

# **IL PIETRISCO TRANSLATIONS**

## **Poetry and the Pandemic**

**Edited by Anna Aresi and Monica Boria**



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# Poetry and the Pandemic

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## Notes on Contributors

GIANLUCA CINELLI Gianluca Cinelli is a researcher in Italian Studies and Comparative Literature and scientific consultant of the Nuto Revelli Foundation. His research interests include war narratives, history, literature and myth, and violence and trauma in literature. He has published numerous articles on Nuto Revelli, Primo Levi, Mario Rigoni Stern, Alessandro Manzoni and Joseph Conrad. Among his monographs: *Nuto Revelli* (2011); *La questione del male in Storia della colonna infame di Alessandro Manzoni* (Troubador, 2015) and “*Viandante arrived in Sparta ...*” (2016). His most recent publications are the monographs *Il paese dimenticato: Nuto Revelli e la crisi dell’Italia contadina* (Francoangeli, 2020) and *Le guerre di Mario Rigoni Stern* (Morlacchi, 2022), and the collection of essays *Innesti: Primo Levi e i libri altrui* (with Robert Gordon, Peter Lang, 2020). He is one of the editors of the journal *Close Encounters in War*. As an author of fiction and poetry, Gianluca has published the novels *Fantasma in Val d’Orcia* (Nerosubianco, 2012) and *Il segreto della città di K.* (Italic Pequod, 2019), the collection of short stories *La voce delle cose* (Nerosubianco, 2017), and the selection of poems *Un giorno nella vita* (2015).

VIVIANA FIORENTINO is originally from Italy and lives in Ireland. Her poems appeared in anthologies (Dedalus Press, Salmon Poetry, Arlen House), magazines (i.e. The Stinging Fly) and on air for RTÉ 1. They were recorded for the Irish Poetry Reading Archive (UCD). In Italy, she published two poetry collections (*In Giardino*, Controluna Press 2019, *Trasmerimenti* Zona Contemporanea, 2021) and a novel (*Tra mostri ci si ama*, Transeuropa Press 2019). She translated Irish poet Freda Laughton into Italian (Arcipelago Itaca Press, 2022). Her essay and translations of Anne Carson were published in the volume *Trasparenze 8/22*, San Marco dei Giustiniani Press, 2022. Her translations, articles and interviews appeared in many literary blogs, such as Nazione Indiana and Balena Bianca. She is winner of the 2022 Irish Chair of Poetry Student Prize. Viviana is Language Project Artist for Quotidian. Word on the Street and is supported by a SIAP grant by the Northern Ireland Arts Council. She is a board member of Le Ortiq, an initiative to rediscover forgotten female artists, and for the Irish PEN.

FRANCA MANCINELLI was born in Fano, Italy, in 1981. Her poems and prose poems, translated into English by John Taylor, are published at The Bitter Oleander Press: *The Little Book of Passage* (2018), *At an Hour’s Sleep from Here* (2019). A volume gathering her prose narratives and personal essays, *The Butterfly Cemetery* was published in. Her latest book, *Tutti gli occhi che ho aperto* (Marcos y Marcos, 2020), has won the Europa in Versi Prize and the San Vito al Tagliamento Prize. Taylor’s translation of this volume, *All the Eyes that I Have Opened*, is forthcoming from Black Square Editions. Taylor and Mancinelli also carry on a dialogue about literary, philosophical, and spiritual issues: the first part was published in the special feature, on her writing, in the Autumn 2019 issue of *The Bitter Oleander*; a second part appeared online in *Hopscotch Translation* (July 2021); and a third part, which was originally broadcast on Trafika Europe Radio, was published in *Eurolitkrant* (April 2022). Her writing is featured in the University of Oxford project “Non solo muse: panorama della poesia italiana dal 1970 a oggi” coordinated by Adele Bardazzi and Roberto Binetti. Her work has been translated into fifteen languages.

