

An underwater photograph showing the surface of the water with ripples and bubbles. The light creates a shimmering effect on the water's surface.

PIECES OF TEXT

BIČČIET TA' KITBIET
FRAMMENTI DI TESTI
FRAGMENTI TEKSTOVA
Αποσπάσματα κειμένων

ed. Leanne Ellul

PIECES
OF
TEXT

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Din hija ġabra stampata u mxandra online li tiċċelebra lill-kittieba u tradutturi letterarji emergenti barranin li żaru Malta u l-kittieba u tradutturi letterarji emergenti Maltin li żaru b'liet barra minn Malta b'ħala parti mill-proġett Ulysses' Shelter 3 (2022–2025). Ulysses' Shelter huwa proġett ta' koperazzjoni kofinanzjat mill-Unjoni Ewropea li għandu l-għan li jibni xibka ta' residenzi letterarji permezz ta' skambju madwar l-Ewropa. L-imsieħba tal-proġett jinkludu: il-Kroazja, ir-Repubblika Ċeka, il-Greċja, Malta, is-Serbja, is-Slovenja, Spanja (Mallorca) u Wales, ir-Renju Unit.

Il-proġett huwa mmexxi mill-pubblikatur Kroat u l-agenzija letterarja Sandorf ibbażata f'Žagreb. F'Wales, l-inizjattiva hija mmexxija minn Literature Across Frontiers u l-imsieħba l-oħra huma Culture Reset fi Praga, ir-Repubblika Ċeka, Thraka f'Larissa, il-Greċja, Inizjamed f'Malta, Krokodil f'Belgrad, is-Serbja u l-Assoċjazzjoni tal-Kittieba Sloveni f'Ljubjana, is-Slovenja, u l-Kummissjoni tal-Films ta' Mallorca, Spanja. F'Malta, il-proġett tmexxa minn Karsten Xuereb bl-ġhajjnuna ta' Jean Paul Borg u Leanne Ellul. Il-partecipanti tal-proġett kienu: Đorđe Božović (2024), Jake Buttigieg (2023), Ryan Falzon (2024), Gabriel Schembri (2025), Matthew Schembri (2023), Kat Storace (2025), Ruqaya Izzidien (2023), Esyllt Lewis (2023), Ioanna Lioutsia (2024), Virginia Monteforte (2024), Lana Pukanić (2024), Maja Ručević (2024), u Kaja Teržan (2024).

Dan il-proġett ġie ffinanzjat permezz tal-Voluntary Organisations Project Scheme amministrata mill-Kunsill Malti għas-Settur tal-Volontarjat fi hdan il-Ministeru għall-Inkluzjoni u s-Settur tal-Volontarjat. Din il-pubblikazzjoni tirrifletti biss il-veduti u l-hsibijiet tal-awturi, u l-Kunsill Malti għas-Settur tal-Volontarjat ma jistax jinżamm responsabbli għall-kontenut jew għall-użu li jista' jsir minn dan l-istess kontenut. Il-fehmiet u l-opinjoni espressi huma daww tal-awturi biss u mhux neċessarjament jirriflettu daww tal-Unjoni Ewropea jew tal-Kummissjoni Ewropea. La l-Unjoni Ewropea u lanqas il-Kummissjoni ma jistgħu jinżammu responsabbli għalihom.

Il-jeddijiet tal-pubblikazzjoni miżmuma. Dan il-ktieb qed jitqassam bla ħlas bil-kundizzjoni li ma jistax jinbiegħ jew jingħata b'xejn f'xi għamla jew legatura oħra ħlief kif inhu ppubblikat. Ma jista' jsir fih ebda tibdil. Ebda silta minnu ma tista' tkun ippubblikata jew mahruga f'mod fotostatiku, elettroniku, mekkaniku, irrekordjat jew b'xi mod ieħor mingħajr il-permess tal-awtriċi u tal-pubblikaturi.



Contents/Kontenut

Introduction/Daħla	Leanne Ellul	6
Pieces of Text/Biċċiet ta' kitbiet		
Over here/Lil hawn		12
My Sweet Malta	Đorđe Božović	14
Excerpt	Ruqaya Izzidien	21
Mela!	Esyllt Lewis	24
Ειλικρίνεια	Ioanna Lioutsia	32
Honesty		
Osmog dana u tjednu, iz Chagallovog kista	Maja Ručević	40
On the Eighth Day of the Week, from Chagall's Brush		
L'ottavo giorno della settimana, dal pennello di Chagall		
Nisa Nomadi		
Dones Nòmades		
Excerpt from Obračun	Kaja Teržan	48

Over there/Lil hemm 54

Ilbieraħ rajtek mgħawweġ Arkata	Jake Buttigieg	56
Sirna nirfsu biss fuq il-ħaxix		
ibbattmat		
Slovenia you took me in with an embrace		
C.	Ryan Falzon	62
L'antidiario.	Virginia Monteforte	76
The municipality of no choice	Gabriel Schembri	92
ħadtulna s-sema	Matthew Schembri	108
zebra cross		
iż-zebra llum kollha ħamra		
Signs and Wonders	Kat Storace	114

Bionotes/Bijonoti 126

Introduction

Dahlia

Leanne Ellul

Bħal Uliſſe

7

Il-faxxinu tiegħi b'Uliſſe beda minn meta kont daqs naqra. Iz-zija Ċettina, mara qaddisa daqskemm struwita, kienet ħaditha drawwa li fi żmien il-Vitorja torganizza ġita għal Ghawdex. Kienet tagħmilha kull sena — torganizza grupp shiħ ta' nies għax in-neputija, li niġi jiena, kienet tieħu gost titla' Ghawdex bħal dak iż-żmien. Niftakarni ngħidilha minn kmieni: "Dis-sena se tagħmilha?" U anke jekk ma kinitx tkun se tagħmilha, kienet tara x'tagħmel u torganizzaha. Iz-zija kienet thobb torganizza l-vjaġġi u thobb tikkuntenta lili u ta' kull sena konna mmorru Ghawdex, noqogħdu f'lukanda semi-sabiha, inżuru Ta' Pinu, nieklu x-Xlendi u nżuru l-Għar ta' Kalipso. Ma nista' ninsa qatt kif

iz-zija kienet tkantaha l-kelma Calypso: Kalipsjo. Qisha Calippo, imma bil-j. Ta' kull sena kienet tirrakkonta l-ġrajja ta' Calypso fi kliemha u fil-qosor, imma l-iktar ta' Uliſſe. U kienet temmen bis-shiħ fil-leggenda li min jinżel fl-għar ma jergax jitla'. Forsi biex nibza' u ma nibqax nieżla. Biex nisfida, darba bqajt sejra kemxejn iżjed 'l isfel. Ma nafx kontx inżilt biżżejjed biex nintilef hemm ġew, imma kien x'kien, ergajt tlajt niġri.

Bħal Uliſſe (frażi li jużaha Đorđe Božović fil-kitba tiegħu "My Sweet Malta"), iz-zija Ċettina kienet thobb tivjaġġa: l-Ingilterra, Franza, l-Italja, it-Tuneżija, il-Portugall, Dubai ... Jien u nikber, bqajt ndur u naqra u nieħu gost niskopri bħalma kienet tagħmel hi. Bqajt nieħu gost insiefer. Għalhekk ħasadni ħafna l-artiklu ta' Agnes Callard, "The Case against Travel" f'*The New Yorker*. Hi tgħid li "We go to experience a change, but end up inflicting change on others", u żżid li "When you travel, you suspend your usual standards for what counts as a valuable use of time." L-artiklu miktub

tant tajieb li ftit ftit beda jikkonvincini. Fi ftit kliem, it-turizmu jiddeumanizzana u jiddeludina. Is-safar nirromantiċizzawh wisq u niġġustifikawh b'fatturi estrinsiċi, b'har-rotta tal-ekonomija. Inigiżżni l-kumment ta' Ioanna meta tikteb li "Tourists ... are happy people. They come to Greece and expect us to dance." Il-konsolazzjoni nsibha fil-fatt li hafna drabi ma nsifirx b'hala turista, bl-implikazzjonijiet kollha tal-kelma. Insib konsolazzjoni ikbar fi kliem Eyllt: "But what is a tourist other than someone doing research?" Insiefer u nfittex fejn imorru n-nies tal-post, ingib miegħi weraq u ġebel u b'ċeġġe li jfakkruni li darba kont hemm, mhux sempliċement mort hemm. B'halmu ngib l-oġġetti minn pajjiżi differenti, hawnhekk, f'dal-ktieb qed niġbor il-kitbiet. L-irwol tiegħi ta' editriċi, fil-fatt, hu iżjed ta' kollezzjonista tal-kitbiet.

Iktar ma għadda ż-żmien, iktar bdejt inwarrab iż-żajjar mal-gruppi u bdejt insiefer waħdi, daqqa għal xi residenza, daqqa biex inżur xi ħbieb, daqqa għal xi kunċert. Infittex l-imkejjen

li jgħammru fihom in-nies tal-lokal. Forsi dawn huma r-raġunijiet li jraqqduli kuxjenza tniggeż li fil-proċess jiena wkoll qed inniggeż il-pjaneta. L-argument l-iehor: żajjar b'hall dawn huma inevitabbli u essenzjali biex nikbru, nibqgħu f'kuntatt mal-oħrajn, naraw x'toffri d-dinja.

Din hi tip ta' indipendenza li tghallimtha mingħajr ma l-ġenituri kellhom l-intenzjoni li jgħallmuhieli. Fi żmien l-Università, segwejt kors fuq il-Mediterranjetà mmexxi minn Adrian Grima. Kien wieħed mill-korsijiet favoriti nett. Kien kors li jkompli wara ħin il-lekċer, għax jekk Adrian kien jgħidilna li hemm daqstant testi li jsemmu l-Mediterran, jiena kont dahħaltha f'moħħi li nsib iżjed. Kont skoprejt, u Adrian kien ha gost hafna, is-silta "Odissea" ta' Kilin u l-poezija "L-Odissea" ta' Mario Azzopardi. Ir-riċerka li kont għamilt kienet issarrfet fil-ktiba "Riflessjonijiet dwar il-Mediterran" li dehret f'*Lehen il-Malti* (2013). Diġà għaddew 12-il sena.

Il-Mediterran donnu baqa' jigrì warajja, jew jien niġri warajh. Jew niġru wara xulxin. Antoine Cassar kien häreġ *il-Mappa tal-Mediterran* fi żmien li kont parti mill-kumitat tal-Għaqda tal-Malti — Università. Izjed tard bdejt ngħin f'Inizjamed u la tkun parti minn Inizjamed u l-Festival Mediterranju tal-Letteratura ta' Malta ma tistax ma tmissx mal-Mediterran u anke mal-figura ta' Ulisse. Niftakar ċar kif saħħarni *The Penelopiad* u kif qallibli rasi James Joyce. Fil-bidu tal-2025 rajt *The Return*, li kif jiġrili fil-każ ta' kull film ieħor, qsamtu f'minn tal-inqas biċċtejn.

Imma mbagħad hemm il-Ulysses' Shelter, proġett ta' koperazzjoni kofinanzjat mill-Unjoni Ewropea li kellu l-għan li jibni xibka ta' residenzi letterarji permezz ta' skambju madwar l-Ewropa. Malta saret ir-refugju ta' kemm-il kuntatt. Mhux sit turistiku. Mhux oġġett ta' faxxinu storiku. Mhux relikwa f'mużew. Mhux biss. Matul is-snin stedinna kittieba minn pajjiżi ta' gwerra u mhumieq. Kull min jiġi Malta jgħidilna kemm haṣṣu komdu u kemm jixtieq

jerga' jiġi. U dan grazzi għal dawk li f'Inizjamed ġew qabli u qegħdin miegħi.

Malta saret id-dar għal tant kittieba li kull fejn marru għamluh tagħhom. U żaru l-fortijiet u żaru l-mużewijiet imma dahl u wkoll fid-djar tagħna u kielu magħna. Meta l-iskambju jsir fid-direzzjoni l-oħra, huma l-kittieba tagħna li jsibu dar xi mkien ieħor. L-hena tiegħi niftaħ Facebook jew Instagram u nara r-ritratti li jkun qed itellgħu l-kittieba tagħna waqt ir-residenza tagħhom barra minn Malta — f'xi raħal imwarrab jew inħawi skarsi.

It-torri tal-avorju m'għadux japplika bħal qabel għall-kittieba tagħna, imma għad hemm haṣṣa valur f'li wiehed jinqata' għal ftit żmien minn fejn jgħix u jikteb. Anke jekk ikun hemm telfien ta' hin fil-pajjiż li wiehed iżur, mhuwiex l-istess telf ta' hin li wiehed jesperjenza fil-post li jaf l-izjed — b'min jistaqsi għal kafè haṣṣ, min jitlob għal imqar karta u biro, b'min irid tal-inqas pjaċir. Hemm il-lussu fil-possibiltà li tmur xi mkien biex tikteb. Biex

tikteb ma tridx wisq; anke lapes u karta bizzejjed. Li jkollok spazju li hu kamra, li hu raħal, li hu pajjiż iehor qed jilqgħek fih, kultant huwa daqstant iehor bżonn. *A Room of One's Own* li titkellem fuqha Virginia Woolf fil-bidu tas-seklu 20 għadha daqstant attwali. Dan lussu għax mhux kulhadd isibu, imma bżonn għax (aktarx) kulhadd iridu. Naf kittieba li jagħmluha minn jeddhom din, bħal M.J. Camilleri li ddokumentaha pubblikament. Fil-każ tal-kittieba li applikaw għar-residenza ta' Uliše sabu struttura shiħa tappoġġjahom.

X'jappoġġjahom eżattament? In-nies. Dawn l-iżjed vitali. Xi ftit ironika li tinqata' minn pajjiżek, niesek, biex tikteb, u ssib nies godda f'pajjiż ġdid. Imma mhi ironika xejn li ssib min jilqgħek u fl-istess waqt itik l-ispazju tiegħek. In-nies jagħmlu l-esperjenza dik li hi. In-nies jagħmlu l-post. Imma anke l-post innifsu. Fejn qiegħed, kif jidher, kif jinxtamm. Jappoġġjahom. Il-proġett juża l-kelma "shelter". Kif taqbad tittraduċiha din? Ġeneralment bil-Malti nużaw "dar". Hu minn Dar il-Kaptan, Dar Hosea,

Dar Bjorn, u ohrajn. Mela dan tagħna huwa Dar Uliše. Naħseb idoqqli u joghġobni.

L-idea ta' Ulysses' Shelter, jew Dar Uliše, mill-bidu kienet eċċitanti immens għaliya. Dan l-iskambju dejjem deherli ferm fertili. Li kittieba u tradutturi emergenti Maltin imorru barra minn Malta u kittieba u tradutturi emergenti barranin jiġu Malta għal residenza jista' johroġ biss ġid minnha. Hekk naraha. U naħseb li hekk hu. Għandi ħafna mumentu sbieħ u memorabbli f'moħħi: il-qari ta' Ešyllt l-Oratorju tal-Ġiżwiti, jiena u naqra l-ewwel darba l-antidjarju affaxxinanti ta' Virginia, il-mument meta ngħažlu Gabriel u Kat, Maja u l-Festival tal-2024 li fil-fatt gawdejt mill-bogħod ... Imma aktarx il-mumentu s-sbieħ huma wkoll dawk li jitkomplew. Il-messaġġ ta' kultant mingħand Virginia. Il-messaġġ vokali darba fill ta' Gabriel. L-ittra elettronika mingħand Matthew jew Maja.

Dan il-ktieb huwa speċjali għax jgħaqqad vuċijiet li għaliya mhumieħ biss ismijiet fuq karta, imma

kittieba bl-esperjenzi umani kollha tagħhom. Dawn kittieba li ltqajt magħhom jew għext magħhom, anke jekk għal żmien qasir. Jiena u nerga' naqra x-xogħlijiet ta' dal-kittieba spiss bdiet tfeġġ il-kelma “piece”, omofona għal “peace” (imma dan diskors għal darb'ohra). Đorđe jsemmi “a myriad of pieces”, Esyllt issemmi “pieces of text”, Gabriel isemmi “piece by piece” u l-istess kelma kemm-il darba. Virginia tgħid hekk: “I pezzi però non stanno più insieme.” Dal- “biċċiet” huma kollha differenti, ma jirreferux għall-istess tip ta' biċċa. Għall-kuntrarju, hawnhekk jingħaqdu kollha mill-ispirtu li nkitbu fihom, mill-baħar li messew miegħu għax ġew qribu jew telqu minnu, mis-sens ta' għaqda nnifsu. Dal-kitbiet aktarx li ma jistgħux ikunu iżjed distinti minn xulxin: fil-vuċi, fil-lingwa, fl-istil, fil-ġeneru, fl-arkitettura ... imma daqstant ieħor hemm x'għaqqadhom. Imqar fil-fatt li ma jixxibhux. Huma xogħlijiet fittiexa u li qegħdin fuq tiftixa, li bdew minn residenza u terrqu xi mkien ieħor.

Dan il-proġett kien suċċess grazzi għal ħidma sfika

ta' Alexandra Büchler u Karsten Xuereb flimkien ma' Jean Paul Borg, Ken Scicluna, u Matthew Schembri. Ix-xogħlijiet fil-ktieb maqsumin bejn tal-kittieba li żaru Malta (lil hawn) u tal-kittieba li żaru artijiet oħra (lil hemm). Il-kittieba wiegħbu mistoqsijiet marbuta mad-definizzjoni tal-Mediterran, mal-idea ta' festival tal-letteratura, u mal-att ta' skambju residenzjali. It-tweġibiet għalihom issibuhom qabel kull kitba u juru kemm huma kittieba b'mod ta' ħsieb differenti imma f'waqtiet simili wkoll.

Il-Mediterran inxebbhu mas-sirena tal-ġrajja ta' Ulisse nnifisha — jittantak, jiġdek lejha, imma kultant jaf ikun kiefer. Dal-kitbiet jistgħu jagħmlulna hekk ukoll — jittantawna, jiġbduna lejhom, kultant jaf ikunu kiefra fir-realtà iebsa li jesponu. Imma fuq kollox, imqar jekk għal ftit, dal-kitbiet għandhom anke s-saħħa jwennsuna. Nittama li nsiru xi ftit iżjed bħal Penelope — nistennew — u fl-istennija, bil-paċenzja kollha, nomogħdu l-kliem li jiġi għal riħna.

Pieces of Text

Bicčiet ta' kitbiet

Over here
Lil hawn

2024

đorđe BOŽOVIĆ

1. Define the word “Mediterranean”.

An endless blue sphere, with stars twinkling in it; that would be the Mediterranean — if I may play with a quote from Milos Tsernianski’s novel *Migrations*. I think of the Mediterranean as the place of everlong migratory routes, from the Sea Peoples of Antiquity, and Phoenician and Greek colonies, all the way to the modern-day so-called Mediterranean route, along which so many people sadly are losing their lives, even as we speak.

2. What does a literature festival on a tiny island (such as the Malta Mediterranean Literature Festival) mean to you?

I do not perceive Malta as a tiny island. I think that a population of over half a million people can accommodate more literary festivals and events.

3. What impact did the residency have on your career?

My Malta residency has allowed me to meet new audiences, as well as other fellow authors and translators, with whom I could share experiences. As a linguist, I think I benefited most from getting better acquainted with the Maltese language and the overall linguistic situation in Malta.

My Sweet Malta

Jiena sejjer, helwa Malta, se nħallik.

- 16 “I’m going, my sweet Malta, I shall be leaving you.” As I was leaving Malta, I was thinking of the opening verses of the poem *Għanja ta’ Malti sejjer isiefer* by Maltese socialist and strong advocate against British colonial rule Manwel Dimech (1860–1921), in which he contemplates on his forced exile by the colonial authorities, following a decade and a half of his influential activism among the Maltese people. I was intrigued to discover that just at the beginning of his activist campaign, not long after his release from imprisonment, where

he had spent some twenty years of life between the ages of 13 and 36, Dimech travelled to Montenegro in 1903, where he stayed for almost three weeks to study its history and politics. No doubt this small former Yugoslav republic which prides itself on never becoming a subject of the Ottoman Empire, just like Malta, which resisted the Ottoman invasion in the 16th century — a turn of events that will profoundly shape its identity in centuries to come under the jurisdiction of the Order of St John — has influenced Dimech’s own sense of freedom, too. No matter how small they may seem in the long, dark shadow of empires, “Montenegrins do not kiss chains” — as a famous saying, attributed to 19th century Montenegrin prince-bishop and poet Petar II Petrović Njegoš, puts it. Nor should Maltese.

