

Other Islands

(after 'Islands' by Sarah Howe)

I didn't pay attention to the islands
as my plane approached the Kai Tak runway—
a strip of land among clusters
of tattered buildings.
I was too excited to witness the kiss
between the tilted wing and the rooves.

Chunking Mansion was
my first temporary shelter.
Navigating through the ground floor
among Asian and African faces
selling second-hand phones, henna, curry powder,
saris, naan, kebab, spices and dates,
I walked up its stairs—
the lift was often out of service.
The fire doors were kept open
by a trashcan, its acrid stench
mixed with the smell of curry
wafted through the broken windows.
A Pakistani man sat on the landing,
head in his hands.

As the first money came,
My place became a room
in a sublet apartment.
The aircon rumbled incessantly
and plexiglas walls
hid the 'bathroom'.

The shower ritual was
sitting on the toilet bowl,
one hand holding the hose,
the other the soap.
Clouds of humidity loomed,
as I imagined the whole room
turning into a Turkish hammam,
no longer the breeding ground
for cockroaches that at night
basked inside the packet
of my Digestive biscuits,
troubling my intricate dreams of home.

Discombobulated,
an explorer who had lost her compass,
one day I found a Court order
stuck on the entrance door.
The owner sued the tenant
for not paying the rent
despite collecting our money.
I didn't get what my boss meant
when he said, shaking his head,
that there was no free lunch
in Hong Kong.

Stubborn, I stayed a while longer.
Three tattooed guys
were my new flatmates.
They played mahjong until late,
drank beer and swore in Cantonese
with a girl on their laps.
A cloud of smoke hovered over
their orange heads.

In pyjamas and flip-flops,
and armed with ingenuity,
I asked them to be quieter.
I had to work the day after,
and needed to sleep.
One of them put down the can of beer,
stared at me and finally nodded,
with a lopsided smile.

The first time I gave tours
around the harbour,
the sunset revealed islands,
like whales just emerged from the sea,
green and promising private havens
for birds, trees and butterflies.

As dusk fell,
I retired in a corner of the boat
to eat fried rice
from a styrofoam box—
the skyline a postcard
that hid the city's uglier face.

Tall blocks, made of Lego bricks,
raised on land from reclaimed sea,
man-made islands of hope
that offered pricy tiny units,

split into even smaller rooms:
 dollhouses at best
 shoeboxes at worst.

Hong Kong had become my home,
 at times ever-changing,
 the uber-rich being chauffeured,
 the poor fighting for a roof
 while rats scuttled
 in the underbelly of glitzy Central.

All around the city,
 blocks have now multiplied,
 their surfaces swankier, more alluring.
 Dollhouses turned into palaces.
 As for the shoeboxes,
 They've even lost their mouldy shoes.

I still visit Chunking Mansion
 for that curry
 that I would never eat back home.
 Time has never stopped, there:
 new lifts, but same faces and hubbub,
 money-changers and copy watches,
 tailors delivering suits in a day.
 One of the many islands
 that will never be joined to the shore.

(Paola Caronni)

Diametrical Growth

My garden marked the passing of time until I left.

The swaying force of my pine tree dominated the season of rebirth.
 When it was time to change skin, it discharged its dry needles
 into the drain around the roof.
 Under the rains, to Mum's disappointment,
 they fell in a prickling shower,
 and threaded a soft brown carpet that covered the navy tiles and the grass
 in patches of brown.

Ignoring their suffocating power, she planted new flowers.
 The soil woke up and welcomed the seeds,
 eager to find out which colours would blanket its neat beds.
 Mum used to mail me pictures of the resulting artwork, with our black cat
 sitting still in the middle, posing like the Egyptian divinity Bastet.
 Like her, the last one of a series
 protecting home, women's secrets, fertility and birth.

As an open door to warm breeze or chillier gusts,
 autumn passed quite unnoticed instead.
 It was either the weaker trail of a hot summer,
 but without the same daring and seducing strength,
 or a preview of winter, with cold spells that surprised Nature
 and drove it right into the heart of the coldest season
 forcing the vegetal world to hibernate and shed its lush clothes.

But summer is every year for me the season of discoveries.
 The pine tree in my garden has grown suddenly very tall,
 like a teenager you leave as a boy and find the year after a man,
 shambling off the house in a hoodie, hat on his head.
 The rosemary shines in all its splendour and woodsy pungent aroma.
 A lavender bush replaces the deceased apricot tree,
 The grey foggy sky of roasted chestnuts and spiced wine
 is now a permanent blue sheet.
 The dark afternoons get back their long and bright nights.
 And the vapours of hot minestrone, braised meats and polenta
 turn to lunches and dinners outdoors.

I harvest red tomatoes, bite their sweet inviting meat
 dripping joyous blood that tickles my naked arms,
 the ones not eaten on the spot are cut and mixed
 with the milky buffalo mozzarella and just picked fat basil leaves
 that leave a peppery and minty fragrance on my fingertips.
 I pack this aroma with fresh mountain air, white pebbles from the beach,
 drops of emerald seawater and other Italian comforts
 that will travel with me back to the East.

