*, 3rd ed. (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2005), 50-51.

## 2.4 Robert Bly's *Eight Stages*

American poet Robert Elwood Bly (Lac qui Parle County, 1926 – Minneapolis, 2021) was himself a poetry translator and translation theorist. Most of his thoughts on translation theory are included and enumerated in his 1982 essay *The Eight Stages of Translation*. To explain and exemplify his method of translating poetry, Bly uses a sonnet from Rilke's first series of the *Sonnets to Orpheus* (Die Sonette an Orpheus, 1922) and, throughout the essay, applies the technique he is explaining to the various drafts of the translation of the poem.

The first step Bly – as well as other scholars and translators – recommends is a literal translation into a "flat, prosaic, dumpy"[109] English. This passage is useful to get into the mindset of translating and to clarify the meanings of any potentially unknown words in the source language, target language or both. After completing this first stage, the translator must devote the second stage to answering the question: "What does the poem mean?" According to Bly, the second stage is the one during which "we test how far we are willing to go (…) how much resistance we have."[110] The translator needs to at least attempt to understand the meaning of the poem and whether their personal view is aligned with that of the author or how much he can – through the empathy Jakobson's deemed indispensable for all translators – get close to the poet's sensibility and make it their own. Bly also quite harshly claims that when a translator is unable to empathise or align their thoughts and feelings with those the author was thinking and feeling while writing the poem, then "[they should let the poem alone and not translate it; [they]'ll only ruin it if [they] go ahead."[111] If the translator continues pursuing this work, they will now need to go back to the first literal draft and turn it into a proper text in the target language, which might often mean drastically and radically altering the word order, an action that beginner translators especially resist, in fear of being "disloyal" to either of the languages. Once the poem has been rendered in a more "natural" way in the target language, Bly suggests "translating" it into the

[109] Robert Bly, "The Eight Stages of Translation," *The Kenyon Review* (New Series) 4, no. 2 (Spring 1982): 69.
[110] Bly, "Eight Stages," 71.
[111] Bly, "Eight Stages," 71.

spoken version of that language, claiming that initial drafts most of the times adhere quite closely to what the translator might consider the written or poetic standard of the target language, which could result in the target poem sounding unnatural, unnecessarily old-fashioned or simply unenjoyable. It is crucial to remember that, though poems are nowadays most commonly written down and read in silence, they have an intrinsically aural quality that is inseparable from the written element and that reminds readers of the rich oral tradition poetry belongs to. During the fourth stage, the ear comes into play as the main actor and decision-maker. The question the translator needs to answer during this phase is: "Have you ever heard this phrase spoken?", and the resulting draft needs to reflect the attempt of the translator to create a spontaneous, flowing and pleasurable composition. The fifth stage takes into consideration the mood, feeling and tone of the source text's author, and Bly argues that translators who are also poetry writers themselves can be more accurate judges of this. The point of this stage is "to capture the poem's balance between high and low, dark and light, seriousness and light-heartedness."[112] Stage number six is devoted to sound and tone, and Bly suggests that the translator learns the poem they are working on by heart or at least read it aloud so that they can distinguish between the two sound energies that are present in the poem, "one in the muscle system and one in the ear."[113] During this stage, Bly recommends that translators not rely solely on meter to translate, but also take into account the physical feelings elicited by reading the poem aloud, both in the source version and the translated one. That is why, according to Bly, while translating, translators should pay much more attention to internal rhyme than to ending rhyme, since it is the former that mostly contributes to shaping the overall sound of the poem. The seventh stage involves at least one external figure, who should preferably be a native speaker of the language the translator is not a native speaker of, which can be either the source or target language, though, generally, it is the source language. Bly states that, over the course of the translation process, translators would ideally consistently collaborate or at least have access to a native speaker of the language they are less familiar with but, when that is not possible, they should at least consult them when they have a

[112] Bly, "Eight Stages," 82.
[113] Bly, "Eight Stages," 82.

final (or almost final) draft, since native speakers can more easily pick up on expressive nuances and meanings that even people who have studied the language for years cannot detect. This passage might feel daunting or scary for translators, because by this time "we have been slowly possessing the poem and making it ours – we have to do that to bring it alive – but it is possible that we have kidnapped it instead."[114] To make sure that they have not "kidnapped" either a whole poem or even just some of its meaning or language, a translator should submit a solid, reworked draft of their translation to a native speaker who is familiar with both the literary poetic world and the practice of translation. The eighth and final stage in Bly's translation process consists of drafting a final version of the translation by rereading all previous drafts and making final adjustments to the sound, line divisions, wording and meaning of the target text. During this stage, Bly also advises reading other translators' versions of the same poem, when available, an activity he describes as "fun we can't deny ourselves after all the work, and we can sympathize with each translator."[115]

Overall, Bly's method is very thorough and comprehensive, as it takes into account the crucial elements of poetry – sound and meaning – and suggests multiple ways of approaching them to make sure they are being carefully conveyed in the target language.

### 2.5 Francis R. Jones

Francis R. Jones (Wakefield, 1955) is a poetry translator and professor of Translation Studies at Newcastle University, where he is also Head of the Translating and Interpreting Section of the School of Modern Language.

Jones has worked and written extensively on poetry translation, and in his 2011 book *Poetry Translating as Expert Action: Processes, priorities and networks*, he gives an extremely thorough analysis of the stages and tools involved in poetry translation, starting from the more general context of the practice and progressively moving towards more detailed, step-by-step descriptions of translation procedures and techniques. Jones opens this valuable work by defining poetry as a genre and establishing its communicative

[114] Bly, "Eight Stages," 86.
[115] Bly, "Eight Stages," 87.

function:

> poems typically have one or more of the following features: they use 'marked language (that is, language noticeably different from that in other genres); they have some type of regular linguistic patterning; they exploit the sounds, semantic nuances or associations of words, and not just semantic meanings; they convey meanings beyond the 'propositional content' (i.e. the surface semantics) of the words and grammar; they can give intense emotional, spiritual or philosophical experience to their readers and listeners; and they have high social and cultural status. (…) Understanding a poem, therefore, presumably involves interpreting the potential meanings conveyed by all these features.[116]

In this passage, Jones aptly portrays the aforementioned interaction of elements that characterises poetry and, consequently, poetry translation. His definition of poetry is quite a balanced one, since it includes technical and linguistic aspects but also acknowledges the deeper, even spiritual, power of poetry. Jones conducts his analysis and research on translation using "sociological and social-network models of human agency and interaction" (thus drawing on the works of – among others – Goffman, Latour and Bourdieu), and essentially defines the role of the translator as that of "a thinking, feeling and acting 'subject', who works within networks of people and texts."[117] Jones uses different approaches to address different aspects of translation: the process of real-time translation is examined through a cognitive processing framework; a cognitive pragmatics approach, combining stylistics and literary pragmatics, is used to analyse the communication between translators and readers; and the interaction of translators with the social, cultural and political context is investigated and described using a post-structuralist perspective.[118] According to Jones, this multiplicity of theoretical lenses also mirrors and influences the translator's approach to poetry translation, which he defines as "hybrid" and combining different strategies and techniques depending on the text they are

[116] Jones, *Expert Action*, 1-2.
[117] Jones, *Expert Action*, 13.
[118] Jones, *Expert Action*, 13.

tackling.[119]

Jones identifies three types of source-target outcomes in poetry translation: literals, adaptations and recreative translations. Literals (or "prose renderings") keep intact the semantics of the source text but not its poetic features, often serving as explanatory material integrating the reading of the source text rather than being a stand-alone work of art. These renderings can also be used by poetry translators as "raw material" that can be reworked into target-language poems. Adaptations (also called "versions" or "imitations"), instead, might sacrifice some aspects of the semantics and even the poetic features of the source text in order to produce a text that is as culturally efficient as possible in the target language. It is relevant to specify that, at times, these texts are not even labelled as translations by their creators. The third kind of outcome generated by the interaction of a translator with a source text is that of a "recreative translation", which attempts to transpose into the target text both the source text's semantics and poetic features. This method is the one usually traditionally associated with the general concept of poetry translation and it is the most commonly used by translators, but it is also the most challenging of the three, since it tries to maintain most of the characteristics of the source text while still producing a valuable artwork in the target language.[120]

When sketching the characteristic of the (difficult) role of poetry translators, Jones argues that

> [t]ranslators need to be expert source-poem readers and expert target-poem writers (Bassnett 1998; Folkart 2007). They also need cross-language expertise, to find appropriate counterparts for complexes of source-poem features – and when this proves impossible, the literary judgement to decide what to reproduce, what to recreate more loosely, and what to abandon.[121]

He also divides poet translators into two main categories: "foreign-language 'linguists' with a poetry specialism, or published target-language 'poets' with an

[119] Jones, *Expert Action*, 39.
[120] Jones, *Poetry Translation*, 118.
[121] Jones, *Poetry Translation*, 119.

interest in translation."[122] Poetry translation requires not only technical abilities but also a peculiar sensitivity that can often be found more easily in or is more readily accessed by those who produce poetry themselves. Touching upon, among other things, the sensitive topic – usually either ignored or very briskly considered by most studies on the work of translators – of economic remuneration, Jones writes: "Translating poetry, therefore, is a complex task, with high expertise demands and few financial rewards. As with other areas of literary production, however, its intrinsic enjoyment and cultural value make it a task worth doing."[123] Jones is one of the few scholars who examine poetry translation as a professional career, including in his considerations often-overlooked themes such as salary, professional networks and working conditions.[124]

As far as practical translation methods and techniques are concerned, Jones conducted interviews with poetry translators to assess their translating habits and practices. All interviews stated that each text requires multiple drafts, with a break or a pause of variable lengths between each of the drafts, a phase quite aptly labelled as "time in the drawer". Some translators reported they preferred to work analytically, dividing the source poem into its microstructures and finding an exact correspondence in the target language for each microstructure, whereas other translators – whom Jones labels as "wholists" – address the source text as a wider picture or entity rather than focusing on a series of many smaller details. Some interviewed translators also claimed they worked in an in-between way, a hybrid way that combines aspects from both sides of the spectrum, or using different methods for different source texts. Another crucial aspect of poetry translation Jones mentions is the translator's priority while working on a source text. While some translators and texts might require prioritising semantics, pragmatics and images, other translators and texts might, instead, make poetic form a priority. Once again, there are many occasions in which an intermediate approach will be needed or preferred, but these spectrums are useful tools for collocating and categorising working

[122] Jones, *Poetry Translation*, 121.
[123] Jones, *Poetry Translation*, 121.
[124] Francis R. Jones, "The Translation of Poetry," in *The Oxford Handbook of Translation Studies*, ed. Kirsten Malmkjær and Kevin Windle (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 169-182.

methods and techniques, especially in the context of academic research and translation studies.[125]

### 2.6 Susan Bassnett

Susan Edna Bassnett (born in 1945) is a scholar of translation theory and comparative literature who worked at the University of Warwick and is currently teaching as a Professor of Comparative Literature at the University of Glasgow.

