

PETER LEVY (1949-2007)

Poesie tradotte da Antonella Anedda

Peter Levy, who died aged 57 in March 2007, was a much-loved teacher of English at the Faculty of Letters (Arezzo) of Siena University. He was in charge of the English section of *Semicerchio*, for which he wrote poetry reviews and articles. He began writing poetry himself while an undergraduate at Christ Church, Oxford. His early work was influenced in particular by W. B. Yeats, W. H. Auden, and Louis MacNeice. After he came to live in the Casentino valley near Arezzo in 1978, Peter's poetry took on a more personal, idiosyncratic voice, transforming apparently insignificant encounters with local people and places into moments of intense perception and emotion—though controlled, always, by a gentle playfulness and self-irony. The poems published here are from the darker years following the premature death of his brother, the philosopher David Levy, to whom he was deeply attached. They show him, after a long silence, beginning to find words for mourning and reasons for a return to living.

Six months before his own death, as if foreseeing it, he gathered together poems written over almost 40 years in a volume entitled *The Benefit of the Doubt* (2006). The Faculty of Letters and Peter's family have endowed a poetry prize in his name for the students of the faculty.

William Dodd

Translations by ANTONELLA ANEDDA from *The Benefit of the Doubt. Poems 1967-2006*, Private publication 2007

MARS

'Earth's the right place for love...',
Frost wrote. Mars isn't. Multiple screens give us
the thrill, once again, of a new-found-land,

which Earth feels, but Mars doesn't. Mars has discovered
nothing... I might be there, any language I use
to write this, impossible, or lost.

I might be there, unaware of a planet's
rightness for love. Rock-dead. As now.

PROSE POEM

It wasn't simply the conventionally beautiful that
[withdrew:
everything was herded indiscriminately into emptiness...
which meant that when astonishingly it all came
[crowding back,
the dullest phenomenon glowed with the rest, stood there
with them in a single circle, a ring of light. Those crowds
[returning,
hand in hand, from the brink of extinction now resonate,
[for the time
being or for ever, beyond what I had come to hope.

MARTE

Ha scritto Frost che la Terra
è il posto giusto per l'amore. Marte no. Mille schermi
ci danno ancora di un pianeta-inesplorato

il brivido – che la Terra ma non Marte prova.
Marte non ha scoperto nulla... Potrei essere là
qualunque lingua usassi sarebbe impossibile o perduta.

Potrei essere là, ignaro di una terra giusta
per l'amore. Sasso morto. Come ora.

POESIA IN PROSA

Non era solo la bellezza usuale a ritrarsi:
ogni cosa fu spinta come un gregge nel vuoto...
Così quando a sorpresa tutto si affollò all'indietro
il più spento fenomeno risplendeva con gli altri. Restava là
con loro in un unico cerchio – un anello di luce. La folla
[che tornava
mano nella mano da un orlo di estinzione adesso risuona
[per ora
o per sempre, più di quanto ero giunto a sperare.

AUBADE

*Just left of my desk I have two Hopper
postcards: Night Hawks – around five in the morning,
a downtown bar, three customers, two men in fedoras,
a woman in evening dress (red hair, red dress), the
[barman
serving penultimate drinks; and another whose title
escapes me – around five in the morning, a prairie
[highway,
a filling station, red pumps, the attendant,
just risen, attending to them.*

*I've framed them together: Night Hawks on top,
the other below it, as if they were happening
at the same time, same morning, down and out of town
respectively: four night owls and one early riser;
and now, to complete the triptych, imagine a third
[picture:
the main square here around five in the morning
and me walking across it towards this room
half an hour or so before getting these words down.*

IN AND OUT

*What I bring to the river is predictable:
a habitual tension, a muscular inflexibility
which makes the descent hard going,
the rocks I negotiate resistant,
though I'm the resister. When I get there
I undress meticulously, removing shoes,
clothes, glasses, watch in a well-rehearsed order,
positioning them unnecessarily, checking
and double-checking. Those possessions
are as yet impossibly heavy.*

*I dive into the river and almost immediately
am mutable, liquid – my periodic 'wonderful'
acquires new music, its I is complicit
with the water which dissolves solidity;
and when I emerge ten minutes later,
I'm different: I dress leisurely,
un anxiously, my shoes, watch, glasses
have acquired a talismanic quality,
my hair has borrowed its whiteness from the waterfall,*

*or from that heron which appeared unexpectedly
the other evening, hovered a moment, balancing lightly*

*over the water, then continued downstream
into the distance, its flight as liquid as the river,*

*as I murmured 'wonderful', then made my way
up to the road again, effortlessly this time.*

AUBADE

A sinistra sulla scrivania ho due cartoline di Hopper.
La prima *Nottambuli* – le cinque del mattino circa,
un bar del centro, tre clienti, due uomini in cappello,
una donna (capelli rossi) in abito da sera (rosso), il
[barman
che versa ancora un drink. L'altra il cui titolo
mi sfugge – le cinque del mattino circa, una strada nella
[prateria
una stazione di servizio, tre pompe rosse,
il benzinaio appena alzato che serve.

Le ho incorniciate insieme: *Nottambuli* in alto,
l'altra sotto, come se stessero accadendo
nella stessa mattina e alla stessa ora, in città e fuori
rispettivamente: quattro tira-tardi e un mattiniero.
Ora a completare il trittico pensa un terzo quadro:
la piazza del paese qui – le cinque del mattino circa
io che l'attraverso e arrivo in questa stanza
– mezz'ora prima circa – di buttare giù queste parole.

DENTRO E FUORI

Quello che porto al fiume è prevedibile:
una tensione usuale, una muscolatura rigida
che rende la discesa faticosa,
le rocce che scavalco resistenti
benché sia io a resistere. Quando arrivo
mi spoglio con cura, tolgo scarpe,
vestiti, occhiali, orologio, li dispongo
inutilmente in ordine perfetto,
controllando due volte, tanto pesanti sono
per il momento queste cose.

Mi tuffo e quasi subito
sono liquido, mutevole, il mio ripetere "bello"
acquista nuovo suono, la sua "elle" complice
dell'acqua che dissolve il solido.
Quando riemerge dieci minuti dopo
sono diverso, mi rivesto con comodo,
senz'ansia: scarpe, orologio, occhiali
hanno la qualità dei talismani
i miei capelli hanno rubato il bianco alla cascata

o a quell'airone che apparve inaspettato
l'altra sera, librandosi un istante – in bilico

sull'acqua – per poi seguire a valle
la corrente, il volo liquido come il fiume,

mentre mormoravo "bello" e riprendevo
di nuovo la mia strada, stavolta senza sforzo.