Under the big umbrella that sways like a swing before any summer storm,
 all noise, wind, musky smell and little rain,
 we eat ham and melon, bruschetta, spaghetti alle vongole, salads, peppers,
 grilled eggplants, spongy watermelon and heavenly peaches from the South.
 It happens, sometimes, that a pine needle drops into our plate
 and bursts the summer bubble.

Undeterred,
 we spoil ourselves with ice creams from the nearby gelateria,
 as if summer would never return.
 As if the rings of the pine tree, the new cells it forms each springs
 were never growing.
 Year after year, it's comforting to notice,
 its increased height
 but not its enlarged girth.

(Paola Caronni)

It's no longer possible. The crying that turned

into crazy laughing, the nights spent
 running down Via Crescenzago, chasing the neon
 banner of a newsstand. It's no longer possible. It's no longer ours,
 the heartbeat of waiting for midnight, waiting
 until midnight comes with its true tumult,
 with the frenzy of all the hours, all the hours.
 It's no longer possible. There's only one time, only one
 death, a few obsessions, a few
 nights of love, a few kisses, a few streets
 that lead outside ourselves, a few poems.
(Milo de Angelis)

To Simulate the Burning of the Heart

To simulate the burning of the heart,
 the humiliation of the viscera, to flee cursed
 and cursing, to hoard chastity
 and to cry for it, to shut my mouth
 from the dangerous taste of other mouths
 and push it unfulfilled to fulfill itself in the poisons of food,
 in the glorifications of dinners when the already
 swollen belly continues to swell;
 to touch unreachable solitude and there
 at the foot of a bed, a chair
 or the stairs to say goodbye,
 to be able to keep you from my fantasy
 and to cover you with some bank of clouds
 so that your light doesn't fade my path,
 doesn't muddle my circle from which
 I keep you, you unintentional star,
 unexpected passage who reminds me of death.

For all this I asked you for a kiss and you,
 kind and innocent accomplice, didn't give it to me.
(Patrizia Cavalli)

[This red cup]

*And the crack in the teacup opens
 A lane to the land of the dead.*

W. H. Auden

*... as when a crack
 crosses a cup.*

R. M. Rilke

I have from you this red
 cup with which to drink to all my days
 one by one

in the pale mornings, the pearls
 of the long necklace of thirst.
 And if it drops and breaks, I, too,
 will be shattered, but compassionately I will repair it
 to continue the kisses uninterrupted.
 And each time the handle or the rim gets cracked
 I will go back to glue it
 until my love will have completed
 the hard, slow work of a mosaic.

*

It comes down along the white
 slope of the cup
 along the concave interior
 and flashes, just like lightning—
 the crack, black, permanent,
 the sign of a storm
 still thundering
 over this resonant landscape
 of enamel.

(Valerio Magrelli)

The Packer

*What is translation? On a tray
 The pale and flaming head of a poet*
 Vladimir Nabokov

The bending packer
 emptying my room
 does the same work as I do.
 I, too, make
 words relocate,
 words I do not own,
 putting my hand to what
 I do not know, not understanding
 what it is I am moving.
 I am moving myself,
 translating the past into the present
 that travels, sealed,
 enclosed in pages
 or in boxes with the inscription
 'Fragile', not knowing what's in them.
 This is the future, the shuttle, the metaphor,
 time labouring there and over here,
 transfer and trope,
 the removal firm.

(Valerio Magrelli)

S U S A N L A V E N D E R

Dante's Inferno, Canto 26, 8^a circle, 8^a bolgia: The Last Voyage and Death of Ulysses

- 43: Rising to my feet to look, I stood up
 On the bridge. Had I not grasped a jutting crag,
 45: I would have fallen in without a shove.
- My leader, when he saw me so intent, said:
 "These spirits stand within the flames.
 48: *Each one is wrapped in that in which he burns."*
- "Master," I replied,*
 "Who is in the flame so riven at the tip
 It could be rising from the pyre
 54: *On which Etèocles was laid out with his brother?"*
- He replied: *"Within this flame find torment*
 Ulysses and Diomed.
- In their flame they mourn the stratagem*
 Of the horse that made a gateway
 60: *Through which the noble seed of Rome came forth.*
- "If they can speak within those flames,"*
 I said, *"I pray you, Master, and I pray again -*
 66: *And may my prayer be a thousand strong -*
- Do not forbid my lingering awhile*
 Until the twin-forked flame arrives.
 69: *You see how eagerly I lean in its direction."*
- And he to me: *"Your prayer deserves*
 Much praise. Therefore, I grant it,
 72 *But on condition that you hold your tongue.*
 "Leave speech to me, for I have understood
 Just what you want. And, since they were Greeks,
 75: *They might disdain your words."*
 Once the flame had neared, when he thought
 The time and moment right,
 I heard my leader speaking in this way:
 "Oh you who are twinned within a single fire,
 If I have earned your favour while I lived,