PAULA MEHAN was born in Dublin where she still lives. Besides seven award-winning poetry collections she has also written plays for both adults and children. She has conducted residencies in universities, in prisons, in the wider community. She has collaborated with musicians, visual artists and dancers, most recently with artist Dragana Jurišić in a book of photographs and poems, *Museum*, responding to No 14 Henrietta Street, the Dublin Tenement Museum. Poetry collections in print include *Dharmakaya* (2000) and *Painting Rain* (2009) both published by Carcanet Press). *Geomantic*, a long poem in 81 parts, published by Dedalus Press in 2016, received a Cholmondeley Award for Poetry. *As If By Magic: Selected Poems* (Dedalus Press, 2020) presents a generous offering of poetry made in the last thirty years. From 2013 to 2016 she was Ireland Professor of Poetry and her lectures from the Chair, *Imaginary Bonnets with Real Bees in Them*, is published by UCD Press. A collection of critical essays on her poetry and plays, edited by Jody Allen Randolph, was published by the U.S. journal *An Sionnach*. Awards include the Butler Award of the Irish American Cultural Institute, the Laurence O'Shaughnessy Award, the Denis Devlin Award and the Marten Toonder Award.

PATRIZIA PIREDDA (MA Arts; MA Philosophy; MLitt Modern languages; PhD Modern Languages). She develops her research in different countries and European universities, such as La Sapienza, Oxford and Goethe Universities. Her research interests focus on the investigation of the links between literature, ethics and aesthetics. She has published a number of articles on metaphor, on ethics and literature, Wittgenstein, Nietzsche, Pirandello, D'Annunzio, Savinio, Levi, Calvino, Thomas More and Utopia. Amongst her publications: “*L'etico non si può insegnare*”. *Studio ermeneutico sull'etica e il linguaggio in Nietzsche e D'Annunzio attraverso la filosofia di Wittgenstein* (Troubador, 2014); *The Great War in Italy. Representation and Interpretation* (Troubador, 2013); *George Bryan Brummell. Studio estetico della maschera del dandy* (Aracne, 2017); *Ethics and Italian Theatre of the Twentieth Century* (Guida, 2018). She edited (with Matthias Roick) the collection of essays *Vera Amicitia. Classical Notions of Friendship in Renaissance Thought and Culture* (Peter Lang, 2022). As Guest Editor of the journal *Interface*, she curated the Special Issue *Politics, Ideology, and Discourse of Disease* (*Interface* 19, 2022).

JOHN TAYLOR is an American writer, critic, and translator who lives in France. Among his many translations of French and Italian poetry are books by Philippe Jaccottet, Jacques Dupin, Pierre Chappuis, Pierre-Albert Jourdan, José-Flore Tappy, Pierre Voélin, Georges Perros, Lorenzo Calogero, and Alfredo de Palchi. His translations have been awarded grants and prizes from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Academy of American Poets, Pro Helvetia, and the Sonia Raiziss Charitable Foundation. He is the author of several volumes of short prose and poetry, most recently *The Dark Brightness*, *Grassy Stairways*, *Remembrance of Water & Twenty-Five Trees*, and a “double book” co-authored with Pierre Chappuis, *A Notebook of Clouds & A Notebook of Ridges*. His first two books, *The Presence of Things Past* (1992) and *Mysteries of the Body and the Mind* (1998), were republished by Red Hen Press in 2020.

## Introductory note

We are thrilled at the publication of the first issue of *Il Pietrisco Translations* and would like to thank the authors and translators for their excellent contributions and for their patience. We are also grateful to them for granting *Il Pietrisco* permission to publish these original poems and their translations.

Individual contributions are organized following a format that foreground the original texts, followed by their translations and, where appropriate, a brief description/contextualization of the texts and/or their authors.

We hope you will enjoy the issue.