I have spent two weeks in Malta, visiting various places in the archipelago. In a central location, in the old town of Valletta, right next to St John’s Co-Cathedral — a peculiar landmark, more magnificent on the inside than on the outside

— facing the busy Triq ir-Repubblika stands a Neoclassical monument by Antonio Sciortino (1879–1947), commemorating the Great Siege of Malta in 1565, an unsuccessful attempt by the Ottomans to conquer the island held by the Knights Hospitaller. Now it is made into a makeshift memorial to journalist and anti-corruption activist Daphne Caruana Galizia, who was assassinated for her outspokenness in a car bomb attack in 2017, at the age of 53. Rising above candles and flowers in tribute to Caruana Galizia, the three figures — one male and two female — featured in Sciortino's Great Siege monument, are said to represent courage, faith, and civilisation. How ironic.

Nowhere echoes *memento mori* more — and so vividly, at that — than while walking inside St. John's Co-Cathedral, literally standing on the knights' colourful marble gravestones all over its floor. In the Chapel of the Langue of Aragon, a funerary monument to the 17th century Grand Master Nicolas Cotoner blatantly depicts an

Asian and an African slave kneeling at the bottom while supporting the pedestal with the Grand Master's golden bust on their backs, just like the mythological Atlas, who was punished for rebellion against Zeus to hold up the heavens on his shoulders for evermore. *Vae victis!* Even in death and in eternity, there is no make up for racism, earthly injustice, inequality, and oppression.

One of Atlas's daughters was the nymph Calypso, who resided in Gozo, where she kept Odysseus, the Mediterranean storyteller — as the Maltese philosopher, emeritus professor Peter Serracino Inglott (1936–2012) calls him — for several years on his way back home. She offered him immortality if he stayed with her, but he chose instead to return to Ithaca, where his wife and son awaited him to drive away the greedy suitors. Was he just homesick, or was he aware, in fact, that the false promise of transcendental, divine justice is but an illusion, and that we alone are responsible for this world of ours, that needs fixing?

Then there is Caravaggio! He was expelled from Malta, too. It made me think how the greatest among us often end up contested and persecuted by their surroundings. I found another Montenegrin link inside the Co-Cathedral — the Chapel of Our Lady of Philermos was where the Order of St John kept the icon of their patroness, brought here as a war trophy from Rhodes. When Malta was invaded by Napoleon in 1798, the icon was taken to Russia. In the turmoil of events following the October Revolution, it ended up in Montenegro, then part of Yugoslavia, where it was eventually hidden from the public for several decades. Today it is exhibited in the National Museum of Montenegro, in a totally dark room illuminated only by Philermosa's gold and diamond covering. Indeed, strange are the ways of destiny.

Another historical event brings together Malta and Yugoslavia. In 1945, Hajduk, then the official football team of the Yugoslav partisan resistance led by Josip Broz Tito, embarked on a tourney through

the Mediterranean. On March 25th, they met with the team of Malta at the Empire Stadium in Gżira. As only the Yugoslav and the British national anthem *God Save the King* were played before the match, thousands at the stadium rose up in protest and sung the Maltese anthem, *Innu Malti*. This has inspired Rużar Briffa (1906–1963), who was in the crowd on that day, to write what's arguably one of the most patriotic poems of Maltese literature, *Jum ir-Rebħ*, in which masses, united, stand up and shout, demanding equal treatment and an end to humiliation: "*Jien Maltija!*" — "I am Maltese! Woe to him who mocks me, woe to him who laughs at me!" Is there a more noble cause?

Yugoslavia, the land of my ancestors, exists no more. Like Odysseus, we, too, are left in troublesome search for home, in a permanent state of exile, but ours is an eternal punishment by the devious gods. As Yugoslavia broke into a myriad of pieces, we are now condemned to finding them recurrently all over the world — in Malta, too —

whilst knowing for sure, however, that no human should ever be able to collect them all. Still, each piece tells a bittersweet story of a lost civilisation that once resisted the chains of colonialism and oppression.

2023

ruqaya IZZIDIEN

Excerpt

22 I was always a coward. Perhaps that comes as a surprise, given what they'll have told you about me by now. Wicked, traitorous, barbaric, you might think, but certainly not spineless. I'm not going to try to justify my actions. I don't believe that one-man's-freedom-fighter nonsense and we all know which side you'd banish me to anyway. I wish I could offer you the apology I know the nation expects, but I've sworn off dishonesty. Besides, sorrys won't reverse history, won't undo my actions, won't revive the dead.

But there is one debt I believe I owe, something that may help you to understand how we ended up here, something that nobody else in the government will offer you: the truth of it all.

Baba brought a single heirloom with him to Britain, a pocket watch from the only watchmaker in Jerusalem, he told me. My grandfather had smuggled it in his underclothes as he fled gunfire with his parents. I knew I wasn't supposed to touch it, but its enduring tick-tock enraptured me as a child, a siren's call each time I passed my father's study. Bronze shell, dazzling nozzles, a faded velvet pillow, nestled there in Baba's precious glass cabinet. I would wait until my parents were distracted by the snapshots of home on the television, and I'd creep across the landing, carefully unlatch the cabinet, and clutch the watch to my ear. I'd shut my eyes, bobbing my head in time to its song. But the watch face had lost its glass years before and my hands were drawn to its own. Dials that had

persisted for decades, though gushes of gunpowder and adrenaline and blood, came to a halt at my curiosity.

At playtime, two years later, the school bully tried to snatch a netball from my fingertips. But a summer running across Palestinian hills with my cousin Rami had turned my legs explosive. I jumped higher than the bully, and as my hands closed around the ball, my elbow struck him in the jaw.

At fifteen, when my arms and legs were so dumpy and mismatched that I felt I was formed of the limbs of three different people, I would take a detour through the park to avoid the girls from the year above who squatted at every intersection, ready to mock me for my Frankenstein shoulders. But I came upon a swan on the bank of the overgrown river, protecting her fuzzy cygnets in the reeds below; she spread her wings, hissing in displeasure as she flapped and charged at me.

And each time, with every unwitting or intentional provocation of danger, I reacted in the way that I always have. I ran, escaping the wrath of my parents, the bullies, and the swan.

So if you're ready to hear the truth, you must forget everything you think you know about me. You can't say I didn't warn you; Samar Baker is a coward.

This excerpt of a work in progress was read by Ruqaya Izzidien at the Malta Mediterranean Literature Festival 2023.

1. Define the word “Mediterranean”.

24

How it exists in British stereotype as opposed to real life is striking. Welsh does not have a direct translation — we say ‘the area of the Mediterranean sea’, this looser description resists fish sun terracotta stereotype, but lapis lazuli is what I think about. I found the ex-colonial nature of Malta hugely fascinating, with expats still slipping over from Britain and the world to enjoy that ‘Mediterranean’ feeling, without having to change language.

2. What does a literature festival on a tiny island (such as the Malta Mediterranean Literature Festival) mean to you?

25

Being invited to perform in Malta was a huge privilege; coming from a small nation I recognised similarities in the culture, the bilingual nature of the place, the small arts scene and the sense of community that it brings. I found the experience of making and responding to the Maltese landscape — where languages and cultures are rubbing up against each other, and the dry land meets the wet water — very profound. I hope creative engagement with the land, its people and its history can continue and thrive, in order to undercut somewhat the tourist industry which tends to flatten and distract.

3. What impact did the residency have on your career?

Undertaking a translation residency in Valletta, Malta was my first international artistic residency, and the experiences I had will stay with me forever. The film I made of my trip, *Blobus* was exhibited in an exhibition in Pontio, North Wales, and was later developed into a performance *Blobus a Phryderon Eraill (Jellyfish and Other Worries)* which won the Ivor Davies Award at the National Eisteddfod in 2024. The residency has influenced my practice to focus more on climate and its relation to identity, and I hope to continue to take part in residencies locally and internationally.

Mela!

Planning Application /07229/22.

This is my first time abroad alone. This is my first time alone abroad. This is my first time alone abroad on a residency. This is my first time in Malta, alone abroad on a residency. None of my family have been here and the friends who have been speak in general pleasant platitudes. It is in this sense a virginal land for me, untouched by others' preconceptions, a place ripe for my creativity to juice. Being here alone means that I have no-one to bounce off, no ally from my own culture with

whom I can gawk at the scenery. The wonderment and confusion remains internal, splashing in the sea is a brief release. I'm here to attempt to translate, what I see, what I read, the conversations I have. Into a language that I can understand. Rhwbeth fi'n gallu deall. Bilingualism. Maltese. English. Welsh. Manglish. Wenglish. Wemanglish. Chaosish.

I am here on a translation residency, my languages being Welsh and English. As a first language Welsh speaker with the name 'Esyllt' living in Glasgow, Scotland, I spend a lot of time translating my identity for others to understand, to close the gap (or open?) between myself and the context within which I find myself. My loose proposal coming here was to translate pieces of text from English into Welsh and vice versa, with an experimental and radical view of translation. But truthfully, rather than translating pieces of specific texts in Welsh and English, I have spent more time trying to translate Valletta into a language that I can understand, into my own conception of truth and beauty, morality

and nature through writing, drawing, speech. I have been thinking about bilingualism, how a country sustains two languages and two windows on the world, and how this puts my bilingual identity into relief.

So I soak it all up. I want to see it as a place of neat dualities, dry stone, wet sea, Maltese but English, eclectic but stuck in its ways, traditional architecture but modern abominations, one country but a bilingual culture with two ways of seeing things. Something like my country. And in many ways, this is what I have decided to see. Within the grid system of Valletta, I put a lot of effort into creating a singular vision of this duality — a traditional culture and a colonial culture that are butting up against each other, or living separate lives in harmony, like lovers in different time zones. But all the tourists from all over blur this clean translation that my brain so desperately wants to reduce the fortifications into. Mae'n fwy na deuoliaeth, mae'n benchwiban melysgybolfa

gythreulig hardd a hyll. Y cychod cruise enfawr sy'n tra-arglwyddiaethu dros y baeau, y bobl glên o Montenegro, the angry Germans waiting for their food for 45 minutes at the blue grotto, puce spreading across their cheeks. The English pensioners complaining about queue jumps, and “these people are clearly not British”, a'r dynion Indiaidd sy'n dechre sgwrs gyda fi ar y stryd a finne'n ateb I come from Wales. Is that in Australia? A cherdded i ffwrdd yn sydyn. Nothing like saying you're from Wales to get a man off your scent.

Many Maltese persons I meet here tell me wildly different things from one another, and sometimes even within the same person, the conversation will fork and twist, opinion and truth becoming conflated and swollen. Go to the Malta Experience, DO NOT go to the Malta Experience. I meet Marica who tells me I must be assertive. Dwi'n dal fy anadl. That she has never had bad experiences with men. That she was harassed on the bus often as a young woman and is still slapping people on the street.

I meet Amanda who says that she once saw a tiger in a squat in the building we are standing in now. In Welsh we hear smells. Clywed arogl. Above me at night I hear the scent of burning rubber and smell animal sounds way past when the Bombi stop shooting.

I worry that I am a tourist here. I meet Elizabeth who tells me that feminists are too extreme in this chauvinistic patriarchal culture, where the beautiful balconies were a way for the Arabs to keep her indoors. That the Maltese are obsessed with penises because that's the only thing they know how to sculpt, and I will find a penis on most roundabouts. She tells me that her husband has a village mentality and that she hates code-switching. Dwi'n dweud wrthi mod i'n ofni mai twrist ydw i yma. Mae'n hurtio. She exclaims NO that I am not, you are here doing research, no no no you're not a tourist.

But what is a tourist other than someone doing research? Breaking off bits of the world into their

own conception, like a child gnawing on a hunk of chocolate. Getting away from your familiar field of knowledge to see it better, seeking external reference to validate your own way of being, your own argument for living. When we experience anything different from ourselves and take it into account, reflect on it, even for a quarter of a pastizz, is that not research? The Hawaiian hat I bought with Malta EST. 1967 is a souvenir of a place distinct yet amalgamated in the fantastical splurge of this globalisation.

One of the reasons why doing 'research' in Malta is so difficult for me is because half of it is so familiar, which instead of anchoring me, adds to a feeling of distance and confusion. Even though one of the few things I knew about this island before I came here was 150 years of British colonial rule (I google the amount of years as it feels like it could be longer, or much less), part of me is annoyed that Malta is not a clean break from everything, everything I know. And yet if it was I would never

have understood about the penises, or the tiger, or the old boatman in his seventies trying to give me his number. English here is easy and available and everywhere, people with accents implying that English is their second language come here because they wish to speak English. It delineates what I believe to be 'foreign'. When I walk down from the parliament along republic street I hear a teenage girl with a thick Scottish accent moan "what kind of McDonald's closes at 11pm", then groups of people drinking with Scandinavian, Italian, Canadian, Irish, Maltese, Welsh accents all speaking together in English. The universal tongue flattening difference, easing small talk, a non-political unifier, both sapping and swelling cultural variety. This global English is not the English I understand to be true. When I start feeling frustrated, I see red. Postboxes, telephone boxes, 'colonial stores' in Sliema. Coch oedd fy hoff liw. Bits of Sliema feel like its identity has been chewed up, pulverised from within its own diarrhea.

I swim in the sea most days, stung twice by jellyfish. I swipe my card to get the venom out, I tap my card to pay for spritz. In Welsh jellyfish are called, cont-y-môr, blobus, or, as the English like to mock, pysgodyn wibli wobli. Pysgodyn wibli wobli is one of those made up Welsh words used specifically by English people to make fun of the language. Emma invites me to a stand-up comedy night at a place called King's Gate Pub in Msida and there are sheep-shagger jokes, just like Wales. Or the ones made about the Welsh. It's all in English.

When I sit drawing Valletta from Fort St Angelo, Birgu, drying salty skin from the cruise ship sea, I see all her arches and structures more clearly, the mass of windows, angles, colours, lack of colours, stressed trees jutting out above the fortifications and I think: is it easier to draw a place that is familiar or foreign? What language do the walls of Valletta speak? What part of Wales are you from? Oh yes, I've smelled of that.

The main actual tangible text I have translated whilst I'm here is 'A Manifesto For Ultratranslation' by Antena, a call for radical translation that resists making things easy for the dominant language (in my case English). In struggling ymbalfalu am ystyr ac eglurdeb, I have tried to keep the dominant message of the manifesto in mind in my interaction with Malta and her landscape. Not to superimpose, to extract, to take away from, to smoothen for my own benefit and for my own culture her nuanced chaos, her chaosed nuance, but to respect the fact that there is a gap between me and the place, that there always will be a gap, that the gap that the gap but in the gap there is the potential for new understandings, different readings. Tourism that's healthy, research that's trashy. Achos does dim math beth ag ystyr llythrennol gair. Would you like tal-pepè with that?

People often speak of language being 'irreducible', rendering translation an impossible task. Malta, in its multitudes, cannot offer me a smooth

translation, sensible sips like a straw in a milkshake. I feel her chaos on my burning skin, the overdevelopment in her jellyfish stings, the slivers of authenticity in the crawl of her spider underneath my pillowcase when I arrive.

Maen nhw'n cyfri mewn saesneg fan hyn hefyd, ynghanol Malteg.

In Rabat, before entering Mdina, yn chwyslyd o'r bws ac angen pisio, dwi'n mynd i fwyty crand yr olwg i ddefnyddio'r tŷ bach ac archebu espresso. I sit out in the afternoon sun looking over one of the best views of my life, fields and green and orange like a thought from early childhood, like what I imagined maybe being an adult would be like. It is a plane of patterns that I draw and I want to cry, mae'n atgoffa fi o adre. An early place.

Tell me what's Maltese for Maltese? That's the type of thing I should have learnt by now. Y geiriau dwi wedi dysgu hyd yma: Luzzu, grazzi, ciao, pastizzi,

trig, tal-pepè, Mdina. Ftira. Exat. Wy y. Bombi.
Manglish. MemshimNiche. M danone!

In Welsh we have a word. Mela. Sometimes with an
'n' added at the end. It means to interfere, disrupt,
meddle. Paid â mela gyda hwnna! Mae hi wedi
bod yn melan eto. I have never ever heard it being
used in a positive way, it is disparaging, telling-offy,
disdainful. But I've always thought its sound was
joyful, kind, delicious, fizzing. Mela.

2024

ioanna LIOUTSIA

1. Define the word “Mediterranean”.

32

The Mediterranean for me is a warm place, literally and figuratively, and if you look at the map you will see that it looks like a big hug. That should be for everyone: a big warm embrace that gives you a sense of security, a sense of motherly care. At the same time, it's an embrace that opens up, that holds you as tightly as you need so you don't feel lonely, but not too tightly that you suffocate. The Mediterranean is the beginning, it is the first, big family that unites — or should unite — everyone around and in the Mediterranean.

2. What does a literature festival on a tiny island (such as the Malta Mediterranean Literature Festival) mean to you?

It is extremely important to hold a literary festival on a small island in the middle of the Mediterranean, because it brings together creators and audiences, prepares readers, as well as help authors learn about each other's work and meet international participants. Furthermore, both authors and audiences get new stimuli, and most importantly, do not feel isolated — the sea that separates them from the mainland is just a physical barrier, imaginary barriers can be overcome thanks to literature and, finally, a sense of community can be created, even if only temporarily, between authors and audiences.

3. What impact did the residency have on your career?

The residency helped me to showcase my work both in my own country and internationally. When I say internationally, I mean both in Malta where I met interesting writers and artists and where a small event was organised for my work, and also potentially globally through the programme's websites, social networks etc. Moreover, I found time and space to work without stress, I saw new places, I visited museums and I learned many new things about Malta's history and Malta's traditional and contemporary culture. All the above inspired me already in my writings, and I believe they will continue to inspire me as they are a valuable material I have collected and kept within me and will surely reappear in my writings at some point in the future.

Ειλικρίνεια

Λοιπόν, είμαι εγώ εδώ τώρα που έχω έρθει λίγες μέρες με σκοπό να γράψω, ωραία; Και σου λένε όλοι, τέλεια, θα εμπνευστείς φουλ εδώ γιατί είναι ένα παραμυθένιο μέρος - λες και γράφω για την Ντίσνεϋ ξέρω 'γω, τελοσπάντων, θα εμπνευστείς κ.λπ. Και πας σε όλα αυτά τα παραμυθένια μέρη μ' αυτήν την κίτρινη τη ρημαδόπετρα, την ώχρα, όλα αυτά τα μεσαιωνικά σκηνικά και δε νιώθεις τίποτα. Πάλι τίποτα. Δοκίμασε όμως να κάνεις το άλλο. Απομακρύνσου από αυτά. Βάδισε από μακριά με τα πόδια, ή μέσα σ' ένα αυτοκίνητο περνώντας ή ακόμη και σ' ένα καφέ κάτσε και

κοίτα την καστρόπολη που πριν ήσουν μέσα, κοίτα την τώρα απ' έξω, από μακριά. Τι νιώθεις; Δεν νιώθεις κατευθείαν τα γρανάζια του μυαλού και της φαντασίας σου να παίρνουν μπρος; Λες, τι μέρος υποβλητικό και τι δε θα έγινε εκεί μέσα! Πόσοι ιππότες με ξιφολόγχες θα πέρασαν, πόσες μηχανορραφίες και πισώπλατα μαχαιρώματα, τι δεσποσύνες με τριγωνοκωνικά *hennin* στα μαλλιά ... Τα οραματίζεσαι ενώ, ενώ ξέρεις, ξέρεις τι είναι μέσα στην καστρούπολη. Μπήκες πριν λίγο μαζί με τους άλλους τουρίστες. Είναι μόνο τουρίστες, πινακίδες για μεσαιωνικού τύπου ταβέρνες και κιτς μίνι μάρκετ με πλαστικούς ιππότες και αναψυκτικά. Κάθε μυστήριο, κάθε σημάδι στον τοίχο, κάθε ρόπτρο και κάθε καμπαναριό μπαίνει αυτόματα σε ανάκριση. Τώρα αυτό ήταν έτσι; είναι αυθεντικό; Αξίζει να το βγάλω φωτογραφία ή το κάνανε για μένα τον τουρίστα; Όταν είσαι απ' έξω χέστηκες αν ό,τι βλέπεις είναι αυθεντικό. Ακόμη κι από φελιζόλ να ήταν όλη η καστρόπολη, εσένα σου αρκεί. Σου δίνει κάτι, μια ατμόσφαιρα, ένα συναίσθημα ... ένα ...

