

The author, the anniversary, the short story, the tribute

Franco Troiano (b. 1944), the author of this story, is the founder and Managing Director of the EUROLOGOS Group, a multinational linguistic services company which celebrates its twentieth anniversary this year. The narrative follows the fortunes of a Flemish translator in Italy, as she sets out on a quest to find traces of the Great Polyglot, while at the same time, looking for an intense love story and, more mundanely, for her first job. The translation of the short story in six languages and an introduction dedicated to literalness in translation (the “fine and faithful” translation) complete the tribute to the Patron Saint of translators, that truly modern, cosmopolitan intellectual, who lived 1,500 years ago.

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“Saint Jerome”
by Il Caravage (1573-1610),
Rome, Galleria Borghese

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d’après Le Caravage (1573-1610),
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“San Gerolamo”
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Franco Troiano

Jerome

By the same author, published by TCG Editions:
“Traduction, adaptation & editing multilingue”
in collaboration with J. Permentiers and E. Springael (1994),
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“Traduttori”
First edition
Brussels, August 1994
Second edition
Milan, August 1996

Franco Troiano

Jerome

A novel in seven languages in memory of Saint Jerome,
patron saint of translators.

Jérôme

Une nouvelle en sept langues en hommage à Saint Jérôme,
patron des traducteurs.

Hieronymus

Eine Novelle in sieben Sprachen, gewidmet dem Heiligen Hieronymus,
Förderer der Übersetzer.

Jerónimo

Una novela en siete idiomas en homenaje a San Jerónimo,
patrón de los traductores.

Hiëronymus

Een novelle in zeven talen, als eerbetoon aan de heilige Hiëronymus,
de patroonheilige van de vertalers.

Gerolamo

Un racconto in sette lingue in omaggio a San Gerolamo,
patrono dei traduttori.

Jerome

A short story written in Italian

by Franco Troiano

taken from “Traduttori”,

TCG Edizioni, Milano, 1996

and translated into six languages

(EN-FR-D-SP-NL-GR)

**The Twentieth Anniversary
of
the Eurologos Group
(1977 - 1997)**

A tribute to Saint Jerome, patron saint of translators

The EUROLOGOS group is celebrating the 20th anniversary of its creation by paying homage to Saint Jerome, the patron saint of translation. In fact, the core activity of our offices in Brussels, Cologne, Milan and Antwerp is still, despite the growth of our multimedia applications, the provision of multilingual services.

We wanted to celebrate the event in a relevant, simple and, for us, entirely normal manner by publishing a text in several languages just as we have been doing every day for twenty years now - a total of more than 5,000 days intense work.

And, as it happens, the first short story published by Franco Troiano, our founder and managing director, had - nothing ever really happens by chance - been entitled “*Jerome*”. The book “*Traduttori*”, published in 1996 by T.C.G. Editions in Brussels, began symbolically with this story involving a young Flemish woman translator searching for traces of the Holy Translator in Italy... All that remained for us to do was to ask the translators and revisers of the Eurologos Group to prepare versions of this story in seven of the most important languages in Europe: English, French, German, Spanish, Dutch and Greek. As for the Italian version, our very Milanese managing director had written “*Jerome*” in his mother tongue.

Of course, we had inevitably to try to forget about the other two dozen languages - highly important as they are - of Greater Europe, from the Urals to Lisbon and from Helsinki to Athens. Translators, as is well known, have a lot on their star-studded plate with the Union of our Old Continent.

Thus, in putting together this little book, so obviously modest and inadequate compared with the linguistic challenges of our time, we hope at least to have avoided the risk of self-congratulation, often fatal in commemorations.

The Management of the
EUROLOGOS Group
Central Office, Brussels

Brussels, 13 November 1997

A tribute to

Saint Jerome, Doctor of the Church and Patron saint of translators.



Saint Jerome (347-420)
 according to an engraving
 by Albrecht Dürer (1471-1528)

A polyglot from 1,500 years ago as the patron saint of translators.

Several translation associations throughout the world are marking the occasion of the 30th of September, the feast day of Saint Jerome, by celebrating his art of good translation. In fact, Jerome was the first to render (most admirably) the Bible from Hebrew into Greek and Latin, the famous *Vulgate*. But translators are also grateful to him for his innumerable lessons on how to combine translational fidelity with stylistic beauty. Saint Jerome, Secretary to Pope Damaso and his orricial representative in ancient Gaul, personified the figure of the modern, cosmopolitan polyglot, 1,500 years before our time.

Six translations of the same short story published alongside the original: a book, by definition, recklessly translated.

After that of Saint Jerome, one would like to beg the readers' mercy: do not shoot at our six pianists who dared publish their translations (tapped out on their PC keyboards) alongside the original text of the short story, written in Italian.

Henry Miller always wondered what became of his books "at the hands of the translators". And Umberto Eco even went so far as to ask himself if the author is not forced to "believe in God", at least concerning the translations of his texts into languages unknown to him. In this book with the same short story in seven languages, we do not have these problems, but we have an even more formidable one - that of curbing the inevitably over-critical nature of the polyglot reader. In fact, in Europe, bilingualism or trilingualism is no longer a rarity worthy of the interest of cultural anthropology. The generalised study of languages - even if it is not always of great quality - means that significant progress is being made in multilingual reading. The international press, travel, telecommunications, films in their original version,

unavoidably “multicultural” television zapping, the consultation of multilingual promotional documentation and other Internet documents are in the process of radically changing the traditional one-language approach to reading.

And whilst recognising a revival of the evaluation of each language from the point of view of geo-stylistics, philology and orthosyntax, we are increasingly learning and reading in foreign languages.

The habitual inevitably incestuous attitude towards one’s own culture is thus being transformed, in our so-called post-industrial era, into a process of radical change. The ground swell of multiculturalism has already left its marks on our perceptions of the intellectual heritage of our Old Continent. Europe will thus be pluricultural and multilingual or will not be at all. In any case, it is already so.

This little book also wants to indicate - most humbly - the progress to be made towards the birth of a new conception of linguistic identity. And, above all, of the creation of the new sort of relationship it must establish with its other cultural partners - other languages.