*Anna Aresi and Monica Boria, July 2023*

## GIANLUCA CINELLI

(translated from the Italian by Patrizia Piredda in collaboration with the author)

### **L'infermiere**

N'antro turno de notte, n'antro giro de giostra  
che tante miserie ogni giorno me mostra,  
e nun lo sa nessuno a chi tocca la sorte:  
da qua ritornano solo i forti,  
è 'na roulette russa, è tutta 'na morte.

Quanno me viè da piagne me chiudo e nun ce penso,  
faccio quer che posso pe' daje un senso  
ma nun me so da' pace, che nun posso fa' gnente  
p'allungà li fili troppo corti  
ai quali sta appesa tutta 'sta ggente.

Me dicono "sei 'n eroe, l'orgoglio nazzionale",  
e intanto c'ho du' processi ar tribunale,  
perché un anno fa so' morti du' pazzienti  
e pe' raddrizzà chissà che torti,  
m'hanno denunciato, incazzati, li parenti.

Io nun me raccapezzo, so' pure infastidito,  
già che ritorno a casa ogni sera sfinito,  
co' li lividi 'n faccia pe' questa mascherina,  
pensanno a tutti quei pori morti  
che nun ritroverò domani a mmatina.

Eppure me sto zitto e sempre tiro avanti,  
e come me ce ne stanno ancora tanti.  
Ner mezzo der casino mantengo l'allegrezza  
pure a la fine dei giorni storti,  
e dono a tutti un po' de leggerezza.

### **A Nurse**

Night shift again, a new ticket to ride  
That once more today shows me much dismay,  
For no one can tell the turn of the tide:  
Only the strong may walk away,  
A toss of the dice will tell who's to die.

My mind goes blank, alone I hide and cry,  
I try all I can to make right this mess  
But there's no peace of mind, no matter if I try



To stretch those threads – too short I guess  
On which so many desperately hang.

They call me “hero”, the nation’s pride and joy,  
And yet in the meantime they drag me to the bar  
Because two patients died and one was just a boy.  
I dunno what wrong I’ve done so far,  
To arouse the rage of such angry a mob.

I just don’t get it, I am also a bit pissed off,  
Since I come home face-bruised every night  
And exhausted I sit alone and scoff  
Thinking of those who didn’t last the fight,  
So many a face I won’t see any more.

But I carry on and do not complain,  
For I know that out there I am not alone.  
In such friggin’ a mess I endure the strain  
Even in those days that freeze me in the bone,  
And give everyone a little love and care.

\*\*\*

### **La saggezza de la natura**

Famo a capisse, pe’ me so’ tutti uguali,  
omini e ragni, i cammelli e pure li squali  
e ancora l’erba e la vacca che se la magna:  
pe’ ciascuno che more, un antro ce guadagna.

L’omo se monta la testa, se fa importante,  
vole, dispone e s’atteggia a fa’ er comandante,  
e s’è inventato persino la religione  
pe’ convince se stesso che der monno è padrone.

Mica me posso impone a dittatrice,  
io nun m’immischio: so’ solo er disegnatore.  
Prima o poi tocca a tutti ’na bella cicatrice.

Peggio pe’ lui si quarcuno se sente un re,  
basta a le vorte un virus, un raffreddore  
pe’ stecchè ’na genia. Ma che me frega a me?

### **Wisdom of Nature**

Sharks and spiders, camels and men,  
They’re all the same, let’s make it plain,  
And even the grass and the grazing cow:  
For each one who dies, another thrives and how.

Man gets cocky, he thinks he's such a wonder,  
He wants and claims like master and commander,  
And a God he made up once told him a tale,  
That over the world he'd rule and prevail.

I refuse to play the tyrant, I will not go that far,  
Nor do I meddle: I'm just an engineer.  
Sooner or later, everyone must get some scar.

One may feel like a king, but that is just a cheat:  
Sometimes it takes a cold, not even too severe,  
And folk just waste away. Why should I give a shit?

