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TRANSLATING ITALO CALVINO:
HOW CLOSE READING AND COMPARISONS CAN ILLUMINATE THEORETICAL
PRINCIPLES OF THE TRANSLATION PROCESS

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I have chosen to translate passages from two works by Italo Calvino (1923-1985) into English. The first, a novel, was his first publication, *Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno*, Torino: Einaudi, October 1947. Two English translations of it have been published: the first, *The Path to the Nest of Spiders* by Archibald Colquhoun, London: Jonathan Cape, 1956, and the second, *The Path to the Spiders' Nests* (including the author's 1964 Preface, translated by William Weaver), by Martin McLaughlin, New York: Random House, 1998. It is the first of these that I have used as a comparison with my own translation. Interestingly, Colquhoun's translation was re-published by Penguin in 2009 in a form revised by McLaughlin. Colquhoun (1912-1964) was a leading early translator of modern Italian literature into English. As well as those of Calvino, his translations of Manzoni and Lampedusa were highly successful. He was the first recipient of the PEN Translation prize.

The other passage I have translated comes from *La strada di San Giovanni*, an autobiographical work published posthumously in 1990 by Arnoldo Mondadori Editore, Milano. The English translation, *The Road to San Giovanni* by Tim Parks was published in 1993 by Pantheon Books, New York. Parks (b. 1954) is a prolific author of both fiction and non-fiction and contributor to literary periodicals as well as translator. His translations include works by Moravia, Tabucchi and Leopardi as well as Calvino. He held a professorial post at the University of Milan for many years and published a seminal work on translation, *Translating Style* (London, Washington DC: Cassell 1998).¹ These two works by Calvino, produced respectively at the beginning and at the end of his writing career both concern the symbolic meaning to the protagonist of a path or road, as the titles suggest, and both express something about the author: in *Sentiero*, although a novel, Calvino in his preface to the 1964 edition reflects on his personal identification with the protagonist, Pin.² The second

¹ Jonathan Clarke, 'Without Illusions: Jonathan Clarke Interviews Novelist, Critic and Translator Tim Parks', *Los Angeles Review of Books*, 6 July 2016, Downloaded 3/08/2020 from <https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/without-illusions-jonathan-clarke-interviews-novelist-critic-and-translator-tim-parks/>

² "[...] When I began planning a story about the character of a boy partisan I had known in our group, I did not think it would be longer than the others. Why did it turn into a novel? Because – I realised later – the identification between me and the protagonist had become something more complex. The relationship between the character of the boy Pin and the partisan war corresponded symbolically to the relationship with that war which I myself had come to have. Pin's inferiority, as a child in the face of the grownups' incomprehensible world, corresponds to my own, in the same situation, as a bourgeois. And Pin's audacity, due to his boasted underworld origins which make him feel the accomplice and virtually the superior of any "outlaw", corresponds to the "intellectual" way of mastering the situation, never being amazed, defending oneself from emotion. And so, thanks to these transpositions (which, mind you, I realised only *a posteriori*, a later help to explain to myself what I had written), the story from which my personal viewpoint had been banned became once again *my* story.... [...]"



passage, *Strada*, is an autobiographical work about the author's father who takes the road leading uphill to his horticultural farmland, while the young Calvino's preferred route is downhill to the centre of their town, San Remo on the Ligurian coast of northwest Italy.

Pin's pathway leads to the spiders' nests which hold him in childish awe, but which he tries to destroy in an effort to exert a mastery which he never achieves either when he is playing with other boys his own age or when showing off to adults. The *sentiero* is a safe diversion on his rocky passage towards growing up, and the place where he finally meets an adult who will guide and protect him on the way forward.

Calvino's father, a botanist and committed socialist, is devoted to his horticultural patch and only feels truly alive when he is there.³ Calvino and his brother were compelled to accompany their father up the hill and down again to help carry the baskets of fruit and vegetables, and for them the road to San Giovanni had different associations from those of their father. However, like the *sentiero* for Pin, the *strada* represents for Calvino a stage in his growing-up and early life: the former being his brutal introduction to adulthood as a partisan in the war of liberation, and the latter the beginnings of his adolescent separation from his parents and development of an individual identity. By the depiction of the *strada* as closely associated with his father, and in his preference for the downhill direction towards the centre of town he is implicitly rejecting his father's wish that he follow him into a career in science.