Literariness as an excellent translation method or the translator as a “dancer in chains”.

The Eurologos Group has, for twenty years, untiringly combatted the idea that so-called “literal” translations are bad translations. In reality, those which we habitually refer to as literal are deplorable word for word translations or calques.

Following the example of the great translation tradition, we demand literariness as a preliminary condition and sine qua non for all good translations. A condition which, albeit insufficient, is necessary.

A literal translation is, in fact, a faithful translation which recreates all of the semantic and morphological connotations of the source language in the target language.

Naturally, nothing prevents a literal translation from being geo-stylistically and sociostylistically irreproachable.

On the other hand, it is possible to have versions which are very well written in an admirable style but which cannot be called translations! Martina Csolány, a remarkable translation theorist, uses a very beautiful image to describe good translators. She sees them as “dancers in chains”. Artistically they are dancers in their mother-tongue (the target language), but are humbly tied to the meaning - the totality of the meaning - of the source language.

The modern challenge of “beautiful but faithful” translations and the globalised logosphere

Modern translation claims to be both beautiful and faithful. Gone is the glorious but damaging custom of “beautiful but unfaithful” translations, even in literature. These were texts “translated” by writers who did not have sufficient knowledge of the foreign languages and, above all, who were boosting their literary ego instead of placing themselves humbly at the services of the author. It should be noted on this subject that it was not a rare occurrence for these talented writers to ensure, via their translations, a fortune for foreign authors who were sometimes frankly mediocre. Their texts were more excellent adaptations, more reworkings than real translations.

The orders of the six translators of this book were thus to produce literal versions whilst ensuring stylistic reproductions without translational interference.

This is what renders their performances particularly masterful.

Overly critical readers - most of all colleagues in translation who are so merciless, even cruel in this respect - will thus have to temper their predictable and fatal “purist” aggressiveness. They have to remember the numerous and questionable attacks which have been made on

Saint Jerome for one thousand five hundred years in relation to his Vulgate. And nonetheless, his Bible is the most translated and printed source text in all of history.

The good multilingual reader - and even more so the good translator - thus has to cultivate to the highest level his sense of critical tolerance. This is, moreover, so necessary in our continents which are already globalised and characterised by multicultural practices.

So do not - frivolously - shoot at the pianists, especially if their talents are held in chains.

The Management of
The **EUROLOGOS Group**
Head Office, Brussels

Brussels, July 1997

JEROME

**"Non verbum e verbo,
sed sensum exprimere de sensu"**

San Gerolamo,
De optimo genere interpretandi
Littera LVII*

*The translation of some of St. Jerome's letters from Latin into English is also available on Internet.

**One doesn't discover the truth.
 One creates it.**

Antoine de Saint Exupéry

They found it striking that the girl with the tight-fitting T-shirt should be so eager to enter the church. She had already walked all around it once, even trying to get in through the sacristy. The parish priest of Stazzona only opened the church for Sunday morning service. The few souls of Brenzio, a village in the western part of the Alto Lario district, had been gathering there for the past five centuries as if drawn by a timeless imperative which the church bell signalled without the slightest chance of an echo. Its sound made their gazes become even more lost in the boundless landscape which faded in the distance, where the snowy peaks of the far-off Alps could just be made out. The church had been built in the late fifteenth century on one of the most delightful spots overlooking the lake, half way up the mountain's steep slope. From time immemorial, the local people had naturally walked there from their barns and cottages to contemplate, with the mute - and, nowadays, rare - dignity of the humble, the spellbinding beauty of the lofty peaks mirrored in the lake.

"Excuse me, isn't the church open today?" The two chess-players glanced up at her without apparently interrupting their game. Before answering, Alberto even moved his knight to D4. His satisfaction at having secured a good central position on the chessboard did not however stifle his admiring curiosity for this exquisite young woman. She, too, although intent on finding a way into the church, had paused to wonder at these two men engrossed in a game which she would have never associated with Italy. During a trip to Ukraine organized by the University of Ghent two years earlier, she had discovered that chess was very popular in that country and was even customarily played in public gardens. But in the Bellagio area, with more than sixty miles of mountainous countryside visible at a glance, and amid such a dazzling profusion of colours between earth and sky, the fact that anyone should want to concentrate on a twelve-inch black and white board seemed to her a form of supreme luxury.

"Buongiorno, is there any way I can get into the church to look at the St. Jerome altarpiece?" Alberto glanced at his grandfather, who had just moved his bishop, threateningly, to G7. The old man had been going to that church for over fifty years - even before he had joined the partisans camped on the mountains above Dongo. Yes, those were the same units that had subsequently arrested Mussolini as he tried to flee the country. The "panicky Duce", as is well known, had vainly and ignominiously tried to disguise himself among the soldiers of a defeated German convoy on their homeward retreat. Alberto knew little about St. Jerome, nor was he aware that an altar was devoted to him in the church. But the old man, a military ensign from the "Alpini" regiment prominently displayed on his lapel, did seem to remember something.

"Ah yes, there is a fresco inside the church, it must be the one on the right-hand side. You should ask Father Mario."

"Have a seat, if you like." Alberto beckoned to the girl who spoke with a foreign accent, inviting her to sit down by the makeshift stone table. For a moment, she hesitated to accept the young man's somewhat overly bold invitation, but then overcame her misgivings when the older man, with an imperious gesture, made room for her, placing his jacket on the low wall of the portico.

"He's the priest of that village over there," explained Alberto. "You'll find him there in the mornings."