In her theoretical writings on poetry translation, Bassnett often refers to Shelley's metaphor according to which the translation of poetry implies a "transplantation" of the source text into the different soil of the target language. Bassnett also stresses – just as Jones did – the crucial role that context plays in reading, understanding and, consequently, translating poetry. The reception and comprehension of poetic texts are subject to an endless set of variables, ranging from geographical location, historical period, age, sex, religion of the reader and so many more. In short, reading poetry is a "culturally determined" activity.[126] Moreover, "the way in which we approach poetry changes as aesthetic tastes change, [so] it becomes impossible to insist that there might be any single right way to read any poem."[127] The contextual element is so significant that Bassnett believes that, over time, translators should regularly "keep on rereading and retranslating,"[128] periodically updating their translations as time passes and they potentially become less relevant, attractive or suited to the linguistic trends of the present. Bassnett highlights multiple times the importance for translators to be voracious, informed, accurate and thorough readers first, and suggests "reading previous translations, if they exist, reading other work by the same poet, reading work by contemporaries of the chosen poet and reading to understand more about the poet's world."[129] This first stage of "intelligent reading" – as Bassnett defines it – should be followed by "a detailed process of decoding that takes into account both textual features and

[125] Jones, *Expert Action*, 91-96.
[126] Susan Bassnett, "The Complexities of Translating Poetry," *Ticontre. Teoria Testo Traduzione* 3 (April 2015): 158.
[127] Bassnett, "Translating Poetry," 158.
[128] Susan Bassnett, *Translation* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014), 108.
[129] Bassnett "Translating Poetry," 162.

extratextual factors."[130] Additionally, a translator must also be deeply in touch with the aesthetics, sensibility and language evolutions of their own social, geographical, cultural and historical context in order to produce a target text that is both a valuable and enjoyable literary product. In this perspective, translators for Bassnett are seen more as "rewriters" and "recreators" of the source text, and though this relieves them of the weight and responsibility (and, likely, also the boredom) of having to stick to a word-for-word reproduction of the source text in the target language, Bassnett still argues that "the skills of the translator have to be such that the end product is more than merely acceptable."[131]

In order to produce this more-than-merely-acceptable translation, Bassnett suggests following the "tried and trusted" comparative method, which – as its clear and self-explanatory name well clarifies – essentially consists in comparing different translations of the source poem, considering the strategies employed by the different translators and assessing which solutions, methods or techniques could be more suitable for the current translator and translation. Bassnett points out, though, that this process is not intended as an evaluation or a ranking of the existing translations; instead, its aim is to understand and explore a range of translation strategies and a variety of potential outcomes.[132] Bassnett also energetically argues against American poet Robert Frost's famous statement that "Poetry is what is lost in translation", to which Bassnett replies that, on the contrary, "poetry is not what is lost in translation, it is rather what we gain through translation and translators."[133]

At the end of her 2015 essay *The Complexities of Translating Poetry*, with a conclusion that sounds like a wholehearted wish and a way of reclaiming the dignity of the work of translators more than anything else, Bassnett writes: "Joyfulness and playfulness are the two crucial elements in translating poetry that are so often overlooked and which give the lie to the negative discourse of loss and betrayal that deserves finally to be dismissed."[134] This joyful and playful approach would lighten translators from the burden of rigid

[130] Susan Bassnett, "Transplanting the Seed: Poetry and Translation," in *Constructing Cultures: Essays on Literary Translation*, ed. Susan Bassnett and André Lefevere (Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 1998): 60.
[131] Bassnett "Transplanting the Seed," 60.
[132] Bassnett, "Transplanting the Seed," 70.
[133] Bassnett, "Transplanting the Seed," 74.
[134] Bassnett, "Translating Poetry," 167.

correspondence, equivalence, exactness or "loyalty" to the source text, opening up a vast array of translation possibilities and potentially even resulting in a much more enjoyable target poem that could reach and move many more people than a correct-sounding but lifeless word-for-word translation could.

### 2.7 Jean Boase-Beier

Jean Frances Boase-Beier (Huddersfield, 1954) is a translator, researcher and Professor Emerita of Literature and Translation at the University of East Anglia whose work focuses on stylistics, poetics and Holocaust poetry.[135] Boase-Beier has contributed to the field of translation studies with a large number of essays, articles and books.

In many of her works, Boase-Beier points out and explores the ambiguous nature of poetry, whose purpose "is not to make alternative readings possible but to make several readings simultaneously possible; that ambiguity comes about as a result of a complex world view being expressed."[136] Poetry's ambiguity, while being one of the main fascinating aspects of the whole genre, can also pose quite a few problems for translators, as it is an impalpable feature which is not easy to pin down within the verses and is very tricky to transpose and keep intact from the source language into the target language, also because "if poetry uses all the means at its disposal to express in language something ineffable, it is likely to become diffuse, and thus lose its effects, when translated into another language."[137] An additional and interesting key feature of poetry that Boase-Beier analyses in depth is its inventiveness which, of course, influences and interferes with the translator's work:

> The inventiveness of poetic language is often seen to arise inextricably from the acoustic qualities of the source language, and this presents a particular difficulty for translation. Often it is not merely the properties of the source language but also the language politics of the source culture that

[135] "Jean Frances Boase-Beier," Routledge, accessed 9 August 2023, https://www.routledge.com/authors/i20492-jean-boase-beier.
[136] Jean Boase-Beier, "Using Translation to Read Literature," in *Literary Translation- Redrawing the Boundaries*, eds. Jean Boase-Beier, Antoinette Fawcett, and Philip Wilson (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 257.
[137] Boase-Beier, "Poetry Translation," 478.

> lead to poetry's subversive inventiveness.[138]

Poetic inventiveness is both a tool and an issue for the translator, and this largely depends on their attitude towards translation in general. If translators manage to keep the playfulness and joyfulness Susan Bassnett deems crucial,[139] then they might end up using the inventive potential of poetic language to their advantage (and they might even have some fun along the way). On the other hand, if translators are determined to convey every single unit of meaning present in the source text into the target poem, not only will they come to despise the inventiveness of poetic language, but they might also produce a stiff target text that sounds forced and is, for many, completely unappealing if not altogether unreadable.

Another aspect Boase-Beier takes into consideration in her studies of poetry translation is the unique form of poems as literary texts. In her 2011 essay *Translating the Special Shape of Poems*, Boase-Beier explores and analyses in detail how translators could and/or should go about addressing and transposing the shape poems have on the page into the target language. Boase-Beier defines poetry as "a type of literature with the added dimension of foregrounded shape" and "the real interest (and difficulty for the translator) in poetic shape lies in the way it interacts with other aspects of poetry."[140] She also adds that

> poems have shape, and the shape, and the reading it guides, are crucial to the thought processes the reader, or translator, goes through, including rereading, examining of contexts, putting oneself in the position of the narrator, seeing the world through the poet's eyes.[141]

According to Boase-Beier, the shape of poems is as crucial in defining a poetic text as meaning and sound, thus translators should pay careful attention to conveying not only linguistic features but also the unique shape of each source poem.

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[138] Boase-Beier, "Poetry Translation," 477.
[139] Bassnett, "Translating Poetry," 167.
[140] Jean Boase-Beier, "Translating the Special Shape of Poems," 115-117.
[141] Boase-Beier, "Special Shape," 142.

Boase-Beier has written a brilliant essay titled *Translating repetition* which has been incredibly useful for translating Patrizia Cavalli's verses, since one of the distinguishing features of her poetry is, in fact, repetition. Explaining the function and relevance of repetitions in poetic texts, Boase-Beier writes:

> Repetitions are important in texts and especially in poems because they add structure. However, they contribute more substantially to meaning in that they are also frequently iconic. That is to say, repetitions in the language of a poem may mirror repetitions in the world the poem is describing.[142]

Just as with linguistic inventiveness, repetition can also be either an obstacle or an asset for translators,[143] always depending on their attitude towards translation and their linguistic and expressive skills. The open-endedness of poetry and of its interpretation is what makes reading poetry an act of human and cultural enrichment, and translation can help as many people as possible to have this enriching experience, as Boase-Beier writes:

> If poetry has a purpose is to allow us to enter a different world and experience different feelings from those we usually have. Part of experiencing feelings is a response to a poem's openness to individual interpretation, depending on the background each reader brings to the poem. A translation should enhance rather than undermine this purpose and this experience.[144]

To attain this significant purpose, translation must be executed carefully. In order to do this, Boase-Beier recommends carrying out a thorough stylistic analysis of the source poem, since "translation is not a transference merely of sense, but also of style, and in fact these often cannot be separated in a literary text."[145] Thus a stylistic analysis cannot be overlooked if the translator wants to

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[142] Jean Boase-Beier, "Translating repetition," *Journal of European Studies* 24 (December 1994): 406.
[143] Boase-Beier, "Translating repetition," 406.
[144] Jean Boase-Beier, "Translation and timelessness," *Journal of Literary Semantics* 38, no. 2 (February 2010): 112.
[145] Jean Boase-Beier, "Translating repetition," 402.

produce a target poem that efficiently communicates the expressive intentions of the author of the source text.

### 2.8 Poets translating poets translating poets

Unsurprisingly, poets are among those who have shown the greatest interest in poetry translation, when it comes to translating both their own work and that of other authors. Some scholars even go so far as to state that only poets should be translating poetry. Weighing in on this debate and clarifying the role of the poetry translator, James S. Holmes wrote:

> It is frequently said that to translate poetry one must be a poet. This is not entirely true, nor is it the entire truth. In order to create a verbal object of the metapoetic kind, one must perform some (but not all) of the functions of a critic, some (but not all) of the functions of a poet, and some functions not normally required of either critic or poet.[146]

Holmes' definition of the figure of the poetry translator adds to rather than lightening their yoke, but it also underlines how complex and multi-faceted their work is. On a softer (and much more poetic) note Pound wrote that the job of translators is to show readers "where the treasure lies,"[147] meaning that the responsibility for the success and communicative efficiency of a translation is not solely the translator's, but it also falls, at least partly, on the readership.

The list of poets who endeavoured to translate poetry includes authors such as Iosif Brodskij, Vladimir Nabokov, the above-mentioned Ezra Pound, Octavio Paz and Paul Valéry. Each of these writers approached translation from a different background and a different perspective, drawing on existing translation theories or even creating their own. For example, Pound – who boldly stated that "some of the best books in English are translations[148] – advocated for collaborative translation when he wrote: "Literature belongs to no

[146] Holmes, "Poem and Metapoem," 11.
[147] Ezra Pound, "Guido's Relations," in *Theories of Translation: An Anthology of Essays from Dryden to Derrida*, eds. Rainer Schulte and John Biguenet (Chicago/London: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), 92.
[148] Ezra Pound, "How to Read," in *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound*, ed. T. S. Eliot (New York: New Directions Books, 1968), 34.

one man, and translations of great works ought perhaps to be made by a committee."[149] Essentially, Pound believed that the aim of translation is that of reproducing in the target language the function or purpose that the source text would have had in the source context or culture.[150] For Mexican poet Octavio Paz, on the other hand

> When we learn to speak, we are learning to translate; the child who asks his mother the meaning of a work is really asking her to translate the unfamiliar term into the simple words he already knows. In this sense, translation within the same language is not essentially different from translation between two tongues, and the histories of all peoples parallel the child's experience.[151]

This statement implies that translation is an innate human activity, and that, at some point in their lives and to a certain degree, all humans are (or at least act as) translators. Paz also argues: "There is no such thing – nor can there be – as a science of translation, although translation can and should be studied scientifically."[152] Attempting to settle once and for all the centuries-long debate on who should be translating poetry, Paz writes that "the good translator of poetry is a translator who is also a poet (…) or a poet who is also a good translator."[153]

### 2.9 Rhyming translation with collaboration: a case for *poettrios*

Much of the literature on translation studies and poetry translation focuses on the most common (or, at least, considered as such) method of translating, i.e., individual translation. As Michelle Hartman writes, in most cases translators are seen "as a sole and lonely figure working with a text"[154] and, though authors

[149] Ezra Pound, "Hell," in *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound*, ed. T. S. Eliot (New York: New Directions Books, 1968), 207.
[150] Bassnett, "Translating Poetry," 160.
[151] Octavio Paz, "Translation: Literature and Letters," in *Theories of Translation: An Anthology of Essays from Dryden to Derrida*, eds. Rainer Schulte and John Biguenet (Chicago/London: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), 152.
[152] Paz, "Literature and Letters," 157.
[153] Paz, "Literature and Letters," 158.
[154] Michelle Hartman, "Prose fiction," in *The Routledge Handbook of Literary Translation*, ed.

such as Robert Bly include external figures in their translation approaches, these figures are often marginal and only have an impact on limited stages of the work or come into play only at a late point in the translation process. But there is also an alternative way – perhaps a lesser known and practised one – of carrying out a translation project, that is, collaboratively. Collaborative translation is more often applied to the translation of theatrical texts than poetic texts, but there are some instances of collaborative poetry translation that are worth considering.