The two works are very different in style, as would be expected: one is a novel and the other an autobiographic account, and one is written at the beginning of Calvino's career and the other at the end of a very long and prolific life as a writer. *Sentiero* is a mixture of stream of consciousness interpolated into a third-person account, while *Strada* is mainly the latter, but with a substantial amount in first-person. The former is a story with quite a lot of dialogue, while the latter is more of a vignette with little dialogue. Both contain a few words of dialect – one of which, *beudo*, is common to both and signifies an important link between each extract. As a translator, I felt it was important to

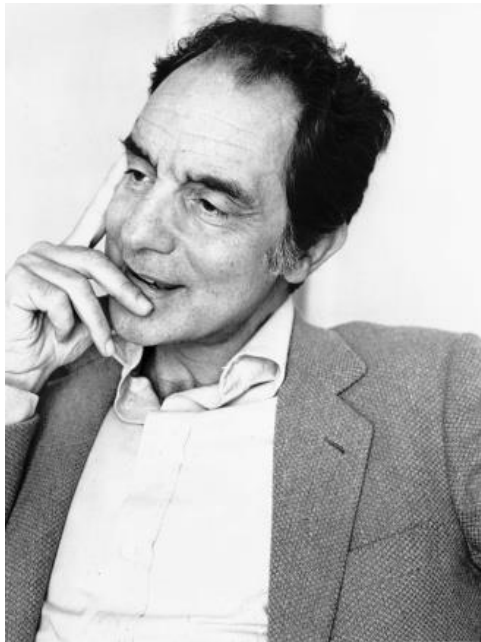
“So the symbolic protagonist of my book was an image of regression: a child. To Pin's childish, jealous gaze, weapons and women were again distant and incomprehensible. What my philosophy exalted, my excess of love dyed with infernal desperation.”

Preface, pp. xx, xxi, Italo Calvino, *The Path to the Nest of Spiders*, trans. Archibald Colquhoun, *Preface* trans. William Weaver, 1976, New York: Ecco Press, 1976.

³ Calvino stated that his father "had been in his youth an anarchist, a follower of Kropotkin [a Russian activist and writer who promoted anarcho-communism] and then a Socialist Reformist" (Calvino, 'Political Autobiography of a Young Man', *Hermit in Paris*, 132.)

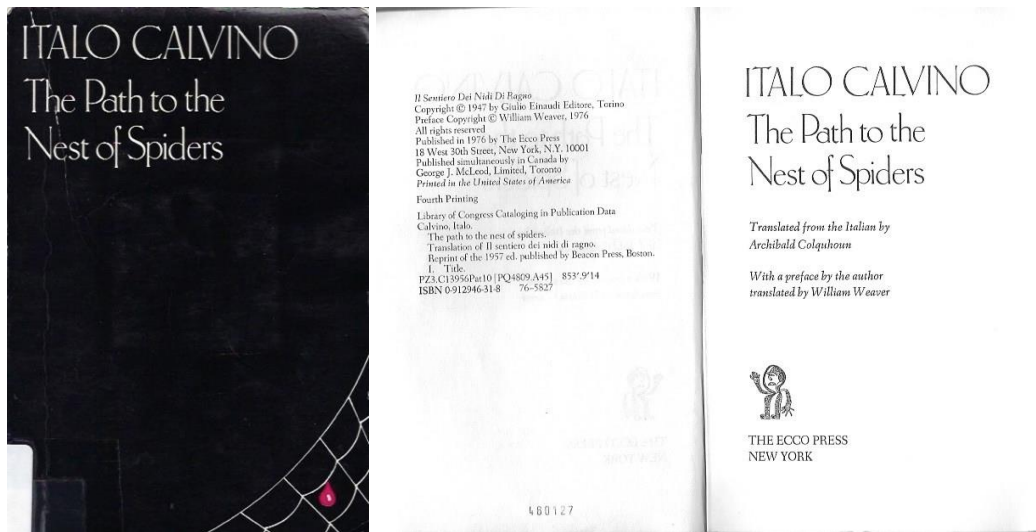


retain this word since it embodies an important aspect not only of the respective pathways of each book, but also because of the link it creates to the land itself, the foothills behind San Remo, home to the Calvino family, and the location of Calvino's involvement with partisan activity during the Nazi occupation of northern Italy towards the end of World War II.



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⁴ Photographer unknown. Public domain. Downloaded from Wikimedia Commons.



La **pistola** rimane a Pin e Pin non la darà a nessuno e non dirà a nessuno che l'ha. Solo farà capire che è dotato d'una forza **terribile** e tutti lo obbediranno. Chi ha una pistola vera dovrebbe fare dei giochi meravigliosi, dei giochi che nessun ragazzo ha fatto mai, ma Pin è un ragazzo che non sa giocare, che non sa prender parte ai giochi né dei **grandi** né dei ragazzi. Pure adesso Pin andrà lontano da tutti e giocherà tutto solo con la sua pistola, farà giochi che nessun altro conosce e nessun altro potrà mai **sapere**.

The **gun** stays with Pin, and Pin won't give it to anyone and he won't tell anyone that he has it. But he will make it clear that he possesses a **fearsome** power and everyone will obey him. If you have a real gun, you should play wonderful games, games that no boy has ever played, but Pin is a boy who doesn't know how to play, who can play neither **adult** games nor games for boys. So now Pin will hide away from everyone and play all by himself with his gun, games that nobody else knows and nobody else will ever **know**.