Ever since she had visited Italy for the first time as a student at Perugia's University for Foreigners, Katrien had often been amazed at the almost insolent nonchalance with which Italians seemed to move among great works of art set in marvellous landscapes. At first she had thought them a rather barbarous people, unworthy heirs of such artistic and natural bounties. Then she had very much tempered this judgement, realizing that their casual manner was mainly the result of long-standing familiarity with beauty, which abounded everywhere around them. UNESCO, she had read somewhere, located one third of the world's artistic heritage in Italy. In the end, the didactic attitude often displayed by her Belgian countrymen towards art and nature had struck her as rather pedantic. Their zeal in building a museum around each shard and stone pompously labeled "historical", unearthed after laborious archeological exertions, seemed both touching and laughable to her. She had also come to view the pathetic passion of the Flemish for their admittedly placid polders - the Plat-Pays' farmsteads so much adored by her father and so often celebrated at school - with a critical and even cruel eye. Yet she somehow found it striking that the two men should almost turn their backs on this spellbinding landscape which could have enraptured them for hours on end. This was, after all, the view described by Stendhal in "The Charterhouse of Parma" as one of the most beautiful in the whole of Creation. On the advice of one of her teachers, Katrien had read the Italian translation of the novel by the great French author to improve her knowledge of the language. However, she had reread the passages about the Griante district a short while ago in the original language in order to better savour, in her second mother tongue, the boundless admiration that Lake Como had inspired in a well-travelled writer who was familiar with many of Europe's most celebrated sights.

"I know Don Mario quite well. I can introduce you to him tomorrow," Alberto said. "I shouldn't want to disturb you," the girl replied promptly, still addressing him with the formal "lei". She was slightly embarrassed but also flattered by the pressing interest shown for her by the dark-haired young man with blue eyes. His beard - she immediately noticed - was closely and accurately shaven, despite the fact that it was already mid afternoon.

"Not at all." And, to slightly mitigate his daring, he immediately added - albeit using the informal "tu" - that, in any case, next morning he had to fetch a document from Stazzona's town hall.

Romildo, the old chess-player, known to all as "El Cagnun" or "Big Dog", had now shifted his attention from his grandson to the girl. Once again he could observe the "eternally womanly" at work. Though eighty years old, he did not tire of letting himself be charmed by the grace and promise of bliss that a young girl evokes in even the gloomiest male. No door - he thought - not even that of the most cloistered of churches, could resist her eyelashes and the captivating playfulness of her smile. While he advantageously exchanged his rook for that of his grandson, Romildo attentively observed the flirtatious technique with which Katrien had become attuned to Alberto. He had never managed to understand to what extent intentionality and conscious calculation actually played a part in feminine seductiveness. As he watched the Flemish girl engrossed in the story of her quest, starting in Belgium, for the portrait of St. Jerome, he suddenly and with great vividness recalled the sensual lips of a prostitute in a brothel he had frequented in Como before the war. Even then he had puzzled over the artificiality or authenticity of Carlina di Parabiago's - as she was called - winsome smile. In love with her, and out of a sense of gratitude, he had even given the girl his watch as a present. Listening to Katrien as she told of St. Jerome, the patron saint of translators - on which subject she was writing her final dissertation for a degree in modern languages - he experienced again, in a flash, the euphoria of his early manhood, when his whole life had been geared to the love game. Although, culturally speaking, at least a millennium - rather than just

fifty or sixty years - had gone by between his liquid brilliantine and Alberto's hair gel, he realized, with a sense of reassurance, that nothing had basically changed. The shift from the agricultural and pre-industrial civilization of the thirties to the so-called post-industrial civilization of the nineties had revolutionized many things, but not the desire and the search for the opposite sex. As if by way of confirmation, he was able to capture Alberto's queen, which the young man had inadvertently left unprotected. The game was practically over. But Alberto had already started a new one, of a different kind. With tactful complicity, Romildo left the two youths to what would probably develop into their first evening together. He was certain that he was contributing to the birth of a positive relationship, which he already sensed was ineluctable. "El Cagnun" was very fond of his grandson, even more so than of his own son whom, to tell the truth, he no longer respected ever since, towards the end of the seventies, he had become a civil servant working for the Lombardy regional water board. He even suspected him of arranging for bribes to be paid into a Swiss bank account by the farmers of the lowlands in exchange for the water to which they were entitled. He did not recognize, I Alberto's father, the straightforward son he had always wished for. Of course he had no proof of his professional dishonesty, but his affected and equivocal way of speaking was enough to nurture a feeling of contempt. Yes, that language embellished with political and technocratic jargon was surely despicable enough. Indeed, "El Cagnun" had always maintained that people who did not speak dialect should be mistrusted. With Alberto he almost always spoke the local "Cumasc". Now that he had broken off with "that bitch of Letizia, who used to take sick leave to go to Leoncavallo's left-wing demonstrations", Alberto often spent

his weekends with him, fishing on the lake, playing chess or preparing roast pork. "El Cagnun" regarded him not so much as a young man convalescing from an unsuccessful relationship as someone in the process of experiencing a cultural change, which included a number of question marks. Of course Alberto had to recover from the emotional split but, above all, he had to rebuild his confidence by overcoming a rather deeper crisis. The reasons that had drawn him away from Letizia's sad merrines concerned not only his feelings and emotions but also, above all the sphere of culture and politics.

The only aspect of his life which had not changed was his professional activity as a graphic designer for the advertising industry. In fact, lately he had been working at his job with increased energy. He had started using new computerized techniques. His Macintosh, a veritable time-devouring monster, illuminated his evenings, making him forget his worries in front of the magical screen alive with many-coloured omnipotence. He was working over ten hours a day with a lighthearted gusto which had pleasantly surprised his two partners at the Editing Studio. They had taken him into the company not without some reservations. They believed that, although he could not be expected to act like a fully-fledged entrepreneur, he should at least show plenty of initiative, that is, behave like a partner in the fullest sense of the term. Following an initial period of adjustment during which, to put it mildly, Alberto's performance had not been brilliant, they had finally been rewarded in their expectations.

At any rate, Alberto could no longer stand the "psychological" disquisitions of belated feminists nor Letizia's apparently "transgressive" but actually parasitic discourse. He was disgusted at their weak-willed and anti-productive sub-culture based on the individual's infinite "needs", which they never bothered to compare with the limited possibilities actually available to satisfy them. The querulous irresponsibility of the champions of the so-called "right to happiness" led him to paroxysms of righteous fury against the would-be progressive selfishness of "wanting everything".