84: *Let one of you relate
 Just where, having lost his way, he went to die."*

87: *And the larger horn of that ancient flame
 Began to murmur and to tremble,
 Like a flame that is worried by the wind.
 Then, brandishing its tip this way and that,
 As if it were the tongue of fire that spoke,
 90: It brought forth a voice and said: "When I
 Took leave of Circe, who for a year and more
 Beguiled me there, not far from Gaëta,
 93: Before Aeneas gave that name to it,*

96: *Not tenderness for a son, nor filial duty
 Toward my aged father, nor the love I owed
 Penelope that would have made her glad,*

99: *Could overcome the fervor that was mine
 To gain experience of the world
 And learn about man's vices, and his worth.*

102: *And so I set forth upon the open deep
 With but a single ship and that small band
 Of shipmates who had not deserted me.*

108: *I and my shipmates had grown old and slow
 Before we reached the narrow strait
 Where Hercules marked off the limits,
 Warning all men to go no farther.*

114: *" 'Oh brothers,' I said, 'who in the course
 Of a hundred thousand perils, at last
 Have reached the west, to such brief wakefulness*

117: *Of our senses as remains to us,
 Do not deny yourselves the chance to know –
 Following the sun – the world where no one lives.*

120: *Consider how your souls were sown:
 You were not made to live like brutes or beasts,
 But to pursue virtue and knowledge.'*

123: *With this brief speech I had my companions
 So ardent for the journey
 I could scarce have held them back.*

And, having set our stern to sunrise,

126: *In our mad flight we turned our oars to wings,
 Always gaining on the left.*

129: *Now night was gazing on the stars that light
 The other pole, the stars of our own so low
 They did not rise above the ocean floor.*

132: *Five times the light beneath the moon
 Had been rekindled and as often been put out
 Since we began our voyage on the deep,*

135: *When we could see a mountain, distant,
 Dark and dim. In my sight it seemed
 Higher than any I had ever seen.*

138: *We rejoiced, but joy soon turned to grief:
 For from that unknown land there came
 A whirlwind that struck the ship head-on.*

142: *Three times it turned her and all the waters
 With her. At the fourth our stern reared up,
 The prow went down – as pleased Another –
 Until the sea closed over us.*

***Tre volte il fé girar con tutte l'acque,
 A la quarta levar la poppa in suso
 E la prora ire in giù, com'Altrui piacque,
 Infin che 'l mar fu sovra noi richiuso".***

Translation by Robert and Jean Hollander

“Una Voce” (“A Voice”) by Luigi Pirandello (1867 – 1936)

“Lydia! Lydia!” Silvio called.

But she had already gone out, slamming the door behind her violently. She went and threw herself on her bed, bit the pillow in her rage and at first broke out into uncontrollable sobbing. When the first fury of her tears had abated, she remained dumbfounded, as if horrified in the face of her own conscience.

How could she go on denying it now? She wished, truly wished her Silvio to remain blind. His blindness was the indispensable condition for his love. For, if he should regain his sight tomorrow, handsome as he was, young, rich, a nobleman, why would he marry her? Out of gratitude? Out of pity? Ah, for no other reason! And in that case, no, no! And even if *he* were willing, *she* wouldn’t be; how could she accept that? She who loved him and wanted him for no other reason; she who saw in his misfortune the reason for her love and almost the excuse for it. Can one make compromises with one’s own conscience that way, without realizing it, to the point of committing a crime, to the point of founding one’s own happiness on someone else’s suffering?

Even now she could believe that her love would have been sufficient to compensate that blind man for the loss of his sight; she could believe that, even if by some miracle he now regained his sight, neither that supreme blessing, nor all the pleasures he could buy himself with his wealth, nor the love of some other woman, could compensate him for the loss of *her* love. But these were reasons for herself, not for him. If she had gone to him and said, “Silvio, you have to choose between the joy of seeing and my love,” he surely would have replied, “And why do you want to leave me blind?” Because only in this way, that is, on the condition of his misfortune, was her happiness possible.

She heard Silvio’s voice calling her from his room. She felt confused, dizzy: she was on the point of falling; she put her hands to her face to hold back her tears; she hastened toward him.

He was sitting, waiting for her with open arms; he hugged her to himself with tremendous strength, shouting his happiness in short, choppy phrases, saying it was for her alone that he wanted to regain his sight, to see her face, to see his beautiful, sweet bride; for her!

“You’re crying? Why? But I’m crying too, see? Oh, what joy! I’ll see you... I’ll see!”

Every word was death to her; so much so that, happy as he was, he realized her tears were not the same as his, and he then started to tell her that surely – oh, but surely – not even he, would have believed what the doctor said, and so, forget it, enough now! What was she still thinking about? Today was a holiday! Away with all sorrows! Away with all thoughts, except one: that his happiness would now be complete because he would see his bride. Now she would have more leisure, more time to furnish their home together: and it had to be beautiful as a dream, that home, which would be the

first thing he saw. Yes, he promised he would leave the clinic with his eyes bandaged, and he would open them there, for the first time, in his home.