So Pin decides that he will keep the pistol himself and not give it to anyone or tell anyone that he has it. He'll just hint that he controls a terrible power, and everyone will obey him. Whoever owns a real pistol must be able to play wonderful games, games which no other boy has ever played. But Pin is a boy who does not know how to play games, and cannot take part in the games either of children or grown-ups. So he will go off now, away from everyone, and play with his pistol all on his own, games that no one else knows and no one else can ever learn.



È notte: Pin ha scantonato fuori dal mucchio delle vecchie case, per le stradine che vanno tra orti e scoscendimenti ingombri d'immondizie. Nel buio le reti metalliche che cintano i semenzai gettano una maglia d'ombre sulla terra grigio-lunare; le galline ora dormono in fila sui pali dei pollai e le rane sono tutte fuor d'acqua e fanno cori per tutto il torrente, dalla sorgente alla foce. Chissà cosa succederebbe a sparare a una rana: forse resterebbe solo una bava verde schizzata su qualche pietra.

It's night time: Pin has avoided the cluster of old houses by taking the narrow streets that go between vegetable gardens and the steep slopes cluttered with rubbish. In the dark, the wire nets that surround the seedbeds cast a shadow over the lunar-grey earth; the hens are asleep in rows on their perches in the hen houses, and the frogs are all out of the water and making their choruses all along the stream, from its source to its mouth. Who knows what would happen if you shot a frog: maybe all that would remain would be a green splatter on a stone?

It is dark now. Pin turns out of the huddle of old houses into paths running between vegetable patches and rubbish-pits. The wire-netting around the crops throws a network of grey shadows over the moonlit ground. The hens are now sleeping in rows on their perches in the coops, and the frogs are out of the water and chorusing away along the bed of the whole torrent, from source to mouth. What would happen if he shot at a frog? There'd be nothing left, perhaps, but green slime squashed on the stones.



Pin va per i sentieri che girano intorno al torrente, posti scoscesi dove nessuno coltiva. Ci sono strade che lui solo conosce e che gli altri ragazzi si struggerebbero di sapere: un posto, c'è, dove fanno il nido i ragni, e solo Pin lo sa ed è l'unico in tutta la vallata, forse in tutta la regione: mai nessun ragazzo ha saputo di ragni che facciano il nido, tranne Pin.

Forse un giorno Pin troverà un amico, un vero amico, che capisca e che si possa capire, e allora a quello, solo a quello, mostrerà il posto delle tane dei ragni. È una scorciatoia sassosa che scende al torrente tra due pareti di terra ed erba. Lì, tra l'erba, i ragni fanno delle tane, dei tunnel tappezzati d'un cemento d'erba secca; ma la cosa meravigliosa è che le tane hanno una porticina, pure di quella poltiglia secca d'erba, una porticina tonda che **si può aprire e chiudere**.

Pin goes along the paths that skirt the stream, steep places where nobody cultivates. There are tracks that only he knows and that the other boys would yearn to know: and that there is a place where spiders make their nests, which only Pin knows and he alone in the whole valley, perhaps the whole region, knows: no boy has ever heard of spiders making a nest, except for Pin.

Maybe one day Pin will find a friend, a true friend who understands and can be understood, and then to him, and only to him, will he show the place of the spiders' lairs. It's on a stony shortcut that descends to the stream between two walls of earth and grass. There, in the grass, spiders make dens, tunnels plastered with cemented dry grass; but the wonderful thing is that the dens have a little door, also made of that dried paste of grass, a little round door that **can be opened and closed**.

Pin wanders along the paths which wind along the side of the torrent, stony parts which no one cultivates. Here there are paths which he alone knows and which the other boys would love to be told about. There is a place where spiders make their nests. Only Pin knows it. It's the only one in the whole valley, perhaps in the whole area. No other boy except Pin has ever heard of spiders that make nests.

Perhaps one day Pin will find a friend, a real friend, who understands him and whom he can understand, and then to him, and only to him, will he show the place where the spiders have their lairs. It's on a stony little path which winds down to the torrent between earthy grassy slopes. There, in the grass, the spiders make their nests, in tunnels lined with dry grass. But the wonderful thing is that the nests have tiny doors, also made of dried grass, tiny round doors which can open and shut.



Quando ha fatto qualche grosso dispetto e a furia di ridere il petto gli si è riempito d'una tristezza opaca, Pin vaga tutto solo per i sentieri del fossato e cerca il posto dove fanno la tana i ragni. Con uno stecco lungo **si può arrivare fino in fondo** ad una tana, e infilzare il ragno, un piccolo ragno nero, con dei disegnini grigi come sui vestiti d'estate delle vecchie bigotte. Pin si diverte a disfare le porte delle tane e a infilzare i ragni sugli stecchi, anche a prendere i grilli e a guardarli da vicino sulla loro assurda faccia di cavallo verde, e poi tagliarli a pezzi e fare strani mosaici con le zampe su una pietra liscia.