Through his work, through the production of wealth, he had for some time become convinced that it was a basic duty not to ask anyone, much less the state, for anything. On the contrary, in creating added value, that is, in adding value to Creation, he saw the only thing anyone

should ever really demand from themselves and provide for others. He had thus learned to classify people according to their production-consumption ratio. With the obvious exception of children and truly elderly or handicapped people, Alberto had realized that the number of individuals who showed a positive balance sheet were exceedingly few. Almost everyone consumed more than he or she produced, and this applied also to the cultural and emotional fields. "This is what the economic crisis really boils down to, despite the very erudite and equally improbable macroeconomic explanations endlessly provided for it. In actual fact," he thought, "things are quite simple. A little common sense would be enough. You cannot spend everything you earn. The first intelligent prehistoric men founded civilization on this elementary principle. It was by stocking seeds, rather than eating them, that agriculture was created. The generations that came after the 1960s, however, have devoured everything they could lay their hands on, and everything that could be bought in countless instalments. How can anybody be surprised at the crisis and consequent unemployment? To meet the needs of the new markets and, therefore, to create new jobs, you need investment capital, which you must have saved beforehand, or ad hoc credits must be available."

But such issues Alberto could only discuss, so to speak, with his grandfather Romildo. His former friends regarded him by now as a blinkered and alien yuppie. He himself, for a time, had wondered whether he might not be falling into a simplistic, reductive outlook which made everything mistakenly clear. Be this as it may, he no longer had any faith in the obsolete (to say the least) economics of watered-down Marxism. Croce's idealism and Marx's materialism had crumbled into nothingness before his eyes. He now read Hayek and Tremonti, and, in particular, tried to gain a deeper understanding of the American economists who criticized socio-economic models based on an "Ideal Typus". Grandpa Romildo, who was not in a position to be a truly critical interlocutor - lacking, as he did, any knowledge of economic theory - played the role of a willing listener during these investigative soliloquies on political issues. In any case, Alberto deeply mistrusted all the more-or-less accredited "experts". He had come to realize how false and mendacious and, above all, how fundamentally incompetent they were. Particularly those on the Left. With his grandfather, he could talk things over and, what was more important, think about them in a calm, relaxing atmosphere. Although in his company he did not work out a unitary and definitive system in which to organize his new ideas, he felt conclusively won over by "El Cagnun" the day when, on returning from the cottage in the mountains, the old man opened up his heart to him like never before:

"You see, Alberto, that wimp of your father and I myself belong to the two most despicable generations that ever existed on this planet. Two generations of money-grubbers who, when all is said and done, had children in order to be kept by them after retirement and who have already burdened them with a debt of some fifty million lire apiece, all of which have already been used up. Not a penny has been truly invested in the future. In addition, having to pamper us and provide us with an easy life, you have no choice but to keep us for another fifteen or twenty years, forking out the pensions we granted ourselves and which you will never be able to afford. As for any inheritance, assuming anything is left, you'll only get it when it's too late for you."

"Nobody is thinking of inheriting, grandpa."

"I wouldn't be so certain. I'm ashamed of belonging to this twofold generation which has turned beggarly hedonism into the banner of its hideous "cleptocracy", as Bocca calls it. What we call Bribe City, starting way back from the time before fallen president Leone down to crooked prime minister Craxi and suicidal businessman Giardini, is nothing but the distillate of a thieving harvest carried out at your expense for the past thirty years. Look at that parasite of your Aunt Patrizia: she is only forty-one, but she's already retired and has been receiving a small pension since she was thirty-eight. It is you who will have to pay for the

upkeep of this precious little product of statism for another fifty years at least - to the tune of almost one million lire a month."

"I must say I've also realized this recently. Just think that, before she became a pensioner, I was such a fool I told her I agreed with her and I even put forward the ludicrous argument that her early retirement would "create" a job for another teacher! I'm ashamed of my own stupidity."

"Or look at that scoundrel of your father," "El Cagnun" went on.

"Where do you think he gets the money for his little boat at Cinque Terre? For twenty years now he has been the errand-boy and lickspittle of that boorish devil of Gerosa, who is possibly the greatest crook in the region. Well, do you think your father suffers any pangs of conscience? Soon after he joined the aqueduct consortium, as no doubt you will remember, he bought himself a villa in Portovenere, but everyone knows by now that the is tied for life to that shark. You may have noticed that I've never set foot there among those Ligurian bricks probably paid from Lugano."

"Dad feels hurt by it, you know."

"If you knew how little I care! When you were a left-wing militant, deep down I was on your side. It's better to be an honest Leninist than a hypocrite and petty Mafioso complete with turbo-charged Mercedes. Now that you're a man – twenty-six, aren't you? - I feel I can speak openly to you. Alberto listened to him, wondering why he had not been closer to his grandfather already when he was a student at the Brera Academy of Arts. Their shared views about his ever-holidaying aunt's "baby pension" and his father's lifestyle, so rampant for a mediocre state-employed engineer, completely bridged the fifty-five-year gap that separated him from his grandfather. He also felt that never before had his philosophical conceptions been called into question so radically as on that Sunday. Thus he had speeded up the practical critique of his own life, benefiting from the old "Alpino's" company and taking care not to ever neglect the habit of drinking a thoughtful bottle of Sassella together.

"In vino veritas", "El Cagnun" repeated predictably, though not irrelevantly, as he uncorked one without, however, losing completely the thread of the conversation.

Her pleasant features enhanced by a fresh touch of makeup, Katrien was sitting at a solid chestnut table opposite Alberto.

Between them, on the table, stood a bottle of much appreciated Valtellina red. The girl had not been long in accepting the invitation to dine at the Oenological Centre in Porto di Domaso, the small town where she was camping by the lake with a friend, Chantal. They had arrived there a few days earlier to meet Chantal's youthful parents, who were enthusiastic about their ailing holidays at Domaso. Katrien's decision to accept the invitation had been partly motivated by a half-conscious wish to show off her newly-conquered trophy. Chantal, of course, would never have thought that such an appetizing sample of maleness could be procured by visiting mountain churches in search of frescoes representing the Bible's first Latin translator. Nothing of the sort had come her way despite four days of topless sunbathing on the beach.

