

FRANCO BUFFONI

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## NEW POEMS

### I. - *SILVANO THE CONFECTIONER AND OTHER "LOMBARD" POEMS*

#### **Silvano the confectioner**

Silvano confectioner aged sixteen  
And Guido eighteen wood-turner  
Took time off at Vizzola Ticino  
To see each other during lunch breaks.  
Guido passed by on his Yamaha  
And together they'd go down to the river  
To eat the sandwich of kisses.  
Nothing strange about the accident on return  
Caused by the sudden  
Reversal of a lorry.  
The photo on the Prealpina  
Shows two vanilla hands  
Still clasping the overalls  
Faded on one side.

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#### **Porro Lambertenghi**

Now that no one learns the history of the Risorgimento  
And the old schoolmistresses have retired or died,  
I recall the whispered amazement of Carla Martegani -  
Reluctant to open her books -  
At the third mention of the Carbonari heroes  
Maroncelli, Pellico, Porro Lambertenghi...  
"But why "Porro"? Was he a relative?"  
Confused by the simple use of the prefix "poro"  
The Lombard word for the dear departed  
"Poro" Michele  
"Poro" papa.

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**Angels to Paris**

Up there from here I almost feel  
The murmuring of the older angels,  
And the more timid ones whisper,  
But certain others raise their voice  
While the great candelabras and waxes move  
To Paris, between Crenna and the Boschina...  
Where wandering I emerge along the edge  
Of a shady roadside  
In the sombre early afternoon.

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### **Ul sass de preja buia**

Ul Sass de Preja Buia close to Sesto  
On the eastern bank of the Ticino  
Just outside Verbano  
Recalls both movement and immobility.  
A heavy splintery mass from the Zumstein  
That in light errancy  
On the layer of Precambrian glacier  
Then pierced down into the ground below  
At the junction for Taino.  
Like that real splinter  
Of glass in my wrist  
As a child.

*Ul Sass de Preja Buia is an enormous mica schist, a moving block regarded as sacred until the Nineteenth century, particularly for the fertility of young brides. Zumstein is one of the peaks of Monte Rosa. Taino, Crenna, Boschina are villages in the moorland area of the Parco del Ticino.*

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### **With the smell that fish nets have**

With the smell that fish nets have  
Damp in the sand  
With the taste of oranges in England  
On the morning terrace  
With the colour of the sky in the last  
Days of August  
With the noise of the water at the falls  
On the Rossa Pass,  
From year to year  
Summer things decreed and rediscovered

I know  
That when the last time comes  
When I really no longer wish it  
The last time will have already gone.

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## **Cemeteries**

### **I**

Then when you return you find  
Someone there at the cemetery,  
Of those high up on the wall  
Shooting for fun  
At the neighbours' dahlias.  
You see them there with their  
Tired little faces  
And you wonder how much longer,  
Yesterday, the day before, how much? Among photos  
Of those you know or knew  
Aunts of parents  
And motorcycle victims intransigent  
Nephews.  
In their own way a community,  
A small town,  
While in the squalid metropolis  
The living have confirmation of the dead  
In the tenements outside the gate  
Or on their way toward civilization  
Of the urn of ashes on the sideboard.

### **II**

It's raining on the country cemeteries  
And on those of marble in the city,  
It's raining on the bare pigeonholes  
On occasion of the new memorial  
concessions allowed for the proportion  
Between population and burial ground.  
Pigeonholes. A name that as a child  
Seemed to be a joke:  
"You in the pigeonholes, keep quiet",  
My teacher would say to the three Colombo boys  
- Daniele, Marco and Gino -  
Sitting in a semicircle on the third row...  
And there they are today, but not together, wealthy Gino  
In the marble and green glass chapel

In the middle of the cemetery arcade;  
Marco abandoned by wife and children  
In a bunk bed on the salt flats  
Where the nomad camp has joined up to the dead;  
While Daniele smiling takes  
The rural April rain  
Between a willow and an olive tree  
Alone, as he'd always been,  
And in ground not exactly consecrated.