"Speak to me! Don't let me go on speaking alone!"

"Are you getting tired?"

"No... Ask me again, 'Are you getting tired?' with that voice of yours. Let me kiss it, here, on your lips, that voice of yours..."

"Yes..."

"And speak, now; tell me how you'll furnish it for me, our home."

"How?"

"Yes, I haven't asked you anything up to now. But no, I don't want to know anything, not even now. You will take care of it. For me it will be a marvel, an enchantment... But I will see nothing at first: only you!"

She resolutely stifled her anguished weeping, made her face completely cheerful, and there, kneeling in front of him, with him bending over her, in her embrace, she began speaking to him of her love, practically in his ear, with that voice of hers, sweeter and more bewitching than ever. But when he, in rapture, held her tight and threatened never to let her go again, at that moment she freed herself and stood straight up, as if proud of a victory over herself. There! Even now, she would have been able to tie him to her indissolubly. But no! Because she loved him.

All that day, till late at night, she intoxicated him with that voice of hers, self-assured because he was still there, in his darkness, in the darkness in which hope was already flaring up, as beautiful as the image he had formed of her.

The next morning she insisted on accompanying him in the carriage to the clinic and, as she left him there, she told him she would get right to work, right away, like an industrious swallow building her nest.

"You'll see!"

For two days, in terrible anxiety, she awaited the result of the operation. When she heard it was successful, she waited a little longer, in the empty house: she furnished it for him lovingly. In his exultation he wanted to see her, if only for a moment, but she sent a message asking him to be patient for a few more days: if she wasn't hurrying over, it was to avoid exciting him: it was against the doctor's orders...

She gathered up her things, and the day before he left the clinic, she departed without anyone knowing.... in order to remain, at least in his memory, a voice, which perhaps, now that he had emerged from his darkness, he would seek on many lips, in vain.

Raccolse le sue robe, e il giorno prima che egli lasciasse la casa di salute, se ne parti ignorata, per rimanere almeno nella memoria di lui, una voce, ch'egli forse, uscito ora dal suo buio, avrebbe cercata su molte labbra, invano.

The Dying Bride

by Susan Lavender ©

Once again she stands ready
 To meet her groom.
 Ever less steady,
 She awaits her inevitable doom.

She recalls, many moons ago, the first time,
 No father to defend her, she yielded to his salty slime,
 A child bride, buoyed by enthusiasm: virgin, pristine,
 Ravishing, not ravished, shiny and clean.
 This year, as each year on Ascension Day, they renew their vows.
 Stooping ever more arthritically, to her lord and master she bows,
 As a wedding ring drops in water, to the crowd's applauding roar.
 It's just one more briny notch on his ancient score
 Against his now aging, but ever elegant, whore.
 She's no longer a maid,
 She's just simply decayed.
 She's ravaged and raped, she's battered and bruised,
 But as he devours her, seasoned with salt, he's quietly amused.

Giant cement hands prop up her osteoporotic plight,
 But they can't withstand her gradual crumbling, sinking out of sight.
 He says: *"Surrender to me, don't you see, I won't let you stand taller than me."*
 He need not persist. Faithful, as always, she can't resist.
 She says: *"I choose not liberty, but thee"*.
 She has no choice, she has no voice.

He doesn't want her on top of him.
 He's dragging her down slowly into his lagoon.
 He wants her beneath him,
 To be submerged, very soon.

Venice, bride of the Sea, abused wife of the Sea,
 Soon to be a drowned bride city *under* the Sea.

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A Memory/Un Ricordo

by ***Umberto Saba*** (1883 – 1957) a 20th century poet from Trieste, in the north of Italy.

I can't sleep. I see a road, a grove
That makes my chest tight, anxious;
where we went to be alone and together,
another boy and I.

It was Easter; the long strange rituals
Of old folks. And what if he doesn't like me—
I thought—what if he doesn't come back tomorrow?
And tomorrow never came. It pained me,
like a spasm towards evening.

***Un'amicizia (seppi poi) non era,
Era quello un amore;
Il primo; e quale e che felicità
N'ebbi, tra i colli e il mare di Trieste.
Ma perché non dormire, oggi, con queste
Storie di, credo, quindici anni fa?***

That was not friendship (I later learned)
It was love;
My first love; and what joy I derived from it
Between the hills and the sea of Trieste.
But why can't I sleep tonight, because of
These memories from what must be - fifteen years ago now?

UN RICORDO

(the full Italian original version – just for reference in case anyone would like to have the original)

Non dormo. Vedo una strada, un boschetto,
che sul mio cuore come un'ansia preme;
dove si andava, per star soli e insieme,
io e un altro ragazzetto.

Era la Pasqua; i riti lunghi e strani
dei vecchi. E se non mi volesse bene
– pensavo – e non venisse più domani?