Once they were seated at the table, Alberto felt no need to secure any tactical advantages. He did not want to overdo things, so he let Katrien take the initiative. The woman of words, the linguist, led the conversation from the start, temporarily overshadowing the man of images, the graphical aesthete. She spoke in a lively, unselfconscious manner. Alberto provided a friendly counterpoint, in deeper, responsive tones. Katrien's femininity was completely devoid of the ideological fineries which Alberto was used to in Letizia and her self-styled "intellectual" girlfriends. Her fresh, unspoilt personality had transported him into a world of linear simplicity, a world he had been longing for, far removed from the often hysterical

neurosis of the relentlessly militant "sisterhood". On this journey of discovery, only Grandpa Romildo had been able to offer him understanding.

Katrien's lightheartedness paradoxically touched a deep chord in him. Her genuine spontaneity was drawing him towards her, and he felt his whole self was at stake.

As he listened to her, he became even more aware of the falseness of his relationship with a housewife from Milan, a married woman he had kept on seeing through sheer inertia. "A luxury chick with beautiful feathers", he had thought the first time he had met her. It had been during an audition of little girls for a biscuit advertisement whose logo he was restyling. The woman's daughter, rather dull-looking, had not been chosen. The mother had consoled herself by adopting Alberto as a weekly - and always promptly though not hastily enjoyed - pastime; a dispassionate and basically pragmatic intercourse performed between ten o'clock and noon on Wednesdays. The only variations were the periods of abstinence when the family was on holiday or those with two weekly rendezvous if the lady was in the mood for it before doing some shopping at the local market. Just as she bought veal or cooked ham, the angel of the hearth procured the equally carnal pleasures which Alberto would dispense with obliging vitality. The truth was that, after meeting regularly for almost a year, they hardly knew anything about each other. Their encounters took place in the most relaxing verbal rarefaction, in a sort of muscular exuberance not devoid of aesthetic rigour - true and genuine physical performances with no psychological complications. The two bodies celebrated each other in a sort of Apollonian rite, utterly care-free and outside time. Their affair had practically no history behind it and, paradoxically, would have almost given rise to its own voluptuous innocence, had it not dragged on for too long already. Alberto had started fearing the day when, possibly through some "accident" or other, he might be unable to perform the Dionysian rite with the beautiful metropolitan bacchant.

Katrien enjoyed speaking to him. She had already explained how, on all her trips, she always gathered some information beforehand and went to see any pictures of St. Jerome she could find: Leonardo's in the Louvre, Antonello da Messina's in the National Gallery or even an etching by Dürer which formed part of an obscure private collection in Norwich.

"Now that you tell me, I remember seeing the painting by Antonello. The saint is portrayed sitting on a high-back chair at a desk. A reproduction is included in a book I have in my studio. His niche is set in some very harmonious architectural surroundings, Catalan, I believe, with a peacock."

"And a lion in the background. It's my favourite picture of him."

"A lion?" Alberto asked.

"According to the story, Jerome pulled a thorn from his paw. Out of gratitude, the lion faithfully watched over the saint wherever he went. The man was a great linguist and scholar, over fifteen hundred years ago. He knew ancient Greek and Hebrew. "Ah, the translation of the Bible, the so-called Vulgate."

"Right. But I find St. Jerome interesting for another reason, too. He had a double life. First he became a prominent public figure. He was secretary to the Pope and conducted sensitive missions in Gaul, in my own part of the world and in Jerusalem - a sort of fully-fledged Kissinger of his times. He then retired to the desert, to become an ascetic. I believe these two dimensions are not just successive moments in time, but also permanent aspects of his personality, of the continuity of his life - which is probably also true of most competent translators."

Alberto thought he was dreaming. For years he had been speaking mostly to girls who were proud of being "political" and who chain-smoked up to two dozen pestilential cigarettes, spewing out ungrammatical sentences full of blatant logical contradictions. Girls whose craving for life was greater than their vitality, who were more domineering than seductive, more neurotically sensual than truly erotic. Katrien spoke articulately, even though she

obviously found it difficult to translate all her thoughts. Italian was, after all, her fourth language after Dutch, French and English. She expressed complete, logical views, with intellectual liveliness but no bookish ostentatiousness. The passion driving her was objectified, materialized in a justified and intelligible enthusiasm. This was no doubt the result of the discipline and pedagogical rigour of her Belgian schooling, of the Germanic culture she belonged to. Or perhaps it originated from the great French-speaking tradition of conversation, the habit of rational and sparkling dialogue. Her father was Flemish but had been educated in French, as was the custom in many bourgeois families of Flemish-speaking Ghent.

“Franskiljon” was the term Flemish extremists applied, somewhat disparagingly, to their fellow countrymen from these families that, through their perfect bilingualism, “betrayed” the Germanic ethos of the Dutch language. The “flamingants” (thus the ultra-nationalist and separatist Flemish are called in turn by French-speaking Belgians) could never quite swallow, for instance, the fact that their national hero, Tjil Uilenspiegel, was immortalized in a novel written by Flemish writer De Coster in French: For centuries, culture and conviviality were expressed, as a matter of course, in the refined language of Voltaire and Flaubert.

In any case, Alberto was impressed by Katrien's perceptive words, all the more so because her explanation about St. Jerome's double life, mundane and contemplative at the same time, seemed to be uncannily relevant to his own cultural crisis.

In the meantime, he had also discovered a little dimple in Katrien's chin. Feeling she had a good listener, the girl had opened up. A third glass of vintage Sassella, with its distinctive ether scent, had no doubt helped.

Before walking out onto the pier, Katrien even asked the chef, with gourmand interest, what greens he had added to the beef casserole, of which she had asked for a second generous helping.

Alberto was somewhat at loss. One thing, however, he knew for certain: he would devote himself to this girl body and soul. He would love Katrien at any cost and above everything else.

The warm day had by now completely surrendered to the breva, the local win which, coming from Menaggio and Gravedona, blows northwards across the lake up to the mouth of the Adda. The evening's coolness was lulled by the gentle wash of the lake, where solitary fishing boats, their lights dimly visible in the distance, were darkly outlined against the expanse of water. Leaning on the pier's parapet, the two youths were now exchanging play-full, jesting confidences, telling each other about their likes and dislikes. With his keen sense of aesthetics, Alberto knew that it is through such exchanges that common tastes develop.