Honesty

Well, here I am now, having come here for a few days with the intention of writing, right? And everyone says, great, you'll be fully inspired here because it's a fairytale place — like I'm writing about Disney, I don't know, anyway, you'll be inspired and so on. And you go to all these fairytale places with this yellow damn stone, ochre, all these medieval settings and you don't feel anything. Nothing again. But try doing the other thing. Get away from them. Walk from afar on foot, or in a car passing by, or even in a café, sit and look at the castle you were in before, look at it now from outside, from afar. What do you feel? Don't you

directly feel the gears of your mind and imagination start turning? You say, what an evocative place and what wouldn't happen in there! How many knights with bayonets would have passed, how many machinations and backstabblings, what damsels with triangular hennin in their hair ... You visualise them while, while you know, you know what is inside the castle town. You went in a while ago with the other tourists. It's just tourists, signs for medieval-style taverns and kitschy mini-markets with plastic knights and soft drinks. Every mystery, every sign on the wall, every robe and every bell tower is automatically brought in for questioning. Now this was like that; is it authentic? Is it worth taking a picture of or did they do it for me the tourist? When you're on the outside you don't give a shit if what you see is authentic. Even if the whole castle was made of Styrofoam, that's good enough for you. It gives you something, an atmosphere, a feeling ... a ...

Put it into fucking words! Yes, but just as I'm about

Βάλ' το γαμώτο σε λέξεις! Ναι αλλά εκεί που πάω να χαρώ ότι κάτι γράφω, αυτή τη χαρά για τη χαρά του γραψίματος έρχεται κάτι και με διαλύει και με τραβάει στην άβυσσο. Κάτι που λέει ότι χάνω τον καιρό μου, γιατί δεν θα είναι καλό και τίποτα καλό δεν μπορεί να βγει απ' αυτό. Γιατί μας έχουν μάθει έτσι; Ακόμη κι εγώ που ως άνθρωπος, ως προσωπικότητα, είμαι αντίθετος σε αυτήν την ιδέα, ναι νιώθω τύψεις, νιώθω ενοχές ότι δεν κάνω κάτι χρήσιμο, δεν δουλεύω πάνω σε κάτι που θα έχει νόημα. Τι σημαίνει νόημα και χρήσιμο; Κάτι που θα μου αναθέσουν, κάτι που θα μου δώσει λεφτά, κάτι που θα πληρώσει ένα ενοίκιο και λίγο φαΐ στην κατσαρόλα; Θεέ μου, έχω χάσει τον πυρήνα μου. Το τι θέλω να πω εγώ, το έχουν σκεπάσει όλες αυτές οι ενοχές και από πάνω τους ακόμη πιο βαριά όλα αυτά τα πρέπει, πρέπει, πρέπει και νιώθω να ασφυκτιώ. Μέσα στον ίδιο μου τον εαυτό ασφυκτιώ. Ή μάλλον όχι. Ο εαυτός μου έχει γίνει μόνο μια μικρή μικρή κουκίδα, έχει συρρικνωθεί και βρίσκεται κρυμμένος σ' ένα μικρό δωματιάκι της καρδιάς μου. Φοβισμένος και διπλωμένος, ο εαυτός

μου κάθεσαι στο πάτωμα κρατώντας τα γόνατά του αγκαλιά, δεν κλαίει, αλλά τρέμει. Φοβάται μην εξαφανιστεί εντελώς. Το υπόλοιπο σώμα το καταλαμβάνει ένα απροσδιόριστο υγρό, δεν είναι αίμα, είναι καφές με συμπληρώματα ενέργειας και ένα τσικ αλκοόλ. Αυτά με οδηγούνε στον αυτόματο, να βγάλω τη δουλειά. Ότι χρειάζεται ένας καλός συγγραφέας.

Δεν έχω κατάθλιψη. Το πιστεύω ότι δεν έχω, δεν είναι κάποιου είδους άρνηση. Δεν έχω κατάθλιψη. Απλώς ζω στην Ελλάδα. Αυτό είναι από μόνο του a state of mind. Θα μπορούσαμε π.χ. όταν μας ρωτάνε «τι κάνεις; πώς είσαι;», εμείς να απαντάμε «είμαι απ' την Ελλάδα» ή ακόμη καλύτερα «μένω στην Ελλάδα». Αυτό θα αρκούσε για να καταλάβει ο συνομιλητής μας τα πάντα για εμάς. Αν, βέβαια, θέλει να τα μάθει και δεν περιορίζει τα μάτια και τα αυτιά του στις διαφημίσεις του ΕΟΤ, είτε είναι Έλληνας είτε είναι ξένος. Γιατί αν ξανακούσω κάποιον να μου πει για τον ήλιο ή τον αττικό ουρανό που τόσο του έχει λείψει θα αυτοκτονήσω.

to rejoice that I'm writing something, that joy for the joy of writing something comes along and tears me apart and pulls me into the abyss. Something that says I'm wasting my time because it won't be any good and nothing good can come of it. Why have we been taught this way? Even I, who as a person, as a personality, am opposed to this idea, yes I feel guilty, I feel guilty that I'm not doing something useful, I'm not working on something that will be meaningful. What is meaningful and useful? Something I'll be commissioned to do, something that will give me money, something that will pay a rent and some food in the pot? God, I've lost my core. What I want to say has been covered by all this guilt and on top of that even heavier all these musts, musts, musts and I feel suffocated. Inside myself I am suffocating. Or maybe not. My self has become just a tiny little dot, has shrunk and is hiding in a tiny little room in my heart. Scared and folded, my self sits on the floor holding its knees in its arms, not crying, but shaking. Afraid of disappearing completely. The rest of his body

is taken over by an indeterminate liquid, it's not blood, it's coffee with energy supplements and a cup of alcohol. That's what's driving me on automatic, getting the job done. Everything a good writer needs.

I'm not depressed. I believe I'm not, it's not some kind of denial. I'm not depressed. I just live in Greece. This is in itself a state of mind. We could, for example, when people ask us "how are you? how are you?", we could answer "I am from Greece" or even better "I live in Greece". This would be enough for the person we are talking to to understand everything about us. If, of course, he wants to know and does not limit his eyes and ears to the advertisements of the Greek National Tourism Organisation, whether he is Greek or foreign. Because if I ever hear someone tell me again about the sun or the Attic sky that they miss so much, I will kill myself. Yes, I will kill myself. Not for any other reason, just because that phrase will bring to mind the house where I live, on the mezzanine

Ναι, θα αυτοκτονήσω. Όχι για κανέναν άλλον λόγο, απλώς και μόνο με τη φράση αυτή θα μου 'ρθει στο μυαλό το σπίτι που μένω, στον ημιώροφο, που όχι αττικό ουρανό δεν βλέπει, ούτε ήλιο ούτε τίποτα. Πολύ ωραίος ο ήλιος, κι η Αθήνα κι η Ελλάδα ολόκληρη αν είσαι τουρίστας. Γιατί αν είσαι τουρίστας, εκτός από λεφτά κι ευχέρεια χρόνου, έχεις και το άλλο μεγάλο προσόν: άγνοια κινδύνου. Δεν αγχώνεσαι για τίποτα. Δε σκέφτεσαι ότι το τρένο σου μπορεί να συγκρουστεί, ότι τα μηχανήματα δεν λειτουργούν, ότι το αστικό λεωφορείο θα πιάσει φωτιά, ότι θα μείνεις με τις ώρες εγκλωβισμένος από το χιόνι, ότι το σπίτι σου θα πλημμυρίσει και θα χαθεί εν μια νυκτί, ότι κι εσύ ο ίδιος πρέπει να έχεις κάνει τα κουμάντα σου από πριν: αν πάρουμε φωτιά πού είναι η κοντινότερη θάλασσα να μην καούμε; Οι τουρίστες δεν τα ξέρουνε αυτά. Είναι άνθρωποι ευτυχισμένοι. Έρχονται στην Ελλάδα και περιμένουν να χορεύουμε.

Πώς γίνεται να είσαι Έλληνας και να μη χορεύεις;

Αν ξανακούσω αυτή τη φράση επίσης θα αυτοπυρποληθώ. Δεν νομίζεις ότι είναι ρατσιστική στον πυρήνα της; Εμένα δεν μου βγαίνει να χορέψω, συγγνώμη, δεν έχω αίσθηση ρυθμού, δεν πάλλεται κάτι μέσα μου όταν ακούω ζεϊμπέκικα και παραδοσιακά και σίγουρα μα σίγουρα το greek syrtaki δεν είναι κάτι που κυλάει στις φλέβες μου βιολογικά. Σε κανενός τις φλέβες δηλαδή γιατί είναι ένα κατασκευάσμα, είναι μυθοπλασία. Μη με κοιτάς έτσι, το greek syrtaki είναι απλώς μια πολύ πολύ γνωστή χορογραφία. Όπως είναι ξέρω 'γω το μακαρένα. Πετυχημένη, δεν λέω, αλλά χορογραφία.

floor, which sees no Attic sky, no sun, no nothing. The sun is very nice, and Athens and the whole of Greece if you are a tourist. Because if you are a tourist, apart from money and time, you have the other great advantage: ignorance of danger. You don't worry about anything. You don't think that your train might crash, that the machinery won't work, that the city bus will catch fire, that you'll be trapped for hours by the snow, that your house will flood and be lost overnight, that you yourself must have done your homework beforehand: if we catch fire where is the nearest sea so that we don't burn? Tourists don't know that. They are happy people. They come to Greece and expect us to dance.

How can you be Greek and not dance? If I hear that phrase again, I will also set myself on fire. Don't you think it's racist at its core? I don't feel like dancing, sorry, I have no sense of rhythm, nothing pulsates in me when I hear Zeybek and traditional and definitely but definitely Greek Syrtaki is not something that flows in my veins biologically. In

nobody's veins that is, because it is a fabrication, it is fiction. Don't look at me like that, Greek Syrtaki is just a very well-known choreography. As is the Macarena. Successful, I'm not saying, but choreography.

Part of this text was written in Valletta.

1. Define the word “Mediterranean”.

40

Someone said Mediterranean? Is it that seemingly distant and cynical, yet humorous and resourceful islander with a soul nourished by stories, like the body of an oyster? If you drop three drops of lemon juice on him, he will transform into the captain of an ancient European ship. Maybe he will mention something about seagulls stealing fish from the plates of joyful tourists by the canal in Trieste, or share an anecdote about the colorful Maltese balconies and the bustling crowds of Barcelona's La Ramblas. Perhaps he will say that there are no tastier pomegranates than those in southern Montenegro, nor more delicious fish bites and olives than those on the Croatian Adriatic, where my homeland is. But don't get carried away by the sunny days and

hedonism. The Mediterranean is a serious old man, he is the past, evolution, and the essence of life. So, when he sobers you with his serious history, don't overdo it with wine in the bloodstream of an ecstatic traveler. Carefully listen to the stories from his inexhaustible treasury he decides to share with you. Because he has been through tough times too. He is a battlefield and a crossroads of civilisations. He is all the brilliance and poetry woven into the fantastic book *Mediterranean Breviary* by Predrag Matvejević. The Mediterranean is magical and harsh, inexpressible and fluid. He is your plasma that has retained the “memory of the sea.”

2. What does a literature festival on a tiny island (such as the Malta Mediterranean Literature Festival) mean to you?

41

The literary festival on an island in the middle of the Mediterranean, such as the Malta Mediterranean Literature Festival, is an invaluable experience for me. The fusion of cultures, languages, and customs, as well as the wealth of experience exchanged by the participants of such an event, is like a colorful kaleidoscope with the most beautiful images from life and art. The literature and energy we selflessly gift each other is the bond that forever connects us. Festivals like this teach us how to be better people. When you add to this the professionalism in the organisation that this festival can boast of, it is clear that this is a quality and pleasure that is remembered for a long time.

3. What impact did the residency have on your career?

As part of the Ulysses' Shelter project, I had the opportunity to stay in Belgrade, Serbia, on the island of Mljet in Croatia, and in Valletta, Malta. The residencies contributed to my career in several ways, such as connecting with other actors in the literary-publishing, translation, and artistic fields, exchanging experiences and professional knowledge with local and international colleagues, etc. A very important and positive aspect of residencies is also the fact that they provide continuous free time for artistic creation, which, if you are constantly employed alongside your artistic ambitions, you don't have much of. During the residencies, I progressed in every sense. I was also able to freely develop and complete the literary works I had started, which were later published.

Osmog dana u tjednu, iz Chagallovog kista

u krvotoku loze i krša
o kamenit jastuk
udara Posejdonov trozub

ničeg tvog u brzini mungosa
ni sporosti otočkih satova

uz klopot plastične bove
što se odbija od aluminijskih plovila
plutam kroz soli noći

beskonačnost naplavine
bura u nagovještaju
plavi serum na raspucalnoj koži čežnje

osmog dana u tjednu, iz Chagallovog kista
tvojih očiju, krcat jug

On the Eighth Day of the Week, from Chagall's Brush

in the bloodstream of vine and rock
against a stony pillow
Poseidon's trident strikes

nothing of yours in the speed of a mongoose
nor in the slowness of island clocks

with the clatter of a plastic buoy
bouncing off aluminum boats
I float through the salt of the night

the infinity of driftwood
the bora in a foreshadow
blue serum on the cracked skin of longing

on the eighth day of the week, from Chagall's brush
your eyes, laden with the south

L'ottavo giorno della settimana, dal pennello di Chagall

nella circolazione sanguigna della vite e del carso
contro un cuscino di pietra
s'infrange il tridente di Poseidone

niente di tuo nella velocità della mangusta
o nella lentezza degli orologi dell'isola

con il rintocco di una boa di plastica
che sbatte sull'alluminio del natante
fluttuo nel sale della notte

infiniti detriti
la bora in arrivo
siero blu su pelle screpolata del desiderio

nell'ottavo giorno della settimana, dal pennello di Chagall
i tuoi occhi, colmi di sud

Traduzione: Irene Chias

Nisa Nomadi

f'dil-hajja kienu nisa nomadi
u ftit setghu jimmaginaw
dik is-saudade tant magħrufa dwar xiex kienet qed tkanta
kemm habbew bil-qawwi mkejjen
li ma kinux djarhom, speċjalment nies
li magħhom saħansitra qatt ma kienu ltaqgħu

tul il-pjanura tal-Pannonia hallew traċċi
ta' sarar ma' hlejqa bla sura
kien l-uniku kung-fu ta' dwejjajq possibbli

fuq il-bokka tax-xmara, il-gawwi
dar f'ċirku f'forma ta' V matul is-sajf
u fuq il-linji żdingati tad-depots tal-vaguni eżatt fiż-żmien
li xagħarhom waqagħlhom
l-epithelium beda jitfarfar, l-istratum corneum ixxaqqaq
u frak ta' particelli minn ġisimhom waqgħu
fix-xquq tal-linji tal-ferrovija msadda

kienu qalulhom li kienu strambi u li kellhom stil
imma qatt ma qalulhom leopardi, tigri, graw, sriep
jew draguni

biex jegħlbu b'hażen il-ġibda li jimirħu
jingabru xi mkien, ibejtu, isibu s-sliem

dik li jkunu parti mill-folla kienet xi haġa mbieghda
minn mohħhom

dawn kienu n-nisa tagħna li dwarhom jinzamm is-skiet
tista' tiltaqa' magħhom
fil-Ġerusalemm Ewropea
subborgi Awstro-Ungariċi
f'kull sqaq maħsul bil-bewl
bi xquq fl-asfalt

id-dublett ikkulurit tal-krinolin ta' harifa aźmatika
għawweġ il-fildiferru fuq il-mistoqsijiet
mingħajr qatt ma daqu
il-hajja bla tbatija tad-dar

fix-xitwa, mingħajr qabar mixtri
marru jistrieħu ferħanin

Traduzzjoni: Mario Cardona

Dones Nòmades

en aquesta vida, elles eren dones nòmades
i molt poques podien endevinar
què cantava aquella saudade dispersa
amb quina força havien estimat llocs
que no eren casa, especialment gent
que ni tan sols coneixien

a través de la plana Panònica van deixar empremtes
de lluita amb un oponent amorf
era l'únic kung-fu possible del dolor

sobre l'estuari, gavines de riu
volant en forma de V durant l'estiu
i sobre cobertes caigudes exactament en el moment
que els queien els cabells,
epiteli pelat, teixit callós esquerdat
i partícules en pols dels seus cossos assentades
als buits dels rails rovellats

els van dir que eren estranyes i elegants
però mai lleopards, tigres, grues, serps o dracs
per derrotar sàviament l'impuls de vagar
d'establir-se, de fer niu, de trobar la pau

el tema dels ramats els quedava lluny

eren les nostres dones sobre les quals es guarda silenci
les podrieu trobar
a la Jerusalem europea
Suburbis austrohongaresos
a cada carreró amarat de pipí
amb esquerdes a l'asfalt

la crinolina de la tardor asmàtica
plega el filferro sobre els signes d'interrogació
sense haver conegut mai
aquesta vida indolora i casolana

a l'hivern, sense parcel•la funerària pagada
anaven a dormir felices

Traducció: Josep Pedrals

The poems' translations to Italian, Maltese, and Catalan were translated during the Malta Mediterranean Literature Festival translation workshops in 2024.

1. Define the word “Mediterranean”.

The Mediterranean represents to me a space of freedom that loosens the density of the layers of life. I think of the sea, of bare feet and palms full of sand, which paint a different portrait ...

49

2. What does a literature festival on a tiny island (such as the Malta Mediterranean Literature Festival) mean to you?

I remember an open reading in a small town in Malta, where I went during my literary residency. I was enchanted by the sound of the Maltese poetry, so I would love to attend such a festival.

3. What impact did the residency have on your career?

The residency was very important for my career. I finally developed the appropriate form and structure of my debut novel.

Excerpt from Obračun

50

»Gremo, gremo, je že pet čez ...«

Velikanska ura na steni spominja na tiste stare, pokončne, na železniških ali avtobusnih postajah. Verjetno z razlogom. Vsaka plesna ura je hitri, prehitri vlak, ki drvi mimo pogledov na postaji. Pravzaprav tam lebdi le moj. Ostali se nemudoma vržejo na vagone kot kaskaderji.

»Prosto hodiš po prostoru, pozoren si na razdalje

med telesi, pogled je usmerjen navzven — ne se skrivat. Če koga srečaš, ga pogledaš v oči, lahko se nasmehneš, samo brez besed prosim ...«

Začetke sem imela rada, kadar smo subtilno vstopili v prostor in odnose med telesi. Toda slej ko prej je večina plesnih klasov s tem na silo presekala in zgodila se je ločitev med umom in telesom ... telo je bilo samo še sredstvo, ki uboga ukaze in hotenja uma. Koreografija. Besedilo, ki naj se ga naučimo na pamet. Brez osebnega odnosa. Na horuk! Kar tam, pred vsemi.

Bili so gibi. Najprej eden, dva, trije ... Potem pa je v nekem trenutku čas pospešil — šel sam od sebe naprej in me pustil zadaj. Ostala sem sama z drugim ali tretjim gibom, ki mi je obtičal v rokah kot predmet; orodje, ki ga ne znam uporabljati. Študirala sem njegove koordinate, ki se niso skladale z nobenim od prekatov, ki jih je ponujala praznina dvorane.

Plesalci so bili vedno spretnejši in hitrejši. Priključili so glasbo. Čas je postal mogočnejši; dvigoval se je nad mojo majhnostjo in statičnostjo. Šteli so si: »Dva, tri, štiri ...« Ali pa: »Pet, šest, sedem, osem ...« Medtem so se moji gibi vrteli okoli svoje osi kot samosvoji planeti — povsem neusklajeni z zakonitostmi galaksije ... Tu in tam sem prestregla sočuten ali naveličano vzvišen pogled — odvisno od primarne (ne)naklonjenosti moji kompleksni osebnosti, ali bolje: ne-osebnosti.

Ta, ki je vodila klas, je dobro vedela, kaj zmorem in kdaj ne vem niti tega, kako mi je ime. Pustila me je, da sem tavela, dokler ni bil sram, zaradi nedostopnosti do povezave med umom in telesom tako močan, da sem pričakovano (še stotič) zapustila dvorano, počepnila v lasten trebuh in padla v neskončne vice svoje nesposobnosti v premišljevanju o tem, kaj se je pravkar zgodilo.