E domani non venne. Fu un dolore,
uno spasimo verso la sera;
che un'amicizia (seppi poi) non era,
era quello un amore;
il primo; e quale e che felicità
n'ebbi, tra i colli e il mare di Trieste.
Ma perché non dormire, oggi, con queste
storie di, credo, quindici anni fa?

INVISIBLE CITIES - ITALO CALVINO (1972)

Arriving at each new city, the traveler finds again a past of his that he did not know he had: the foreignness of what you no longer are or no longer possess lies in wait for you in foreign, unpossessed places.

Marco enters a city; he sees someone in a square living a life or an instant that could be his; he could now be in that man's place, if he had stopped in time, long ago; or if, long ago, at a crossroads, instead of taking one road he had taken the opposite one, and after long wandering he had come to be in the place of that man in the square.

By now, from that real or hypothetical past of his, he is excluded; he cannot stop; he must go on to another city, where another of his pasts awaits him, or something perhaps that had been a possible future of his and is now someone else's present. Futures not achieved are only branches of the past: dead branches.

'Journeys to relive your past?' was the Khan's question at this point, a question which could also have been formulated: 'Journeys to recover your future?'

And Marco's answer was: 'Elsewhere is a negative mirror. The traveler recognizes the little that is his, discovering the much he has not had and will never have.' (Translated by William Weaver)

UP IN SMOKE – LAURA RUGGERI (2019)

Ash on my sleeve, a lingering smell of trail-blazing and bridge-burning
Acrid promises made among the ruins of cities choking on smoke.
You, torch carriers, beware of sudden gusts and changing winds
Of scattered embers that burn holes and turn cold.
I should know: I guard my cigarette with a cupped hand
As the day slowly sinks shapeless under my feet.
I have been a smoker for 40 years, only constant among life's variables
Threadbare identities clinging to coats I refused to turn
I was Larissa and Vlatko's son
I was a student
I was the citizen of a country that has vanished from maps.
Inhale. Exhale.
Inhale the present (small impotent drag)
Exhale the past (without coughing)

Bony back leaning against this metal fence, desiccated fingers playing with a plastic lighter.

I never walk and smoke

Walking takes you somewhere, smoking makes you endure

The place where you are

For hours, days and months I knelt on sand bags like a penitent

Drinking words brewed from my ancestors' bones.

Bullet-scarred buildings seen through the scope of a precision rifle

The stench of urine in my nostrils, a chipped cup of coffee on the window-sill.

If you miss the target, you become one.

Inhale. Aim. Shoot. Exhale.

The dead were living and the living were dead

When my heart, that battle drum, started missing a beat

And the voices in my head told me to run.

If you look back you turn into stone, if you look ahead a grimace freezes your face.

Eyes on the ground I crossed borders, old and new

Till it was safe to lift my eyes and curse the gods I never prayed to.

The skin of the sky here looks pallid and sick

Pierced by concrete, reinforced bars, vain hopes.

Give me a sky that laughs and cries

With geese, storks, cranes, swans and pelicans

Cornflower blue or grey like a wet mop.

Return to me the undivided sky that stretches from the Mediterranean to the steppes.

I am an ex- (you fill the rest)

I have no masculine energy left to explain who I was or what I have become.

A cloud of smoke expelled in a coughing fit

Democratically excommunicated by exuberant guardians of truth

Who protect graves, buttress watchtowers, scrub coffers clean, banish doubt, march to the tune.

I washed up on many shores

Spitting water with my foreign tongue, chewing words marinated in misunderstandings

I traded declension for tones.

Here I blend in with the diesel fumes, don't pretend to notice me

Because I stink less than a Kowloon bus.

I - a fleeting reflection on glass and stainless steel

Address unknown, for a little or a long while

Non-being, just a has-been

Vibrating with love and hatred.

Someone will be sent for me - Only when and who?

His intentions I know, they keep me company

Like the bare-chested delivery man pulling out a pack from his trousers

Where a dragon curls its tail.

He lights up and takes a puff crushing the filter with his teeth

Sucking intensity from the dry bones of life

On this cracked pavement, huddled around a dirty bin

While food wrappers whirl in the wind.

Where have all the crystal ashtrays gone? Who took the gold-plated lighters?

Inhale. Exhale. Toss the empty pack away.