The shores of the lake were garlanded by the pearly lamps of successive promenades along the water front: Colico, Gravedona, Dongo, Menaggio, all the way up to Tramezzina. In the darkness all round, shone the tiny lights of countless villas and cottages overlooking, as if spellbound, the lake softly illuminated by a waxing half-moon.

"Be my guide, tell me, where is the church we saw this afternoon in Brenzio?" Katrien unselfconsciously took Alberto's hand in her own right one, raising it towards the mountainside and pointing the forefinger of her free hand in the same direction, prompting Alberto to indicate the place. Performing this rather awkward and very intimate movement, her breast pressed against Alberto's bare arm a little too long for him to consider this a chance collision. It was the first time their bodies touched. Katrien was experiencing an obscure desire to find out whether her physical sensations would confirm the warmth she had felt coming from him, almost at once, during their first meeting by the church. She vaguely wished to know if the deep mental attraction which drew her to Alberto could withstand the test of superficial skin-contact. Physical indifference had always very quickly revealed to her the actual strength of her infatuations. Prone to analyse her relationships in depth both

because of her temperament and her education, she knew that she needed the unequivocal confirmation of the senses. With Alberto she had quickly intuited that she would not need to force herself to allow him into her intimacy. Perhaps it had been that first image of him as an intent and at the same time dreamy chess-player which had aroused this markedly poetic and seductive feeling in her. The image of the silent young man, calmly concentrating in the company of an old man under a fifteenth-century vaulted arch overlooking a lush and uncontaminated landscape, was something she would never forget. Alberto, instead of following her movement and pointing at the mountainside, kissed her, drawing her towards him only slightly. He had not so much decided to do this as been unwilling, powerless not to do so. Katrien became aware of a certain emotive shyness in him, which deeply contrasted with the impression of manful experience conveyed by his appearance. In Alberto she had recognized that type of man to whom everything comes easy. Who would never have to ask. It was enough for him to be present and others had no choice but to strive to please him, as if it were in the natural order of things. Katrien had always liked good-looking men, provided they did not vaunt their irresistible charm.

Next morning, with the sun already high in the sky, Katrien was having breakfast on the terrace of the youth hostel by the lake. The breva had not yet risen and the water formed a perfect mirror. Only a few ripples from the distant bow-wave of a ferry passing abreast of the Piona Abbey, built opposite Domaso, lapped the shore. Her friend Chantal, visibly irritated at not having received any detailed confidences from Katrien about her evening out with Alberto, had soon left her alone at the table, contemplating, in a dreamy mood, the Legnon mountain, over two-thousand meters high, which rises steeply at the tip of the lake, behind Colico.

Although she had been willing to go much further, Katrien did not regret Alberto's controlled reservedness. First making an appointment for the following morning, he had accompanied her back to the campsite fairly early in the evening. They had kissed, but he had taken care not to press too deep between her lips. She saw him approach sprightly, wearing sunglasses, well-polished moccasins, jeans and a very colourful shirt. Wim Wender's angel immediately sprang to her mind. She thought that certain young men have a graceful handsomeness which even the most beautiful woman can only equal, but never surpass.

"Sleep well? Ready for Don Mario?" Kissing her dimple, he took her forefinger in his hands and, imitating yesterday evening's gesture, he playfully pointed it in the direction of Brenzio and Stazzona. Once in the car, glad to resume their relationship where they had left it off the day before, he began to point out, in broad daylight, the places she had asked about in the darkness.

"You see, that farmstead belongs to Miglio, the federalists' theoretician who advocates constitutional reform."

"You mean the racist and separatist?" Katrien said.

"What? Nonsense! This isn't Antwerp, and there is no Vlaams Block here! If only Belgian intellectuals and journalists - and the French ones, of course - could come here and drink a glass of Miglio's red wine from those vineyards - see, down there? - they would understand. Many French-speaking people - rather conceitedly, I must say - apply to Italy the interpretative criteria and value judgments, which they use - often mistakenly, for that matter - in France or Belgium.

"Yet they love Italy very much," argued Katrien, defensively.

"I'm not so sure. When people love something without knowing it, they risk falling into a self-erotic relationship." Only too late did Alberto realize the striking double meaning of his

last sentence in the context of their relationship, which was still largely uncharted ground. Katrien, however, interpreted it as a flattering explanation of his reserve the evening before.

"The fact is that, although they did not manage to win power in any European country, Marxists have exercised complete hegemony on the political and cultural intelligentsia, even on its most moderate sections, over the past fifty years."

"But weren't you also left-wing?"

"I was left-wing for far too long, in fact up to a few months ago. I also had a girlfriend who still is a far-left activist and who now seems to me to be light years behind."

Before going into Stazzona, Alberto called quickly at the gate of Grandpa Romildo's house.

"Do you want a lift? We are on our way to Don Mario's." The old Alpino was in his garden, picking some winter cress and chards for a minestrone. He was in the company of his old friend Giovanni. El Caprun – as he was nicknamed, though no-one knew why - was the one who after the war always went round in clogs, which he had made from Mussolini's belt. El Caprun had also been one of Dongo's partisans and - so he claimed - the Duce's belt could not have found a worthier use.

"No, thanks. Go ahead without me, and tell Don Mario to think more of marrying young people than staging the funerals of the old."

On hearing this, El Caprun touched his private parts in an unequivocally exorcising gesture.

"Beyond a certain age," thought the girl, "even vulgar gestures acquire a certain heart_warming significance."

Katrien was discovering an unsuspected and surprising side of Italy. She was particularly astounded to hear from Alberto that El Caprun had never denied the rumour that, together with some other partisans, he had hidden the mythical Dongo treasure which Mussolini and his mistress Claretta were trying to take with them to Germany. Even Churchill himself had come to Domaso looking for it. It seems he was anxious to recover some secret documents which concerned him and which he did not want divulged. The people's mistrust of the powerful is not without a material foundation.