When he has done some serious mischief followed by furious laughing and his chest is filled with an opaque sadness, Pin would wander all alone along the paths of the ditch and look for the place where the spiders make their dens. **You can push a long stick all the way down a hole**, and skewer the spider, a small black spider with grey patterns like on the summer clothes of pious old ladies. Pin enjoys dismantling the doors of the burrows and skewering the spiders on sticks, and also taking crickets and closely watching their absurd green horse faces, and then cutting them into pieces and making strange mosaics with their legs on a smooth stone.

When Pin has played some particularly cruel joke and has laughed so much that a heavy sadness has finally filled his chest, he wanders all alone along the paths in the little valley, looking for the place where the spiders make their nests. With a long stick he can probe right into the nests and skewer the spider, a small black spider with little grey markings on it, like those on the summer dresses of old village women.

It amuses Pin to break the doors of the nests down and skewer the spiders on sticks, and to catch grasshoppers and gaze close into their little horse-like faces, then cut them up into pieces and make strange designs with their legs on a smooth stone.



Pin è cattivo con le bestie: sono esseri mostruosi e incomprensibili come gli uomini; dev'essere brutto essere una piccola bestia, cioè essere verde e fare la cacca a gocce, e aver sempre paura **che venga un essere umano** come lui, con una enorme faccia piena d'efelidi rosse e nere e con dita capaci di fare a pezzi i grilli.

Pin is wicked with animals: to him they are monstrous and incomprehensible beings, just as men are. It must be tough to be a small creature, that is, to be green and to crap in droplets, and to always be afraid **that a human being like him will come**, with a huge face full of red and black freckles and with fingers capable of tearing crickets apart.

Pin is cruel to animals; to him they are as monstrous and incomprehensible as grown-ups; it must be horrible to be an insect, to be green, and always to be frightened that a human being like him might come along, with a huge face full of red and black freckles and fingers that can pull grasshoppers to bits.



Ora Pin è solo tra le tane dei ragni e la notte è infinita intorno a lui come il coro delle rane. È solo ma ha la pistola con sé, e ora si mette il cinturone con la fondina sul sedere come il tedesco; solo che il tedesco è grasso e a Pin il cinturone può stare a tracolla, come le bandoliere di quei guerrieri che si vedono nei cinema. Adesso si può estrarre la pistola con un grande gesto come si snudasse una spada, e dire anche: «All'assalto, miei prodi!» come fanno i ragazzi quando giocano ai pirati. Ma non si sa che gusto ci provino quei **mocciosi** a dire e a fare quelle cose: Pin dopo aver fatto qualche salto per il prato, con la pistola puntata, mirando alle ombre dei ceppi d'olivo, s'è già annoiato e non sa più cosa fare dell'arma.

Now Pin is alone among the spiders' nests and the night around him is as boundless as the chorus of frogs. He is alone but he has the gun with him, and now he puts on the belt with the holster around the back like the German; only that the German is fat and Pin can wear the belt over his shoulder, like the bandoliers of those warriors you see in the movies. Now you can draw the gun with a great gesture as if you were drawing a sword, and also say: "Charge, my brave men!" like kids do when they play pirates. But who knows what thrill those snotty-nosed kids get when they say and do those things: Pin after having made a few leaps across the grass, with the gun pointed, aiming at the shadows of the olive stumps, has already got bored and no longer knows what to do with the weapon.

Pin is now all alone among the spiders' nests, and around him is night, infinite as the chorus of the frogs. He is alone but he has the pistol with him; now he puts on the belt with its holster to dangle over his bottom like the German; only the German was fat and the belt hangs down on Pin like the bandoliers worn by warriors in the films. Now he can pull the pistol out with a grand gesture as if he were drawing a sword, and shout: "To the assault, my men!" as boys do when they play at pirates. But he cannot understand what pleasure those silly fools get in doing that; Pin, after jumping around on the grass for a time, waving the pistol and aiming it at the olive-trees, is already bored and does not know what to do with the gun next.



I ragni sotterranei in quel momento rodono vermi o si accoppiano i maschi con le femmine emettendo fili di bava: **sono esseri schifosi come gli uomini**, e Pin infila la canna della pistola nell'imboccatura della tana con una voglia di ucciderli. Chissà cosa succederebbe se partisse un colpo, le case sono distanti e nessuno capirebbe da dove viene. Poi spesso i tedeschi e quelli della milizia sparano la notte addosso a chi gira nel coprifuoco.