Na neki točki sem pristopila k priprtim vratom in opazovala diagonalo, ki so jo zdaj izvajali ne

več kot vajo, pač pa kot del dejanske koreografije. Horizontalno kompozicijo prvotne koreografije so nekako preslikali, da bi dobili novo formacijo. Del te linijske dinamike so bila tokrat povsem običajna kolesa, ki jih sicer izvajajo gimnastičarji in drugi telovadci. Pomislila sem: »Uf, še dobro, da sem šla; le kako bi se soočila s tem?!« Vse, kar je obrnilo telesno os — da sem torej visela z glavo proti tlom, medtem ko so bile moje kilometrske noge nekje daleč v Vesolju, me je spravljal v apokaliptično občutje brez odrešitve ...

»Neverjetno,« sem vsakič znova pomislila, »da se kljub ponavljajočim frustracijam, ki jih doživljam na plesnih klasih, še vedno vračam v dvorano. Samo mazohisti počnejo kaj takega.« Toda vedela sem, zakaj to počnem.

Na ta način sem se izravnila z občo družbeno stvarnostjo. Kar je bilo že skoraj blizu občutku nekakšne pripadnosti ... Po drugi strani pa sem ljubila ples kot se naivno dekletce zaljubi v prijatelja

svojega starejšega brata. Še ne spolno zrela bi se združila z njim, da bi se končno povezala s tistim oddaljenim konceptom, ki mu ljudje pravijo Zemlja, naš dom.

»Ajde, gremo še enkrat! Vem, da ste utrujene, pardon — Aleš — utrujeni ... samo še zadnji del zvadimo. Super vam gre. Pripravite se ...«

Ta sladko prigarani konec klasa, to zmagoslavje dela in inteligence telesa, me je naravnost zasvojevalo. Torej takrat, ko je steklo, ko me moja nemoč ni porazila. Kot tokrat, ko sem se ji popolnoma predala in priznala, da ne zmorem ...

Kolesa, ki so jih nizala telesa, so se zdaj pričela preobražati v spirale. Opazila sem, da je ena od plesalk — tista, ki se je pravkar vrnila iz salzburške akademije za sodobni ples, postala še bolj spretna in zelo hitra ... Ne vem, kako je to naredila, toda v neki točki je iz stranske linije kolesa preusmerila fokus naprej, se pokrčila v trebuhu in ga obrnila

tako, da je trup uprla direktno proti stropu, nato pa spet nazaj v stransko, a vzvratno linijo ... In takrat se je zgodilo. Namesto, da bi z zgornjo roko segla čez glavo proti tlom, se ji je roka nekako izmaknila, spremenila smer in se ji zapičila globoko v usta ...

Nastala je tišina. Vsi smo gledali, kaj bo zdaj. A njena roka je nadaljevala svojo pot skozi usta, kakor da bo pogledala ven na drugi strani pri vratu. Toda ne, Sanja jo je jedla. Kos za kosom je grizla in jo pojedla.

Over there
Lil hemm

2024

jake BUTTIGIEG

Ljubljana

1. Define the word “Mediterranean”.

The only body of water with charm, the dirty bath tub of the world, the Eric Cantona of the earth's seas.

2. What does a literature festival on a tiny island (such as the Malta Mediterranean Literature Festival) mean to you?

A great time fr fr.

3. What impact did the residency have on your career?

Broadened my horizons and jumpstarted a period of productivity and competence in writing that I hadn't had until that point.

Ilbieraħ rajtek mghawweġ Arkata

Ilbieraħ rajtek mghawweġ Arkata
u l-ilwien kienu miġbudin madwarek
u mat-tghawwiġ ta' dahrek qalb it-tifrik.
Taħt żaqkek kien hemm tliet bibien.
Alla — il-bieb ta' dak li kien u li tliet
u li kellu jkun u għandu jkun.
Int id-difer li qaċċat it-tila,
il-firma tar-ruħ,
l-aħħar għajta fuq is-salib.
Int — it-tieni bieb tar-ruħ,
li jirbombja taħt il-qrubija tal-kollass,
it-tletin jum ta' wiċċek.
Ilbieraħ rajtek mghawweġ Arkata
fejn il-kustat imniggeż sibtlek kustilji assidjużi.
Fuq sidrek iż-żebgħa għad tixpakka.
Fuq wied xufftejk il-fjur qed jittentaw jaħarbu.
Ġejt biex nara l-ħsara li saret,
bejn barxa u brixa sibt għajnejk iħarsu.

Sirna nirfsu biss fuq il-ħaxix ibbattmat

Sirna nirfsu biss fuq il-ħaxix ibbattmat,
ġisimna għamilnieh mill-ġdid u għamilnieh skomdu għalina
imma komdu għal xulxin.

Aħna nħarsu lejn xulxin,
nafu biss fuq liem naħa tal-pal
iwarrad il-bajtar.
Nafu lil xulxin meta ninsew
li bejn l-għelieqi tas-sajf u tax-xitwa
hemm differenza biss fil-fwieħa tagħhom.

Slovenia you took me in with an embrace

(notes from the flat of your son Dane Zajc and from the Karst of your son Srečko Kosovel)

Slovenia you took me in with an embrace,
a reserved foreigner's embrace,
a summer rain embrace.

You came to me in the same black that I was wearing.
Under the glow
of the same street light together,

“It is small here,
you will never get lost.”

60

When you weight your words with bronze statues of lovers in anguish
walking apart but close as hummingbird heartbeats do
(and not of guns and dead fascists)

I will allow you to crush me in your embrace.

Tomorrow you held my shoulders and you looked through a Blue Window for me.

See the pines in patches of soil made yearning by their poor stone brothers, and the pine is jealous and
only 5 of them were in your Blue Window.

Now, sudden shivers, the light hits the pines pines pines pines pines!

The shade of their Golgotha shapes!

Trickles through your Blue Blue Blue Blue Window.

The rocks had been barren as in Malta (your little sister). We lie together on garigue limestone in uncomfortable ways and try to guess which rock knows the least war.

Forgive Malta (your little sister)
she remembers different textures and
her skin is puckered with limestone
outcroppings and you hide your
wounds with pine and she wears
them on flag poles and
on visible veins and
she asks you to hold
me as she holds me.

61

We have turned hostile to sober
nighttime breezes, we
sit again, street lamp spilling wicker light onto your
concrete lap,

“We are small,
we need to look out for each other”

2024

ryan FALZON

Mljet

1. Define the word “Mediterranean”.

62

The Mediterranean is a melting pot — an ongoing feast of colour, fury, passion, and joie de vivre, with calm, solemn melancholic undertones, just like waves that constantly erode the land. The terrain renders itself habitable through the relentless labour of its inhabitants. The Mediterranean is heavily shaped by history, where the iconography of the ship can embody the duality: the vessel as a provider of goods, a trader bringing wealth and connection, yet also an invader, a pirate, a force of destruction. The Mediterranean that we Maltese know is the very edge of Europe, the definitive border — a threshold between worlds, where cultures converge, clash, and exchange.

2. What does a literature festival on a tiny island (such as the Malta Mediterranean Literature Festival) mean to you?

In a world obsessed with screens, a literature festival is a beacon of hope. The physical presence of books and the act of gathering to celebrate the written word become even more significant in an age of digital distraction. Reading and writing are often solitary pursuits, yet festivals create a rare space where like-minded individuals come together to share, discover new voices, and engage in dialogue. Small-scale festivals celebrate the local as much as the international, and apart from the scale, I do not make much of a distinction.

3. What impact did the residency have on your career?

The residency I experienced through the Ulysses' Shelter platform, hosted by the Slovenian Writers Association in Ljubljana for two weeks in August/September 2024, provided the ideal physical and mental space to finalise the draft of a collection of short stories I've been working on for the past two years. The conversations that took place were influential and thought-provoking, finding their way in the drafts I worked on during the residency. As an author who consistently explores the political, social, and historical conditioning of my homeland Malta, this exchange of perspectives rekindled an informed, fresh outlook. A standout experience was participating in the 39th edition of the Vilenica Festival.

C.

Jien u C. mhux suppost iltaqajna. Kollox beda minn nejka ta' test online, dawk semidubjużi, b'ismijiet ġeneriċi bħal 'Sib l-imħabba tiegħek illum' jew 'L-imħabba ta' hajtek tinsab hawn'. Dawn testijiet ċuċati, banali, li ssib meta żżur siti dubjużi jew jitiġħu bħala reklam, b'interface ta' żmien il-Windows 95. Hafna minnhom jagħtuk sens li ha jimlewlek il-laptop b'kull tip ta' virus spijuż. Test bħal dan tagħmlu biex tghaddi l-hin, u aktarx tmur tiltaqa' ma' dak li jkun biex tghaddi l-hin ukoll. Meta, nofs aptit, ktibna li qed infittxu kuntatt ma' nies oħra, jien u C. kellna riżultat

fjakk u diskoraġġanti. Jien, kif dan it-test ilaqqa' persuna ma' oħra, ma nafx. Nahseb biss li bħalma l-oroskopju jqabbel skont il-pjaneti u l-istilel, dawn it-testijiet jaħdmu fuq kalkoli kumplessi xogħol l-AI.

Wagt li qed nikteb din il-kitba qasira, fittixt kif tinhadem il-probabbiltà ta' suċċess f'relazzjoni skont l-istilla li twelidna taħtha. Open AI jgħidlek li l-oroskopju janalizza stilel, simboli, elementi zodjatiċi u jaħdem somom ta' data astroloġika miġbura mill-karta tat-twelid, kif gwidat mill-astronomija, matematika u intuizzjoni.

Qed insejhlha C. għax dak hu l-isem li jidher fil-profil tagħha. Qaltli li C. biżżejjed, u l-unika risposta vera li tat waqt it-test kienet tikkonċerna s-sess każwali. Is-suġġeriment min-naħa tat-test kien li mmorru f'post kwiet, inkella ninghaqdu ma' udjenza. Uriena stampi ta' koppja jħarsu f'għajnejn xulxin minn wara ktieb f'librerija siekta. Uriena stampa ta' koppja mkebbin f'xalla ta' tim

C.

Me and C. shouldn't have met. Everything started as a half-joke test, those online dodgy ones, with generic names such as 'Find Your Love Today' else 'Here is the Love of your Life.' These are trivial tests, banal, the ones that show when visiting dubious sites, else pop up as adverts, with an interface reminiscent of Windows 95. Most of them give you the vibe that your laptop will soon be infected with all types of spyware. One does such tests to pass the time and follow up with a meeting just to kill time as well. When, half arsed, we indicated that both were seeking contact with others, the result for me and C. was weak and discouraging. I have no

clue how these tests work. I believe that much like how horoscope matches are determined by planets and stars, these tests operate based on complex AI calculations.

While I'm writing this short text, I researched how to determine the probability of success in a relationship according to the zodiac sign under which we were born. OpenAI tells you that the horoscope analyses symbols, zodiac elements, and astrological data calculations gathered from the birth chart, guided by astrology, mathematics, and intuition.

I refer to her as C. because that name appears in her profile. She told me that C. is enough, and the only true answer she gave during the test concerned casual sex. The suggestion from the test's side was for us to go to a quiet place or meet as part of an audience. We were shown an image of a couple gazing into each other's eyes amidst the quiet of a library. We were shown an image of a couple

jiċċelebraw rebħa. B'supervja, C. tgħidli li ser naghmlu mixja qasira f'villagġ kostali, u naraw minn hemm.

Open AI jgħidlek li wħud mill-villagġi kostali f'Malta huma San Ġiljan, Tas-Sliema, il-Mellieħa, Marsascale, Birżebbuġa, Buġibba u Marsaxlokk. Kont qed nikkonsidra nambjenta din l-istorja bejn Buġibba jew Birżebbuġa. It-tnejn derelitti, mitluqin, bħal student żmattat fuq wara tal-klassi, bravu, gustuż, kariżmatiku, jaf li jista' jgħib marki ahjar, imma għala żobbu.

Birżebbuġa baħħ u mitluqa imma xorta żżomm faċċata ta' xiha mserdqa li tbielet, intesiet imma għadha trid. It-tabelli qodma tal-ħwienet nofshom mixgħulin. Iz-żebgħa kkulurita mqarqça mill-faċċati — bellezza ta' postijiet tal-villegġatura dejjem jaqalgħu l-baħar fuq wiċċhom. L-għassa tal-pulizija magħluqa. Il-ħwienet tal-ikel magħluqin. Is-siġġijiet u l-imwejjed maqfulin b'katnazzi mal-arbli tad-dawl. C. tgħidli li ilha tohlom biex tiġi fil-lukanda

mperrça fuq ix-xatt, dik li hemm tintrudi fil-bajja, imma ħadd qatt ma ried jiġi magħha għax l-AI qatt ma jissuġġerixxi laqgħat romantiċi f'postijiet dekadenti, imqammlin, waslu biex jagħluqu. C. tixxennaq biex tinqabad hemm fil-maltemp, tikri kamra fis-sular ta' fuq nett u tagħmel lejl tara l-mewġ jissabbat, jiżvoga, tittanta tara l-baħar jogħla sa kamritha u jxarrbilha l-par żarbun li halliet apposta fil-gallerija.

Jien, sal-lum, fil-kmamar qatt ma dħalt, imma sal-bar wasalt. Hemm manekkini mlibbsin ta' kavallieri ta' Malta bl-elm u f'rashom u pultruni komdi ma jaqblux. Pjanti tal-plastik mimlijin trab. Hemm mejda tal-biljard enormi taħt tubu jarmi l-abjad. Ikun hemm kelb daqs ħmar idur mas-saqajn. Fl-iljieli sajfin jiżfnu l-line dancing fil-parapett u jdoqqu l-country. Jintefgħu jilagħbu l-boċċi għar-riħa ta' pizza hierġa minn forn għall-apert.

Open AI jgħidlek li ħafna mill-bars ta' Malta huma rustiċi, fihom karattru b'motivi lokali

wrapped in a team scarf, celebrating some win. Cockily, C. tells me that we will be going for a short walk in a coastal village and take it from there.

OpenAI informs me that some of the coastal villages in Malta are San Ġiljan, Tas-Sliema, il-Mellieħa, Marsascala, Birżebbuġa, Buġibba, and Marsaxlokk. I was considering setting this story in either Buġibba or Birżebbuġa. Both are neglected and left to their own devices, like a scruffy student at the back of the class. Clever, handsome, charismatic, aware of the potential, but couldn't care less.

Birżebbuġa is empty and neglected, but still holds onto a facade of a haughty mature lady, past her prime, forgotten but still up for it. The shop signs are half lit. The colourful paint is fading from the beautiful facades of the holiday homes facing the Freeport. The police station is closed. The restaurants are closed. The chairs and tables are padlocked to light posts. C. tells me that she has

long been dreaming of staying in the hotel on the shore, the one protruding on the bay, but no one ever wanted to join her because AI never suggests romantic meetings in decadent, dilapidated, shabby places which are about to close for good. C. yearns to be stuck up there during a storm, rent a room on the top floor and spend the night watching the waves crashing, raging, attempting to see the sea rise to her room and soaking the pair of shoes left in the balcony on purpose. I have never entered any of the hotel rooms until now, but I have visited the bar. There are mannequins dressed as knights of Malta with helmets on their heads and a mismatch of armchairs. Plastic plants covered in dust. There is an enormous billiard table under white neon light. There is always a donkey-sized dog running around. On summer evenings, they organise line dancing on the parapet and play country music. They play bocci amidst the scent of pizza coming out of the open-air oven.

OpenAI tells you that many of Malta's rustic bars

bħas-salib ta' Malta. Ta' min isemmi li s-salib ta' Malta mhu ta' Malta xejn, imma tal-Kavallieri tal-Ordni ta' San Ġwann, kongregazzjoni ta' sinjuri nobbli Ewropej li ħakmu lill-gżira kif dehrilhom huma għal kważi tliet mitt sena. Jgħidlek ukoll li hemm ħafna bars godda bl-aħħar disinn minimali u dwal ikkumplikati u atmosfera bi stil. Fi kliem ieħor, aġenti tal-ġentrifikazzjoni, speċjalment fil-belt kapitali, Valletta.

Għandu raġun kważi f'kollox, għalkemm ma daħalx fl-intrinsikanti, fil-kważi komiku, fil-ġebel tas-sejjeħ imwaħħal bil-konkos mal-ħajt, jew fil-kollezzjoni santi tal-mejtn skjerati għassa wara l-fliexken tal-whisky u r-rum.

Dawn l-immaġini komiċi, għanqbut minn żmien ilu li għadu ma tnaddafx, konna nidħku bihom u nistħu minnhom sa ftit snin ilu. Illum anki nies progressivi qed jirromanticizzawhom, ħarja f'wiċċ l-omoġenizzazzjoni globali li f'postijiet zgħar bħal Malta tidwi f'eku jdamdam. Dawn,

faċli timpresjona poplu tarbija kolonjali li għadu jixxennaq li jkun bħal ta' barra, għax ta' barra kollu aqwa, u dejjem aħjar minn dak li taf tkabbar fuq blata xotta.

C. tinsisti li mmorru fil-lukanda tal-bar imqammell, anki jekk it-tazzi jdellku għax mhux maħsul in sew u tal-bar jagħtik il-bqija ħażina apposta. Insaqsaha tixtieqx tmur wehidha jew f'kumpanija, u ma twegibnix. Tgħidli biss, li kif tidhol fil-kamra mikrija ser taqta' l-internet u titfi l-mowbajl u thalli l-baħar ikellimha u l-mewġ jaħtafha, u thossha fragli, zgħira, submissiva, maqtugħa mid-dinja. B'nofs ċajta ngħidilha ħaffef, għax il-lukanda mal-baħar taf tisparixxi ma ddumx. In-nanna kienet tgħid li skont xi li kien jgħix go għar fuq l-irdum ikewwes ħxejjex mistiċi, fil-futur qarib Malta toġhdos għal dejjem. Għad jgħaddu l-vapuri u l-kaptan jgħid lill-baħrin: "Hawn darba kien hawn gżira fejn kienu jgħammru pirati wikkiela tal-bigilla, sakemm fl-aħħar laħaqhom Alla li tant aduraw u żebilhu f'nifs wiehed, u sparixxiehomm."

feature local motifs, such as the Maltese cross. It's worth mentioning that the Maltese cross is not exclusively of Malta, but rather of the Knights of the Order of St John, a congregation of European noblemen who ruled the island as they pleased for almost three hundred years. It also tells you that there are many new bars with the latest minimalist design, offering complicated cocktails and a stylish atmosphere. In other words, agents of gentrification, especially in the capital city, Valletta. While OpenAI is accurate in most aspects, it overlooks certain intrinsic elements, such as the comical imitation rubble walls stuck with concrete on the walls, or the collection of funeral cards strewn among whiskey and rum bottles. These images, reminiscent of bygone eras yet to be fully eradicated, once served as sources of amusement and, until recently, symbols of shame and backwardness. Today even progressive individuals are romanticising them, fearing global homogenisation in tiny countries like Malta, where the echo chamber effect resonates loudly. Here, it's easy to impress a post-colonial

population, still longing to be like those from abroad, because everything imported is better, and is always superior to the homegrown product grown on a dry island.

C. insists on going to a shabby hotel, fully aware that the glasses are never washed properly, and the bar people give you the wrong change on purpose. I ask her if she wants to go alone or in company, but she doesn't answer. She just tells me that as she enters the rented room, she will lose internet connection, turn off her phone, and let the sea speak to her, allow the waves to embrace her and make her feel fragile, small, submissive, detach her from the world. Half joking, I tell her to hurry up because the seaside hotel might quickly vanish. Grandma used to say that, according to an elderly man who lived in a cave on the cliffs brewing mystical herbs, soon Malta will disappear forever. In the future, ships will be sailing, and the captain announces to the sailors that, now submerged, once here was an island inhabited by bigilla-wielding

C. tgħidli, hallina min-nejk, it-theddida tat-tibdil fil-klima fuq gżira fejn niġbdu l-melħ ma' kull nifs u l-ghadam meqrud artite tinħass reali ħafna iżjed mill-Ewropa kontinentali.