Sergio Lobejón Santos and Francis R. Jones conducted a study on "poettrios", which are "collaborative teams consisting of a source poet, a target-language poet and a bilingual mediator [called] 'language advisor'."[155] During this study, the teams worked on previously untranslated poems and the team members were rearranged in different combinations (even acting in different roles within different teams according to the language combination and abilities of each member, e.g., a bilingual source poet could also act as target poet or language mediator) to reproduce a more diverse set of interactions, challenges and outcomes. The study highlights how the dynamics of in-person or remote collaborative translation influences the "freedom" of the translator, since "translators' interpersonal loyalty to source writers and target readers defines the extent of source-target closeness or deviation they allow themselves".[156] Naturally, translators who work individually and without having contact with the author of the text they are translating or with one or more native speakers of the language they are translating into will go about the translation process in a very different way than a translator who is working alongside the author of the source text and a native/proficient speaker of the target language. The working method used by the poettrios examined in the research follows the "preparation-illumination-verification" chain:

> Typically, creative sequences begin with preparation, where the translation problem is defined and assessed, often by exploring source-item meaning.

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Kelly Washbourne and Ben Van Wyke (Abingdon: Routledge, 2019), 216.

[155] Sergio Lobejón Santos and Francis Jones, "Creativity in collaborative poetry translating," Special issue of *Target* 32, no. 2 (2020): 282. https://doi.org/10.1075/target.20087.lob.

[156] Lobejón Santos and Jones, "Creativity," 299.

> Members of the poettrio then brainstorm possible solutions (illumination) and then evaluate them (verification). If the solution is not accepted, the illumination-verification sub-cycle, or sometimes the whole preparation-illumination-verification cycle, is repeated. If this does not yield a solution, the sequence is revisited later, after an incubation period.[157]

The ”incubation period” mentioned above is the equivalent of the “time in the drawer” Jones writes about and it seems to be a widespread (though not always viable) feature in translation processes, as it allows the translator to distance themselves from a particularly challenging passage, poem or draft and return to it later with a clearer and fresher mind. Collaborative translation also triggers many “scaffolding processes, where one member (often the TargetPoet) builds on information from the SourcePoet or Advisor, or constructively disagrees with another’s proposed solution.”[158] Similar processes cannot happen during individual translations, at least not with the same spontaneity and rapidity as with live, in-person interactions. An interesting finding of Lobejón Santos and Jones’ research is that translators working with collaborators are more willing to take risks because they can count on the critical evaluation of the other team members, whereas individual translators are more likely to “play it safe” when it comes to creative solutions that significantly depart from the source text. Their study also demonstrates how collaborative translation can “produce poetry translations that are both poetically effective and translationally loyal,”[159] thus confirming the great creative potential of collaborative translation.

[157] Lobejón Santos and Jones, “Creativity,” 299.
[158] Lobejón Santos and Jones, “Creativity,” 301.
[159] Lobejón Santos and Jones, “Creativity,” 303.

# CHAPTER 3

## *Translation and comment*

The poems translated in this thesis were selected from the last two published collections of Patrizia Cavalli's verses, *Datura* (published in 2013) and *Vita meravigliosa* (published in 2020). So far, there have been no published translations of these collections or of any of the poems contained within them. The first fifteen poems of the selection – from *Insisting on making nothingness speak* to *Moonflower* – were chosen from *Datura*, whereas the last fifteen poems – from *She climbed my stairs with a grim and brutal* to *Stupid nerves, horrible and lowly* – were selected from *Vita meravigliosa*. This selection aims to give a varied sample of Cavalli's late (and untranslated) work, which retains much of its earlier influences, style and techniques but also displays the development of the poet's writing throughout the years, especially in relation to form and themes. For example, in *Datura*, Cavalli systematises a tendency inaugurated in the previous collection, *Pigre divinità e pigra sorte*, where the poet accompanied her signature epigrammatic compositions with longer ones. In *Datura*, lengthier poems are no longer isolated exceptions, but the core around which shorter poems orbit and narrative tension starts claiming its space.[160] The selection includes a few of these longer poems along with Cavalli's signature short compositions, thus aptly representing the skilfulness with which she employed both forms in an extremely accomplished way. The poems of larger breadth often accompany the expansive space they encompass with a hammering repetition of themes and words (this can be seen, for example, in the poem *«But at least do you know where you're going?»*, where the main theme, oldness, is stressed over and over, both with semantic choices and with the images the verses create). Writing about *Vita meravigliosa*, Gianluigi Simonetti states that "poets can still write about nothing" but also "about everything, as long as it is something concrete and real: pain, a

[160] Giulia Martini, "*Pigre divinità e pigra sorte* di Patrizia Cavalli," *Nuovi Argomenti*, 30 June 2022. http://www.nuoviargomenti.net/poesie/pigre-divinita-e-pigra-sorte-di-patrizia-cavalli/.

starry sky, a bottle of whisky, an antidepressant."[161] This last collection maintains the dichotomy – or, rather, the blend – of tragedy and comedy that characterised Cavalli's poetics throughout the decades, a mix of highs and lows, rarefied and earthly, that accompanies the readers on the beautifully complex ride of human existence and feeling.[162]

As far as translation techniques are concerned, these translations drew from and were influenced by many of the theories explored in the previous chapters. While translating some poems, I followed a specific method, whereas while translating other poems, I chose a different working approach in order to experiment with as many strategies as possible, which led to some interesting outcomes and discoveries along the way. A method that has been particularly useful and inspiring is that of Robert Bly's eight stages, which was crucial, especially in the early phases of the translation work, as the first step of the method is to jot down a literal draft of the translation, simply taking all the words of the source poem and getting them across in the target language without worrying too much about sound, imagery, form or even content. As with many other activities, beginnings are often the scariest, most confusing and paralysing stages of the work. In this case, translation was no different. Getting started on translating poems was much more challenging than anticipated, as I somehow felt that if I could focus on making every single verse "sound poetic" on its own, then translating this selection of poems would merely mean translating a sequence of lines, one after another, getting each one just right as soon as possible. This produced early drafts that sounded and read very disjointedly, as if they did not belong to the same text. Thanks to extensive reading and researching about poetry translation, I eventually understood that poems are organic entities, where each word, line and sentence is tied to every other word, line and sentence, not simply the ones preceding and succeeding it. This meant looking at every poem in its entirety without singling out each line as an independent unit of a larger "container" of units but considering it a thread interwoven with the other lines to form a unique poetic fabric.

It was also very valuable to study and consider the work of scholars such as Francis R. Jones and Jean Boase-Beier, particularly when choosing which

[161] Simonetti, "*Vita meravigliosa*."
[162] Simonetti, "*Vita meravigliosa*."

characteristics of the poem I wanted to focus on more and convey in my translations. Their insight into the nature and identity of poetry as a literary genre laid the foundations for my understanding of poetry translation as a creative practice. Eventually, I decided to focus my translation on imagery, content and storytelling, because the visual universe Patrizia Cavalli creates with her poems is what most captivates many of her readers (myself included). Of course, I always took into consideration the aural quality of the poems, which is crucial to Cavalli's poetry, as made evident by the many instances of public readings the author gave of her own work.

Though Italian and English belong to different linguistic branches, and therefore the majority of words do not have a common root, at times it was possible to recreate very similar-sounding word sequences, a chance I quickly and happily took whenever it came around, especially since alliteration and assonance are some of the figures of speech Cavalli uses most frequently in her poems. Another linguistic challenge that the poems posed in several instances was the generous use of ellipses Cavalli makes, often omitting subjects, predicates, conjunctions and punctuation to create visual and acoustic atmospheres that are sometimes tricky to recreate in English. Subjects are often implicit both in spoken and written Italian, not only in poetry, since it is the verb conjugation that clarifies the identity of the subject in the majority of cases (less commonly, the conjugations of different personal pronouns might also coincide, creating an ambiguity that can be resolved by the context or – especially in poetry – used to the advantage of the poetic quality of the text). In many instances of ellipses, at least one of the omitted words was restored for the sake of a more complete imagery and better readability, though this meant sacrificing a closer formal and visual mirroring of the source text and often resulted in longer verses than those of the Italian poem. An example of this translation choice is the last sentence of the poem *The barbarian majesty*, which, in the original, goes: *Temo che muoia, / temo che scompaia*. The poet uses the Italian verb tense called subjunctive present, which here expresses a fear that something might happen in the future. To convey the same meaning in English, I translated this sentence as: *I'm afraid she'll die, / I'm afraid she'll disappear*, using exactly double the number of words used in the source text, which are only six. In order to keep a similar rhythm as the source poem, I

opted for contracted forms rather than extended ones. When making choices that could drastically affect the rhythm and readability of the poems, I would follow Robert Bly's suggestion to read the poems aloud – not only in my head – multiple times, to really grasp the musical quality of the verses I was translating and try to get as reasonably close to the Italian text as possible.

The rhythm of Cavalli's poetry is largely determined by enjambements, which abound in her compositions, often truncating common collocations and creating a sense of disruption and bewilderment in the reader. This is one of the most challenging features to transpose into English, as its word order differs from that of Italian. In many cases, it was impossible to retain meaning, imagery and readability at once so, in the target poem, enjambements are often placed in different parts of the verse or in the same part but necessarily involving different words. An instance of this can be found at the end of the first stanza of the poem *It's convenient, it's practical* which, in Cavalli's version, reads: *Pirati / nani mi sbarrano la strada.* Here, "nani" ("dwarves") is used as an adjective describing the pirates that are blocking the subject's way, so the more common translation for this would be *Dwarf / pirates block my way*, but this would not have the same effect as the source text, which presents the pirates first, thus creating a precise expectation and image in the mind of the reader and then, in the following verse, tells us that this pirates are, in fact, dwarves, subverting the initial image the reader might have conjured up. If the translation were to follow the normal word order of English, where adjectives and attributes of nouns come before the noun itself, it would create exactly the opposite image, first that of dwarves which then, in the following verse, reveal themselves to be pirates. That is why I decided to keep the same word order of the Italian text (thus translating the verses as *Pirate / dwarves block my way*), attempting to preserve for readers of the English version the same reading experience an Italian reader would have.

Reading and rereading existing translations of Cavalli's work was also really meaningful, especially the collection *My Poems Won't Change the World* edited by Gini Alhadeff, which includes translations from ten solo translators and two translation duos, for a total of fourteen translators, some of whom were native English speakers whereas others were native Italian speakers. This collection allowed me to access a wide variety of translation styles, strategies

and outcomes at once, making for a much-treasured tool throughout the translation process. In the beginning, it helped me get acquainted not only with the translation of Cavalli's work but with poetry translation in general, whereas, while I was actually translating, it served as a blueprint for addressing certain translation issues I was encountering, as these translators had encountered them – and brilliantly solved them – well before me.

Last, but certainly not least, one thing that immensely helped me during the translation task was reading Susan Bassnett's essay *Transplanting the Seed: Poetry and Translation*, which reminded me to translate joyfully and playfully, indulging in the pleasure of well-constructed verses and enjoying every step of the way as much as possible, which is precisely what I did.

*[Ostinarsi a far parlare il nulla]*

Ostinarsi a far parlare il nulla
a cercare parole che non hanno voglia
frequentare il deserto senza voce
senza respiro, macchie di ruggine
– magari![163] – senza arnesi perduti
nella sabbia – magari! – un deserto
senza sabbia senza caldo senza freddo
senza scoppi di luce al buio – magari
magari! – mangiare un pezzo di pizza
- magari! – Masticare. Faccio finta. Che meraviglia
essere in vita, ci si può persino lamentare.

[163] Though the “correct” meaning of “magari” is that of an interjection expressing a strong desire, it is also commonly used in more familiar/informal contexts with the “improper” meaning of “maybe”, “perhaps”. Unfortunately, this ambiguity could not be reproduced in English, so the choice fell on the more “proper” definition of the word, which has been translated as “if only”.

*[Insisting on making nothingness speak]*

To insist on getting nothingness to speak
to seek undesiring words
to frequent the voiceless[164], breathless
desert, rust marks
– if only! – without losing tools[165]
in the sand – if only! –
a sandless heatless coldless desert
without bursts of light in the darkness – if only
if only! – to eat a slice of pizza
– if only! – To chew. I pretend. How amazing
to be alive, you can even complain.