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## II. - *THE BUS OF DEAD CHILDREN AND OTHER "ROMAN" POEMS*

### **The bus of dead children**

The bus of dead children  
Is what Christine Koschel  
Saw in Berlin in forty-five,  
Some still alive, many infants  
All totally alone  
Abandoned escaping from nowhere to nowhere  
During the Soviet advance.  
From here forever the eyes  
Of Christine  
That saw the horror  
Untranslatable except  
In the syntactic wrench.

*Christine Koschel, poet and translator, born in Wrocław in 1936, lives in Rome.*

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### **Rome, winter 2012**

Marietto is gone  
Thrown one snowy Rome night,  
Into the Tiber by his father to spite  
Mummy.  
If Marietto had been three months old  
Or four, he'd have suffered less. Sixteen: no,  
At a year and a half you can't tear  
A conscious child at night from a woman  
Carry him kicking in January to the river  
Yelling words at him.  
The icy water will have moved his arms  
Mixing his cries with the water for a few moments  
While a rougher bough

Scratched a number on his wrist.

*ANSA: "The man admitted throwing the child from Ponte Mazzini. Among the motives for the act, the umpteenth quarrel with his former partner over custody of the child".*

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### **I was dying and that's all**

I was dying and that's all,  
At the traffic lights yesterday morning,  
A fraction of a second saved me,  
Yet for that mass of younger people  
It would have meant little. Very little,  
Except for the inconvenience to traffic  
From a body in distress.

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### **Rome slippery cobbles**

Rome slippery cobbles  
Triple work the morning  
At the veterinary clinic lab,  
Then the mime classes and toward evening  
Proofs ad nauseum to correct ...  
In bad weather Vanni wore  
Waterproofs over his jeans  
And when he took them off at lunch-break  
There ahead  
It was all already planned  
That on Sunday with his paraglider  
He'd exercise breakneck. Vanni  
After many years still nurtures  
The thought of pleasure that doesn't last  
And of pain that then remains.  
Of that lunch-break with no helmet  
Hurriedly transporting the shit and piss  
Of six sterilized cats.

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### **Drops on the carpet**

It is the constant stress, the strain  
To which you constantly subject the windpipe  
That suggests the business is at an end,  
The move negotiated

Your surrender.  
And in emptying the world  
Go gently,  
May there be no drops on the carpet.

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### **The world no**

The world... the world no,  
He continues and continues  
With his dinosaur smile  
Painted on his face,  
And an ego as large as  
A tomb.

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### **Si parva licet**

Leopardi wrote that in a whole year  
Only on a few days is the weather tolerable,  
Lucretius invited us to look at  
The snakes in the desert  
And the expanses of ice  
In order to conclude that no, the world  
Was not meant for us.  
And I – now that the wind, its air  
Left off from high in the heavens,  
Thrust down drives me  
And mocking my slow legs  
Roughly taunts my windpipe  
Barely protected by the raised collar,  
Firing ruggedly at my right ear  
Its “Come, come on  
High in the heavens, march” -  
*Si parva licet* I’ll say they’re right.

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### **Today when the Foro Italico hides**

*There is a certain island beyond Ortygia  
Called Syria where the Sun turns in its course,  
A goodly land where only in old age  
Do people die  
From Apollo’s kindly dart in an instant  
And with no feeling of pain.  
(from Odyssey XV, 403)*

Today when the Foro Italico hides  
Among the folds of distant traffic  
The heartbeat of its statues, their  
Healthy breath, I who scaled mountains  
Climb to the top of the Janiculum  
And from there see Rome, my house  
Empty  
And I  
Who can find no company.

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### **A little Harpagon**

Jealous now I'm old I claw my way  
Like a little Harpagon among my verses.  
Hoopoe folder. Expert  
Like that damned upturned soul  
That slides ably between the swords  
Of fire and burning embers,  
Once I was diligent  
When we exchanged small photos. Now  
Do I send you the prostate scan  
Haematocrit, creatinine?  
Or a good CT chest scan with contrast?  
The relationship that is interlaced with new  
Unknown entities: foreign cities  
Holiday resorts  
I've now established with my body.

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### **Accident at work**

A screech like a thud I was at the computer  
I looked out, silence then suddenly the rasp of a cutter,  
Commotion then noise of an ambulance.  
Life has no price but an expert  
Still knows how to value its parts,  
Usually at the first assessment  
Quantifying the capacity to work,  
Then thanks to special tables  
Calculating even pain and suffering  
The exact pecunia doloris, Vito, for  
You're amputated arm.