"I will introduce you now to Don Mario. I've know him ever since I left to do my military service. I had decided to take a holiday before reporting for duty, and we met almost every day in a club some young people had set up in the area. We had a brief, but intense relationship. My then girlfriend, Letizia, used to take sick leave, as usual, to be able to join us. We often had passionate, though not very methodical, discussions about all sorts of subjects, ranging from eschatology and politics to culture and economics. Somehow I have a fond memory of those occasions."

Katrien was rather amazed at all this. She had almost forgotten that the reason they were driving to meet the priest of that small village up in the mountains was for her to conduct some quiet research on St. Jerome. She was now coming across an unsuspected political vitality which she had never truly experienced before. Her native Belgium had accustomed her to a tenuous and dispassionate relationship with public affairs - a very rarefied and threadbare participation in the community as a polis or body politic. The process of social-democratization and political-economic statism was so advanced, that is, so bureaucratized in her country, that an active involvement in politics was considered a rather uncommon exercise. When everything is institutionalized and highly structured in its smallest details, political discussions become laughable or tedious unless they are held by "professionals" in the field.

If, on the one hand, Katrien realized that ideological positions in Italy were often obsolete, on the other she had to acknowledge the existence of a healthy humanistic vitality which was diametrically opposed to the technocratic and dis-empowering culture typical of endemic statism, that is, of real socialism.

Therefore, at Alberto's meeting with Don Mario, she did not find it hard to play the role of the almost silent bystander. She quickly realized that the old priest held appealing but basically schismatic views. The good man advocated the need for democratic grassroots institutions within the Church. Katrien, who was a Catholic to the extent that Belgians can still regard themselves as Roman citizens, was nevertheless very much aware that to speak of democracy within the Roman Catholic Church was somewhat like assimilating, in theology, the principle of the mystical body of Christ to the dictatorship of the proletariat.

"One institution which has nothing, absolutely nothing to do with democracy," she thought, "is the Catholic Church."

However, she was careful not to express her views to this rather unconventional priest, deciding, if anything, to do so

first, cautiously, to Alberto. Besides, she was waiting for an opportunity to bring up the question of her saint-translator, a rather more interesting subject, in any case, than the populist ramblings of this generous but doctrinally befogged and canonically Protestant priest.

Therefore, without even hinting at the possibility that the great saint, who was certainly more of an ascetic mystic than a radical political reformer, might turn in his grave if he heard even just one tenth of Don Mario's arguments, Katrien managed to shift the conversation from the Second Vatican Council's reforms to an interesting question:

"Don Mario, how would you explain the myth of the thorn in the lion's paw and St. Jerome's timely intervention?"

Clearly, the priest had never given the matter any thought and was rather taken aback by the question. He looked at the girl as though he were seeing her for the first time. He had been too quick to label her as an extrappa, a systematic protester like Letizia. But now he did not know what to answer and fell silent for the first time since the beginning of the meeting. His thoughts, all of which ran in the direction of "God's flock versus the ecclesiastical hierarchy," had been halted so abruptly in their tracks, they could almost be seen catapulted against the shiny crown of his head, which had been bald for decades.

"I'm not quite certain," the priest managed to mutter. Then, resuming his loquacious manner, he added: "It is probably part of the popular devotion to the saint in his role as physician. In a fresco at the Vergosio Oratory, St. Jerome is portrayed together with St Rocco, who has an ulcerated leg. There must be some link with the lion's wounded paw."

"The Vergosio Oratory? Where is it?" Katrien asked eagerly, even though she had not been convinced by the priest's rather farfetched explanation.

"Here above the village, in the woods, there is a sixteenth-century chapel with a number of mastery paintings, like in many other churches in this area. You know, at the time of the Lutheran schism, we Catholics had to uphold our faith by building many churches in this area which borders with Switzerland. Quite a few monasteries were founded, too - strongholds of the orthodox faith, loyal to the Trento Council." "What? Are you turning counter-reformist on me now, Don Mario?"

"You shouldn't joke about these things, Alberto. The Church's unity is our greatest treasure. Unam, sanctam et catholicam."

Katrien was thoroughly enjoying herself. This was the Italy she really savoured: a contradictory, anarchic nation, capable of unflagging devotion and great deeds only through exceptionality. Don Mario, an unconscious heretic if ever there was one, professed to be a staunch upholder of orthodoxy against the openly schismatic Lutherans, though he was hardly less heterodox than them.

"What about the Brenzio fresco, Don Mario?"

"It is completely ruined. Let me show you something, signorina." He fetched an album.

"You see, it is hardly visible under all these dents and marks of blows. This is how they restored things in the eighteenth century, with a pickaxe!"

The priest showed them a number of photographs of the church consecrated to John the Baptist. Clearly, it was not worth going there just to look at the devastation.

It was past midday. They said goodbye and Alberto accompanied Katrien to the grocers. They bought bresaola, salami, cheese, bread, fruit and wine. Then they made their way to a cottage high up on the mountainside, over one thousand meters above the lake, which stretched below them as far as the eye could see.

"Take a look, today you'll even be able to see the golden Madonna at the top of the duomo in Milan." Alberto handed the binoculars to Katrien as he laid out the food on the table under the pergola.

"My graphical studio is there on the left, close to that skyscraper." Alberto spoke as if she really were able to see, almost one hundred kilometers away, the offices of Studio Editing. While he washed the fruit at the spring-water fountain, he felt glad he had suggested coming here, where they could be alone. Their closest neighbours were at least half a mile away - another cabin, which did not even look occupied at the moment.

"What are those ruins?"

"That's what's left of the old house that was destroyed by a fire. The fascists burnt it down to retaliate against the partisans, who were using it as a base. Grandpa Romildo joined them after the famous turning point of 8 September 1943, after leaving Badoglio's army, as the regime began to crumble to pieces. Most other antifascists didn't make a move much earlier than that, either. Twenty years went by before he could rebuild his house, one stone at the time. For two years, he spent every weekend here, helped by some friends who were bricklayers, toiling away with trowel and mortar.

"I'm beginning to like your grandfather more and more. Is he a communist?"

"Not at all, he always voted for the Right up until now. Lately he sympathizes with Forza Italia."