[164] Here and in other poems, suffixation with "-less" has almost always been preferred to the more literal translation "without + noun" in order to maintain a similar verse length and rhythm.
[165] This verse is an exception to the translation choice mentioned above, as suffixation with "-less" was not really a viable solution in this case, but the addition of the present participle in place of the original adjective makes it sound different enough from the translations of other instances of "senza + noun" to justify a different rendition without highlighting the inconsistency.

*[Una media di quattrocentottanta]*

Una media di quattrocentottanta
miliardi di battiti al minuto.
E non ci metto gli animali
che non so contarli. E lascio stare[166] gli anni,
e lascio stare i giorni e anche le ore.
Quattrocentottanta miliardi
di battiti mi bastano. Messi insieme
fanno un gran rumore, un rumore
infernale e nessuno se ne accorge.

[166] The phrasal verb “lasciare stare” roughly translates into “leave [something/someone] be”, and, as many expressions in every language, it is tied to a richer contextual and expressive context beyond its pure communicative meaning. It evokes a conversational or domestic setting and it often implies a certain degree of dismissiveness or briskness on the part of the person using it. In this case, translating “lascio stare” with a close linguistic rendition would not have been communicatively efficient nor correct (and perhaps also a bit puzzling to read). That is why, as Holmes aptly notes, at times some type of distortion (which he calls “betrayal”) is necessary to convey the same meaning in a different language. In this instance, “lascio stare” has been translated as “I don’t include”, which eventually communicates the same action and informal context thanks to the contracted verbal form but cannot reproduce some of the semantic and pragmatic nuances the Italian phrasal verb possesses.

*[An average of four hundred and eighty]*

An average of four hundred and eighty
billion beats per minute.
And I'm[167] not including animals,
I can't count them. And I'm not including years,
days or even hours.
Four hundred and eighty billion
beats are enough for me. All together,
they make a racket, a hellish
racket, and no one notices.

[167] Contracted verbal forms exist in Italian as well, especially in poetic language, but in most cases, they have been used not to convey an informal tone (though it is the one Cavalli uses in most of her poems), but to comply with Robert Bly's claim that poetry has to sound "natural" when spoken/read aloud. The use of contracted form is mostly arbitrary in these translations and it often contributes to the rendition of a rhythm close to the original.

*[La maestà barbarica]*

Qualcosa che mi chiama
        mi chiama sempre
e non mi prende. E con dolcezza elastica volevo
        con lento movimento
essere appresa e sciogliermi.
        Come scivolando verso il caldo
come aria fredda
        che muove verso il caldo
e si trasforma in vento e poi ancora
        in sbalordita calma
uscire dai miei margini e raggiungerla.

Stanche divinità che mi lasciate nell'anima
senza governo troppo esagerata,
voi che mi davate forme e nomi
ora anche voi indistinte vi sciogliete.
C'è al vostro posto una maestà barbarica
che gira nel quartiere, che fa di ogni caffè
e negozio casa sua e da padrona siede
dove capita per scrivere lettere agitate,
che imposta senza busta perché loro
sanno fin troppo bene dove andare,
dirette come sono a certe alte
infami autorità. Resta a lungo seduta
in ostensione del suo pensiero assorto
che le detta le parole più giuste, gli insulti
più appropriati perché possa raggiungere
– nessuno sa che cosa, ma raggiungere.
Mi è capitata in mano una sua lettera,
non c'erano né frasi né parole, ma c'era
una scrittura infatuata di consonanti
triple e vocali gigantesche, tenute

*[The barbarian majesty]*

Something that calls me
always calls me
and doesn't take me. And with elastic tenderness I wanted,
moving slowly,
to be known and to dissolve.
Gliding towards the heat
like cold air
that moves towards the warmth
transforming into wind and then again
into astonished calm
I quit my margins and reach for it.

You tired deities that leave me in my soul
ungoverned and exaggerated,
you who gave me shapes and names,
now even you melt into a blur.
In your place, a barbaric majesty
roams around town, making every café
and shop her own house and as landlady she sits
wherever, to write agitated letters,
that she mails with no envelope because they
know all too well where to go,
as they are addressed to certain high
and infamous authorities. She sits for a long time
brandishing her rapt thought
which dictates the best words,
the most apt insults to reach
– nobody knows what, but reach.
I came across one of her letters,
there were no sentences or words, but
an infatuated writing of triple consonants
and giant vowels, kept

insieme da volute e colonnati,
la prova che il rovello è architettura.

Frequenta le due piazze e le cinque strade
che frequento anch'io, non le frequenta
in verità le occupa stabile e immensa,
a differenza di quegli esili e irrequieti
dilettanti, pazzi di giro, che stanno per un po'
e poi scompaiono. Così sicuro
e asciutto è il suo avanzare che essere spinti
o travolti non offende – com'erano
gli schiaffi di nonna, energici,
improvvisi, talmente senza scrupoli
che ne provavo quasi gratitudine.

Ha un'autorevolezza ormai consolidata.
Lei non chiede, possiede. Possiede
per innato diritto originario
quello che ognuno è sempre pronto a offrirle.
Ovunque vada compare carta e penna,
a meno che non sia un piatto di pasta;
entra in un bar, magari neanche sa
cosa le andrebbe e capricciosa assaggia
una brioche che non le va, la lascia,
se proprio insistono accetta una pizzetta.

Grande impresaria della sua pazzia,
con le sue quattro recite ogni giorno
– a luce d'alba, a luce alta,
verso sera, a notte piena –
il suo è teatro stabile. Ha una recitazione
arcaico-tragica. Inizia a testa
bassa e, ferma, nel silenzio
raccoglie le sue forze come immersa

together by spirals and columns,
proof that vexation is architecture.

She frequents the two squares and five streets
I also frequent, but she does not frequent them,
in truth she occupies them stable and immense,
unlike those thin and restless
amateurs, insane vagabonds, who stay a while
and disappear. So sure
and curt is her gait, that being pushed
or overcome does not offend – just like
grandma's slaps, energetic,
sudden, so unscrupulous
that I felt almost grateful.

Her authority's established.
She doesn't ask, she owns. She owns
by innate primordial right
what everyone always so readily offers her.
Wherever she goes, there is pen and paper
if not a plate of pasta;
she walks into a café, perhaps not even knowing
what she'd like, and capriciously tastes
an unwanted croissant, abandons it,
accepting a *pizzetta*, if they insist.

Great impresario of her folly,
with her four daily performances
– at dawn, at noon,
in the evening, at night –
her theatre is permanent. She acts
archaically, tragically, beginning with her head
down and, still, in silence,
she gathers her powers as if immersed

in un oscuro dove, da cui improvviso
sorge sfacciatamente un brivido
che sinuoso l'attraversa tutta
scrollandole di dosso scarti e minuzie.
E quando la sua massa, così purificata,
è ormai densa e compatta, con sacrale
lentezza alza la testa e insieme anche la voce
che si leva – potenza terrifica,
stupore di platee – fino alla fila
dell'ultime finestre, sorda cavea
delle autorità.

Alle invettive maggiori fanno seguito
varie esercitazioni: prove di voce,
di gesto, di postura, riscaldamenti
dei quali non avrebbe più bisogno,
non fossero un di più, quel lusso divertito
di chi per troppa arte si abbandona
all'accademia o indulge nello sprezzo.
A volte si fa il verso, e allora esce
in un falsetto manierato, tutto
di testa e quasi a fiato spento; o come
i grandi attori, per risparmiarsi si limita
a accennare. A volte sembra
che stia per dare inizio al pezzo forte,
quello che ognuno aspetta: e infatti
inspira tutta l'aria che le serve
e, con lo sguardo fisso all'ultime finestre,
immobile, le braccia lungo i fianchi,
inerme si consegna alla sua voce
che lancia a alto regime tre parole
per poi rientrare subito in custodia
e ancora rilanciarsi in aspro volo
finché non si decide per un sobrio

somewhere obscure, where suddenly
an impudent shiver
runs sinuously through her,
shaking off debris and other minutiae.
And when her purified mass
is dense and compact, with sacred
slowness she raises her head and her voice
which rises – a terrifying force
stupefies the audience – the last
row of windows, the deaf cavea
of authorities.

Extensive invectives are followed by
various exercises: she rehearses her voice,
gestures, posture, warm-ups
she no longer needs,
as if they were not a surplus, that amused luxury
of those who for too much art abandon themselves
to academia or indulge in contempt.
She mocks herself sometimes, bursting
into affected falsetto, all in a head
voice, almost breathless; or, like
great actors, to spare herself, she merely
hints. Sometimes it seems
she's about to begin her showpiece,
the one everyone awaits: and, in fact,
she inhales all the air she needs
and, with the eyes fixed on the final windows,
motionless, her arms to her sides,
helpless, she resigns herself to her voice
which launches three words up high
then suddenly goes back to safekeeping
and again taking off on a rough flight
eventually settling for a sober

‘a parte’. È questa la sua arte, di certo
la maggiore.
Ma ce n’è un’altra ancora
da cui riceve gran soddisfazione,
è l’arte sartoriale. Quando non fa le recite
o non scrive, si confeziona costumi
portentosi. Lei non segue la moda,
ma l’impone: vanno in molti a spiare
i suoi drappeggi, le cuciture a vista,
i tagli trasversali. La sua eleganza
è quasi una minaccia, passarle accanto
coi propri vestitucci un po’ si trema
e un po’ ci si vergogna. Io non oso parlarle,
ma la guardo, la guardo sempre,
discosta e laterale. Ogni giorno
ho bisogno di vederla, se non la vedo
la vado a cercare, se non la trovo,
provo paura e noia. Temo che muoia,
temo che scompaia.

aside. This is her art, surely
the greatest.
But there's also one more,
from which she gains great satisfaction:
it's the dressmaking art. When she doesn't act
or write, she makes herself
prodigious costumes. She doesn't follow fashion,
instead, she dictates it: many spy
her drapings, the visible stitchings,
the transversal cuts. Her elegance
is almost a threat; passing her by
in their modest apparel, people tremble a little
and feel ashamed. I don't dare address her,
but do look at her, I always look at her,
far away and from the side. Every day
I need to see her, if I don't see her
I go looking for her, and if I don't find her,
I feel scared and bored. I'm afraid she'll die,
I'm afraid she'll disappear.[168]

[168] For an explanation of the translation choices made for the final verses of this poem, see pages 47-48.

*[Questa notte perfetta, questa ora così dolce]*

Questa notte perfetta, questa ora così dolce,
il silenzio, e nessuno che disturbi
in questa casa esposta solo al mare e al cielo
nella temperatura giusta della carne,
io senza carne qui di fronte a te
mentre mi annoio e mentre tu ti annoi e credi
che rompere il silenzio rompa la noia
che invece ogni parola accresce. E adesso?
Annoiarsi da soli forse è un lusso,
ma annoiarsi in due è disperazione
– non è noia che placida risieda,
ma attivamente lavora nel mio sangue
e mi fa scarsa e debole, mi estingue.

*[This perfect night, this hour so sweet]*

This perfect night, this hour so sweet
the silence, and no one disturbing,
in this house exposed only to sea and sky
in the right temperature of the flesh,
me, fleshless before you,
while I'm bored and you're bored and believe
that breaking the silence breaks the boredom
which, instead, grows with every word. And now what?
Being bored alone is perhaps a luxury,
but being bored in a pair is despair[169]
– this boredom does not placidly dwell
but actively works in my blood,
and makes me scarce and weak, extinguishes me.

[169] Here, a less literal but still appropriate translation has been chosen to reproduce the alliteration of "due" and "disperazione". Translating more literally with "two" and "despair" would have been linguistically and semantically correct, but it would have sacrificed the sound features and aural quality of the verse. Whenever possible, I tried to apply Jones's approach of "recreative translation", attempting to reproduce not only the semantic and linguistic features of the source text, but also its poetic characteristics deriving from sound. In this case, translating "due" as "pair" created a close rhyme that elevates the verse from a mere translation to a poetic translation.

*[Se perdo è giusto che io non sia amata.]*

Se perdo è giusto che io non sia amata.
Perdo perché non sono amata.
Perdo.
Faccio apposta a perdere.
Ho le mie buone ragioni.
Se perdo soffro di perdere, quindi sono spregevole.
Non sono amata perché sono spregevole.
Sono spregevole, non ho speranza di essere amata.
Giocare è spregevole.