OpenAI jgħid li l-probabbiltà li Malta tisparixxi għalkollox hija minima, biss il-villaġġi kostali jaf tigrilhom il-ħsara, u Malta trid tagħmel li tista' biex twaqqaf l-impatt tal-bidla fil-klima fuq id-dinja. X'tista' tagħmel farka li ħafna drabi jinsew iniżżluha fil-mapep, li tiddependi fuq l-importazzjoni biex titma' u ssostni l-iffullar ta' nies li hawn fuqha?

Hawn bieqja karawett mielaħ iżzejjed fuq il-mejda. C. ssaqsi jsajrux bebbux fil-bar tal-lukanda mqammla. Tgħidli li tixtieq tiekol ikla bebbux. Kumbinazzjoni, ilbieraħ missieri qalli li l-bebbux kollu miet għax xita m'għamlitx f'Settembru u lanqas f'Ottubru u lanqas f'Novembru. Dam rieqed iżjed milli suppost għax ma ndunax li x-xitwa bdiet, u miet bil-ġuħ. Lanqas il-ħwienet tal-ikel tradizzjonali

Malti goff, tal-Baħrija u l-Imġarr, fejn jagħtuk nofs żiemel fuq platt jew borma stuffat tal-fenek, ma huma jservu bebbux appetizer mal-birra bħalissa. Malli jixref il-qiegħ tal-bieqja vojta, nindunaw li t-tnejn għajjejna nħarsu fl-għajnejn u ma jigrri xejn. Inkunu spontanji u naqbd u niddeċiedu nikru kamra issa issa u nitilgħu dritt ikkargati biex naħxu.

C. tfakkarni li thobbbhom wisq dawn l-alloġġi temporanji. C. tgħidli li l-istati effimeri dejjem fihom faxxinu ta' libertà. Il-kmamar tal-lukandi qishom l-internet. Tiegħek, imma mhux tiegħek. Kull kamra f'kull lukanda tinħass spazju virtwali, li tidhol fiha taf li ta' maġenbek u tul il-kuritur kollha l-istess, imma mal-ewwel pass, mal-ewwel għafsa ta' "taċċettax il-cookies u tagħtix permess li d-data tiegħek tiġi pproċessata," tagħmilha tiegħek. Timmanipulaha. Titfa' l-ħwejjeg kif ġie ġie, inkella torganizza kolloxx fuq żewġ xkafef. Tbul waħda twila wara ġurnata barra. Tiftaħ il-purtieri. Tara l-istampi u l-filmati oxxeni fuq il-mobile. Taqbad tqalleb u tinbaram fil-virtwali, tara lil min ħa

pirates, until finally they met their fate and the god they simultaneously worshiped and cursed eradicated them. In a serious tone, C. tells me, joking apart, on an island where we inhale salt with every breath and our bones are weakened by arthritis, the threat of climate change feels much more real than in continental Europe.

OpenAI states that the probability of Malta disappearing altogether is minimal, but coastal villages might suffer damages, and Malta must do its part to mitigate the impact of climate change on the world. However, what difference can an overpopulated island that is often overlooked on the maps make?

There are peanuts in a small bowl on the table. C. asks if they serve snails at the shabby hotel. She tells me she wants to feast on snails. Coincidentally, yesterday my dad told me that all the snails died because it didn't rain in September, nor in October, nor in November. The snails hibernated

for a much longer period as they didn't realise that winter started and died of starvation. Not even the traditional gobble-down-as-much-as-you-can Maltese food places are serving snails as an appetizer with beer nowadays. As soon as the peanut bowl is empty, we realise that we are tired of giving each other the eye and that's it. Spontaneously we decide to rent a room and get there in a rush ready for a shag. C. reminds me that she really gets excited by these temporary accommodations. C. tells me that ephemeral states always contain a flavour of freedom. Hotel rooms are like the internet. Yours, but not yours. Every room in every hotel feels like a virtual space, where you enter knowing that the one next door, and every other one all the way down the corridor is identical, but with the first step, with the first click, you accept the cookies and give permission for your data to be processed. You make it yours. You manipulate it. You toss the clothes as you please or organise them on two shelves. You relieve yourself after a long day out. You open the shutters. You

tittanta, tmemmes, min ha jibghatlek ritratt ta' gismu gheri u jghidlek, "Dan ghalik, gej hdej k fil-kamra u ha nidhol f'soddtok," avolja qas jaf min int. Jigi jinvadilek l-ispazju, jahxik, u jitlaq, jaghfes il-buttuna X waqt li jaghlaq il-bieb b'tisbita.

Meta ssaqsi lill-AI fuq x'tip ta' pornografija popolari jhobbu jaraw in-nies fl-istatus flux li wiehed ikun fih meta jabita kamra ta' lukanda, OpenAI, b'ton gentili, jghidlek li tiddiskuti jew tqassam din it-tip ta' informazzjoni mhux l-iskop ta' din il-pjattaforma.

Meta tkun f'kamra ta' lukanda, qisek qiegħed f'post li mhux tiegħek, li żżuru u titlaq minnu kumdità tiegħek. Fil-kamra tal-lukandi tidhol u toħroġ meta trid, bħas-siti tal-internet, imwennes mill-anonimità, mill-funzjonalità, mid-dekor jew in-nuqqas tiegħu. L-ghamara ġenerika sservi lil kulhadd, bħalma jservu s-siti u l-apps. Il-magna tal-kafè solitarja u l-ħalib merħi ġo bieqi "uza u armi." Il-lożor bojod nodfa, sterili, lesti biex jintużaw, jiċcappsu, jitgeżwru, jostru, jgħattu u jsaħħnu l-ġisem. Il-banju mimli

ilma shun. C. ma xxarrabx xagħharha.

Naħxu lejl shih. Gharaqna maqbud f'sufna riha ta' sajf Mediterranju, holm ta' ġelat fuq ġelat mixtri minn vann ikkukurit ipparkjat max-xatt, ruġgata mill-cooler, ix-xemx u d-dell minn wara l-persjana waqt il-mewt ta' waranofsinar, iż-żiffa għaxqija ta' wara l-quddies fil-kappella modesta ta' San Pawl il-Baħar man-nanniet.

Hawn, OpenAI jagħtik twissija finali meta ssaqsih fuq xi jhobbu jagħmlu koppji maħbubin jew persuni sesswalment kompatibbli meta jkun msakkrin f'kamra ta' lukanda.

Hawn, OpenAI jiġi bażwi u bla użu.

Hawn, jien u C. sarilna l-ħin biex noħroġ mil-lukanda. Fil-bieb, C. ma twegħednix li nerġġhu niltaqgħu, la fil-bnazzi u lanqas fil-maltemp. C. tgħidli li jaf ikollha burdata terġa' tagħmel test pop-up li jitla' sorpriża. Din id-darba aktarx

view obscene pictures and clips on your phone. You start scrolling and rolling in the virtual, identifying whom you will hit on, perv on, who will send you a picture of his naked body and tell you, this is for you. I am joining you in your room and I will get in your bed, even though I don't know who you are. He will come and invade your space, penetrate, and leave, pressing the X button as the door closes with a bang.

73 When asked by the AI about what type of pornography people tend to watch in the transient state one finds themselves in when in a hotel room, OpenAI, with a gentle tone, informs you that discussing or sharing this type of information is not the purpose of the platform.

When you're in a hotel room, you feel like you're in a place that isn't yours, a space you check in and out of at your convenience. Just like websites, in hotel rooms you enter and leave as you please, comforted by anonymity, functionality, decor, or

its absence. The generic furniture serves everyone, like websites and apps. There's the solitary coffee maker and watery milk in disposable containers. The sterile white towels folded neatly for use, ready to be stained, wrapped around, hide, cover, and warm up the body. The bath is full to the brim with steaming water. C. doesn't wet her hair. We spend the night fucking, drowning in a dream of Mediterranean summer nights, images of one ice cream after another from the colourful van parked by the shore, lemonade from the cooler, the sun and the shade from behind the slanted windows during the afternoon stillness, the breeze after mass in the modest chapel of St Paul's Bay with the grandparents.

Here, OpenAI gives you a final warning when asked about what activities couples in love or sexually compatible individuals indulge in when they are locked in a hotel room.

Here, OpenAI becomes null and useless.

timlieh onest, sal-inqas dettall, u timxi mal-parir
tiegħu. Forsi, min jaf, din id-darba jimmarkana
naqblu u mmorru niċcelebraw għalenija f'xi folla
waqt partita tal-football, jew nikkwotaw poeżiji
ta' mhabba lil xulxin f'librerija deżerta. Kollox
minbarra nitmewġu f'lukanda mqammla, imperrċa
max-xatt tal-baħar, fejn fl-iljieli sħan tas-sajf jiżfnu
l-line dancing, u l-pjanti tal-plastik għadhom
mimlijin bit-trab.

- 74 *Din in-novella, miktuba minn Ryan Falzon, giet
miktuba speċifikament għat-tema tal-Festival
Vilenica 2024 u ppubblikata fl-antologija Ikar 2.0
(Icarus 2.0), Slovenian Writers' Association, 2024.*

Here, it is time for C. and me to leave the hotel. At the door, C. does not promise that we would meet again, neither in fair nor in harsh weather. C. tells me she might be in a mood to re-do some test that comes up by surprise. Most probably, this time she will answer in the most honest manner and follow the test's advice. Perhaps, who knows, this time the test marks us as highly compatible. We will go celebrate with the crowd during some football match, or quote love poems to each other in a deserted library. Anything but cresting in a shabby hotel by the seaside where in the warm summer evenings they do line dancing, and all the plastic plants are still covered in dust.

This short story, written by Ryan Falzon, was specifically written for the theme of the 2024 Vilenica Festival. Translated by Ryan Falzon.

2024

virginia MONTEFORTE

Caernarfon

1. Define the word “Mediterranean”.

76

Asking an anthropologist of the Mediterranean to define, in her words, the word Mediterranean could lead us everywhere and nowhere. Would the definition I give you be my own, or that of someone else with whom I found myself in agreement, and whose definition I subsequently embodied? So to give “my” definition, I have to forget, for a while, who I am, what I read, what I’ve already written.

Define the word.

Indeed.

‘Mediterranean’ is a word, or a fluid collection of words. The Mediterranean didn’t exist as such before I started to listen to stories about it, to read about it, to see it illustrated in art, on maps ... Words and water, languages, lands and seas with many names, and stories which are both the same and different from coast to coast, from land to land ... words written on water. The impossibility, and futility, of a definition which may last only as long as it takes for a wave to reach the coast before once again receding.

2. What does a literature festival on a tiny island (such as the Malta Mediterranean Literature Festival) mean to you?

Apart from my direct involvement in it for so many years now, it is the possibility, for a few days, to see, and listen, how languages have been loved and taken care of by voices coming both from here and from elsewhere; which makes me feel — temporary — at home again, here.

3. What impact did the residency have on your career?

I can't tell, as of yet, what kind of impact the residency will have on my career. I went there as a translator, but was treated as a writer which made me happy, but I have yet to recognise myself as a writer, to be honest, though writing has been my main passion for the past 40 years. However, I learned to make a very good Welsh Rarebit and shared the recipe with my family who fell madly in love with it, and are now recommending it to their friends too.

L'antidiario.

Ovvero, strenue (*leggi infruttuose*) strategie di resistenza all'odissea autobiografica.

*Je hais les voyages et les explorateurs.
Et voici que je m'apprête à raconter mes expéditions.
Claude Lévi-Strauss, Tristes Tropiques.*

78

Non so dire con esattezza l'istante in cui l'io mi sia venuto in uggia, in altre parole quando una lieve, seppur pulsante, noia per la maggior parte dei romanzi autobiografici si sia insinuata ai varchi delle meningi, dapprima come un brusio che infastidisce solo quando uno inizia a farci caso, infine come una rete a maglie fitte che sbrindella le compatte ragioni di uno scritto ogni volta che l'attraversa — perfino quello che ha ogni diritto di reclamare la pulsione autobiografica come garanzia di integrità e “autenticità” — e rende la benevolenza con cui ero solita accoglierlo difficile da ricomporre, ora.



Non so quindi come e quando sia nata questa riluttanza per l'io, l'io ovunque, l'io che non sa mettersi da parte, l'io che divorava ogni immaginazione e inchioda i piedi nel cemento del non sapersi pensare oltre il getto dei nostri occhi, gli steccati delle proprie intime categorie. O almeno, se si decide di non uscire dal perimetro delle proprie pareti, l'io che non conosce metamorfosi, l'io che non sa trasformarsi nell'io di qualcun altro, neanche per finta, e resta bozzolo, avvolto nei fili corti di una vita solo sua.

*La miopia che si riaffaccia dai bordi delle pupille
quando si fa scuro,
mi rammenta dolorosamente
un crescente rintanarsi dello sguardo
dentro spazi più nitidi e innocui
e il desiderio
di lanciarlo oltre il primo orizzonte di sfocatura.*



Devono essere i
libri che mi è capitato
di leggere in queste
ultime settimane:
glorified journals,
diresti tu. Trovarne
uno che non spacci il
cosa l'autore o l'autrice

hanno mangiato a colazione — *porridge, pane e
ricotta, scones o picau ar y maen* — per una vicenda
universale, è impresa ardua e quei pochi che hanno
l'audacia di raccontare solamente storie, e raccontarle
per bene, ovvero riuscire a modellare l'io in fogge
inusitate e materiali inaspettati per proiettarlo (e noi

lettrici e lettori con esso) in mondi altri, mondi di
fantasia radicale, sono ormai delle rarità.
E raro da cogliere, pare,

*l'odore del mare di Caernarfon,
si sottrae, mi ci accosto,
ma non tanto,
con una prudenza
che mi sorprende.
Se odora è di pietra,
e della pietra ha il colore,
e scaglie d'onda che fendono l'aria,
i ciottoli tanti rivoli di risacca
che ha perso la strada
per tornare al largo,
rivoli
d'acque che all'asciutto si sono sgretolate
in gocce di pietra,
e così sono rimaste.
E con quella pietra
hanno costruito un castello
perché molto tempo prima*

*Macsen il romano
sulle rive di un altro mare
vide in sogno queste terre blu,
e una donna che già amava.*

*E vorrei toccare quel mare cerata
colore tempesta trattenuta
che illividisce il cielo
mare senza odore
— nessun profumo
a involgersi
nelle trame della mia borsa
per farsi portare altrove —
per accertarmi che mare d'acqua sia
e non roccia,
ma il timore che le nocche
s'infrangano contro la superficie
mi fa esitare.*

*Mare grigio, mare di lavagna,
dove antiche storie scritte col gesso
si sono sciolte in schiuma, e tornano
in una lingua che suona*



*come il crepitio del fuoco
in un pomeriggio di novembre,
quando sono tutti intorno a un
fuoco a raccontarsi
cosa hanno sognato la notte
prima.*

*Intrico di rami, barriera d'aglio
orsino,
forse l'odore salino vi resta
impigliato.
Mare di lame di carta scura,
lacerano le falangi che l'hanno
infine sfiorato,
mare rocciato: non scorre tiepido
nelle narici,
non avvolge la testa
e le spalle col suo scialle di sale e
legni,*

*trama di timo, salicornia, mirto e malva.
In quest'acqua dove Ellen è stata maestra di marinai
e un monaco apicoltore salpò con api gallesi
quando fece ritorno a casa, in Irlanda,*

*in quest'acqua d'ombre, corde d'arpa e sonni
non so neanche se saprei nuotare.*

Sarà l'antropologia e tutti gli anni spesi a correrle dietro, sarà questa scienza empirica di materialità e immaginari da fare e disfare come una tela, a rendermi ora invisibile ogni scintilla autobiografica, perfino la mia che tra queste righe s'affaccia, sbilancia, si frammenta nei versi, macchia la pagina e poi s'acquatta, mi guarda di sottocchi?

L'antropologia c'entra sempre, in qualche modo.

Ho provato diverse volte a liberarmi dai suoi artigli da fiore di cotone, soffici, labirintici e letali, e ogni volta ho dovuto arrendermi all'evidenza che, fin dalle prime letture tra gli scorticati muri della facoltà di lettere, quelle spire s'erano ormai

conficcate nella mia carne, globuli ingrati che si inseguivano a perdifiato nel sangue: linguaggi, mormorii, il corpo, la voce, le lacrime, la danza, il ragno, lo specchio velato, il deserto, le liparote cave di pomice e di ossidiana, cristalli di rocca, fuochi d'artificio, onore e vergogna, purezza e pericolo, l'ascolto, il dubbio.

Allora non me ne rendevo conto, e mi sentivo illuminata dal calore di quel nuovo sapere, dal dono di quegli occhi sgranati, pupille da belladonna, pupille che vedevano anche al buio, sazia e allo stesso tempo ancora affamata delle meraviglie che avrei trovato alla pagina successiva, a una nuova lezione, a un tuffo in un nuovo *terrain*.

*A un tuffo da uno scoglio giallo zafferano
nella schiuma increspata, frizzante del mare maltese,
un mare dove mi chiedo se voglio ancora nuotare.*



Adesso è tardi, non c'è rimedio, terapia, efficacia simbolica che tenga. Il mio sguardo è ormai iniettato del suo veleno, e fa sì che ogni apparenza, perfino la più placida e innocua, si riveli subito come crepitante scenografia di cartapesta in fiamme, stridio di intelaiatura di ferro e chiodi, inganno di strutture, mentre scalza sullo sdruciolevole terreno dell'animo inquieto indietreggio, dilato lo sguardo, *sguardo da lontano*, imbocco tratturi impervi, e non mi sento più a casa da nessuna parte.

Deve essere per forza l'antropologia. L'antropologia ricerca del soggetto, l'antropologia e il diario, la storia di vita — l'io isolato a stento nella premessa, e per i più ardimentosi anche nel primo capitolo della monografia, ma che persiste, affiora, qua e là, a spruzzi, pure in quelli successivi — l'io che torna come una perdita d'acqua da tubi saldati male sotto il pavimento. L'io che rumoreggia come l'acqua del ruscello che scorre limpida e gelida ai piedi del cottage,



*e so che è gelida perché ci ho immerso i piedi,
ho conoscenza empirica di quest'acqua che scorre*

sotto la finestra della mia stanza, e che la prima notte ho sognato invadere il pavimento

anche i sogni sono conoscenza

mentre la voce di chi mi era accanto, una sconosciuta, mi diceva imperturbabile che era una cosa normale, succedeva sempre che l'acqua del ruscello finisse pure nella stanza, e nessuno può

farcì niente, se non prenderne coscienza.
Succede sempre: l'io che invade ogni spazio come acqua, l'io da tenere a bada, l'io da problematizzare, l'io che non può essere invisibile, che presunzione questa, l'io che si sente scomodo, un outsider, posizione privilegiata, posizione maledetta, limiti liquidi, il qui liminale.

Magnificare

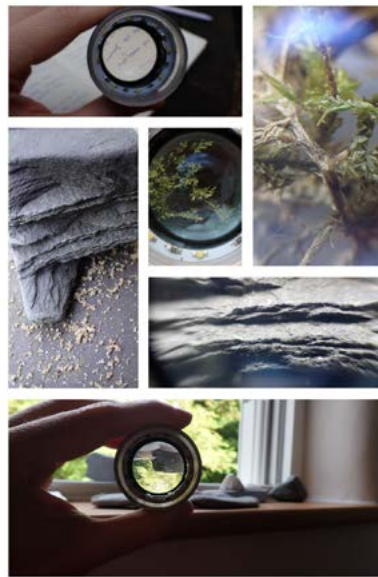
83

Per contrastare l'onnipresenza dell'io, il suo trapezio tra concetti vicini e concetti lontani, tra particolare e universale, mi afferro al particolare. Non potendo sradicare del tutto l'io, decido di decentrarlo spostando l'attenzione verso l'inanimato, pur cosciente che pure quella di inanimato è definizione antropocentrica (leggi presuntuosa). In particolare, l'oggetto a cui decido di ricorrere per mettere un altro ostacolo tra me e quello che mi circonda, in altre parole per attutire l'io, ha un nome altisonante: *magnifier*. Il magnifier che da lontano ribalta le cose e da vicino le restituisce nella direzione che hanno.

Magnifier: Magnificare, amplificare, ingrandire, esagerare.

Mi chiedo (per tornare alla sorgente di questo ragionamento e al motivo per cui sono qui a scrivere): non è quello che dovrebbe fare la letteratura?