THE WANDERER – GIUSEPPE UNGARETTI (1918)

Nowhere on earth/ / I can/make my home.
 In every/new/environment/I encounter/I find myself/longing/for /when it was/already
 familiar/
 And I always leave/a stranger.
 Reborn/returning from epochs/ lived to the brim.
 To enjoy/but a single instant/of primal life.
 I seek an innocent/land

GIROVAGO - GIUSEPPE UNGARETTI (1918)

In nessuna/parte/di terra/mi posso/accasare.
 A ogni/nuovo/clima/che incontro/mi trovo/languente/che/una volta/già gli ero
 stato/assuefatto.
 E me ne stacco sempre/straniero.
 Nascendo/tornato da epoche troppo/vissute.
 Godere un solo/minuto di vita/iniziale.
 Cerco un paese/innocente

ONE SEPTEMBER NIGHT - FRANCO FORTINI (1955)

*One September night
 when hardened women with raucous voices and scorched hair
 loosened up in whitewashed villages
 and the sand washed clattering mess-tins in the fountains ,
 under a copper moon on the violet road of Lodi
 I saw two worker , three girls dancing
 while phosphorus bombs left an inky trail on the asphalt
 one September night
 when fear howled with joy
 when every woman talked to the soldiers
 scattered among the vine rows
 and through the cities ran only the sour wine
 of songs and everything was possible
 around the dim fire of the radio
 and those who would die on country roads tomorrow
 drank from the dribbling iron pipes of the station
 or slept on straw hugging his rifle
 when summer turned to ash
 from Ventimiglia to Salerno
 and nothing else was left
 and we were free
 to run away, to ignore or cry
 one September night*

UNA SERA DI SETTEMBRE - FRANCO FORTINI (1955)

*Una sera di settembre

 quando le dure donne rauche di capelli strinati

 si addolcivano pronte nei borghi calcinati*

e ai fonti la sabbia lavava le gavette tintinnanti

ho visto sotto la luna di rame

sulla strada viola di Lodi due operai, tre ragazze ballare

tra le bave d'inchiostro dei fosfori sull'asfalto

una sera di settembre

quando fu un urlo unico la paura e la gioia

quando ogni donna parlò ai militari

dispersi tra i filari delle vigne

e sulle città non c'era che il vino agro

dei canti e tutto era possibile

intorno al fuoco della radio pallido

e chi domani sarebbe morto sugli stradali

beveva alle ghise magre delle stazioni

o nella paglia abbracciato al fucile dormiva

quando l'estate inceneriva

da Ventimiglia a Salerno

e non c'era più nulla

ed eravamo liberi

di fuggire, di non sapere o piangere,

una sera di settembre

Spring in My Heart

by Luisa Ternau

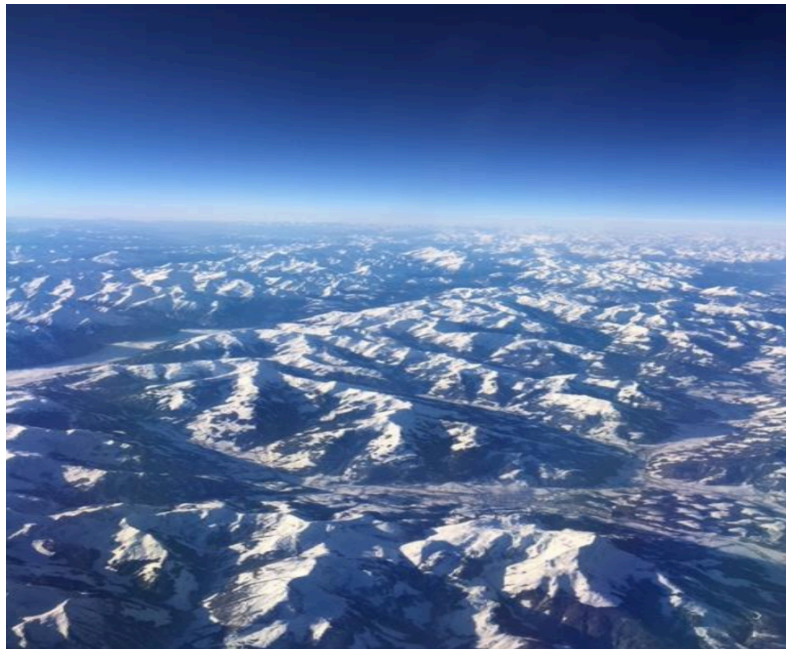
Spring in my heart,
 Spring everywhere!

Imposed on myself
 Like artificial snow
 On the Alps
 When the tourist season
 Is on.

The time for blooming
 Will also come,
 With flowers growing on the slopes,
 Uncontemplated by the ski-ing crowds.

Spring will be only for the moon
 And for the stars;
 Blossoms remaining
 Unnoticed
 on the deserted ski run.

This is a poem about the contrast between façade and the truth it hides. Spring is imposed on oneself, therefore it is everywhere! This artificial feeling of blooming and happiness is compared to the artificial snow which makes tourists satisfied during the skiing season. Artificial snow can create a feeling of happiness the same



way artificial spring imposed on oneself can lead to one's own happiness, if one is ready to believe in it. An ironic note is given by the fact that indeed spring will come in due course—it is unavoidable—. Although it may come at a time when it will remain unnoticed, perhaps even to one own self. This poem won a third prize at the first edition of the International Proverse Poetry Prize 2016.]