*[If I lose I am rightly unloved.]*

If I lose I am rightly unloved.[170]

I lose because I am unloved.

I lose.

I lose on purpose.

I have my good reasons.

If I lose, I suffer the loss, so I am despicable.

I am unloved because I am despicable.

I am despicable, I have no hope of being loved.

Playing is despicable.

[170] In this poem, the verbal form “to not be loved” has been translated, in its various reiterations and variations, with the adjective “unloved”, an efficient solution that balances out the need for explicit personal pronouns (which, with a single exception in the first verse, are all omitted in the Italian text), achieving a rhythm and verse length similar to the original. It is interesting to notice how the need for an explicit subject creates an almost uninterrupted anaphoric structure in the target text which is not present in the source text.

*[Noia annoiata che neanche si stupisce di se stessa,]*

Noia annoiata che neanche si stupisce di se stessa,
noia modesta che non ha bandiera,
che è il solo stare, neanche tanto male,
noia di un corpo quasi sano, noia animale,
pensiero lasco che non sente e non trasale,
io bevo molta acqua minerale
per poi molto pisciare, mi curo in questo
perfettissimo ospedale che vuole
far secco il mio gran dio ormonale.[171]

[171] This poem includes many rhymes of different kinds: perfect rhymes, imperfect rhymes, end rhymes and internal rhymes. Translating rhymes is an especially laborious and often unfruitful practice that, in many cases, results in a forced and unnatural rendition of verses, where meaning and imagery are sacrificed in order to safeguard sound features. Whenever possible, assonances, consonances and alliterations have been restored (“boredom”, “badly”, “banner”, “body”).

*[Bored boredom that is not even surprised of itself,]*

Bored boredom[172] that doesn't even surprise itself,
modest boredom with no banner,
that is just being, not even that badly,
boredom of an almost healthy body, animal boredom,
loose thought that doesn't feel of flinch,
I drink a lot of mineral water
and then pee a lot, I nurse myself in this
most perfect hospital that wants
to slay my great hormonal god.

[172] As Boase-Beier states, repetition gives structures to poems, and Cavalli makes use of it in many of her works. Instead of trying to "enrich" the poem with a variety of synonyms of "bored" or "boredom", I decided to keep the repetitive structure established by Cavalli in the translation.

*[Conviene, è pratico]*

Conviene, è pratico
avere il fisso amore,
ci si innamora per semplificare
e non c'è niente di meglio di un fantasma
per inghiottire ingombri e conclusioni.
Dovrei altrimenti io da sola
tener testa all'inesausta varietà
dei miei umori e alle sparse faccende
doverose, quando ogni robetta, la più futile,
ostenta aspri diritti che pretendono
da me soddisfazione – minutaglia
smaniosa che mi sbrana, che dove accorro
un'altra piccolezza mi reclama. Pirati
nani mi sbarrano la strada.
Ma dove è andato
il conveniente amore, quel pratico
soffietto che capiente raccoglie
ogni ossessione, che si apre a dismisura
e poi si chiude, bagaglio multiuso
da portare a spasso, collasso
di orizzonti in stella densa che assorbe
e annienta ogni altra luminaria
che non serva? Stava da me. Dai, su
ritorna, tu utile davvero,
grandiosa prepotenza.

*[It's convenient, it's practical]*

It's convenient, it's practical,
to have a steady love,
we fall in love to simplify
and there's nothing better than a ghost
to swallow clutters and conclusions.
Otherwise I should, alone,
keep up with the inexhaustible variety
of my moods and the scattered necessary
chores, when every trifling, futile thing,
flaunts harsh rights, demanding
to be satisfied – insistent
minutiae that tear at me and, wherever I might rush,
another smallness claims me. Pirate
dwarves block my way.[173]
But where has
the convenient love gone, that practical,
spacious folder that collects
every obsession, that opens wide
and closes, multi-purpose baggage
to carry around, a collapse
of horizons into the dense star that absorbs
and annihilates any other
unneeded luminary? It was staying at my place. Come on,
come back, you truly useful,
grandiose arrogance.

[173] For a more detailed explanation of the translation choice involved in this verse, see page 48.

*[Il cuore non è mai al sicuro e dunque]*

Il cuore non è mai al sicuro e dunque,
fosse pure in silenzio, non vantarti
della vittoria o dell'indifferenza.
Rendi comunque onore a ciò che hai amato
anche quando ti sembra di non amarlo più.
Te ne stai tranquilla? Ti senti soddisfatta?
Potresti finalmente dopo anni
d'ingloriosa incertezza, di smanie e umiliazioni,
rovesciare le parti, essere tu
che umili e che comandi? No, non farlo,
fingi piuttosto, fingi l'amore che sentivi
vero, fingi perfettamente e vinci
la natura. L'amore stanco
forse è l'unico perfetto.

*[The heart is never safe and so]*

The heart is never safe and so,
even silently, do not boast
victory or indifference.
Honor what you've loved
even when you feel you no longer love it.
Are you calm? Are you satisfied?
Could you finally, after years
of inglorious uncertainty, agitations and humiliations,
reverse the parts, become the
one that humiliates and commands? No, don't do that,
pretend instead, pretend the love you felt
true, pretend perfectly and defeat
nature. Perhaps tired love
is the only perfect one.

*[Dura molto la salita da ubriachi]*

Dura molto la salita da ubriachi
dura molto perché gira su se stessa,
è una salita ferma che si inerpica
e poi ricade, perché è questa
la salita da ubriachi: girano girano
girano intorno, avanzano e ritornano,
giusto che sia così, perché avanzare?
Dove comunque si dovrebbe andare?
A casa? Sì, a casa, ma la casa
è una faccenda certa, perché mai
si dovrebbe andare in fretta? Esitando[174]
sulle scale fatte apposta
fatte apposta
perché si possa
sempre
esitare. Voi capite
la salita è roba tosta,
meglio invece circumnavigare
i primi tre gradini, qui c'è l'anima,
il resto sono scale.

[174] The section starting with "Esitando" plays on the concept of hesitation and on one of the main themes of the poem, stairs, by producing both a rhythm and a visual layout that are reminiscent of a staircase. All of these aspects have been taken into consideration during the translation, though the length of the verses does not always come close enough to the original text (especially in the final part) to fully recreate the same effect.

*[The drunken ascent is long]*

The drunken ascent is long
it’s long because it turns on itself
it’s a still ascent that climbs
and then falls again, because this is
the drunk ascent: they turn, turn
turn around, go forward and come back,
rightly so, why go forward?
Where should we go?
Home? Yes, home, but home
is a sure thing, why
should we ever rush? Hesitating
on special stairs
made exactly
to always
be able
to hesitate. You see,
ascending is tough,
it’s better to circumnavigate
the first three steps: here’s the soul,
the rest is stairs.

*[Salivo così bene le scale]*

Salivo così bene le scale,
possibile che io debba morire?
Le salivo così bene a ogni gradino
che anche il mio più piccolo respiro
si svolgeva mostrandosi sovrano,
e niente andava perso, il dito medio
e il mignolo vibravano nell'intimo.
Perché è nei millimetri che senti
l'immortale disporsi della regola.
Mai avrei potuto sembrare più perfetta,
le chiavi in mano
col verde laccio di gomma
che le tiene e dondola. Ma adesso
che cazzo vuole da me questo dolore
al petto quasi al centro! Che faccio, muoio?
O resto e mi lamento?

*[I used to climb the stairs so well]*

I used to climb the stairs so well,
why must I die?[175]
I used to climb each step so well
that even my smallest breath
would show itself sovereign
and nothing would get lost, the middle
and little finger vibrated intimately.
Because it's in the millimeters that you feel
the immortal arrangement of rules.
I could have never seemed more perfect,
the keys in my hand,
with the green rubber string
that ties them and jingles. But now
what the fuck does this pain want from me, this pain
almost at the centre of my chest! What do I do, do I die?
Or do I stay and complain?

[175] The Italian version of this line offers a variety of possibilities of translations, allowing translators to play and experiment with modal verbs. To stress the inevitability of death, which permeates much of Cavalli's production, "must" was chosen here.

*[Le giornate come al solito a ottobre]*

Le giornate come al solito a ottobre
erano bellissime e tutti svegliandosi
dicevano che giornate! – e era strano
che si stupissero di queste splendide giornate,
che ne avevamo tanto, forse troppe.
Eppure stavano tutti lì a stupirsi
come fossimo a Berlino o in Finlandia.
Che poi queste giornate non erano davvero
così perfettamente belle, perché verso la fine
si sporcavano, spuntava sempre una gran nuvola
da oriente che propagandosi si disponeva
a gregge che, come ognuno sa, vuol dire
addio, scordatevi ogni legge. Eppure
è commovente questa fervida innocenza
del mattino che, ferma all'evidenza della vista,
senza sospetti esulta della vista,
di un cielo tutto azzurro e quindi vuoto,
come se in quel vuoto ci si potesse
trasferire, più comodi di qui,
a far la ninna tutti, in obbedienza.

*[As usual, October days]*

As usual, October days
were beautiful, and everyone waking up
said: “What a beautiful day!”[176] – and it was strange
they were surprised by these beautiful days,
that we had many, perhaps too many.
Still, everyone was amazed,
as if we were in Berlin or in Finland.
These days were not actually so
perfectly beautiful, because towards the end
they were sullied, there was always a big cloud
coming in from the East that, propagating, spread out
like a herd of sheep, which, as we all know, means
farewell, forget all laws. Still,
it’s touching, the zealous innocence
of the morning that, at its mere sight,
without suspicion rejoices in seeing
the sky, blue thus empty,
as if we could move into
that more comfortable emptiness,
and all, obediently, go bye-bye.

[176] In the source text, Cavalli omits the punctuation relative to direct discourse as part of her conversational and informal style. But this is not always the case. For example, in the first part of “Moonflower” (pp. 84-93), Cavalli uses italics to indicate direct speech, whereas in “In Heaven with Elsa” (pp. 100-105), she uses standard direct speech punctuation. In the translation of this poem, standard punctuation has been restored to enhance readability and comprehension.

*[Così schiava. Che roba!]*

Così schiava. Che roba!
Così barbaramente schiava. E dai!
Così ridicolmente schiava. Ma insomma!
Che cosa sono io?
Meccanica, legata, ubbidiente,
in schiavitù biologica e credente. Basta,
scivolo nel sonno, qui comincia
il mio libero arbitrio, qui tocca a me
decidere che cosa mi accadrà,
come sarò, quali parole dire
nel sogno che mi assegno.

*[So enslaved. What a thing!]*

So enslaved. What a thing!
So barbarously enslaved. Come on!
So ridiculously enslaved. Really!?
What am I?
Mechanical, bound, obedient,
in trusting biological enslavement. Enough,
I slip into sleep, my free will
begins here, here it’s up to me
to decide what will happen to me,
how I’ll be, what words I’ll say
in the dream I assign myself.

*[Rivoglio il tetano]*

Rivoglio il tetano
in tarda mattinata
e il morso della vipera
di pomeriggio in piazza,
la meningite
verso mezzanotte
e la poliomielite
subito al risveglio.
Rivoglio la mia salute,
Fantasiosa salute
così potente e certa
che si eccitava a riempire
il suo ineffabile silenzio di terrori.

*[I want tetanus back]*

I want tetanus back
late in the morning
and the viper’s bite
in the afternoon square,
meningitis
near midnight
and polio
right after waking up.
I want my health back,
imaginative health
so powerful and certain
excited to fill
its unspeakable silence with terrors.

*[Come un popolo felice nella varietà]*

Come un popolo felice nella varietà
stavano insieme meravigliosamente
le tante erbe e i fiori ai bordi della strada
per mostrarsi. Vi guardo e vi ammiro,
folte trasparenze, spighe raggiate
da mobili corone in ascensione!
Quei grani, quelle piume,
quell'invenzione di geometrie straniate,
se io non le vedessi, quelle forme
vibranti potrebbero in se stesse
compiacersi della propria così varia
singolarità? Possibile
che solo a noi sia dato lo stupore?