Pin ha il dito sul grilletto, con la pistola puntata nella tana di un ragno: resistere alla voglia di schiacciare il grilletto è difficile, ma certo la pistola è in sicurezza e Pin non sa come si toglie.

A un tratto lo sparo parte così d'improvviso che Pin non se n'è nemmeno accorto d'aver schiacciato: la pistola fa un balzo indietro nella sua mano, fumante e tutta sporca di terra. Il tunnel della tana è crollato, sopra ci scende una piccola frana di terriccio e l'erba intorno è strinata.

The spiders underground at that moment gnaw on worms, or the males mate with females emitting filaments of slime: **they are disgusting beings like men are**, and Pin puts the barrel of the gun in the mouth of the den, wanting to kill them. But who knows what would happen if a shot went off? - the houses are far away and nobody would understand where it came from. Then, of course, the Germans as well as the militias often shoot at those who move around after curfew at night.

Pin has his finger on the trigger, with the gun pointed at a spider's den: resisting the urge to squeeze the trigger is difficult, but certainly the gun's safety catch is on and Pin doesn't know how to take it off.

Suddenly the gun fires, so suddenly that Pin hadn't even noticed he had squeezed the trigger: the pistol leaps back into his hand, smoking and all covered with dirt. The tunnel of the den has collapsed, a little landslide of soil descends from above it and the grass around it is flattened.

At that moment the spiders underground are gnawing away at flies or coupling together, males and females, giving out little threads of slime; they are as filthy as men are, Pin thinks, and he pushes the barrel of the pistol into the opening of a nest, longing to kill them. What would happen if a shot went off? The houses are some way off and no one would realise where it came from.

Pin now has his finger on the trigger, with the pistol pointed into a spider's nest; it is difficult to resist the longing to press the trigger, but the safety-catch must be on and he does not know how to cope with it.

Then a shot goes off so suddenly that Pin does not even realise he has fired it; the pistol jumps back in his hand, smoking and dirty all over with earth. The tunnel of the nest has collapsed; above it is a little furrow of earth and the grass is singed.



Pin è preso da spavento prima, e poi da gioia: tutto è stato così bello e l'odore della polvere è così buono. Ma la cosa che lo spaventa davvero è che le rane tacciono d'improvviso, e non si sente più niente come se quello sparo avesse ucciso tutta la terra. Poi una rafia, molto distante, ricomincia a cantare, e poi un'altra più vicina, e altre più vicine ancora, finché il coro riprende e a Pin sembra gridino più forte, molto più forte di prima. E dalle case un cane abbaia e una donna si mette a chiamare dalla finestra. Pin non sparerà più perché quei silenzi e quei rumori gli **fanno paura**. Però un'altra notte tornerà e non ci sarà nulla che potrà spaventarlo e allora sparerà tutti i colpi della pistola anche contro i pipistrelli e i gatti che girano a quell'ora intorno ai pollai.

First Pin is seized with fright, and then with joy: everything was so beautiful and the smell of the gunpowder is so good. But the thing that really scares him is that the frogs are suddenly silent and he can no longer hear anything, as if that shot had killed all the earth. Then a single frog, very distant, begins to sing again, and then another one closer, and others closer still, until the chorus resumes and Pin seems to shout louder, much louder than before. And from the houses a dog barks and a woman starts calling from the window. Pin won't shoot anymore because those silences and noises **scare** him. But another night he will come back and there will be nothing that can scare him, and then he will shoot all the gun's shots, and shoot bats and the cats that lurk around the hen houses at that hour.

At first Pin is terrified, then delighted. How lovely it was, how good the powder smells! But then he is terrified again to find the frogs have suddenly all gone silent and not a sound is to be heard, as if that shot had killed off the entire world. Then, very far away, a frog begins to croak again, and another nearer by, and another nearer still, till the chorus starts up again and the croaking seems to Pin louder, much louder, than before. From the houses a dog barks and a woman calls from a window. Pin thinks he won't fire again, for that silence and then those sounds have frightened him. But he'll come back another night and nothing will frighten him then; he'll fire every round in the pistol, also at the bats and the cats prowling round the chicken-coops.



Ora bisogna trovare un posto dove nascondere la pistola: il cavo d'un albero d'ulivo; o meglio: sotterrarla, o meglio ancora scavare una nicchia nella parete erbosa dove sono i nidi di ragno e coprire tutto con terriccio ed erba. Pin scava con le unghie in un punto dove il terriccio è già tutto corroso dalle fitte gallerie dei ragni, ci mette dentro la pistola nella fondina sfilata dal cinturone, e copre tutto con terriccio ed erba, e pezzi di parete di tana, biassicati dalle bocche dei ragni. Poi mette delle pietre in modo che lui solo possa riconoscere il posto, e va via frustando i cespugli con la cinghia del cinturone. La via del ritorno è per i beudi, i piccoli canali sopra il fossato con una stretta linea di pietre per camminarci.