Ma allora perché tanta opera letteraria rintuzza quasi sempre nel limite del quotidiano, dei nostri ristretti orizzonti? Perché questo incaponirsi, questa cocciuta fissazione sull'io, come se i suoi paesaggi interiori siano gli unici meritevoli di essere percorsi, *magnificati*, appunto? E mi concedo l'attraversamento di un ponte in questo libero (s)ragionare: perché l'essere umano è sempre al centro di ogni cosa, tempo, spazio, dimensione, necessità?





*Perché il principe
Llywelyn può decidere
all'improvviso della vita
dell'ottimo e fedele cane
Gelert che aveva salvato la
vita del figlioletto, uccidendo
il lupo, in nome della
presunzione di avere sempre
ragione in quanto umano?
Perché lo guida una sola
ragione, la sua? Perché il
dubbio non lo sfiora?*

Il dubbio avrebbe salvato Gelert.

Se volessi ancora prestare ancora il fianco all'antropologia, sarebbe sempre più un'antropologia oltre l'umano. In questo, il mio vecchio interesse per gli oggetti si rivela, per il momento, in attesa di approfondimenti maggiori, un prezioso appiglio.

Eppure.

Eppure gli oggetti non sono solo oggetti: il *magnifier* che ho infilato nello zaino prima di partire è la parte visibile, tattile di una biografia stroncata; non mi apparteneva fino a qualche mese fa, e non mi appartiene del tutto neanche adesso; sento di essermene appropriata in maniera prepotente, ma allo stesso tempo ineluttabile.

Volevo qualcosa di *lui*, lui che non c'è più, lui che mi invitava sempre ad appoggiarci l'occhio, a vederci attraverso per cogliere meglio i dettagli dei negativi e dei provini sulla lavagna luminosa, e io pensavo ogni volta: non basta l'occhio nudo? Ma mi avvicinavo comunque e ogni volta gli davo ragione: no, l'occhio nudo e basta non era sufficiente. Noi esseri umani, nella conoscenza, non siamo sufficienti. E così il *magnifier* mi ricorda l'umiltà di un sapere che riconosce i propri limiti. L'occhio nudo che chiede aiuto allo strumento, all'oggetto, all'inanimato.

*In questo occhio nudo sei rimasto impresso,
chino sulla tua lavagna di luce,
in quel tuo anfratto di metallo, vetro e carte,
Atlantide smantellata,
chino sul tuo magnifier che ho portato con me
su quest'altra isola dove un tempo hai immaginato
di cercare un'altra vita,
questo paese in cui sapevi che saresti stata,
è una delle ultime cose che ci siamo detti
a cena.*

85

Il magnifier è rotto, immagino ti sia caduto un giorno. Non so quando. L'ultima volta che mi hai invitato a guardarci attraverso era ancora tutto intero.

Ti sarà caduto, ma la lente non si è rotta; è solo, impercettibilmente, scheggiata. I pezzi però non stanno più insieme. Lo hai riparato con del nastro isolante rosso. Si stava scollando così ce ne ho messo sopra un altro, nero, tre volte avvolto, impossibile abbraccio — *“e tre dalle mie mani svolò, come un'ombra o un sogno”*⁽¹⁾.

Posso fare meglio, magnificare l'incidente, saltare di genere: lo avevi lasciato un attimo da

solo, per andarti a cuocere un caffè, solo qualche minuto su quella lavagna di luce lasciata accesa, e voleva, pure lui, oggetto che simula l'occhio, farsi “io”, non essere solo un mero strumento al servizio dell'umano; voleva vedere di più, provarci da solo a spingersi oltre l'apparenza delle cose, oltre la grana pellicola, scoprire l'universo che si cela in un cristallo d'argento; forse ha colto un luccichio, un bagliore, e ha aguzzato lo sguardo. Ha strizzato sempre più quella sua palpebra vitrea per carpirlo meglio, ma lo sforzo è stato eccessivo e il vetro s'è incrinato e tu, che non eri neanche là, hai sentito un crack e ti sei precipitato di nuovo nella camera oscura, trovando quel tuo oggetto così, dove lo avevi lasciato, immobile sopra i negativi, sulla luce, frantumato dal desiderio di voler scrutare oltre.





E ora il *magnifier* porta la ferita di quel desiderio tanto umano di volersi spingere oltre i propri limiti, come l'Ulisse dantesco oltre le Colonne d'Ercole:

“Ma misi me per l'alto mare aperto”⁽²⁾.

Naufragare

Ulisse ha superato le colonne d'Ercole, la sua nave non si è inabissata e si è diretto verso le isole britanniche; si è prima fermato ad Anglesey dove ha raccolto tre conchiglie e poi è sceso a sud, a Caernarfon, chiudendosi nel suo rifugio; i suoi uomini hanno assaggiato i fiori del giardino, e sono stati mutati in galline. Ora razzolano fuori dal cancello, si litigano il cibo con i gabbiani. Ulisse non scruta più l'orizzonte, non pensa più al mare, al mare che non ha odore, a quello che ce l'ha.

Scruta invece gli oggetti che ha intorno, che ha raccolto, che si è portato dietro, si sofferma sulla superficie delle cose, che come Palomar notava, è inesauribile⁽³⁾. Le uniche colonne d'Ercole che vuole superare ancora, in questi giorni, sono quelle che lo conducono a un ruscello.

“La storia di un ruscello, anche di quello che nasce e si perde tra il muschio, è la storia dell'infinito”, scriveva Elisée Reclus⁽⁴⁾ e come per lui, la sola

conoscenza che basta avere, per ora, è quella di questo ruscello, del suo gorgoglio, di ogni sua goccia, dell'acqua che suona diversamente quando incontra una roccia che emerge e si spezza in una cascatella, o quando si insinua e vortica in una rientranza d'erba e rocce; della luce che scivola dalle foglie di un salice e fluttua sull'acqua, si oscura, ritorna; della nevicata soffice e tiepida dei pioppi, della corrente in senso opposto a mezzo metro dall'acqua di una miriade di minuscoli insetti; di



un'anatra con i suoi cinque piccoli, due che restano indietro, e si affrettano per raggiungere gli altri; d'una sorgente che vedo solo se chiudo gli occhi, e dove posso viaggiare, solo se chiudo gli occhi.

Non dirmi nulla Tiresia, che tutto è stato già svelato, raccontato, mostrato; e la rimbombante, e spesso ripetitiva cacofonia di racconti che troviamo nei social, la cosificazione dell'io e di ogni suo passo oltre l'uscio di casa, o di stanza in stanza, ha reso impossibile il viaggio, o ci ha intrappolato nell'idea che uno spostamento che non sia pensato come ripetizione delle tappe del già visto, o commercio della propria esperienza, è qualcosa di inutile. Ci vuole una bella forza interiore per decidere di non fare qualcosa di già suggerito, quando si è in viaggio, per non "comprare" il viaggio di un altro.

Ho cercato di non leggere quello che era stato scritto da altri nel corso delle loro residenze, e ho scansato con cura: le dieci cose da vedere a Caernarfon, Caernarfon in un giorno, due, tre; i migliori ristoranti di cucina gallese; Manchester, cosa vedere in un giorno. E così via.

L'Odisseo che c'è in me (il nome mi è sempre piaciuto di più di quello d'Ulisse) canticchia *Wake up the dawn and ask her why/A dreamer dreams she never dies/Wipe that tear away now from your eye*⁽⁵⁾, pensa che in fondo non avere una connessione internet non è poi così male, e decide di fermarsi; restare a scrivere, imbrattare fogli di acquerelli rimpiangendo di non aver mai imparato davvero a usarli, leggere sul ciglio di un ruscello, oziare sul soffice e fresco materasso d'una stanza d'albergo



a dieci minuti dall'aeroporto. E passare le notti successive a sognare di andare alla deriva per i terminal, e perdere il volo.

Per dire: non mi interessa prendere nota di una lista di cose tradizionali, o ritrovarmi il vero Galles sulle papille gustative. Mi interessa però che un gruppo di amici, tra cui i proprietari del cottage che mi ospita, dedichi il proprio tempo, e quindi dia importanza, alla preparazione di uno spettacolo di balli in costume per esibirsi nel corso dell'annuale e caotico Food Festival; o che Nici inviti a cena a casa sua me e Kristina, la mia compagna di residenza, per essere lei a cucinare *piatti gallesi*, e dunque che scelga intenzionalmente di essere la mediatrice materiale di questa conoscenza di cui ha anche scritto in passato. Attenzione, non ha scritto di *cucina gallese tradizionale*, ma di cucina sua. Penso che non esista e non sia mai esistita una *cosa* come la cucina tipica, tradizionale, addirittura nazionale. Ogni cucina è immaginariamente collettiva, ma sempre individuale. Tutt'al più familiare, se la pensiamo come rituale (impreciso) di ri-attuazione di legami passati.

E mentre osservo Nici cucinare, ecco farsi strada nella mente un pizzico di ricordo:

il coniglio finto, il buon Rarebit, che credevo contenesse carne, mi fa sempre pensare all'orrore che provai, prima di giungere a Malta per la prima volta, nello scoprire l'esistenza della fenkata, il pasto maltese a base di coniglio. A quel tempo dividevo la mia stanza con una bellissima coniglia bianca, gli occhi celesti.

E posso anche sentirmi libera, nonostante il mio amore per i miti e le leggende, di tralasciare i libri dedicati alle leggende gallesi ammiccanti dagli scaffali del *Palas Print*.

Ma allo stesso tempo ascolto rapita le fiabe che Kristina racconta mentre passeggiamo lungo i sentieri di Beddgelert. E risento quel friccicare che in ogni caso questo tipo di storie mi suscitano sempre, per il modo in cui colorano i luoghi, li fanno splendere.

Però poi, nel momento in cui il racconto finisce, mi chiedo: sono gli antropologi, in sostanza persone mosse dall'incanto per l'altrove, per la

coscienza che non esista un radicale altrove (e non certo da ora), individui ormai incapaci di incanto? Ma senza incanto, che senso ha lo sguardo?

E come si ritrova l'incanto?

Dovrei addormentarmi sotto una quercia o un olmo, risvegliarmi nella terra delle fate dove il tempo scorre in modo diverso, per poi far ritorno in un luogo che è ormai un altrove temporale, nuovo e incontaminato al mio stesso sguardo?

89 — *Sembra una cosa bella, finire nel mondo delle fate*
— *aveva concluso Kristina quella volta, — ma non lo è affatto: quando ci si sveglia ci si ritrova soli [perché chi amavamo non c'è più].*

Pure qui a Caernarfon il tempo scorre in maniera diversa, e dimentico spesso che giorno è.

“Quello che sono è quasi nulla caro. Quasi mortale, quasi un'ombra come te. È un lungo sonno cominciato chissà quando e tu sei giunto in questo sonno come un sogno. Temo l'alba, il risveglio.

Se tu vai via, è il risveglio”.⁽⁶⁾

E come la Calipso di Pavese anche io temo il risveglio, a meno che non significhi *risvegliarmi* in un luogo dove la me scrittrice mette da parte, per un po' di tempo, la me antropologa, per poter creare un radicale altrove che le porti stupore, e poi un altro, e un altro ancora. In altre parole, (come avrebbe detto Alberto Sobrero, il mio professore di Antropologia e Letteratura quando parlava di antropologi divenuti alla fine scrittori e poeti), *naufragando*.

E così, per disperdere l'io, per la strategia dell'oggetto, per magnificare, per ritardare il risveglio, mentre ero ancora in Galles, mi sono messa a naufragare in tutti gli altrove che non si vedono a occhio nudo.

Nota:

*Per ritrovare l'odore del mare:
dimenticare di saper nuotare.*



Riferimenti

1. Omero, Odissea, Libro XI.
2. Dante Alighieri, La Commedia, Inferno, Canto XXVI.
3. Italo Calvino, Palomar.
4. Elisé Reclus, Storia di un ruscello.
5. Oasis, Champagne Supernova.
6. Cesare Pavese, Dialoghi con Leucò, L'isola.

Read the English version here:

https://tovar.hr/us_item.php?t_id=303&j=2&kat=6

2025

gabriel SCHEMBRI

Mljet

1. Define the word “Mediterranean”.

92

The Mediterranean for me, but mostly for the people I work with, is a cemetery. The Mediterranean seabed is littered with lifeless bodies of men, women and children who were left to drown, pushed back by politics of hate, populism and borders. It is also a physical, mostly visual, escape from the boundaries that confine a tiny island. Its infinity echoes back my thoughts. Its vastness, makes me think of things to come, places to be that are not here, not now.

2. What does a literature festival on a tiny island (such as the Malta Mediterranean Literature Festival) mean to you?

A healthy dose of literary culture and a celebration of what could be one of the main pillars of our heritage as a nation. A manifestation of language, its uniqueness and the weight of words in every varied form.

3. What impact did the residency have on your career?

I think one of the impactful things that my literary shelter provided was improving my ability to control my thoughts, and channel my efforts on something. I feel I learned to focus more, do things more intentionally, be more present with what I am doing now. On Mljet, my home for three weeks during the shelter, time was warped, the way I plan the day changed, my mind did not seek to plan much but my ears, eyes and all the senses, they wanted to take in as much as possible. These abilities of sorts, of sensing the environment around us, and the ability to intentionally channel my thoughts onto something, are the two things which I believe will have a lasting impact on my literary journey.

The municipality of no choice

The sun makes everything on the island better. The sea is more blue, the green bush more lush. The mood a little brighter. But it's "the Bura wind that makes everything clearer". Or at least that was what the ferry worker told Gustav once he landed from mainland Croatia. And it was this blizzard cold wind that pushed him all the way to the island of Mljet.

The wind vents violently in between the tiny inlets of Babino Polje, Mljet's main village, right in the middle of the 50km long island. The village is home to less than 260 people in winter including a

fireman, a nurse, a visiting chaplain, half a dozen teachers, librarian, bus driver and a baker. And for a couple of months, this community will now also have to count Gustav among its pack.

It's the early months of the year 2005. Gustav is by now a seasoned writer and researcher who was, some years back, commissioned to write about the Slav coast and its islands following the war of the early 1990s.

He has been touring the coast on this side of the Mediterranean since 1995, producing a handful of well-researched books. One island, one coast after another. All the way from the Cursed Mountains in Albania, to the tiny rocky islands littering the coast of Croatia.

With the population in winter being so small, everyone on the island knew that there was a stranger in their midst. In a matter of days, he worked on understanding the machinery of the

island. The location of the only shop, the one restaurant and, very importantly, an illegally-run bar which housed very decent local red wine, made by the owner himself.

The conglomeration of men smoking at the corner of the bar appeared like a theatrical scene from a Greek tragedy. Their unrelenting puffs of smoke smudged the dim light from the electricity bulb in the middle, engorged their shadows against the ancient wall of the bar and produced a cloud of mysticism to a bar on an island which was already mystique, in every literary quality.

Although, as Gustav would discover, there wasn't much of a literary culture to speak of in Mljet. And the men looked at Gustav as if he were committing some bizarre atrocity when, after ordering his wine, he sat in a corner and opened his notebook and landed his reading book on the table.

"You're a writer?" said an aged voice in one dark

corner. Gustav only managed to make out his wrinkled face through the flame at the end of his thick cigarette.

"I am, yes. I came here to research ..."

The man interrupted him. "Nah nah nah ... if you are into books, you ought to speak to Ivana."

"Who is Ivana?" Gustav asked.

"The lady who opened the room with books."

"You mean a library?" That was a weird way to describe a conventional library, thought Gustav.

"It's a room ... with many books. Ivana runs it. Speak to her. The rest of us here, we are not into books," the man said dismissively.

"Ok ... thank you." Gustav wanted to extend the conversation and perhaps explain that one way to

learn about the island was to speak to the locals. But given the omni-directionality of the conversation, it was clear that this man was not willing to tell much.

His evening at the bar did not, however, leave him empty handed.

As he went to pay for his wine, Gustav asked about Ivana, the lady of the many books, in a little room.

“Yes, her room is just down by this same road. The main road of Babino Polje. How are you travelling?”

“By foot”, said Gustav, very matter-of-factly.

Then the owner behind the bar shouted at the four men sitting in the smokey corner and yelled something in Croatian. After a couple of minutes, the man behind the bar told him; “that guy. He will lend you a bike. But good luck with cycling here. It’s many ups and downs. And Mljet has had many more ups than downs in recent years ... you’ll see.”

—

“Are you Ivana?”

The woman in her late forties emerged from between the tall piles of books like Godzilla between the skyscrapers of Manhattan. She was wrapped in a thick chequered blanket which looked heavy and stained with years.

“So you’re the writer?”

Of course, like everyone else on the island, she knew Gustav was the latest addition to the odd popolis of Babino Polje.

“I am. I’ve come to Mljet to research on the recent years of the island, after the war of the nineties.”

“I know who you are,” Ivana muttered, as she scrambled for two glasses in one corner of the

small room. She continued before Gustav asked for more; "I've read your books. I probably have them here somewhere. You're good. You seem to go to places which tend to be overlooked. And Mljet is particularly overlooked, even by our own compatriots."

Gustav could tell that this was an old building, but he could not see the traditional rubble walls that most of the Mljet old houses were made out of because of all the books.

"Quite a collection you have here," he said as she passed him a cup with some red wine.

"It is the *only* collection of books you'll find on this island. The people here are not of the reading type. I have tried, believe me, to revitalise the literary interest here, but oh it's been a struggle. I might as well keep the door open at night, cos no one will set a foot inside."

In the limited space there was between them, Gustav tried to walk around and have a look at the titles. Ivana sat down and put some music on her newly acquired CD player. There was one book called "Parallel islands: Mljet and Malta". Gustav grabbed it and asked Ivana if he could borrow it.

"Sure. This is an open library. Borrow what you want. As long as you get it back before you head to wherever you came from."

And so he did. The book was a treasure trove for his research and Gustav devoured it in a couple of days.

Over the next few weeks, Gustav became a regular at this 'room with books', as the barman put it. Because that is what it really was, nothing much else to it. Ivana grew accustomed to this stranger and she herself enjoyed the company. Although she did not speak much. Her mouth was often occupied downing glasses of red wine or holding a rolled-up cigarette. Notwithstanding, having another

person sharing her space was pleasant, even for an eccentric like Ivana.

“I’m heading home soon. Do you want to stay more?” she asked as she grabbed her thick coat and a warm beanie.

The room was small but not very well lit. In fact, the only source of light was a yellow, warm-coloured bulb in the middle that provided this intense chiaroscuro effect on the myriad of books that cluttered these walls.

Ivana noticed that her departure was going to go unnoticed. “Mr Gustav, I said I’m going home. Feel free to stay a while longer.”

Gustav emerged from an obscure corner of the room holding a thin book, of not more than a hundred pages.

“What is this book?” Gustav moved closer to the

light. The title and the text inside were handwritten, not printed and the cover only contained “The Municipality of no choice” as a title.

“Who wrote this? And why is it hand written?” He looked at her.

Ivana was already holding the door open with the jacket in her hand ready to leave. She looked towards the outside. Bura wind was persisting and the cold outside made it unbearable to just stand in anyone’s doorway. It was either out or in. And by the looks of Gustav’s discovery, she had to stay in.

“Ah, I see you found this library’s precious manuscript.”

Gustav pulled over a small chair and sat down under the one source of light. Ivana closed the door shut, and Gustav opened the first page of the book.

“Like many of you, I was born afflicted with the

freedom of choice. As I grew up, I exercised myself into abolishing this burden and piece by piece, I managed to live a simple life, free of anxiety, fear and insecurity."

"What is this? Who wrote this? Is it a draft of some sorts?" Gustav fired his questions without looking up at the only other person in the room.

Ivana pulled a chair next to him and grabbed the book in her hand. She opened a random page;

"To make my life even more simple, choiceless, I became vegan. So when I came to the only restaurant open on the island, I got myself absolutely no option, unburdened with a redundant choice from a needy menu. I made my life simpler. I was, here too, free, completely."

She smiled and shook her head as she read this.

"You know the author" said Gustav as he saw her smile.

"Yes. Yes, I did."

Gustav was waiting for some more elaboration from her.

"No one bothered to come here for a very long time. In fact, he was practically the only one attending this blessed library. You remind me so much of him, actually. Sitting here in these dark corners, reading."

"Well, I am intrigued. I'd love to read it. Perhaps I'll take it home with me, Ivana. I know you were on your way out. I don't want to keep you."

"No," she said immediately.

"This book does not leave these four walls. The people out there ... they wouldn't understand." Gustav didn't quite get what she meant by that but the woman in front of him seemed adamant not to have the book moved from here.