\*\*\*

### **25 aprile 2020 – II**

Ho perso er conto dei giorni finiti  
senza lascià quarcosa d'importante:  
se so' sommersi nell'acqua stagnante  
e nun se po' capì a che so' serviti.

È un senso generale d'oppressione  
che questa sera esala dai viali  
deserti e scoloriti, tutti uguali.  
È senza gioja 'sta libberazione.

A la finestra aspetta e spera  
che presto finisca la priggionia  
de la paura e pare 'na chimera

quer verde fresco de la primavera,  
che lungo er fiume lenta s'avvia  
a risvejà 'na nazzione intera.

### **April 25, 2020 - II**

I cannot reckon the days that have gone by  
leaving behind nothing worth the while,  
sunk in murky water, and no one can tell why  
we had to endure this time so dull and vile.

Dreary exhales a disheartening feeling  
from the empty avenues at dusk,  
they look all the same and as if disappearing.  
This day of liberation is a joyless, bitter rusk.

By your window you wait and hope

that fear releases us from this captivity  
and yet you have still much to mope

before the green freshness of spring may lope  
along the river in slow tranquillity  
to awaken the nation for a new, better scope.

\*\*\*

### **Dopo la piena**

Giù lungo er fiume maggio s'acchitta in fiore,  
l'aria densa de glicini e de rose  
rasserena er ricordo de le ore  
de reclusione e de notti angosciose.

Si fissi l'acqua, se cheta la mente  
che come i mulinelli gira a voto:  
stasse a lambiccà nun serve a gnente,  
ché dove er fiume finisce è noto.

Scorre pacioso, è passata la piena  
co' tutti quei detriti sparpajati  
e i tronchi d'arberi disancorati:

lasciano dietro un marchio de pena,  
la buca scoperchiata e le radici  
nude nell'aria, spezzate e infelici.

### **After the spate**

Down by the river May's dressed in flowers,  
heavily scented with roses and wisteria  
the air soothes the memory of imprisoning hours  
and nights of distress, unrest, and hysteria.

Look at the water and find some peace of mind,  
your brain like a whirlpool spins in vain around:  
there's no use in brooding, for all rivers wind  
and everyone knows whereinto they are bound.

The river streams quietly after the rage  
that dragged away in scattered debris  
chunks and trunks of unanchored tree:

they left behind a mark of rampage,  
an open grave and broken roots  
naked in the air, trampled under boots.

\*\*\*

**Context / Commentary.** These poems were written in the spring of 2020, in the city of Turin, during the lockdown imposed by the Italian government as a measure to tackle the spread of Covid-19. The atmosphere in the city was gloomy and tense. People were afraid, the shops were closed, and the deprivation of freedom represented an experience for which everyone was unprepared. These poems were written in the Roman dialect, which is traditionally characterized by a polemical and sarcastic spirit, and are linked to the poetic traditions of the “pasquinades” and of Giuseppe Gioachino Belli. The proposed poems, selected from a larger collection, transcend the Italian situation in which they were conceived insofar as they speak of universal emotions of fear, solidarity, hope, and anger that everyone felt during the Covid-19 pandemic. In the specific case of the poem *April 25, 2020 - II*, an Italian national holiday (celebrating the Liberation of Italy in 1945) becomes a symbol of a much-expected and desired rebirth.

# FRANCA MANCINELLI

(translated from the Italian by John Taylor)

## *Tre poesie. –Per un cielo di pietra*

tra i rami dei polmoni  
si sono posati i corvi.  
Nessun battito che li richiami via.

\*

da un vaso di cemento ci sporgiamo  
recisi dalla nascita.  
–È quasi finita la luce.

\*

hanno sparato al cielo,  
si è fatto pietra.  
Noi incisi sulla lastra di un sepolcro  
–figure rosse e azzurre  
di ali aperte in viaggio.

Qualcuno tra queste rovine  
sfiorerà con un dito  
la nostra storia  
di uccelli sfuggiti all'appostamento  
per attraversare l'aria.