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## POESIE FRANCO BUFFONI (ITALIANO)

### INVITO A NAPOLI

E in questo golfo attraversato stamattina  
Da quattro jet sopra Posillipo e due cargo  
Verso molo Beverello,  
Io rivedo insieme a tre gabbiani  
Da un balcone del Royal  
La mia relazione  
Per il convegno sulla traduzione.  
In Cappella Pappacoda oggi all'Orientale  
Saremo in tanti figli di navigatori  
Santi e poeti, mi viene in mente ora  
Tutti già un tempo anche traduttori.  
Come i piloti quattro dei jet militari  
E dei cargo i dieci marinai.  
Lasciami Napoli  
Nelle loro scie  
E dolcemente strangolami in cielo  
O in mare  
Da questo ottavo piano.  
Non mi tradurre altrove.

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### PROFEZIA

Da qui, tra luci fragili  
Che orientano il profilo verso il golfo,  
Si vede bene che la città è fondata  
Su cunicoli e cunicoli, e cantine profondissime  
E canali, acque morte in transito acquitrini  
Ciechi sbocchi di sabbia e ghiaia, ossa pietrificate  
Di necropoli a strati su carcasse di orse  
Alte tre metri e di altri animali avariati.  
Si sa che è lavata da acque di giro  
Costantemente dal porto e da ponente,  
Che è divaricata e biforcuta tangenzialmente  
Verso la collina di macerie putrefatte.  
Che è nata e rinata su fondamenta mobili  
E che questa non sarà l'ultima volta.

### A CARTAGINE IL TOPHET

Tre bambini si tengono per mano  
Sotto l'arco del ristorante Nettuno

A due passi dal Tophet.  
Non si son dati per vinti e qui a Cartagine  
Non li immolano neanche più.

Ma il capo cameriere  
Come Mastro Ciliegia  
O delle guardie il re  
Li guarda infastidito dalla sala  
Che sovrasta gli scogli,  
Il Tophet era lì

Con le sue urne piccoline  
Contrassegnate da una stele...

Si levano intanto i gabbiani  
Da un tappeto di erbacce  
Di fronte al porto circolare  
Delle duecento navi  
Pronte a sfidare Roma.  
E qualche scavo mostra  
Il quartier generale  
E le stanze dei rematori  
Coi segni di catene alle pareti.

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#### IL SILENZIO DEI BISBIGLI

Yusif, non so se alla fine tu abbia  
Davvero imparato la mia lingua  
- Persino due rughe vedo formarsi  
Ai lati degli occhi levantini  
E più profondamente farsi  
Segnali di estati vissute vicini -  
O se invece io stia iniziando a cogliere la tua  
Dalle inflessioni del canto, so soltanto  
Che una lingua delle lingue  
Risunava al pomeriggio verso Kerouan,  
Le due voci la tenda il thè alla menta.  
E alla sera il silenzio dei bisbigli:  
La tua lingua che danzava nella mia  
O la lingua-canto-suono del Libro dei consigli?

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#### CROCI ROSSE E MEZZE LUNE

Cocciniglia cinabro carbone  
E pigmenti vari vegetali  
Ematite anile  
In bacheca minerali e animali,

Di amuleti ossa sacre reliquie il potere  
Al piccolo museo della natura e del mare  
La finestrella il cortile,  
Seif che aspetta fuori.

Parlerò della tua porta con decorazione,  
Della cucina dove si vede il mare  
Da una parte e dall'altra,  
E dei panni stesi sul terrazzo  
Stringendo le mollette tra le labbra.  
E di sauri storioni attesi al guado  
Dagli occhi accesi di calma caparbia  
Che ti ho visto sui verbi irregolari.  
E dell'acqua rosa nera della baia.

Ci si immagina caldo il Maghreb,  
Ma il vento di questo gennaio  
Ti ha ispessito la pelle del viso  
E le mani graffiano, stringendo.  
Così il tuo armadietto di farmacia  
Con scatole e boccette  
Croci rosse e mezze lune  
Altre carezze.