“Let’s revisit this tomorrow, what do you think?” she asked, holding the book close to her chest.

—

In the few weeks living on the island, Gustav’s flat got populated by newspaper cuttings, history books and little pieces of loose paper with hand-written notes. He had newspaper clippings of developments in the past decade, infrastructural improvement on the island as well as a number of odd disasters which stood out in an otherwise very uneventful island scenario.

There was a fire which destroyed most of the carob trees on the island leaving many households dumbfounded as to how such a tragedy happened. The olive trees owners, which constitute the other half of the population, helped out the families financially as their production never seized fire — the fire literally only destroyed the part where carob trees grew.

The newspaper clipping next to it spoke about the increase in population of goats and how it’s affecting the human inhabitants who would randomly find goats grazing on their front lawns and destroying their crops.

The oddest of stories was preserved on a newspaper clipping which described the vanishing of a lone tourist who came to visit the island. There wasn’t much detail about the woman. She was in her late 30s, and at the time of the visit, in January of 1997, she was practically the only tourist on the island. Her last known whereabouts was the olive passage which led to the Odysseus cave in the south coast of the island.

So many stories to occupy his mind. But nothing, nothing, caused more intrigue than that hand-written manuscript he found at the library.

So, the next morning, right after his first coffee, he got onto his bike and sped down towards Ivana’s library.

Gustav found Ivana at her usual seat, sipping coffee this time, not wine. And in her hands, piles of loose paper. “The Municipality of No Choice” was there next to her, unopened.

“What are you reading?” Gustav asked.

“Letters I received over the years.”

He smiled at her reply. In the weeks he’d known her she never gave in to any deep human sentiment. But today, this morning, the woman in front of him seemed to carry a warm, loving look. Albeit, Gustav noticed a twinge of melancholy weighing on her smile.

“You’re here for the book. Here.” She passed on the hand-written manuscript before he could ask more questions about the letters she was clenching in her hands.

Gustav sat down, poured himself some of the

freshly brewed coffee and opened the book. The hand-writing was refined, easy to read and clear enough for everyone to read.

This book was the final version of multiple writing tryouts, thought Gustav. The author didn’t sit down for one long night and covered the whole thing. Whoever this person was, he or she must have written it after compiling little pieces of texts, of information, or in this case, arguments in this ‘manifesto’. And it was well written. Being a writer himself, Gustav could appreciate the craftsmanship of the language used.

At first Ivana sat a few metres away from him, reading her letters. But at one point, after sometime, Gustav lifted his face and eyed her with curious intrigue. She deemed it wise to give this man some space.

Or perhaps, she was the one who needed space to breath.

She got her coat and left. For once, Mljet was blessed with a nice sun and no wind. A walk would do Ivana a lot of good. And perhaps right now, a long walk was the only thing she needed.

A couple of hours later, she headed back to the library. Gustav's coffee mug was replaced with a glass of red wine. The book was closed in front of him. And his face was stunned. Ivana knew he had devoured it all in one go. She had barely any time to put her coat on the hanger, Gustav turned to her for questions.

102 "You knew the author?"

"I did," replied Ivan as she sat down.

"I met him the first time when I used to work at the local mini-market. The manager called me to go clean the isle where the clothes detergents were. I walk there and I see Igor — that's his name — lying on all fours. He had just thrown up."

Gustav had no idea where this story was going.

Ivana continued.

"I asked him if he was feeling sick. His face was wet with sweat. He was ... beautiful."

Igor had stood up abruptly and left the mini market without looking up at the shelves, eyes on the floor, as though ashamed, but mostly angry.

"I knew something was off with this man. So I followed him out."

Igor turned to face her. She realised then that she had never seen him on the island before — which either meant that he just arrived or that he didn't interact much. It's a small population, and everyone knows who's inhabiting the village.

"Since when do you have so many different brands of laundry detergents?" That was the first thing Igor told Ivana.

"What? That was his opening line?" Gustav asked,

intrigued now more than moments before.

“Yes. I sat with him for a while. He looked traumatised, poor man. He explained to me that, he had thrown up upon seeing so many different choices on the detergent’s section of the mini market. You see, he later confessed to me that he suffered from severe anxiety. And that his main trigger was choice.”

103 “Choice?”

“Options, alternatives ... to things which could otherwise be clear and straight forward. For Igor, choice was like a looped prison. A source of tremendous anxiety and tension.”

Ivana recalled how the two had sat under an olive tree. Igor had opened up, as though talking to a long-lost friend, divulging every little detail of this particular malaise of his.

Back at the library, Gustav looked at his book in hand. Choice. *The Municipality of no choice.*

“So this book, this manuscript is ... ”

“It’s his manifesto. To live in a world, free of choice. Unburdened by alternatives. That is why he had travelled to Mljet. This was to be his perfect, safe ground.”

At this point Gustav needed to stand up, to make sense of what he had just learned and what he had read in the small book.

“Do not judge him, please. He was a sick man, taunted by an obsession. Whatever you read, whatever you may have understood from the words he wrote, don’t rush into anger or judgement.”

“Choice ...” Gustav said, although he wasn’t even sure if he was talking to Ivana or himself.

“At some point he had to choose more than a simple laundry detergent, did he?”

And he recalled the passage of how he would become so annoyed when, while hiking the Olive Path which goes all the way under the village of Babino Polje, he would find two paths which would take you to the exact same destination.

104 *“Why are people so obsessed with handing out alternatives? Stick to one path. Why should there be two paths to the same destination, if the one that is already there is perfectly fine? So I went, one night, and chopped down a big tree and closed off the alternative roads. I slept better that night, knowing that I made my life simpler.”* Gustav recalled this particular passage now as he walked around.

“But then his obsession grew wilder, didn’t it?” he said. “Choice of food, paths ... who to love even. These choices burdened him deeply”. He was no longer sitting down, pacing around and his brain

was on a fast track of joining the dots and making connections.

Then he stopped and looked at the woman in front of him.

“Oh my god ... the woman, the tourist who disappeared in the cave back in ‘97.”

Ivana looked down.

“And these letters. They’re from him. Right?” he asked.

Gustav’s eyes on her made her uneasy, but she had an accepting resigning look on her face, as he continued to fire questions towards her:

“You did not only know him, did you? He fell in love with you, that’s why he did what he did ... he eliminated his alternative, the other option. He wanted to get rid of any form of choice ... including

who to be with, who to love.”

The newspaper cutting in his little flat suddenly flashed before his eyes as he said this.

“Igor was a romantic. He was, like you, a writer. He stole my heart writing to me poems about Mljet, beauty and the sun. He used to get inspired after long walks round the island. He only carried a bottle of water, a reading book and a writing notepad. I was in love with him too, yes. But I could tell that, despite his love, he could not relax and simply be with me. Something was holding him back.”

“It was his woman back home”, blurted out Gustav.

“He had only just started seeing her,” Ivana added.

“It destroyed him, poor man,” she proceeded. “To know that he came all the way to Mljet to eliminate choice, but left being unable to deal with the

harshest of alternatives — who to love. That is the biggest choice of all. And Igor wanted to deal with it.”

Gustav could not utter much after that. His mind was picking up pieces of little puzzles from the things he learned while on the island, and collaged them with what Igor wrote in his manuscript. The burning of the carob trees incident — was it him? Did he want to eliminate even the choice of produce of the island? It sounded too crazy to even speak of it in front of Ivana, although she would, indeed, be the only one who could possibly understand him.

“The letters you were holding this morning ...”

“They were all his, yes. This island inspired him. And he produced some of the best pieces of literature I ever saw.”

Then Ivana walked towards the desk and chose one

from the pile of hand written letters.

“I’ve never shared these with anyone. But I gather you will appreciate the words, even if they were written by a madman.”

Gustav took the letter and started to walk back home. He stopped at the highest point of the village and sat down for a while, opening the letter he had just been handed and read the last bit of a very long poem.

The sun was about to set but the golden ball of flame it produced did not make things brighter. The Bura wind, however, did not disappoint. The cold gushing wind just before the dark, made Gustav’s stay on Mljet now clearer.

*Loving you is not fate’s embrace,
but our choice made in time and space.
No stars aligned or destined ties,
but steady hands and willing eyes.
Each day we choose to stand or stray,
To mend, to trust, to give away.*

*Not just a dream, not just a voice,
You are my heart, my choice.*

2023

matthew SCHEMBRI

→ Mljet

1. Define the word “Mediterranean”.

It is the sea I was born in. It is also the sea where many die.

2. What does a literature festival on a tiny island (such as the Malta Mediterranean Literature Festival) mean to you?

It means the world to me, especially because I have the privilege of being part of it!

3. What impact did the residency have on your career?

I have written several final chapters of my first children’s manuscript in Maltese, one of my favorite works, which I hope will be published in the coming years.

ħadtulna s-sēma

allura aħna
ħadniekom il-qawsalla

110

you took our sky

so we
took your rainbow

Translation: Jake Buttigieg

zebra cross

kont inhobbok
meta ž-žebra kienet mižbugħha qawsalla

issa

iż-žebgħa tqaxxar
sar griż

u m'għadnix

111

zebra crossing

i loved you
when the zebra was painted rainbow

now

the paint has peeled
and become gray

and i don't anymore

Translation: Jake Buttigieg

iz-zebra llum kollha ħamra

tghid bid-demm jew bl-imħabba

today the whole zebra is red

112

could be the blood or the love

Translator: Jake Buttigieg

2025

kat STORAGE

Belgrad

1. Define the word “Mediterranean”.

114

To me, the word ‘Mediterranean’ is synonymous with home. It is the locus around which my world, my perspective is centred. Especially since I no longer physically inhabit that space in my daily life. I spent a lot of time contemplating this during my residency in Belgrade. As part of my own identity, ‘Mediterranean’ also means ‘multiplicity’ — of languages, people, currents, histories, flavours — with a single constant uniting it all, the sea.

2. What does a literature festival on a tiny island (such as the Malta Mediterranean Literature Festival) mean to you?

115

It signifies a welcome return to this locus, this focal point, and the chance to re-centre my world around it for a few days. It is an opportunity to discover new voices, to gain different perspectives, and to celebrate literature that exists apart from the customary anglophone centre.

3. What impact did the residency have on your career?

The residency provided me with two things: the first, obvious as it might sound, was the space, and so, the freedom, to sit and work, at a remove from the concerns of everyday life; and secondly, it challenged me to think differently about the work, by placing me in an unfamiliar context and connecting me to new people I wouldn't have met otherwise. During the residency, I felt freer to be curious, to push at the boundaries of my own work, and to take myself — and the enterprise of translation — more seriously. Ultimately, I know that the work will be a better version of itself than if I hadn't spent these two weeks in Belgrade.

Signs and Wonders*

Prologue

There are no endings. If you think so you are deceived as to their nature. They are all beginnings. Here is one. —Hilary Mantel, *Bring Up the Bodies*

116

I arrived in Belgrade yesterday morning and I've been out once so far, to pick up some groceries from the supermarket. It feels strange and defamiliarising to arrive again in a place where you know no one yet. I promised myself I'd use some of my time here to draft up a translator's note alongside redrafting my work-in-progress translation of Loranne Vella's novel, *Rokit*. So I'm keeping a notebook — a second notebook, I should say. The challenge, as it stands, is to write down the things I want to say, and so,

each day, to open myself up, little by little, to what's around me. To allow myself to absorb it without fear or resistance.

Over the next couple of weeks, as I work on my translation, I wish to probe my curiosity at being surrounded at all times by a new language that feels so unfamiliar in my eyes, my ears and my mouth, as I grapple, in the meantime, with transferring the cadences and nuances of Maltese into English. I feel my mind stretching in directions I've always wished it would, but had perhaps stopped reaching for.



Signs and wanders

The sun is out, so I go in search of coffee. There's a small, cosy-looking place just down the road, and I go inside and grab a table. The coffee is delicious, as is the sunshine, pouring through the glass windows and bathing me in its warmth. I write, order a second coffee, consider my next moves while studying Google Maps on my phone.

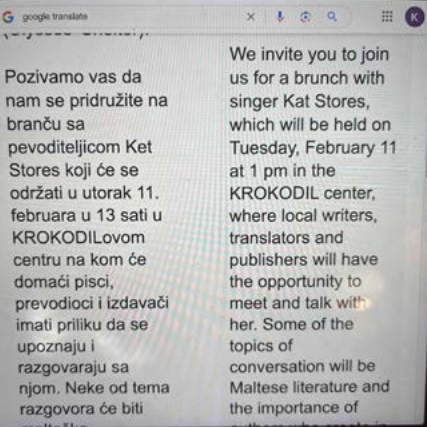
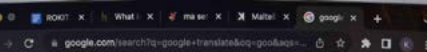
117 Whenever I'm in a new city, I go in search of its botanical gardens. I find comfort in wandering around these bizarre zoos filled with trees and plants. At Jevremovac botanical gardens, just a short walk away, I find I'm almost the only person there. It's a brown time of year for the trees and flowering plants that line the pathways, so I linger at the labels skewered into the soil. I'm none the wiser for reading them, with their odd system of italics, abbreviations and language hierarchies. But it's a fun game of deduction, not dissimilar to translation. Like, the *dracaena angolensis* (from Angola), for instance: the 'cylindrical snake plant', which I recognise from its Serbian denotation, 'sansevierija'.





My coffee speaks to me (and other mistranslations)

Back at the apartment, my coffee speaks to me. Or, to be exact, the writing on the coffee packet threads some English words together to try to impart something to me. You can tell immediately that the two brief paragraphs have been translated into English from an undisclosed language. Clumsily, at that. The text reads like a badly mangled culprit of Google Translate. But I appreciate the strangeness of the words as I'm waiting for my coffee to brew, strung together in a sequence that defies any real sense but still manages to conjure up a feeling: nostalgia, home, warmth, timelessness.



Speaking of mistranslations. I conduct my own experiment and run the details of my event at KROKODIL Centre next week through Google Translate. I'm delighted to discover that it has turned me into a singer.

The past is an island

Petrel looked around, staggered by this giant and incredible discovery he'd just made, and then at the live image, in real time, of the whole of Malta projected onto the ground in the centre of the camera obscura.

I wake up to another sunny morning in Belgrade. Not for the first time, the bright rays filtering through the bedroom curtains surprise me. I think I've mastered the method of preparing coffee on the stove in the Serbian coffee pot I found at the apartment — it produces a dark, almost thick, unclean brew, slightly silty, but with a strong biscuity flavour. I can't get enough of it. It makes me happy, this morning ritual of waking up, reading, brewing coffee and drinking it in the sunshine. I don't kick into work until later, when the morning pivots into the afternoon and so, perhaps, lose the best part of the day. But I'm up late at night and struggle to wake up and get going before ten. I am trying, still, to be accepting of myself, my rhythms, ebbs and flows — to embrace my natural patterns and not to think of time in terms of wins and failures.

I set off toward the city centre to meet the KROKODIL team at their headquarters. The walk is straightforward. I've traced the route again and again on the map on my phone: one straight line

from the apartment along Bulevar Despota Stefana. Belgrade is a place for which I have no mental blueprint — I'm still working out how to be in it. On reaching Republic Square I'm met with an unnatural quiet. A crowd has gathered and people are standing still, facing the direction of Vase Čarapića in silence. I don't check the time, but I guess it's around 11.45, or just after. Later, I learn that this moment of silence is observed everyday at 11.52 a.m., in memory of the people who lost their lives in the Novi Sad railway station tragedy earlier this year.

Later that week, I take a walk through Kalemegdan Park overlooking the confluence of the rivers Sava and Danube. As I pass under one of the fortress gates, I spot something familiar out of the corner of my eye. It is an old map hoisted on a wooden easel outside an exhibition of masterpieces of geographical



history. An old map, no less, of the Maltese Islands.

‘The days flow and I flow with them’**

Inside these walls that surround me I’ve started to find shelter — as long as there’s a window for me to look out of and to allow the light to filter in and hit the wall opposite.

120 Since I’ve been in this apartment I’ve been making tiny observations. My life has become simpler, more predictable. I wake up around nine or ten, put the kettle on the stove and pour out a bowl of muesli and spoon some greek yoghurt onto it. I make tea and sit, eat and read until my brain starts to sharpen into focus. I text Imo, my parents, Jen, and push down any anxieties about the world outside threatening to derail my pure state of mind. Then, I get dressed, wash my face and teeth, and sit down at my desk — to write, to think and translate. On

some days I plan my moves with clinical precision before venturing out. I set myself a small objective: buy pasta, take myself for lunch, visit a bookshop. I spend a few hours outside — walking, observing, breathing in

the sunshine and icy air. I speak to practically no one. When I get back, always before dark, I make myself another cup of tea and dive back into my work. I stay up late, stopping only to make some dinner or to take a shower, and then I prepare a hot water bottle, turn off the lights and climb into bed, where I read and watch history documentaries on



YouTube on my phone in the dark.

I enjoy this simplicity, this predictability. I'm like my dog, who knows exactly what to expect out of each day. It means I don't worry about the things I'm missing out on. It takes discipline of sorts, an acceptance of the little things — tiny steps towards the light. There is a joy, for me, in this repetitive existence, like the soothing thump-thump of my feet on the ground beneath me during my daily walks.

121

And then, there's the light. Day after day of unadulterated sunshine in the middle of winter. Inside my small room where I work, the sunlight travels from left to right, diminishing in intensity as the day wears on. I've learnt its rhythms. The sun hits the balcony at around 10.30 a.m. and it's possible, by 11.30, to sit out there and drink my coffee until around midday, by which time it's moved along and reappears minutes later, blasting through the four-panelled window. It settles, like a bird, on my desk, my hands, my face.

As the days go by, I also begin to think: yes, maybe, small spaces suit me better. As long as there is a window for me to look out of, and warm light filtering through it and hitting the wall opposite.

A rocket in the museum

Everything you want to know is in the picture.

In the National Museum of Serbia, in the section dedicated to Yugoslav Modern Art, I encounter a painting from the 1960s titled 'Rocket'. I stand in front of it for almost half an hour and I'm convinced this isn't a coincidence. Later that evening, I come across the following lines as



I'm translating:

Petrel saw lines everywhere. And where they were absent, he imagined them: physical lines in the buildings and structures around him, the horizon in the distance and on walls close by, outlines required to give form and meaning to nothing.

It strikes me, as I write them down, that this is something I've always done, too. It's triangles for me — tracing them into corners and edges, surfaces and ceilings. Every square or rectangle split diagonally once, twice, in search of symmetry. I always thought of this habit as a mental exercise for bringing order to chaos, or rhythm, perhaps, a sense of pattern and repetition which I find soothing. Is this what Loranne does, too, I wonder? Does she trace over the world in invisible lines? I want to ask her this right now. But it's 1.10 a.m.



Sorry, today I don't have a day off.

The days dissolve so that there are nearly none left. How does time do that, act like there's surplus and then, all of a sudden, it's galloping off into the distance and you can barely keep up? I regret not staying longer, but I know that's just false logic. Time speeds up no matter what, once the newness

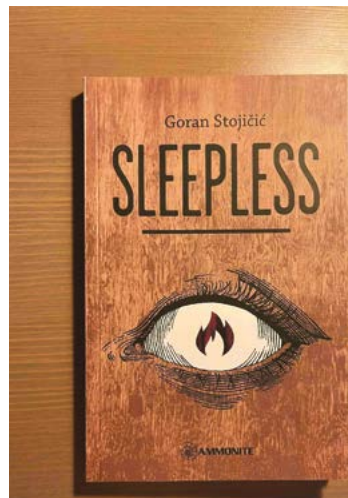
has settled into a daily routine, into a city you've mapped out in your head and with your feet. And as the sense of an ending looms, I pick up my feet and start running: the inevitable race to the finish line, cramming in words and thoughts, and all the things I want to do read think before I'm catapulted back into the real world.

Each day my patterns creep later and later into the night. Maybe it's the amount of coffee I'm drinking, or the adrenaline of the work itself, or a heady mix of both. Last night, I went to bed at 2.20 a.m. with my heart pounding, my legs restless, my mind racing. All this because I'd caught a whiff of the end, I'd broken through some wall in my own words. I could see the puzzle before me: X words in X amount of time. The challenge delighted me. Finishing the translation was no longer a perhaps, a when, an unanswered question. I'd almost arrived at the so-called end point and could just about hold the entire work in my hands.