In Fear of Dusk

by Luisa Ternaui

This is the hour that judges you
That makes you fear
Looking at your own self in the mirror.
The dust and dirt of the day
Cover your face, your body
In sticky layers.
And yet the heart beats on.
The day is vanishing over the sky-scrapers' tops.
Street lights are being lit
Even offices seem to glow
in the impending dusk.
Red, green, red, green, red, green
The raging traffic is controlled.
On your pocket mirror
Your dreamy face covets
Colourful butterflies
Embroidered on clothes
Behind the shop-window.
They even seem to hover
Taking your thoughts
Over the flaming clouds
Where Cupid is dozing off
An uncast arrow loose
On his lap.
The heart expands
In total readiness to receive it.
Pinging devices show messages from
Work, advertisements, more work
Darkness after dusk is
Only for the distant horizon
Where layers of dust and dirt
Matter no more.

Metropolitan Happiness

by Luisa Ternaui

Sitting on the bench
Around me I hear
Footsteps in the wind
Mingled with voices
Not so faraway
Colourful lights dancing out of the walls
Hoping to reach the stars
Or dashed to the ground
Like arrows cast from outer space.
After all, even a metropolis
Is not large enough
To contain all my dreams, thoughts
Reasonings, hesitations, emotions.

Sitting on the bench
Yet where am I?
My weight is like a feather
Following the neon pink light
Up and up and up
Well over the skyscrapers' tops
Reaching high over the airplanes
An angel smiles at me
Touching me, holding me tight
With strong arms

Suddenly, fearing to fall,
I cling to the angel
And oh! I see the tree before me
The street overcrowded with footsteps
And their owners' voices
I am just sitting on the bench
Lights dancing by
Their vivid colours patting
My face, my dress, my body
With quick caresses

People walk by
They don't know I soared
So high into the sky
To touch the most beautiful being
With wings light and strong
With muscular arms
To clutch my happiness
Never to give it back to me!

Colour It Beautiful!

by Luisa Ternau

Life is a void. Colour it beautiful, then!

"You see, I do not want to sound like a venting diary, but I will tell you about my typical day now. I wake at six; allow myself the luxury of a second alarm call ten minutes later; and get up. This is even after sleeping on average only about four hours a night. Go to work. Be presentable. Smile too. It is important. My colleagues will appreciate that little arch of my lips! Then work. Discuss work at lunchtime, too. Because you are supposed to show that you love your job, and to work late and forget the sleepiness. After lunch it's back to work. Look happy and be happy as well. Remember: there are many out there who would love to have a job, even an unfulfilling job like mine. That's my everyday routine. Somehow I slipped into it and now I cannot get out."

My listener was by now eyeing the wine. I'd better change the subject. After all, this was supposed to be a happy social gathering.

"Trapped? Perhaps." I go on musing.

Who knows? Certainly the day starts and ends in a void. I look into it every night when my head aches from the pains of tiredness and it is just like gazing into a deep well. So deep that I cannot see the water at its bottom. I would love to throw a pebble into it to judge its depth from the echo. No pebble around though.

Yes, the void. And the void reminds me of a colouring book that lay open before the wondering eyes of a toddler left alone in a room. In the room – no colour pencils.

I suddenly recall that last night I had a dream. I often wonder where nocturnal dreams come from. Are they really part of our life? They must be. At least some dreams for sure are. But who sends them? Why? Where from?

I was in a rush. I needed to be at the office in twenty minutes and the traffic was horrendous. What should I do? Take a taxi of course! Walking would be impossible: too many people on the street under the scorching sun. A kid is walking on the curb. No. She is not walking. She's hopping. She looks at me sideways and blocks me from reaching the curb. I need to stop a taxi and the child is in the way.

"Move out of the way!" I yell. "It is dangerous to walk on the curb, especially in this heavy traffic!" She continues to run up and down the curb; she pulls funny faces at my words. Now she laughs defiantly.

"Just get out of the way," I say. This time I try a softer tone, hoping that she will eventually let me get to the roadside.

I get in the taxi. The driver smiles gently and I perceive a cheerful note in his voice. "Please take me to Marsh and Lockhart Road. As soon as possible!" I say.

It felt good to be rid of the annoying kid. I look out of the window. The traffic is stationary. What time will I arrive? I check my watch, then my mobile phone. I want to be sure what the exact time is. Helplessness and anguish overcome me.

"Miss, are you OK? How is your day so far?" asks the driver.

Why do you want to know? I would like to answer him, rudely. However, I spare him my rudeness, respecting that cheerful tone in his voice.

I start thinking about excuses to make once I finally arrive at the office. I know very well that no one will believe them. My colleagues will just look at me silently and burst out laughing as soon as I am out of sight.

The taxi driver is about to say something when I notice the kid. She is sitting in the front seat, right in front of me. This time she's dressed like a small princess with a crown on her head. The kid again?

"Why did you get in my taxi?" I yell.

She smiles broadly and points her little finger to the inside of the taxi's roof. Several dozen stickers of every shape and colour are pasted there, each one carrying a handwritten note. I cannot believe I had not noticed them before. How was that possible? I was just like the traveller, lost in a foreign land at night who fails to see the beautiful stars above.