*[Like a people happy in its variety]*

Like a people happy in its variety
the many herbs and flowers on the side of the road
stood together wonderfully
displaying themselves. I look at you and admire you,
dense transparencies, spikes radiating
from mobile ascending crowns!
Those grains, those feathers,
the invention of alienating geometries,
if I didn’t see them,
could these vibrant shapes
take pleasure in themselves, in their varied
singularity? Is it possible
that wonder is given only to us?

*[Datura]*

*a Alessandro Anghinoni*

Dice un mio amico: *Io quando mangio troppo*
*dopo pranzo mi scendono le lacrime da sole*
*e allora, visto che piango, ne approfitto*
*per concentrarmi sulle cose tristi,*
*la morte di mia nonna per esempio,*
*o altre circostanze altre persone*
*per cui non ho saputo piangere al momento.*
*Ho queste lacrime lì a disposizione,*
*prendo le mie tristezze e ce le butto dentro,*
*così le lacrime hanno una ragione*
*e la disgrazia trova il sentimento.*

No, non lasciate le lacrime da sole,
accostatele al vostro dolore
e quello che ha mancato il proprio tempo
riavrà il suo momento, avrà un'altra occasione,
da noi dipende, solo da noi dipende
questa perfetta commossa comunione.

Eccomi bella larga ora mi muovo
nell'alta presunzione del plurale,
come il mio amico anch'io
ho lacrime spaesate,
la sola differenza è che le sue
provengono da un fatto interno, ossia
la digestione, mentre le mie dipendono
da agguati di meteore dall'esterno
se c'è l'alta pressione, ma poi alla fine
il risultato è identico: riempire
di figure quel sintomo umorale
che resterebbe altrimenti vuoto e perso.

*[Moonflower]*

*for Alessandro Anghinoni*

A friend of mine says: *When I eat too much,*
*after lunch, tears fall on their own,*
*and then, since I'm crying, I take that chance*
*and concentrate on sad things,*
*my grandma's death for example,*
*or other circumstances, other people*
*I could not cry about at the time.*
*I have these tears at my disposal,*
*I take my sorrows and throw them in,*
*so the tears have a reason*
*and disgrace finds a feeling.*

No, do not leave tears alone,
put them next to your pain
and what has missed its own time
will have its moment back, will have another chance,
this perfect emotional communion
is up to us, only to us.

Here I am, nice and wide, moving
in the lofty presumption of plurality,
and just like my friend, I, too,
have homeless tears,
the only difference being that his tears
come from an internal fact,
digestion, whereas mine depend
on external meteoric ambushes,
if there's high pressure, but then in the end
the result is identical: filling
with figures that humoral symptom
that would otherwise remain empty and lost.

Il tempo di mangiare mezza mela, sbucciare
un mandarino, in uno di quei gesti
trasognati quando la volontà
illanguidita lascia sguarnita
la sua propria sede, è allora,
se il clima è sfavorevole,
che arrivano furtive le meteore.
Arrivano furtive, ma subito bivaccano
padrone in quella zona strategica centrale
da dove è facile per loro penetrare
le parti più segrete del cervello –
le finte addormentate,
dove risiede in varietà di umori
il sentimento, latente repertorio
che ci segue pronto alla parte
se e quando si richiede.

Ma le meteore non fanno distinzioni.
Inerte e vaghe intorno a noi, una volta dentro
A caso come capita sommuovono
gli umori e li scatenano, e questi nel disordine
si accrescono, si mischiano scambiandosi
le parti, si mascherano persino,
mostruosi. Come allora nel corpo
immateriale si diffonde un'anonima
minaccia, qualcosa che si slabbra
e aprendosi si lascia conquistare
da un'immobilità attonita in ascolto
di un lontanissimo brusio che avanza,
quasi il segnale di qualche messinscena
che stia per cominciare. Ah, presto
si saprà di che si tratta.

Ora si muove come fosse amore –

The time to eat half an apple, to peel
a tangerine, with one of those dreamy
gestures when the languished will
leaves its own seat
undefended, it's then,
if the climate's unfavourable,
that, furtively, meteors arrive.
They do arrive furtively, but immediately camp,
owners of that central strategic zone
from which it's easy to penetrate
the most secret parts of the brain –
as mock-sleepers,
where feeling resides
in a variety of moods, a latent repertoire
that follows us ready to play its part
if and when required.

But meteors make no distinctions.
Inert and vague around us, once they're inside
they randomly agitate moods, haphazardly
activate them, and then, in the chaos,
they grow, mix and exchange
parts, they even mask,
monstrously. Then in the immaterial
body an anonymous threat
spreads, something that bursts,
opening itself up to be conquered
by the amazed immobility listening
to a faraway buzz advancing,
almost like the signal of some play
about to begin. Oh, soon
we will know what that is about.

Now it moves like love –

un’ambizione di cellule in trasporto
verso una qualche improbabile stazione,
carne esiliata che cerca la sua patria.
Ora si passa dall’ira alla pietà –
ciò che era morto nel cuore e nel giudizio
riaverlo vivo con più vivida realtà;
disprezzo fermo e chiusa antipatia
eccoli in pochi istanti trasformati
in una intraprendente nostalgia.
Ma nostalgia di che?
Soltanto nostalgia che gira e si rigira
dentro il suo molto affaccendato niente.

Magari è spoglia vita abbandonata
appesa in alto nel buio siderale,
o cenere dispersa in un deserto
da dove si rinasce alle freschezze
di terse insenature e di terrazze.
Così mi accendo e faccio
se già non sono morta
cadavere in un sacco.

Ci sono dei motivi, c’è forse una ragione
per questi bei teatrini? C’è qualche causa
di cui sono l’effetto o perlomeno
la rappresentazione? Forse l’avevano,
c’era un oggetto all’origine, reale.
Ma come poi l’oggetto che sembrava tale,
o che comunque era lì prestandosi alla parte,
come scompare poi! E come il suo sparire
perfeziona la forma del congegno,
e con quale prontezza questo si rivela
solo a sfiorare il punto del suo avvio,
e come più dolorosamente di prima,

an ambition of transported cells
towards some improbable station,
exiled flesh seeking its homeland.
Now it moves from wrath to pity –
what was dead in the heart and in the judgement
to resuscitate it even more vividly;
steady contempt and closed antipathy
in a few moments transform
into dynamic nostalgia.
But nostalgia for what?
It's just a nostalgia turning and turning
within its own busywork.

Perhaps it is bare abandoned life
hanging high in the sidereal darkness,
or ashes scattered in a desert,
a rebirth into the freshness
of clear coves and terraces.
So I light up and act
if I'm not already dead
a corpse inside a bag.

Are there any roots, is there perhaps a reason
for these nice little shows? Is there some cause
of which they are the effect or even just
the representation? Perhaps they had,
perhaps there was a real, original object.
But then the object that seemed to be so,
or that was there, playing its part,
how it then disappears! And how its disappearance
perfects the shape of the device,
and how readily it reveals itself
only to touch its own beginning,
and how, more painfully than before,

pur sapendosi vuoto, procede, anzi proprio
sapendosi vuoto procede con più potente
inerzia e non ha scampo da sé
perché non ha ragioni.

Ma che ci vuole,
gliele troviamo noi queste ragioni!
Non come gli animali, che sono quel che sono,
che fanno quel che fanno, chiusi e irrelati
nel loro repertorio
d'immediati spaventi e lente beatitudini.
Io chiedo, tu rispondi, noi spieghiamo –
Mettere insieme è il gioco dell'umano.

Ma io non voglio andarmene così,
lasciando tutto come ho trovato
in questa scialba geografia che assegna
l'effetto alla sua causa e tutti e due consegna
all'umile solerzia dell'interpretazione.
Un altro è il mio progetto, la mia ambizione
è accogliere la lingua che mi è data
e, oltre il dolore muto, oltre il loquace
suo significato, giocare alle parole
immaginando, senza una identità,
una visione. Come di fronte a un fiore
di datura, a quel suo giallo
non propriamente giallo, crema piuttosto,
la stessa crema che ha la pesca bianca,
con brividi di verde trasparente,
ma delicati, piccoli,
il modo di morire al terzo giorno
o meglio, di seccarsi plissettandosi,
pelle di daino, straccetto, guanto,
ala di pipistrello acciaccato, riccioli, rostri,

though aware of being empty, it proceeds, in fact,
aware of its emptiness, with stronger
inertia and cannot escape itself
because it has no reasons.

But how hard can it be,
we can find these reasons!
Not like animals, which are what they are,
which do what they do, closed and disconnected
in their repertoire
of sudden scares and lazy bliss.
I ask, you answer, we explain –
putting things together is the human's game.

But I do not want to leave like this,
leaving everything just as I found it
in this dull geography assigning
the effect to its cause and consigning both
to the humble diligence of interpretation.
I have other projects, my ambition is
to welcome the language I'm given
and, beyond the mute pain, beyond its
loquacious meaning, to play with words,
to imagine a vision, without
an identity. Like before
a moonflower, with its yellow
which is not quite yellow, but rather a cream,
the same cream as white peaches,
with shivers of translucent green,
but delicate, small,
its way of dying on its third day,
or better, drying, pleated,
like deer leather, a rag, a glove,
the damaged wing of a bat, curls and rostrums,

questa bellezza propriamente sua,
che tutto ciò in se stesso non ci pensi
neppure alla lontana a poter essere
una soltanto di tutte queste cose,
che dipenda da me la sua apparenza,
che ne sia io la sola responsabile,
questa è la gioia fiera del mio compito,
qui è il mio valore. Io valgo più del fiore.

its peculiar beauty,
but all of this in itself does not think
even remotely of being able to be
even one of these things
its appearance depends on me,
I am the only one in charge,
this is the proud joy of my task,
this is my worth. I am worth more than the flower.

*[Saliva le mie scale con una torva malinconia]*

Saliva le mie scale con una torva malinconia
brutale, io l'aspettavo fuori dalla porta
ma era così assorta nella sua ascesa
quasi rinocerontica mortale
che solo giunta in cima mi vedeva
improvviso bersaglio da incornare.
Allora io da matadora accorta
veloce mi spostavo e lei incornava
dritta al mio letto il vano della porta.

*[She climbed my stairs with a grim and brutal melancholy]*

She climbed my stairs with a grim and brutal
melancholy, I waited for her outside the door
but she was so intent her mortal,
almost rhinocerontic[177] ascent,
that only at the top did she see me,
suddenly, as a target to ram.
Then, like a quick matadora,
I swiftly moved, and she rammed
through the doorway straight into my bed.

[177] Words that do not have a direct English equivalent but whose meaning can be easily inferred have been translated literally, such as “rinocerontico”, which means “resembling/like a rhinoceros.” Here, choosing a paraphrase or a longer definition would have excessively altered the rhythm.

*[Continuazione dell'Eden]*[178]

L'originale comunque non lo voglio
non voglio stare dove ogni momento
se sbagli possono cacciarti via.
Lo preferisco falso e permanente
dove la legge la decido io.
Abolirò memoria e nostalgia,
non ci sarà intenzione né immaginazione
ma un'aria mite e ferma che acconsente:
si morirà per noia, dolcemente.

[178] This poem is one of the few which has a "proper" title chosen by the author, as almost none of Cavalli's poem have one. In this case, the title "Continuation of Eden", refers back to a short poem titled "L'Eden" (Eden) included in the 2006 collection *Pigre divinità e pigra sorte* (Lazy Gods, Lazy Fate), which goes: *Mi hanno mandato via?* / *E io me lo rifaccio*. / *E visto che ci sono lo miglioro.* (They sent me away? / And I'll make it again. / And while I'm at it I'll improve it.)

*[Continuation of Eden]*

I don’t want the original anyway
I don’t want to be in a place where at any moment
they can kick you out if you make a mistake.
I prefer it fake and permanent,
where I decide the law.
I’ll abolish memory and nostalgia,
there won’t be intention or imagination
but a meek and steadfast air that consents:
we will die of boredom, sweetly.

*[Occupata da poveri pensieri]*

Occupata da poveri pensieri
– la puzza di fritto, il freddo –
dov'è la mia anima,
dov'è la mia anima?

Senza sonno ma non sveglia,
torpida e irrequieta,
rassegnata ma querula,
è questa la mia anima?