Now to find a place to hide the gun: the hollow of an olive tree; or better: bury it, or better yet dig a niche in the grassy bank where the spider nests are and cover everything with soil and grass. Pin digs with his nails in a place where the soil is already completely eroded by the dense network of spider tunnels, places into it the pistol in the holster which he has removed from the belt, and covers everything with soil and grass, and pieces of den wall, fashioned by the mouths of the spiders. Then he places some stones so that he alone can recognize the place, and he goes away whipping the bushes with the strap of his belt. The way back is by the *beudi*, the small channels above the main ditch which have a narrow line of stones for walking.

Now he must find a place to hide the pistol; in the trunk of an olive-tree; or to bury it would be better; or better still to scoop out a hole in the grassy bank where the spiders' nests are and cover it over with mould and grass. Pin begins scooping away with his hands at a part where the earth is already honeycombed with tunnels made by the spiders, takes the pistol off its belt and puts it into the holster, and covers it all over with mould and grass and bits from the walls of chewed grass made by the spiders. Then he sets off back along the little channels running above the torrent-bed, with narrow lines of stones to walk on.



Pin andando trascina la coda del cinturone nell'acqua della cunetta e fischia per non sentire quel gracidio di rane che sembra s'amplifichi di momento in momento.

Poi ci sono gli orti e le immondizie e le case: e arrivando lì Pin sente delle voci non italiane che parlano. C'è il coprifuoco ma lui spesso gira lo stesso di notte perché è un bambino e le pattuglie non gli dicono niente. Ma Pin questa volta ha paura perché forse quei tedeschi sono lì a cercare chi ha sparato. Vengono verso di lui e Pin vorrebbe scappare, ma quelli già gli gridano qualcosa e lo raggiungono. Pin s'è rattrappito in un gesto di difesa con la cinghia del cinturone come una frusta. Ma ecco che i tedeschi guardano proprio la cinghia del cinturone, voglioso quella; e tutt'a un tratto lo prendono per la collottola e lo portano via. Pin dice moltissime cose: preghiere, lamenti, insulti, ma i tedeschi non capiscono nulla; sono peggio, molto peggio delle guardie municipali.

As he goes, Pin drags the tail of the belt in the water of the gutter and whistles so as not to hear the croaking of the frogs that seems to get louder from moment to moment.

Then there are the vegetable gardens and the rubbish and the houses: and arriving there Pin hears non-Italian voices speaking. There is a curfew, but he often goes about at night just the same because he is a child and the patrols ignore him. But this time Pin is afraid because maybe the Germans are there to look for whoever it was that fired a shot. They come towards him and Pin wants to run away, but already they are shouting something at him as they reach him. Pin shrinks in a defensive gesture with the strap of his belt held like a whip. But the Germans are just looking intently at the strap of the belt; and suddenly they take him by the scruff of the neck and take him away. Pin responds with multitudinous things: pleas, complaints, insults, but the Germans understand nothing; they are worse, much worse than the municipal guards.

As he goes along Pin is dangling the end of the belt in the water and whistling so as not to hear the chorus of frogs which seems to be increasing every moment.

Now he is among the little gardens and the rubbish dumps outside the houses. As he reaches them he hears voices, not talking in Italian. Pin often goes round at night in spite

of the curfew and the patrols don't say anything to him because he's only a child. But this time he is afraid, as it occurs to him that those Germans there may be looking for the person who fired a gun. They come towards him and he tries to run away; but they shout something and catch him up. Pin takes up a position of defence, holding the belt as if it were a whip. But that is what the Germans are looking at, it's the belt they are after; and suddenly they take him by the scruff of the neck and drag him off. Pin talks ceaselessly; begs, complains, insults, but the Germans do not understand any of it; they are worse, much worse, than the municipal guards.



Nel vicolo ci sono addirittura delle pattuglie tedesche e fasciste armate, e della gente presa ed arrestata, anche Miscèl il Francese. Pin viene fatto passare in mezzo salendo per il vicolo. C'è buio; solo in cima ai gradini c'è un punto illuminato da un lampione guercio per l'oscuramento.

Alla luce del lampione guercio, in cima al carruggio, Pin vede il marinaio con la grassa faccia imbestialita che punta un dito contro di lui.

In the alley there are German as well as armed fascist patrols, and some people who have been taken and arrested, including Michel the French. Pin is made to go up the alley through the middle of them. It's dark; except at the top of the steps is there a place illuminated by a single street light, shielded for the blackout.

In the light of the single street light at the top of the alleyway, Pin sees the sailor with his fat, furious face pointing a finger at him.