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PER SNIDARTI PASSERINO

Per snidarti passerino darti acqua  
Prima che finisca il Ramadan,  
Attraverso la processione delle tute  
Dei ginnasti ricciolini  
- Profili usciti dalle mani di pittori su legno -  
In tasca code d'angelo cadute  
Per felicità alessandrine.  
E lampade vasi caffettiere  
Con il becco aguzzo e alto,  
Il Corano miniato sotto vetro,  
Sul corpo strisce di luce dalle griglie cielo.  
E dove l'ocra pallido del muro  
Si fonde col verde del mandorlo  
Erbe aromatiche creme odorose  
Tè e spezie tisane liquirizie  
Cavate fuori da un anfratto  
Mirabilmente intatte.  
Oh se la senti la forza delle voglie  
Alla medina tra gli odori  
Di zafferano e fiori di cumino  
Del venditore il figlio la mano  
Come sfiora.

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### COI CENTOSESANTAMILA NODI

Coi centosessantamila nodi sul rovescio  
Il tappeto nuovo nuovo posto in strada  
Controllato dall'alto  
Calpestato da passanti e carri  
Deve nascere.  
Spazzata via la polvere  
Poi rimesso a nuovo  
Non gli accadrà più nulla.  
Ogni villaggio ha il suo disegno, ogni ragazzo  
Arditamente arrampicato alla colonna  
La sua nonna tessitrice.

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### LE MADRI FECONDE BALENE

Le madri come feconde balene  
Dal regolare respiro, e attorno  
Ali Mustafà Bessem a crescere  
Di notte rantolando  
Contro lo scoglio morbido.

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### MIRRA E' IL PROFUMO COL QUALE L'AMANTE

Mirra è il profumo col quale l'amante  
Conduce a sé l'amato  
E Tunisi come un contagocce  
Lascia filtrare attraverso il metrò  
Cento maschi nuovi ogni mezz'ora  
In cerca di refrigerio a Sidi Bou.  
Ma poi risalgono e io li aspetto qui.

Dove il rosso dei ciottoli ossidati  
Diventa verde chiaro in primavera  
Per la graminacea che li intride,  
E ornata di buganvillee è la gola  
Con gli anfratti al mattino più freschi.

Così il mio andare e venire da Cartagine  
E' turismo nel passato, coi ragazzi  
Berberi arabizzati dai costumi fenici  
Alessandrini greci, seduti in circolo al tramonto  
Accosciati a raccontarsi storie di mare  
Sapendo d'alghe d'inchiostro ed invitanti  
Me a restare.

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## SANT'AGOSTINO

Basso continuo al mio pensiero questa sera  
L'idea selvatica di Sant'Agostino  
Nordafricano in stanza scomoda a Milano  
Con altri tre o quattro magrebini.  
E il vescovo era un germano.

POESIE FRANCO BUFFONI (INGLESE translated by Richard Dixon)

## INVITATION TO NAPLES

And in this gulf crossed this morning  
By four jets over Posillipo and two cargo ships  
Toward Beverello port,  
On a balcony of the Royal  
In the company of three gulls  
I check through my paper  
For the conference on translation.  
At Pappacoda Chapel today at the Orientale  
We'll be many children of navigators  
Saints and poets, now I come to think of it  
All of them once translators too.  
Like the four pilots of the military jets  
And the ten sailors on the cargo ships.  
Leave me Naples  
In their wake  
And gently strangle me in the sky  
Or in the sea  
From this eighth floor.  
Don't translate me somewhere else.

+++

## PROPHECY

From here, among frail lights  
That guide the outline to the gulf,  
You see clearly that the city is founded  
On passageways and passageways, and deepest cellars  
And channels, dead waters in transit, marshes  
Blind outlets of sand and gravel, petrified bones  
Of necropoli in layers over carcasses of bears  
Three metres high and scraps of other rotting animals.  
It is known to be constantly washed  
by water circulating from the port and from the west,  
That it is split and forks off at a tangent  
Toward the hill of rotten debris.  
That it is born and reborn on moveable foundations  
And that this won't be the last time.

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### AT CARTHAGE THE TOPHET

Three children hold hands  
Under the arch of Restaurant Neptune  
A few steps from the Tophet  
They haven't given up and here in Carthage  
They're not even sacrificed any longer.