Cuore fermo che non pensa
mente astiosa che non sente
non c'è nulla che mi accende.
Ma avrò davvero un'anima?

Cerco di ricordare
ma è un compito il ricordo,
colpa dell'orologio
che fa troppo rumore.

O è il tavolo di marmo
che certo non è caldo?
Ma l'anima è immortale
e quindi immateriale.

Se poi scopro che ho un'anima
noiosa quanto me,
faccio a meno dell'anima
mi accontento di me.

*[Occupied with poor thoughts]*

Occupied with poor thoughts
– the stench of fried food, the cold –
where is my soul,
where is my soul?

Sleepless but not awake,
asleep and restless,
resigned but querulous,
is this my soul?

A steady hear that doesn’t think
a spiteful mind that doesn’t feel,
nothing lights me up.
Do I even have a soul?

I try to recall,
but recalling’s a task,
it’s the clock’s fault,
it makes too much noise.

Or is it the marble table
that’s certainly not warm?
But the soul is immortal
and thus immaterial.

Then, if I discover that I do have a soul
as boring as I,
I can give up the soul
and settle for me.

*[Con Elsa in Paradiso]*

Elsa ogni tanto ci portava in Paradiso.
E a chi chiedeva: «A me mi porti?» «No»,
lei subito, decisa, «Non c'entri niente tu.
Tu non ci puoi venire in Paradiso».
«E allora chi ci porti?» insistevano i delusi,
«Patrizia ce la porti?» E Elsa: «Sì,
Patrizia può venire in Paradiso».

Ah, come mi piaceva questo andare
facile, sicuro, senza dover competere!
Però, per non offendere, facevo
la distratta coi respinti. Anche se poi,
tra discussione e dubbi, un po' alla volta
venivano alla fine quasi tutti assunti.
Ma io – a parte i gatti, che stavano già lì
ad aspettarci – ero la prima, sempre,
la prescelta. Non mi chiedevo il motivo
di questa preferenza: da un lato
mi pareva naturale, dall'altro
pensavo fosse meglio
non mettersi a indagare. Del resto,
io a quei tempi venivo ammessa ovunque:
ai pranzi, al cinema, a teatro, andavo
sempre bene con chiunque. Neanche
di questo mi chiedevo la ragione,
forse anche per questo avevo l'ammissione.

In quanto al Paradiso, a figurarmelo,
io non vedevo altro che il prato dove stavo,
come un vassoio che ci portasse
in alto, un po' inclinati e senza più
le sedie, per cui ci si arrangiava

*[In Heaven with Elsa]*

Elsa would take us to Heaven sometimes.
And to those who asked: «Will you take me?» «No»,
she immediately answered, blunt, «It has nothing to do with you.
You can't come to heaven».
«So who will you take?» some, disappointed, insisted,
«Will you take Patrizia?» And Elsa said: «Yes,
Patrizia can come to heaven».

Oh, how I enjoyed this easy, sure
departure, with no competition!
However, so as not to offend, I acted
distracted with the rejects, although,
between discussions and doubts, one by one
almost all of them were eventually admitted.
But I – apart from the cats, who were already there
waiting for us – was always the first, always,
the chosen one. I did not ask the reason
for this preference: on one hand
it seemed natural, on the other,
I thought it was better
not to investigate. After all,
at that time, I was admitted everywhere:
at lunches, at the cinema, at the theatre, I went
well with everyone. Not even then
did I ask myself why,
maybe that was also why I was always admitted.

As for heaven, if I had to imagine it,
I could see nothing but the meadow I was on,
like a tray bringing us
up high, a little tilted and without
any chairs, so we made do

poco comodamente sopra l’erba.
Un’altra differenza era con gli alberi,
molto piccoli, qui, da miniatura,
e con le chiome composte e tondeggianti.
E poi c’erano i gatti, lenti, sul fondale,
che, finalmente belve, parevano più grandi del normale.
Non c’era altro,
neanche mezza schiera di beati.

Ce ne stavamo lì, tranquilli, a chiacchierare,
le voci liete, senza mai un’asprezza
– persino Elsa teneva basso il tono –
le facce buone buone, intese a dimostrarsi ospiti
all’altezza del posto e del regalo. E anch’io pallidamente
simulavo, pur annoiandomi degli altri
e di me stessa, mentre qualcosa mi diceva
che essere prediletti può bastare in sé,
e che a volerne raccogliere i frutti
si può cadere in una scialba
sproporzione. Che c’entra, per Elsa
era diverso, aveva un’altra idea
del Paradiso, lei ci vedeva
innegabili vantaggi: andare senza borsa,
per esempio, o alla sera non lavarsi i denti.
Ma io non ero ancora così stanca
e preferivo i pranzi concitati, benché
tra me un po’ mi vergognassi
di non avere spirito abbastanza
per trasognarmi nei piaceri alti.

Avrei più tardi rimediato, quando
crescendomi la noia mia e degli altri,
sarei ricorsa al più sfrenato immaginare
per abolire, non dico la realtà

a bit uncomfortably over the grass.
Another difference was with the trees,
very small, here, like miniatures,
with thick, rounded foliage.
And then there were cats, slow, in the background,
that, finally beasts, seemed bigger than normal.
There was nothing else,
not even half a flight of blessed ones.

We stood there peacefully chatting,
our glad voices, without ever any harshness
– even Elsa spoke softly –
our good faces, intent on acting as suitable guests
for this gift and this place. And even I softly
simulated, though bored both by the others
and by myself, while something was telling me
that being favoured can be enough in itself,
and that by wanting to reap its fruits
one can fall into a dull
disproportion. What does it matter, for Elsa
it was different, she had another idea
of heaven, she saw
undeniable advantages: not carrying a bag,
for example, or not brushing your teeth at night.
But I wasn't yet that tired
and I preferred excited lunches, even though
I felt a bit ashamed
not to have enough spirit
to dream of higher pleasures.

Later on, I would catch up when
growing my boredom, growing along that of others,
I would resort to the wildest fantasies
to abolish, I won't say reality,

ma ogni traccia di verosimiglianza.
E adesso mi stupisco quando penso
a tutti quegli ingenui andirivieni
tra un prato e l’altro nei nostri Paradisi
tra i quali io sceglievo il più terreno
per fingermi l’amata, la prescelta,
chissà per quale grazia immeritata,
senza sapere che in realtà ero bella.

but all traces of verisimilitude.
And now I am amazed when I think
of all those naïve comings and goings
between one meadow and another in our heavens
among which I chose the earthliest one
pretending to be beloved and chosen,
who knows thanks to what undeserved grace,
without knowing that I was actually beautiful.

*[Ancora? Ancora? Di nuovo? Davvero?]*

Ancora? Ancora? Di nuovo? Davvero?
Sì, è così, è vero, ci credo,
ecco bellezza chiara, sì la vedo
meravigliosa uguale esultanza
con passo saldo e lucido io incedo
sempre uguale, se mi guardo indietro
sempre uguale lo spazio sereno
del bene certo offerto in esultanza.

*[Again? Again? Once more? Really?]*

Again? Again? Once more? Really?
Yes, it’s true, I believe it,
here’s the clear beauty, yes, I see it,
the same wonderful jubilation
with a steady and lucid step I pace,
always the same, if I look back
always the same serene space
of guaranteed goodness offered in jubilation.

*[Io qui presente, la tua solitudine]*

Io qui presente, la tua solitudine
mi offende. Porterò via il mio corpo
lo metterò in viaggio
e nel trasporto, tra scosse di treni
e paure di voli, ritroverò la confidenza
materiale. Con altro peso allora
calpesterò la mattonella sconnessa
che, a metà strada verso la tua stanza,
con un suono leggero ti avvisava.
Ma tu protetta da questa docile
ripetizione continuavi a leggere,
rimandavi a più tardi ogni emozione.

*[I am right here, and your loneliness]*

I am right here, and your loneliness
offends me. I will take away my body
I will make it travel
and transport it, between shaky trains
and scary planes, I will find material confidence
again. Then, with a different weight,
I will step on the uneven tile
that, halfway to your room,
would alert you with a light sound.
But, protected by this docile
repetition, you'd keep reading,
postponing all emotion.

*[Falsamente me ne andavo alla conquista]*

Falsamente me ne andavo alla conquista.
*Di che cosa, avanti, dimmi, di che cosa?*
*Della sposa?*
Ah questo no, non della sposa.
*Bene, allora di che cosa alla conquista?*

M'inoltravo nella torre mostruosa.
*Che cercavi, avanti, dimmi, che cercavi?*
*I conclavi?*
Ah questo no, non i conclavi.
*Bene, allora perché mai era mostruosa?*

Io partendo mi portando i miei sicari.
*Chi uccidevi, avanti, dimmi, chi uccidevi?*
*I tuoi allievi?*
Ah questo no, non i miei allievi.
*Bene, allora perché andavi coi sicari?*

Me ne andavo tutta nuda nella notte.
*Per che fare, avanti, dimmi, per che fare?*
*Per scappare?*
Ah questo no, non per scappare.
*Bene, allora perché nuda nella notte?*

Me ne andavo senza mai poter partire.
*Come mai, avanti, dimmi, come mai?*
*Per i guai?*
Ah questo no, non per i guai.
*Bene, allora adesso vattene a dormire.*[179]

[179] Cavalli does not often resort to alternative layouts of her poems but, whenever she does and whenever possible, I tried to reproduce the visual experience of the Italian text (see also "The Barbarian Majesty").

*[I falsely went conquering]*

I falsely went conquering.
*What, come on, tell me, what?*
*The bride?*
Oh no, not the bride.
*Well then, conquering what?*

I advanced into the monstruous tower.
*What did you look for, tell me, what did you look for?*
*The conclaves?*
Oh no, not the conclaves.
*Well then, why was it monstruous?*

I left taking my hitmen with me
*Who were you killing, come on, tell me, who were you killing?*
*Your pupils?*
Oh no, not my pupils.
*Well then, why did you take the hitmen?*

I went naked into the night.
*To do what, come on, tell me, to do what?*
*To run away?*
Oh no, not to run away.
*Well, then, why naked into the night?*

I left without ever leaving.
*Why is that, come on, tell me, why is that?*
*For the trouble?*
Oh no, not for the trouble.
*Well, then, now go to sleep.*

*[Parla a se stesso il pazzo e si consola]*

Parla a se stesso il pazzo e si consola
e il santo parla solitario a Dio.
E io a chi parlo quando parlo da sola?
Parlo a qualcuno che non sono io

ma una platea vista di sbieco al volo,
mutevole a seconda del mio tono,
che non risponde mai, ascolta solo,
se la parola trova il giusto suono.

Questa muta assemblea inconcludente
che non fa petizioni, non si ostina
a voler controbattere e opinare,

mi anima di speranze la mattina:
avere un tale dono della mente
poter parlare, e farsi anche ascoltare!

*[The crazy man talks to himself and comforts himself]*

The crazy man talks to himself and comforts himself,
and the holy man, lonely, talks to God.
And to whom do I talk when I talk alone?
I talk to someone who is not me

but an audience quickly seen from the side,
changing according to my tone,
that never replies, only listens,
if the word finds the right sound.

This mute inconclusive assembly
that doesn't ask, doesn't insist
on debating or giving opinions,

animates me with hope in the morning:
to have such a gift of the mind
to be able to speak, and to be heard as well!

*[Ma basta insomma vieni cosa aspetti,]*

Ma basta insomma vieni cosa aspetti,[180]
menti pure se vuoi, che me ne importa?
Mi basta che tu appaia alla mia porta
e con la voce scura sillabata
mi dica ancora quell'unica parola
che esiste solo quando è pronunciata.

[180] This first line is a great example of the conversational tone often present in Cavalli's poems, as it has a natural spoken quality to it that would clearly resonate as a voice in the reader's head. The verse is made up of four separate expressions, "ma basta", "insomma", "vieni" and "cosa aspetti", and all attempts made at translating all four expressions into English resulted in a verse double the length of the original and which unbalanced the whole poem. That is why the final version presented here only includes the translation of "ma basta" ("enough is enough") and "vieni" ("come here"), keeping the meaning and atmosphere of the original but also the visual balance and rhythm of the poem.