## **Three Poems: For a Stone Sky**

between the branches of the lungs  
crows have alighted.  
No beat calls them away.

\*

from this concrete vase we stick out  
cut off at birth.  
–The light is almost gone.

\*

they shot at the sky,  
it became stone.  
We, etched on a grave  
—red and blue figures  
traveling with open wings.

Among these ruins  
someone's finger  
will touch our story  
of birds escaped from the ambush,  
to fly through the air.

\*\*\*

## PAULA MEEHAN

(Translated from English by Viviana Fiorentino)

### Seed

The first warm day of spring  
and I step out into the garden from the gloom  
of a house where hope had died  
to tally the storm damage, to seek what may  
have survived. And finding some forgotten  
lupins I'd sown from seed last autumn  
holding in their fingers a raindrop  
each like a peace offering, or a promise,  
I am suddenly grateful and would  
offer a prayer if I believed in God.  
But not believing, I bless the power of seed,  
its casual, useful persistence,  
and bless the power of sun,  
its conspiracy with the underground,  
and thank my stars the winter's ended.

### Seme

Primo giorno caldo di primavera  
ed esco in giardino, dal buio  
di una casa, dove la speranza è morta  
e conto i danni della tempesta, cerco cosa potrebbe  
dopo tutto essere sopravvissuto. E trovo qualche pianta di lupino  
dimenticata, l'ho piantata da seme lo scorso autunno,  
trattiene tra le dita una goccia  
di pioggia ognuna un'offerta di pace, o una promessa,  
d'improvviso mi sento grata, reciterei  
una preghiera se credessi in Dio.  
Ma non credo, allora benedico la forza del seme  
la sua casuale, utile persistenza,  
e benedico la forza del sole,  
la sua cospirazione con il sotterraneo,  
e ringrazio le mie stelle l'inverno è finito.

\*\*\*

## **Hannah, Grandmother**

Coldest day yet of November  
her voice close in my ear —  
*tell them priests nothing.*  
Was I twelve? Thirteen?  
*Filthy minded.*  
*Keep your sins to yourself.*  
*Don't be giving them a thrill.*  
*Dirty owl feckers.*  
As close as she came to the birds and the bees  
on her knees in front of the Madonna,  
Our Lady of the Facts of Life  
beside the confessional —  
oak door closing like a coffin lid  
neatly carpentered  
waxed and buffed.  
In the well made box of this poem  
her voice dies.  
She closes her eyes  
and lowers her brow to her joined hands.  
Prays hard:  
woman to woman.

## **Nonna Hannah**

Il giorno più freddo ancora Novembre  
la sua voce nel mio orecchio —  
*Non dirgli ai preti niente.*  
Avevo dodici, tredici anni?  
*Sporcaccioni.*  
*Tieniti i peccati per te.*  
*Non dargli soddisfazione.*  
*Vecchi sporchi bastardi.*  
Per quanto potesse parlare *di uccellini e passere*  
in ginocchio di fronte alla Madonna,  
Nostra Signora dei Fatti della Vita  
accanto al confessionale -  
una porta di quercia chiusa come il coperchio di una bara  
ben lavorato  
cerato e lucidato.  
Nella bella scatola di questa poesia  
muore la sua voce.  
Chiude gli occhi  
e congiunge la fronte alle mani giunte.  
Prega intensamente:



donna a donna.

\*\*\*

### **The New Regime**

After love we sleep curled together.  
I am dreaming her old dreams; she dreams  
pines freighted with snow, ice storm weather.

Her mouth's rimed with my milk, her hair streams  
in curls and rivulets down her back.  
She is spelling out the new regime:

its ins, its outs, my place in the pack;  
where she keeps the names of the lost things;  
how to bear the pain, the sweats, the rack.

### **Il Nuovo Regime**

Dopo l'amore dormiamo insieme rannicchiati.  
Sogno i vecchi sogni di lei; lei sogna  
pini carichi di neve, in un tempo da tempesta di ghiaccio.