But the head waiter  
Like Mastro Ciliegia  
Or the king of the guards  
Watches them in annoyance from the hall  
That stands above the rocks,  
The Tophet was there

With its small urns  
Marked by a stele ...

Meanwhile the gulls fly up  
From a carpet of grass  
Opposite the circular port  
Of the two hundred ships  
Ready to challenge Rome.  
And several excavations show  
The headquarters  
And the oarsmen's rooms  
With chain marks on the walls.

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### THE SILENCE OF MURMURING

Yusif, I don't know if in the end  
You have really learnt my tongue  
- Even the two wrinkles I see forming  
At the sides of your Levantine eyes  
And more deep down show  
Signs of summers spent close -  
Or if instead I'm beginning to pick up yours  
From the inflexions of the chant, I know only  
That one tongue of tongues  
Echoed in the afternoon toward Kerouan,  
The two voices the curtain the mint tea.  
And in the evening the silence of murmuring:  
Your tongue that danced in mine  
Or the tongue-chant-sound of the Book of Kavus.

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### RED CROSSES AND HALF MOONS

Cochineal cinnabar charcoal  
And various vegetal pigments  
Haematite indigo  
Minerals and animals on display,  
The power of amulets bones sacred relics  
At the small museum of nature and of the sea  
The small window the courtyard,  
Seif who waits outside.

I'll speak of your decorated doorway,  
Of the kitchen where you can see the sea  
From one part and the other,  
And clothes hung out on the terrace  
Clenching the pegs between your lips.  
And of lizards sturgeons waiting at the ford  
Their eyes flashing with the calm obstinacy  
That I saw in you on irregular verbs.  
And of the rose black water of the bay.

The Maghreb is supposed to be hot,  
But the wind this January  
Has hardened the skin of your face  
And your hands are grazed, clasping.  
So too your medicine cabinet  
With boxes and bottles  
Red crosses and half moons  
Other caresses.

+++

#### TO DRIVE YOU OUT LITTLE SPARROW

Give you water, little sparrow, to drive you out  
Before Ramadan ends,  
Through the procession of tracksuits  
Of curly-haired gymnasts  
- Outlines straight from the hands of wood etchers -  
Tails of fallen angels in pockets  
For Alexandrine bliss.  
And lamps vases coffee pots  
With tall sharp spout,  
The illuminated Koran under glass,  
Over the body strips of light from the skylights.  
And where the pallid ochre of the wall  
Blends with the green of the almond  
Fragrant cream aromatic herbs  
Tea and spices tisanes liquorices  
Extracted from a ravine  
Marvellously intact.  
Oh you can feel the power of desire

At the medina among aromas  
Of saffron and cumin flowers  
Of the vendor the son the hand  
How it lightly skims.

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#### WITH A HUNDRED AND SIXTY THOUSAND KNOTS

With a hundred and sixty thousand knots beneath  
The brand new carpet laid out on the street  
Watched from above  
Trampled by passersby and carts  
Must be born.  
Once the dust is swept off  
Then returned to new  
Nothing more will happen to it.  
Every village has its own design, every boy  
Up there fearless on the pillar.  
His grandmother the weaver.

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#### MOTHERS FERTILE WHALES

Mothers like fertile whales  
Breathing regularly, and around  
Ali Mustafà Bessem growing  
At night gasping  
Against the soft rock.

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#### MYRRH IS THE PERFUME WITH WHICH THE LOVER

Myrrh is the perfume with which the lover  
Draws his beloved to him  
And Tunis drop by drop  
Lets a hundred new males  
Filter through the metro every half hour  
In search of coolness at Sidi Bou.  
But then re-emerge and I wait for them here.

Where the red of oxidized cobblestones  
Becomes light green in springtime  
With the grassy weeds that invade them,  
And bougainvillea decks the gorge  
With its hollows fresher in the morning.

And so my coming and going from Carthage

Is tourism into the past, with boys  
Arabized Berbers in Phoenician costume  
Alexandrian Greeks, seated in a circle at sunset  
Squatting down to tell stories of the sea  
Scented with seaweed and ink and inviting  
Me to stay.

+++

SAINT AUGUSTINE

Basso continuo of my thoughts this evening  
The wild idea of Saint Augustine  
North African in a stark cell in Milan  
With three or four other Maghrebi  
And the bishop was Germanic.