The alley is crowded with armed German and Fascist patrols, and men they have arrested, including Michel the Frenchy. Pin has to pass through these on his way up the alley. It is very dark; the only light comes from the top of the steps, from a lamp that only lets out a glimmer because of the black-out.

By the light of the glimmer, at the top of the alley, Pin sees the sailor, his fat face distorted with fury, pointing a finger at him.

* * * * *



Fuori è già notte. Il vicolo è deserto, come quando lui è venuto. Le impannate delle botteghe sono chiuse. A ridosso dei muri hanno costruito antischegge di tavole e sacchi di terra.

Pin prende la via del torrente. Gli sembra d'essere tornato alla notte in cui ha rubato la pistola. Ora Pin ha la pistola, ma tutto è lo stesso: è solo al mondo, sempre più solo. Come quella notte il cuore di Pin è pieno d'una domanda sola: che farò?

Outside, night has already fallen. The alley is deserted, like when he came. The shops' shutters are closed. Anti-splinter boards have been erected up against the walls and sandbags piled up.

Pin takes the path by the stream. It seems to him that he has returned to the night he stole the gun. Although Pin now has the gun, everything else is the same: he is alone in the world, more and more alone. Like in that night, Pin's heart is full of one single question: what will I do?

Outside it is already night. The Alley is deserted, like when he came. The shutters of the shops are up. There are shrapnel shelters against the walls, made of planks and sandbags.

Pin takes the path to the river-bed. He feels as if he were back at that night when he stole the pistol. Now he has his pistol, but everything is just as it was; he is alone in all the world, and lonelier than ever. And Pin's heart is overflowing with a single question, as it was that night: "What shall I do?"



Pin cammina piangendo per i beudi. Prima piange in silenzio, poi scoppia in singhiozzi. Non c'è nessuno che gli venga incontro, ora. Nessuno? Una grande ombra umana si profila a una svolta del beudo.

- Cugino!

- Pin!

Questi sono posti magici, dove ogni volta si compie un incantesimo. E anche la pistola è magica, è come una bacchetta fatata. E anche il Cugino è un grande mago, col mitra e il berrettino di lana, che ora gli mette una mano sui capelli e chiede: - Che fai da queste parti, Pin?

- Son venuto a prendere la mia pistola. Guarda. Una pistola marinaia tedesca.

Il Cugino la guarda da vicino.

Pin walks over the *beudi*, crying. First he cries in silence, then breaks into sobs. He is not going to come across anybody now. Not anybody? A great human shadow looms at a turn of the *beudo*.

- Cousin!

- Pin!

These are magical places, where there is enchantment every time. And even the gun is magical; it's like a fairy wand. And Cousin is a great magician as well, with a machine gun and a woollen cap, who now scratches his head and asks: - What are you doing around here, Pin?

- I came to get my gun. Look. A German sailor's pistol.

Cousin looks at it closely.

He walks along the irrigation channels, weeping. First he cries silently then breaks out into loud sobs. There is no one coming towards him now, as there was before. Isn't there? No one? A big shadow is falling on a turn of the channel.

"Cousin!"

"Pin!"

These are enchanted places, where magical things always happen. The pistol is enchanted too, like a magic wand. And Cousin is also like a great magician, with his tommy-gun and his woollen cap, as he puts a hand on Pin's shoulder and asks: "Well, Pin, what are you doing down here?"

"I came to fetch my pistol. Look. A German naval pistol."

Cousin looks at it closely.



- Bella. Una P. 38. **Tienila da conto.**

- E tu che fai qui, Cugino?

Il Cugino sospira, con quella sua aria eternamente rincresciuta, come se fosse sempre in castigo.

- Vado a fare una visita, — dice.

- Questi sono i miei posti, - dice Pin. - Posti fatati. Ci fanno il nido i ragni.

- I ragni fanno il nido, Pin? - chiede il Cugino.

- Fanno il nido solo in questo posto in tutto il mondo, - spiega Pin. - Io sono l'unico a saperlo. Poi è venuto quel fascista di Pelle e **ha distrutto tutto.** Vuoi che ti mostri?

- Fammi vedere, Pin. Nidi di ragni, senti senti.

Pin lo conduce per mano, quella grande mano, soffice e calda, come pane.

- Ecco, vedi, qui c'erano tutte le porte delle gallerie. Quel fascista bastardo ha rotto tutto. Eccone una ancora intera, vedi?

- Beautiful. A P.38. **Keep that in mind.**

- What are you doing here, Cousin?

Cousin sighs, with his air of eternal regret, as if he was always being punished.

- I'm going to pay a visit, - he says.

- These are my places, - says Pin. – enchanted places. Spiders make their nests here.

- Spiders make nests, Pin? - asks Cousin.

- They only make nests in this one place in all the world, - explains Pin. – I'm the only one who knows. Then that fascist from Pelle came and **destroyed everything.** Do you want me to show you?