*[Enough is enough, come here,]*

Enough is enough, come here,
lie all you want, what do I care?
It’s enough to have you appear at my door
and with a dark, enunciating voice
tell me again that one word
that only exists when pronounced.

*[Questa notte dormirai, te lo prometto]*

Questa notte dormirai, te lo prometto
nella chiusa cerimonia del mio letto.
E come il cielo mi promette tenerezza
– stretta da nuvole, bianca coperta –
io ti tolgo alla paura e all'incertezza.

*[Tonight you'll sleep, I promise]*

Tonight you'll sleep, I promise
in the closed ceremony of my bed.
And as the sky assures tenderness
– enveloped in clouds, a white duvet –
I'll save you from fear and uncertainty.

*[«Ma almeno lei lo sa dov'è diretta?»]*

Nel quartiere ricco borghese
dove seppur provvisoria abito
tutto dura di più, persino i vecchi;
in questa città fatta per disfarsi
la vecchiaia vuole pensarsi eterna.
Le vecchie soprattutto benestanti
le incontro in autobus
e a una che va con due bastoni
la sento dire risentita a un'altra
non così vecchia, ma certo più smarrita:
«La prossima volta però non esca sola!
Ma almeno lei lo sa dove è diretta?»
Poi mi trovo per caso in soccorso
a una cieca aggrappata a una vecchia
sulla stessa lastra di ghiaccio
perché cieca non vede che è vecchia
e le chiede soccorso. All'angolo le incontro
disperate, ognuna pericolo all'altra.
Sorreggo la vecchia, ma questa
mi dice: «Non io, non io, ma l'altra!»
e mi guarda ammiccando, lei salva,
non vista dall'altra.
Terribilmente attraversando la strada
contratte nell'impresa del semaforo
con gli occhi acquosi trascinando un cane
o trascinate, a volte parallele
se la fortuna le ha invecchiate insieme.
Alcune che hanno perso la ricchezza,
di primo mattino già subito truccate
la sigaretta lasciata tra le labbra
sottili, coi pantaloni stretti
senza cappotto lievi sul marciapiede

*[«Do you even know where you're going?»]*

In the rich bourgeois neighbourhood
where (though temporarily) I live
everything lasts longer, even old people,
in this city made to come undone
old age likes to think it's eternal.
Especially rich old ladies,
whom I meet on the bus,
and there's one with two sticks
resentfully telling another
not as old, but surely more confused:
«Next time, don't go out alone!
Do you even know where you're going?»
Then I happen to find myself assisting
a blind woman holding onto an old lady
on the same slab of ice
because, being blind, she doesn't see the other is old
and asks her for help. On the corner I meet them
desperate, each a danger to the other.
I prop up the old lady, but she
says: «Not me, not me, the other one!»
and looks at me winking, safe,
unseen by the other.
Terribly crossing the street
absorbed in the task of traffic lights
with watery eyes, pulling a dog
or being pulled, at times in parallel
if luck aged them together.
Early in the morning,
some who lost wealth, already with makeup
a cigarette between the thin
lips, tight trousers,
no coat, treading lightly on the sidewalk

indecise se muoversi o restare
guardano e allungano una mano
nei grandi cesti aperti della spazzatura
per far qualcosa, tanto per far qualcosa
per controllare come va la vita.
Con quell'aria di cupo accanimento
fa spavento il cappello con la piuma
fresco di moda o sempre posseduto
e il rossetto che sbava in una fiamma.
Le più ricche vanno in carrozzella
di solito per semplice stanchezza,
infermiere o assistenti, trovano sempre
qualcuno che le spinge. Ne ho vista una
a una mostra che gridava
per essere sospinta avanti e indietro
almeno dieci volte per la sala.
All'uscita poi mi ricompare
forte sicura, in piedi dritta
che s'infilava da sola la pelliccia.
Dal parrucchiere le vedo da vicino.
E il parrucchiere avvolge sei capelli
a bigodino. Sedute provvisorie e scomposte
la borsa stretta tra le ginocchia
il vestito che scopre carne di cosce,
si fanno strappare i peli delle sopracciglia,
tendono le mani alla manicure
disciplinate obbedienti a ogni tortura.
D'improvviso un lamento un urlo addirittura,
un'unghia tagliata troppo corta,
il casco caduto sulla testa.
Perché la manicure il parrucchiere l'infermiera
le trattano con spiccia ruvidezza
per vicaria vendetta contro la ricchezza
o perché contano su quell'anestesia

undecided whether to go or to stay
they look and extend a hand
into the big, open garbage bins
to do something, just to do something
to check how life’s going.
With that dark air of fury
the scary hat with a feather
perhaps the last fashion, perhaps always owned
and the lipstick bleeding flames.
The richest ones using wheelchairs
usually just out of fatigue;
nurses or assistants, they always find
someone to push them. I saw one
at an exhibition, screaming
to be pushed back and forth
at least ten times across the room.
Then, at the exit, she reappeared,
strong and sure, standing straight,
putting on her fur by herself.
I see them close up at the hairdresser.
And the hairdresser rolls up six hairs
in each roller. Sitting tentatively and disordered
the bag clutched between the knees,
the dress revealing the flesh of the thighs,
they get their eyebrows plucked,
hold out the hands for the manicure,
obedient and disciplined in the face of every torture.
Suddenly a howl, a scream, even,
a nail cut too short,
the helmet fell on the head.
Because the manicurist, the hairdresser, the nurse,
all treat them with quick roughness,
vicariously avenging their wealth
or counting on that anesthetic

che la natura produce con il tempo
sui loro sensi lenti e disattenti
e poi a rovina si può aggiungere rovina,
«hai preso tanti colpi,
prendine un altro!»

that nature produces with time
on their slow, inattentive senses
so then insult is added to injury,
«you’ve taken so many blows,
what's one more?”

*[Questa timidezza, questa nuova]*

Questa timidezza, questa nuova
timidezza, io non più insediata
nel cuore di me stessa, questa
pudica modesta timidezza,
io non più spettacolo a me stessa,
soltanto spettatrice un po' annoiata
di un nuovo malinconico miracolo
che mi smarrisce di consapevolezza.

*[This shyness, this new shyness]*

This shyness, this new
shyness, I'm no longer installed
within my own heart, this
prudish, modest shyness,
I am no longer a spectacle for myself,
only a slightly bored viewer
of a new melancholic miracle
that leaves me lost in awareness.[181]

[181] As with many other poems, a few commas have been added to the original punctuation to add with rhythm and readability.

*[Ogni interruzione di abitudine]*

Ogni interruzione di abitudine
è dolore. Una morte improvvisa
è violenta interruzione di abitudine.
La morte lenta è un lento
cambiamento di abitudine. Lento
dolore che si esercita all'evento.
Tutti i futuri morti sono già morti
abbandonati. E noi stessi presaghi
della nostra morte ci esercitiamo
con largo anticipo all'abbandono.

*[Every interruption of habit]*

Every interruption of habit
is pain. A sudden death
is a violent interruption of habit.
A slow death is a slow
change of habit. A slow
pain, practicing for the event.
All the dead are already dead,
abandoned. And we, prefiguring
our own death, we practice
abandonment well in advance.[182]

[182] With this poem, it was possible to play and work with sound features much more than in many others. Cavalli's verses use alliteration to create the atmosphere of death as an interruption and a dissolution of life with the repeated use of "r" and "t", putting the two sounds close or next to each other in words such as "interruzione", "esercita", "futuri", "morti". Though recreating alliteration with the exact same sounds was not a viable solution, it was possible to create a similar sounding translation by choosing words containing the voiced alveolar "d" (a sound close to the voiceless alveolar "t"), such as "sudden", "already", "dead" and "abandonment".

*[Se mi si disfa… se mi si disfa]*

Se mi si disfa… se mi si disfa
nel cuore la parola e non ho mente
per riaverla insieme…
È vita morta sopravvissuta a morte.
Le scale non salita pensierosa,[183]
ma scale, solo scale faticate.
Basta un piccolo arco che si tende
da un suono all'altro, un arco
che comprende e ancora per un po'
io sono insieme.
Solo perché si anima
ancora per un po' la cognizione.
È feroce perversa crudeltà
tenere le parole separate.
Sturatemi le arterie, o sangue corri,
vai dove devi andare, scalda il cuore.

[183] In some instances (such as this verse), Cavalli goes as far as omitting the predicate, leaving the reader disoriented and possibly even in need of re-reading the verse multiple times in order to grasp its sense and meaning. This happens also because "salita" is both a noun meaning "climb", "ascent", and the past participle of the verb "to climb", "to ascend". After contemplating different potential solutions, I did not restore the omitted predicate in the translation, as the English word "climb" works as both noun and verb, recreating some of the ambiguity of the original, though this effect in the English version is limited by the positioning of the word, which clarifies its grammatical function much more quickly than its Italian counterpart.

*[If it unravels… if the word in my heart]*

If it unravels…if the word in my heart
unravels and I don't have the mind
to put it back together…
It's dead life surviving death.
The stairs not a pensive climb,
but stairs, only strenuous stairs.
Just a small arch stretching
from one sound to another, an embracing
arch, and I am held together
a little longer.
Only because cognition
is animated a little longer.
It is vicious, perverted cruelty,
to keep words apart.
Unclog my arteries, run, blood,
go where you have to go, warm up the heart.

*[Stupidi nervi orribili e inferiori]*

Stupidi nervi orribili e inferiori,
padroni del dolore e del piacere
eppure servi sempre risentiti,
vulnerabili e tanto delicati
sempre pronti a contrarsi spaventati,
a ogni offesa così vendicativi.

*[Stupid nerves, horrible and lowly]*

Stupid nerves, horrible and lowly,
masters of pain and pleasure,
and, still, always resentful servants,[184]
so delicate and vulnerable
always ready to shrink in fear,
so vindictive at every offense.

[184] Though, as stated before, Cavalli often omits punctuation in her verses to create a flow resembling that of conversation or thought, in some cases punctuation has been added into the verses to help readability, especially in compositions (such as this one) that do not follow standard syntactical patterns.

## Conclusions

Patrizia Cavalli passed away on 21st June 2022 and left us a rich – though unfortunately (or, perhaps, thankfully) not abundant – inheritance of verses and prose that remind us to constantly look for beauty in smallness, in nothingness, in the everyday. Cavalli's poems are an ode to life in all its tenderness and roughness, its highs and lows, its intense pleasures and excruciating pains. This thesis was surely a linguistic experiment in poetry translation, but it was also a small homage to a great poet who inspired and captivated many minds, hearts and souls.

Translating Cavalli's poetry was an honour but also a great challenge: many hours were spent deciding exactly where to cut off verses while trying to keep together (at least some of the) internal rhymes, aural features, images and meanings. Many hours were spent pacing back and forth or in circles while reading her poems out loud, both in the original, euphonic Italian and in the sometimes unsure and odd-sounding English of the first drafts. Countless hours were spent reading and rereading all of Cavalli's work, basking in the sunlight coming through the many windows of her writing, petting the many cats that populate her verses, and smelling all the smells that come through her vivid, colourful pages.

Patrizia Cavalli wrote about life in such a straightforward, honest way that she made it (in both writing and living) seem such an easy, human action. No theme was off-limits, no topic was too trivial or unimportant not to be included in one of her poems. Patrizia Cavalli was – and is – at once the poet of everything and the poet of nothing. I would like to conclude this work with the words Enrico Palandri wrote in memory of his friend Patrizia Cavalli, shortly after her passing:

> "This is what poetry can be and where it can go. Not an aesthetic manifesto, not a political statement, not a newspaper article. Just our intimate awareness that the same inner place where we have felt the highest things, the love for someone, the pain of loss, a metaphysical bewilderment, can also be occupied by humble thoughts, by the cold or the smell of fried food. And that if we want to talk about love, death, travels or

God, we do so with our chains, the smells and fears in which we are immersed. And if you happen to be Patrizia, as if by magic, this ordinary level of existence will rise up, and be full of every thing."[185]

[185] Enrico Palandri, "Patrizia Cavalli: dove arriva la poesia," *Doppiozero*, 22 June 2022, https://www.doppiozero.com/patrizia-cavalli-dove-arriva-la-poesia.

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