The taxi driver chuckles at my surprise. "Miss, could you please write a note, too? I always ask my customers to write something nice and positive on a sticker and to put it wherever they want up there."

There were messages of love, vernacular jokes, words of incitement, some notes written in foreign languages. They all seemed to share a sense of happiness.

I agree to write a note. "Give me a sticker, please," I say. To mine and the taxi driver's disappointment, only white stickers remain.

"Oh, no! I wanted a colourful one!" I protest.

Still, I jot down something with my pen: "Life is a void." I struggle to find something positive to complete my message. But what? What could I say or write? The traffic was stuck and going nowhere. The job I was going to had no direction and made no sense. But if I left it, there would be nowhere else to go. And then, the white sticker. Why among all the taxi passengers should I be the one to have to write on a white sticker? White is a void, too.

As politely as possible, I ask, "Are you sure you don't have ONE coloured sticker left?"

Before the taxi driver can answer, the kid pipes up cheerfully, “Just colour it beautiful!”

Holding a shocking-pink pencil in her hand, she waves the pencil at me inviting me to finish my note fast because she, the Little Princess, is eager to start colouring it in!

"Colour it beautiful, then!" Like lightning I write down the words.

The kid immediately runs her pink pencil up and down all over the sticker to fill the remaining white spaces. I fix it triumphantly to the taxi's roof just above my head. I smile at the kid, and thank her for her colouring.

I wake up. The rays of the early sun have already hit my face. I go to the kitchen and ponder. In the end the kid wins. Ha! And Shakespeare put it right in his *Tempest*.

“We are such stuff as dreams are made on, and our little life is rounded with a sleep.”

This story was inspired by a photograph taken by WiPS member Celia Claase and used during Celia's workshop on Creative Images in March 2016.

Catullus 46

Literal English Translation	Original Latin	Line
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Now spring brings back the thawed-out warmth,
now the raging of the equinoctial sky
subsides with the sweet breezes of Zephyr.
Let the Phrygian plains be left behind, Catullus,
and the rich land of sweltering Nicaea:
let us fly away to the famed cities of Asia.
Now my fluttering soul yearns to wander;
now my joyful feet come alive with eagerness.
Farewell, dear bands of fellow travellers,
whom, having left home at the same time,
split paths carry home by different routes.

Iam ver egelidos refert tepores,
iam caeli furor aequinoctialis
iucundis Zephyri silescit aureis.
Linguntur Phrygii, Catulle, campi
nicaeaeque ager uber aestuosae:
ad claras asiae volemus urbes.
Iam mens praetrepidans avet vagari,
iam laeti studio pedes vigescunt.
O dulces comitum valet coetus,
longe quos simul a domo profectos
diversae varie viae reportant.

Catullus 31

Literal English Translation	Original Latin
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O Sirmio, little eye of peninsulas and of islands,
whatever in shining lakes
or vast sea either Neptune brings,
how gladly and how happily I go to see you
scarcely myself believing myself that I have left b
Thynia and Bithynian fields and that I see you in
O what is happier than worries released,
when the mind sets aside its burden, and we
having been exhausted from foreign labor, have
home,
and we rest in our longed for bed?
This is what is the one thing in return for such gr
Greetings, O beautiful Sirmio, and rejoice in [you
master rejoicing; and you, O Lydian wave of the l
laugh whatever there is of laughter at home

Paene insularum, Sirmio, Insularumque
ocelle, quascumque in liquentibus stagnis
marique vasto fert uterque Neptunus,
quam te libenter quamque laetus in viso,
vix mi ipse credens Thyniam atque Bithynos
liquisse campos et videre te in tuto.
O quid solutis est beatius curis,
cum mens onus reponit, ac peregrino
labore fessi venimus larem ad nostrum,
desideratoque acquiescimus lecto?
Hoc est quod unum est pro laboribus tantis.
Salve, o venusta Sirmio, atque ero gaude
gaudente; vosque, o Lydiae lacus undae,
ridete quidquid est domi cachinnorum.

A Poem by Sappho

*Some say a host of cavalry, others of infantry,
and others of ships, is the most beautiful
thing on the dark earth, but I say it is
whatever a person loves.
It is perfectly easy to make this
understood by everyone: for she who far
surpassed mankind in beauty,
Helen, left her most noble husband
and went sailing off to Troy with no thought at all
for her child or dear parents,
but [love?] led her astray ...
lightly ...
[and she]
has reminded me
now of Anactoria
who is not here;
I would rather see her
lovely walk and the bright sparkle of her
face than the Lydians' chariots and armed
infantry ...*

Two poems by Ono no Komachi
The colour of this flower
Has already faded away,
While in idle thoughts
My life goes by,
As I watch the long rains fall.

In my desolation
I am as duckweed:
Cut my roots and
Take me away-would the water do it,
I should go, I think.