Sleepless

In *Rokit*, characters disappear through time portals, bending time back and forth, so that every ending is a beginning and 'all is always now'. I have a sense of being inside this cycle, this circle, this merry-go-round.

I haven't slept in two nights. I climb into bed and watch documentaries about the Tudors on my phone; I listen to Hilary Mantel's Reith Lectures on writing the past; I read Solvej Balle's *On the Calculation of Volume I*, which, coincidentally, is about a woman falling out of time. I randomly pick out a book from the bookshelves in the bedroom: *Sleepless* by Goran Stojičić.





The beginning of the end

Everything has its moment. Everything arrives in the end, all you have to do is wait.

And here I am during each of these days, inside a time bubble of my own. Each day repeats itself, in a sense. Would it just go on repeating, if I continued to sit here, if I had more time? This ending, which will also end on Monday, marks a new beginning.

I sit with the past and contemplate its place in the here and now. I think about Hilary resurrecting the dead. I think about Belgrade and its past, echoes of it visible everywhere. I think about my dear friend Teo, whose own personal history is tied up to this city's. And I think about the imagined history of Malta Loranne has written into *Rokit*, which I'm now rewriting into actual history, in a new language, a new form.

The connections come — a soft cloud descending over my head — inviting me to grasp at the nebulous particles as they float past and to rearrange them in whatever order the story

makes sense to me. It feels like an extension of the act of translation: these images, these words begetting words, traversing universes, defying time. All of them, signs and wonders.

*All images are my own. All quotations, unless otherwise stated, are from my working draft of *Rokit* by Loranne Vella, forthcoming from Praspar Press (2025).

**From *On the Calculation of Volume I* by Solvej Balle, tr. Barbara J. Haveland (Faber, 2025).

Bionotes

Bijonoti

Dorđe Božović was born in Titovo Užice, SFR Yugoslavia, not long before both of those toponyms ceased to exist. He lectures in theoretical and Balkan linguistics at the University of Belgrade, while also actively translating from the languages he does research into and critically writing about the process. He has translated at least one piece from each genre of contemporary literature from Albanian — novels, short stories, poetry, essays, memoirs, and drama.

Dorđe Božović twieled f' Titovo Užice, SFR Jugoslavja, f' it qabel ma dawn it-toponimi spiċċaw jeżistu. Huwa jgħallem lingwistika teoretika u Balkana fl-Università ta' Belgrad

filwaqt li jittrađuċi attivament mil-lingwi li jirriċerka fihom u jikteb b'mod kritiku dwar il-proċess tat-traduzzjoni. Huwa ttraduċa mill-inqas biċċa minn kull ġeneru tal-letteratura kontemporanja mill-Albaniz — rumanzi, stejjer qosra, poeżija, esejs, memoirs, u drammi.



[7] Medija Centar

Jake Buttigieg, born in 2000, is a young lawyer who served as President of the student organisation 'Junior Chamber of Advocates' from 2021–2022. Jake has had works and translations published in the journal *Lehen il-Malti*, *Scintillas 2* and *Antoloġija 24*, among others. Jake was a participant in the Tahżiż and Kjażmu projects as well as the Ulysses' Shelter Programme, during which he was an attendee at the Vilenica Literature Festival. He translates poetry from Russian, Italian and English to Maltese. He also writes poetry on Memory and Time, Mysticism and Outsider Art.

Jake Buttigieg, twieled fl-2000, u huwa avukat żagħżuġ li serva bħala President tal-organizzazzjoni studenteska Junior Chamber of Advocates bejn l-2021 u l-2022. Ix-xogħlijiet u t-traduzzjonijiet tiegħu deheru fil-ġurnal *Lehen il-Malti*, *Scintillas 2* u *Antoloġija 24*, fost l-oħrajn. Ipparteċipa fil-proġetti Tahżiż u Kjażmu kif ukoll fil-Programm ta' Residenzi Letterarji Ulysses' Shelter, li matulu attenda l-Festival tal-Letteratura ta' Vilenica. Jake jittrađuċi l-poeżija mir-Russu, mit-Taljan u mill-Ingliš għall-Malti u jikteb poeżija dwar il-Memorja u ż-Żmien, il-Mistiċiżmu u l-Arti tal-Barrani.



[7] Martina Buttigieg



Ryan Falzon, born in Malta in 1988, is a visual artist, published author and art educator. His work is often abrasive and playful, and he is known for constructing narratives by arranging disparate images and texts in a collage-

like fashion. Since 2011, Falzon has published several short pieces in various publications. *SAJF*, the first novel by Falzon, was published in 2022. Several reviews have referred to *SAJF* as the voice of the Maltese millennial generation. *SAJF* was shortlisted for NBC 2023 National Book Prize. In 2024, Falzon has been selected as a participant in the literary residencies European programme Ulysses's Shelter. In the same year, Falzon was awarded the National Prize for the Best Emergent Author of the Year.

Ryan Falzon, twieled f'Malta fl-1988, u huwa artist viżiv, awtur ippubblikat u edukatur tal-arti. Ix-xogħol tiegħu spiss jipprovoka u jilgħab, u magħruf li joħloq narrattivi billi jpoġġi immaġini u testi distinti f'sura ta' collage. Sa mill-2011, Falzon ippubblika diversi kitbiet qosra f'pubblikazzjonijiet differenti. L-ewwel rumanz tiegħu, *SAJF*, ġie ppubblikat fl-2022 u ġie deskritt bħala l-vuċi tal-ġenerazzjoni tal-millennials Maltin.

SAJF kien fil-lista finali tal-Premju Nazzjonali tal-Ktieb tal-2023. Fl-2024, Falzon ġie magħżul biex jipparteċipa fil-programm ta' residenzi letterarji Ewropej Ulysses' Shelter u ngħata l-Premju Nazzjonali għall-Aqwa Awtur Emergent tas-Sena.

Ruqaya Izzidien is an Iraqi-Welsh writer and editor focused on Arab and Muslim representation. Her debut novel, *The Watermelon Boys*, won a Betty Trask Award and reached the Amazon top 600. Her second novel, *Tick Bloom* received multiple literary grants and is to be published soon.

She founded Muslim Impossible, a blog critiquing media portrayals of Muslims, and has written for outlets like The New York Times, BBC, and Al Jazeera. Ruqaya has reported from Egypt and Gaza and now consults for UK agencies by providing copyediting and editing services.

Ruqaya Izzidien hija kittieba u editriċi b'għeruq Iraqqini u Welsh, u tiffoka fuq ir-rappreżentazzjoni tal-komunitajiet Gharab u Musulmani. Ir-rumanz tagħha *The Watermelon Boys*



[◉] Catrin Menai

rebah il-Betty Trask Award u kklassifika fost l-aqwa 600 fuq Amazon. It-tieni rumanz tagħha, *Tick Bloom*, kiseb diversi fondi letterarji u għandu jiġi ppubblikat dalwaqt. Hija waqqfet il-blogg Muslim Impossible li jikkritika kif il-Musulmani jiġu muriġa fil-midja, u kitbet għal pubblikazzjonijiet bħal New York Times, BBC, u Al Jazeera. Ruqaya rrapportat mill-Eġittu u l-Ġaħa, u bħalissa taħdem bħala konsulenta ma' aġenziji fir-Renju Unit billi tipprovdi servizzi ta' copyediting u editjar.

Esyllt Angharad Lewis, artist, hails from Craig-Cefn-Parc. Her work across performance, drawing, printmaking and moving image plays with the visual and oral tension of translation. She won the Ifor Davies Award at the 2024 National Eisteddfod in Pontypridd for her performance *Blobus a Phryderon Eraill* (*Jellyfish and other worries*). @esylltesylit

Esyllt Angharad Lewis, artista, ġejja minn Craig-Cefn-

Parc. Ix-xogħol tagħha fl-oqsma tal-performance, it-tpiġġija, il-printmaking u l-immaġni li tiċċaqlaq tilgħab bil-kunflitt viżiv u orali tat-traduzzjoni. Hi rebħet il-Premju Ifor Davies fil-National Eisteddfod



[©] Catrin Menai

f'Pontypridd fl-2024 għall-prestazzjoni tagħha *Blobus a Phryderon Eraill* (*Jellyfish and Other Worries*). @esylltesylit

Ioanna Lioutsia was born in Thessaloniki, Greece, in 1992.

She holds a PhD in Performance Art in the Balkans and its Political Dimensions. She also holds an Integrated Master's degree in Directing, a BA in Acting and a BA in History & Archaeology. Her latest poetry book is titled *Wide Vowels and Bitten Consonants* (2022). She is a co-creator of street writers' group grafoules. She has received the 3rd award in the Performance Art category at the Florence Biennale 2021 for her piece *Every day is a Woman's Day*.



[©] Nikos Katsaros

Ioanna Lioutsia twieldet f'Tessaloniki, il-Greċja, fl-1992. Għandha Dottorat fil-Performance Art fil-Balkani u d-Dimensjonijiet Politici tagħha. Hija wkoll gradwata b'degree fil-Masters Integrata fid-Direzzjoni, kif ukoll fil-Istorja u l-Arkeologija. L-aħħar ktieb tal-poezija tagħha huwa *Wide Vowels and Bitten Consonants* (2022). Hija kokreatriċi

tal-grupp ta' kittieba tat-toroq grafoles u rebhet it-3et post
fil-kategorija tal-Performance Art fil-Bjennale ta' Firenze
fl-2021 bix-xogħol *Every day is a Woman's Day*.

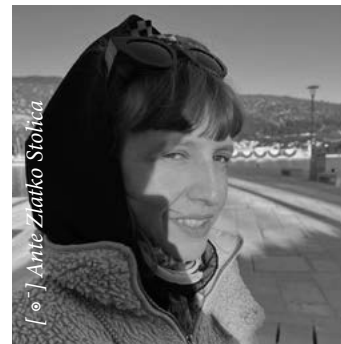


Virginia Monteforte is an anthropologist, translator and photographer who studied at the Faculty of Arts at La Sapienza (Rome) and earned a PhD in Social Anthropology at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales (Paris). Besides being an author herself of prose, poetry and academic essays,

she has been working as a collaborator of literary events and published translator for poetry, prose and children's literature from Maltese, English and French into Italian. She has managed various community cultural projects about women, material culture, displacement, alternative cultural heritage and social memory. She has worked as lecturer at University of Malta, and tutor at the Italian Cultural Institute of Valletta and ISIT in Paris. She lives between Malta and Rome.

Virginia Monteforte hija antropologa, traduttriċi u fotografa, u studjat fl-Università La Sapienza (Ruma) u kisbet Dottorat fl-Antropologija Soċjali mill-École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales (Parigi). Hi awtriċi ta' proża, poeżija u esejs akkademici, kif ukoll traduttriċi tal-letteratura Maltija, Inġliża u Franċiża għat-Taljan. Monteforte hadmet f'diversi proġetti kulturali komunitarji dwar in-nisa, il-kultura materjali, l-ispostjament, il-wirt kulturali alternattiv, u l-memorja soċjali. Kienet lettur fl-Università ta' Malta u għalliema fl-Istitut Kulturali Taljan tal-Belt Valletta u f'ISIT Parigi. Tgħix bejn Malta u Ruma.

Lana Pukanić graduated in Comparative literature and English language and literature. She was the editor, co-founder and webmaster of the Croatian feminist website Muf (2014-2018), and now edits the feminist website Krilo. She's also worked as a translator for websites, magazines and NGO's, and was the printshipping coordinator for the World Festival of Animated Film — Animafest Zagreb. In 2020 a collection of her feminist essays *Teenage Girls*



and Other Monsters was published by Fraktura. Feminism in all its shapes is her primary interest.

Lana Pukanić gradwat fil-Letteratura Komparattiva u fil-Letteratura u l-Lingwa Ingliži. Kienet editriċi, kofundatriċi u webmaster tal-websajt femminista Kroata Muf (2014-2018) u issa teditja l-websajt femminista Krilo. Hadmet bħala traduttriċi għal siti online, rivisti u NGOs, u kienet kordinatriċi tal-printshipping għall-Festival Dinji tal-Films Animati — Animafest Zagreb. Fl-2020, ippublikat gabra ta' esejs femministi bl-isem *Teenage Girls and Other Monsters* ippublikata minn Fraktura. Il-femminiżmu f'kull forma tiegħu huwa l-interess ewlieni tagħha.

Maja Ručević was born in 1983 in Zagreb, where she graduated in French language and literature and Croatian language and literature from the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences.

She works as a translator of French and English for over fifteen years. She worked as a journalist for over ten years. In 2016, her debut novel *Je suis Jednoruki* was published by Algoritam publishing house in Croatia. In 2022, her collection

of poems titled *Sutra ćemo praviti anđele u padu* was published in the Poetry Library of the Croatian Writers' Association (HDP). She has received several awards for her poetry (Ratkovićeve večeri poezije in 2008 and 2009, Ulaznica in 2022). Her new novel, *Borilište* will be published in Croatia in 2025. Her prose and poetry have been featured in numerous literary magazines and publications. She lived in Zagreb, Sarajevo and Belgrade.

Maja Ručević twieldet fl-1983 f'Žagreb, imnejn iggradwat fil-Lingwa u l-Letteratura Franciża u l-Lingwa u Letteratura Kroata mill-Fakultà tal-Arti u x-Xjenzi Soċjali. Ilha taħdem bħala traduttriċi tal-Franciż u l-Ingliż għal aktar minn ħmistax-il sena. Hadmet ukoll bħala ġurnalista għal aktar minn għaxar snin. Fl-2016, ir-rumanz debuttanti tagħha *Je suis Jednoruki* ġie ppubblikat mid-dar tal-pubblikazzjoni Algoritam fil-Kroazja. Fl-2022, il-ġabra ta' poeziji tagħha bl-isem *Sutra ćemo praviti anđele u padu* ġiet ippublikata fil-Librerija tal-Poezija tal-Assoċjazzjoni tal-Kittieba Kroati (HDP). Irčeviet diversi premijiet għall-poezija tagħha (Ratkovićeve večeri poezije fl-2008 u l-2009, Ulaznica fl-2022). Ir-rumanz il-ġdid tagħha, *Borilište*, se jiġi ppubblikat fil-Kroazja fl-2025. Il-proża u l-poezija tagħha deħru f'ħafna rivisti letterarji u pubblikazzjonijiet. Kienet tgħix f'Žagreb, Sarajevo u Belgrad.





Gabriel Schembri was born in 1991 and spent close to a decade in journalism, and is now a writer, and communications coordinator for a human rights NGO. He published three

books: *Esklussiva Dotkom* (2014), which was short-listed for the National Book Prize, *Patria* (2017) and *Kafé Kolombja* (2024). His writing featured in other projects, including a collection of short stories published by Klabb Kotba Maltin. He has also written and performed a number of poems at literary events, with the most recurring theme.

Gabriel Schembri twieled fl-1991 u qatta' kwazi deċennju fil-ġurnaliżmu. Issa kittieb, u kordinatur tal-komunikazzjoni għal NGO tad-drittijiet umani. Ippubblika tliet kotba: *Esklussiva Dotcom* (2014), li tniżżel fil-lista l-qasira tal-Premju Nazzjonali tal-Ktieb, *Patria* (2017), u *Kafè Kolombja* (2024). Il-kitba tiegħu dehret fi proġetti oħra, inkluż ġabra ta' stejjer qosra ppubblikati minn Klabb Kotba Maltin. Kiteb u qara numru ta' poeżiji minn tiegħu f'attivitajiet letterarji, bil-migrazzjoni bħala t-tema l-iktar rikorrenti.

Matthew Schembri is an artist, writer, and poet based in Malta. Schembri won Divergent Thinkers 04 (2015), Shifting Contexts (2019) and was named Young Artist of the Year in 2017 by Arts Council Malta. His debut novel, *Stessi* (2018), won The Literary Contest of Novels for Youth 2016, and his debut poetry collection, *Hassartek* (2021), won him the Best Emerging Author award given by the National Book Council Malta in 2022.

Matthew Schembri huwa artist, kittieb u poeta bbażat f'Malta. Schembri rebah Divergent Thinkers 04 (2015), Shifting Contexts (2019) u kien iż-Żagħżuġh Artist tas-Sena fl-2017 mill-Arts Council Malta. Ir-rumanz debuttanti tiegħu, *Stessi* (2018), rebah il-Konkurs Letterarju tar-Rumanzi għaž-Żgħažgħ 2016, filwaqt li l-ewwel ġabra ta' poeżiji tiegħu, *Hassartek* (2021), rebhet il-premju tal-Aqwa Awtur Emerġenti mogħti mill-Kunsill Nazzjonali tal-Ktieb ta' Malta fl-2022.





Kat Storace is an editor, publisher and literary translator from Malta. She is the co-founder of Praspar Press, a UK-based small press dedicated to publishing Maltese writing in English and in English translation. Her first full-length translation, *what will it take for me to leave* by Lorraine Vella (Praspar Press, 2021), was shortlisted

for the Society of Authors TA First Translation Prize. Her translations have appeared in *Modern Poetry in Translation*, *The White Review* and *European Stories*. She is the recipient of a PEN Translates award for her English translation of Lorraine Vella's prizewinning novel *Rokit*, forthcoming from Praspar in 2025.

Kat Storace hija editriċi, pubblikatriċi u traduttriċi letterarja minn Malta. Hija l-kofundatriċi ta' Praspar Press, dar tal-pubblikazzjoni żgħira bbażata fir-Renju Unit li tiddedika ruhha għall-pubblikazzjoni ta' kitba Maltija bl-Ingliż u t-traduzzjoni għall-Ingliż. L-ewwel traduzzjoni tagħha ta' ktieb shiħ, *what will it take for me to leave* ta' Lorraine Vella (Praspar Press, 2021), kienet finalista għall-premju TA First

Translation tas-Society of Authors. It-traduzzjonijiet tagħha dehru f'*Modern Poetry in Translation*, *The White Review*, u *European Stories*. Hija wkoll ir-rebbieha ta' PEN Translates għall-verżjoni tagħha bl-Ingliż tar-rumanz rebbieh ta' Lorraine Vella, *Rokit*, li se jiġi ppubblikat minn Praspar fl-2025.

Kaja Teržan was born in 1986 and grew up in Slovenia and Sweden. She initially studied Art History and Sociology but then redirected her focus to the contemporary dance-performative practice. She made her poetry debut in 2015 with her first book of poems *Delta*, which was nominated for the Veronika Award. It was followed by the 2018 collection *Krog* (*The Circle*), which was nominated for the kritiško sito Award and won her the Jenko Award (the most important national poetry award). In 2021, the same publishing house, Center for Slovenian Literature, published her third collection *Nekoč bom imela čas* (*I'll Have Time Someday*). In 2024 her first poetry collection for children *Narisati ptico* (*To Draw a Bird*) was published by Mladinska knjiga. In January 2025 she published her first novel *Obračun* (*Showdown*) at Beletrina Publishing House.



Kaja Teržan twieldet fl-1986 u trabbiet l-Islovenja u l-Iżvezja. Fil-bidu studjat l-Istorja tal-Arti u s-Socjologija, izda mbagħad iddedikat ruhha għall-prattika performattiva taż-żfin kontemporanju. Iddebuttat bil-poezija fl-2015 bil-ktieb tagħha *Delta*, li kien nominat għall-Premju Veronika. Dan kien segwit mill-ġabra *Krog (Iċ-Ċirku)* fl-2018, li ġiet nominata għall-Premju kritiżko sito u rebħet il-Premju Jenko (l-aktar premju importanti għall-poezija fl-Islovenja). Fl-2021, l-istess dar tal-pubblikazzjoni, iċ-Ċenru għal-Letteratura Slovena, ippubblikat it-tielet ġabra tagħha, *Nekoč bom imela čas (Xi darba jkolli hin)*. Fl-2024, il-kumpanija Mladinska knjiga ippubblikat l-ewwel ġabra tagħha ta' poezija għat-tfal, *Narisati ptico (Li Tpingi Għasfur)*. F'Jannar tal-2025, ippubblikat l-ewwel rumanz tagħha, *Obračun (Showdown)*, mad-dar tal-pubblikazzjoni Beletrina.

"'Mediterranean' is a word,
or a fluid collection of words."

Virginia-Monteforte.

Dan il-ktieb huwa kollezzjoni ta' testi minn kittieba bi stili differenti u vuċijiet diversi.
Fil-qalba ta' kitbiethom b'kemm-il lingwa hemm il-Mediterran, il-vjaġġ, u l-iskopertà ...

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