La sua bocca è brinata dal mio latte, fiumi i capelli  
scivolano in riccioli e poi rivoli giù lungo la sua schiena.  
Lei scandisce il nuovo regime:

i dettagli, il mio posto nel branco;  
dove conserva i nomi delle cose perdute;  
come poter sopportare il dolore, le fatiche, lo spasmo.

\*\*\*

### **The Ghost Song**

'The singers and workers that never handled the air'  
- Gwendolyn Brooks

From a dream of summer, of absinthe,  
I woke to winter. Carol singers  
decked the halls of some long-lost homeland.  
Late-night shoppers and drowsy workers  
headed for the train.

So the night that

you died was two-faced, June light never  
far from mind though snow fell. I handled  
grief like molten sunshine, learned to breathe  
your high lithe ghost song from thinnest air.

### **Canzone Fantasma**

“The singers and workers that never handled the air”  
- Gwendolyn Brooks

Da un sogno d'estate, d'assenzio,  
mi svegliai nell'inverno. I cori di Natale  
coltavano le sale di una casa persa da tempo.  
Acquirenti notturni e lavoratori assonnati  
andavano al treno.

Così la notte  
che moristi aveva due facce, la luce di giugno  
presente alla mente mentre cadeva la neve. Tra le mani  
il dolore come sole che scioglie, ho imparato a respirare  
la tua alta e agile canzone fantasma nell'aria più sottile.

\*\*\*

### **The Sea Cave**

It is as close as I'll get to her  
in this life: to swim into the dark  
deep in the cave where the hot springs are,

to float in her amniotic dream  
of children, of a husband, of home.  
Flickers of light there where minnows teem

like memories pulsing through my veins,  
that lull me, that shrive me, uncertain  
whether I hear her heartbeat or mine.

### **La Grotta Marina**

Il più vicino che posso a lei  
in questa vita: nuotare nel buio  
profondo nella grotta lì dove sono le sorgenti calde,  
  
e galleggiare nel suo sogno amniotico

di bambini, di un marito, di una casa.  
Baluginare di luce lì dove pullulano pesciolini

come ricordi che mi pulsano nelle vene  
che mi cullano, mi assolvono, incerta  
di sentire il battito del suo o del mio cuore.

\*\*\*

### **Context / Commentary**

Radicale e indipendente, Paula Meehan scrive poesie che entrano nelle case della gente comune dei sobborghi dublinesi, così come nel mondo dei sogni e dell'immaginazione. Jody Allen Randolph, colloca la sua voce "a un incrocio tra idee *contro-culturali* e tradizione lirica irlandese" e sottolinea l'importanza del "suo attivismo ecologico", ma anche l'influenza della poeta Eavan Boland nell'impegno femminista. Boland e Meehan condividono il desiderio di raccontare storie di donne, di ridefinire cosa significhi poesia politica.

Eppure, Meehan resiste ad apparire come femminista, non ricade negli stereotipi e presenta il suo lavoro come cross-gender. Infatti, come poeta proveniente dalla classe operaia, l'attivismo poetico di Meehan si concentra sulle ingiustizie storiche e restituisce i temi di classe sociale, genere e sfruttamento ambientale come intimamente connessi. La raccolta da cui sono tratte le poesie qui tradotte si intitola *As If By Magic – Selected Poems* (Dedalus Press, 2020), e la sezione è 'Geomantic'. Si riferisce alla divinazione di quei *pattern* dell'esistenza che ci sembrano casuali, così apparentemente impercettibili e che nello scorrere del tempo perdiamo del tutto. La poesia tenta di resistere alla perdita e al disfacimento dell'impercettibile e dell'invisibile, creando ordine dal caos.

Le traduzioni provano a restituire nella lingua italiana la musica, la radicalità e il respiro universale - il senso della natura e dei fenomeni cosmici – così caratteristici della poesia di Meehan.