Once again Katrien was puzzled. How could you be a partisan and a fascist at the same time - and support the liberals to boot?

"No, not at the same time. In Italy, during the twenty-year Fascist period, there were very few dissidents, whatever people say now. In fact, in your country, too, in Belgium, things weren't much better, particularly in Flanders. The partisans, in any case, were never many and only stuck their necks out at the last minute. And quite a few of them had been fascists until a short time before, although admittedly they'd only supported the regime halfheartedly and passively."

Instead of sitting opposite him as they ate their meal, Katrien had placed herself by his side. In the shade of the kiwi pergola, they spoke watching the immense landscape of the Lario lake district. In the distance, the Valsassina mountains outlined their grey peaks against the sky.

"So why did he vote for the Right, if the fascists had burnt down his home?"

"Out of a sense of revulsion and disgust at the clownery of all the last-minute anti-fascists. Rather than go along with the hot air and pompous rhetoric of the 'patriotic and revolutionary liberation war', he preferred to side with the vanquished while at the same time rigorously respecting democracy and the parliamentary system."

"So he's always been in the opposition?"

"Yes. While most of his former friends benefitted from their belated, not to say sham, antifascism, he preferred to be considered an eccentric, and even a neo-fascist, rather than pose as a great and glorious member of the resistance. Few people remained faithful or stayed close to him, though everybody has always respected him."

"Yes, I like your grandfather more and more. I think I understand why they call him El Cagnun." With these words, she drew closer to him, as if she had also wanted to embrace the

old Alpino's proud solitude. Alberto had been looking forward to this moment ever since he had introduced Katrien to his inner world. The time had come to make love. They did so passionately until dusk. Then, emptied of all will, they fell into a childish slumber.

It was Katrien who woke first, shuddering slightly at the chill that nightfall had brought into the room. Dressed in one of Grandpa Romildo's old jumpers, she went out onto the terrace to seal in her memory the feeling of perfect happiness she had experienced on awakening. She then went back indoors to cover Alberto with the blanket and, before making some coffee, she stood still once again, delighting in the most boundless, most ethereal silence she had ever listened to. She thought of Jean Ormesson who, at the end of his book *La douane de mer*, regrets not having had the time to tell his extraterrestrial friend about the beauties of Bellagio. She thought of Alberto. She was by now certain that she could make him happy and completely hers.

She brought him a large cup of coffee, anxious to have him back, to express her gratitude to him. She wanted to make him feel that she was there with him, that there was nothing else she wished. She wanted to confirm this by stroking his body and speaking with him, this time about the future. They spoke for a long time, until their gazes turned to the stars. She asked him about his work, his partners, his plans. She spoke of her thesis, which she wanted to complete to become a qualified translator; of her Flemish and French-speaking friends; of her first experiences of work. Then they became one with the night amidst the fleshly scents of passion.

They were awoken by the bleating of goats which nobody tended. The animals, gone feral, had been roaming the hills for the past two years, since the time when, with substantial financial aid from the European Community, a gigantic, hyper-equipped but perfectly useless breeding farm had been built, never to be used. The "project" had also included a ghost cheese-making plant, never completed, to produce improbable, not to say impossible, oat-milk dairy products. The case constituted a little masterpiece of patronage, fraud, squandering and environmental debasement. In order to protect his plot and prevent the beasts from eating the sweet peas in his vegetable garden, Grandpa Romildo had been forced to build a fence round the cottage, although he owned over a hectare of land. Up in the hills, in that part of the country, it is customary not to fence in one's property.

Rising from her sleep, Katrien immediately thought of Chantal. She must phone her, at least. Alberto had said he had no intention of returning to the lake. In the end, they decided to do some shopping and take the opportunity to stop by at the campsite and give some sign of life to Katrien's "jilted" girlfriend. Then they would be able to continue their honeymoon undisturbed for several days. In the meantime, Alberto was planning to finish digging out a wine cellar down to the bedrock below the cottage, and Katrien would work on her thesis. One day they also went to see the fresco on the left wall of the Verglosio Oratory, where St. Jerome towers majestically between St Rocco and St Nicolas.

Even Alberto was surprised to find another, such magnificent fourteenth-century painting hidden in the hills. The author of the Vulgate is portrayed sporting an impressive beard and holding, in his right hand, the miniature model of a church, as if to illustrate his status as Father, Doctor and Defender of Catholicism.

Alberto tried to analyse the frescoes through the eyes of a translator, as Katrien did. He focused on the saint as if looking for further elements, undiscovered aspects of the woman with whom he was falling in love. He wanted to be closer to her, accept her, translate her into his own idiom- in order to appropriate her, of course. In other words, he had to follow the

same process underlying any successful translation. Katrien had explained to him, in detail, the sequence of mental operations meticulously performed by a good translator: first, in-depth reading of the text, including all its various levels, in order to grasp it and reconstruct it with all its connotations; secondly, acceptance of the text's otherness or difference from oneself in order to become intimately familiar with it; thirdly, faithful rendering, in the target language, of all the semantic and stylistic components of the original.

In these three stages, Alberto had recognized the half-conscious sequence of his own feelings and love-inspired actions.

He now had to translate this process into a new objective reality for himself, for both of them. After welcoming her into his own world and being admitted to her intimacy, he had to render her back, in all her integrity, to herself - a Katrien transfigured by a new life, of which he also happily formed part.

In any case, he wished to think of Katrien as a woman with whom he would achieve something - also in professional terms. It was she, as a matter of fact, who suggested a possible solution, which he immediately thought a good idea. After completing her thesis she could work in the graphical studio, extending its services to the areas which precede production: design, copywriting, and multilingual translation. "I've already worked as a 'temp' in a translation company, in Brussels, which had a subsidiary, next door, for pre-press work. There were some thirty people working in-house, including translators, revisers, terminologists, illustrators and graphic experts. In Milan we could do the opposite, that is, start from the existing graphic work to move upstream into copywriting, translation and multilingual editing."

Only forty-eight hours had gone by since they had first met, but Katrien already knew that their first-born male - if they ever had any children - would have a French name. In French-speaking countries, unlike contemporary Italy, the name was still quite common: Jerome.