- Show me, Pin. Spiders' nests, well I never.

Pin leads him by the hand, that big hand, soft and warm, like bread.

- Here, you see, all the tunnel doors were here. That bastard fascist broke everything. Here's one still whole, see?

"Lovely. A P.38. Look after it carefully."

"And you, what are you doing here, Cousin?"

Cousin sighs, with that eternally regretful air of his, as if he were always doing some penance.

"I'm going to pay a visit," he says.

"These places are mine, down here. Magic places. Spiders make their nests here."

"Do spiders make nests, Pin?"

"This is the only place in the whole world where they do," explains Pin, "and I'm the only person who knows it. Then that Fascist Pelle came and mucked everything up. Would you like me to show you?"

"Yes, show me, Pin. Spiders' nests, just fancy."

Pin takes him by his big hand, soft and warm as bread.

"There, you see, here there were lots of doors into their little tunnels. That Fascist swine broke them all up. Here is a complete one still, d'you see?"



Il Cugino s'è accoccolato vicino e aguzza gli occhi nell'oscurità: — Guarda guarda. La porticina che s'apre e si chiude. E dentro la galleria. Va profonda?

- Profondissima, - spiega Pin. - Con erba biascicata tutt'intorno. Il ragno sta in fondo.

- Accendiamoci un fiammifero, — fa il Cugino.

E tutt'e due accoccolati vicini, stanno a vedere che effetto fa la luce del fiammifero all'imboccatura della galleria.

- Dai, buttaci dentro il fiammifero, - dice Pin, -vediamo se esce il ragno.

- Perché, povera bestia? — fa il Cugino. - Non vedi quanti danni hanno già avuto?

- Di', Cugino, credi che li rifaranno, i nidi?

- Se li lasciamo in pace credo di sì, - dice il Cugino.

- Ci torniamo a guardare, poi, un'altra volta?

- Sì, Pin, ci passeremo a dare un'occhiata ogni mese.

Cousin crouches close and squints in the darkness: - Look, look. The little door that opens and closes. And inside the gallery. Does it go deep?

- Very deep, - explains Pin. - With matted grass all around it. The spider is at the bottom.

- Let's light a match, - says Cousin.

And both of them, huddled together, see the effect of the match-light is at the mouth of the tunnel.

- Come on, throw the match in, - says Pin, - let's see if the spider comes out.

- Why, poor creature? - says Cousin. - Can't you see how much damage they've already suffered?

- Say, Cousin, do you think they'll remake the nests?

- If we leave them alone, I think so, - says Cousin.

- Will we go back to look, then, another time?

- Yeah, Pin, we'll have a look every month.



Cousin has knelt down nearby and is peering into the darkness. "Look, look, a little door that opens and shuts. And a tunnel inside. Is it deep?"

"Very deep," explains Pin, "with bits of grass stuck all round the sides. The spider is at the end."

"Let's light a match," says Cousin.

They both kneel down, side by side, watching the mouth of the tunnel by the light of the match.

"Here, throw the match inside," says Pin, "let's see if the spider comes out."

"Why, poor little thing?" says Cousin. "Don't you see how much harm has been done to them already?"

"Say, Cousin, d'you think they'll remake their nests?"

"Yes, I think so, if we leave them in peace."

"Shall we come back another time and see?"

"Yes, Pin, we'll pass by this way every month and have a look."



È bellissimo aver trovato il Cugino che s'interessa ai nidi di ragno.

- Di', Pin.

- Cosa vuoi, Cugino?

- Sai, Pin, ho da dirti una cosa. So che tu queste cose le capisci. Vedi: son già mesi e mesi che non vado con una donna... Tu capisci queste cose, Pin. Senti, m'han detto che tua sorella...

A Pin è tornato il sogghigno; è l'amico dei grandi, lui, capisce queste cose, è orgoglioso di fare questi servizi agli amici, quando gli capita: - **Mondoboia**, Cugino, caschi bene con mia sorella. T'insegno la strada: lo sai Carrugio Lungo? Ben, la porta dopo il fumista, all'ammezzato. Va' tranquillo che per la strada non incontri nessuno. Con lei, piuttosto sta'

attento. Non dirgli chi sei, né che ti mando io. Digli che lavori nella «Todt», che sei qui di passaggio. Ah, Cugino, poi parli tanto male delle donne. Va' là che mia sorella è una brunaccia che a tanti piace.

It is wonderful to have found Cousin and that he is interested in spiders' nests.

- Say, Pin.

- What do you want, Cousin?

- You know, Pin, I have something to tell you. I know you understand these things. You see: I have not been with a woman for months and months ... You understand these things, Pin. Look, they told me your sister ...

Pin started to grin again; he is a friend of grown-ups, he understands these things, is proud to perform these services for friends, when he gets the opportunity: - **Hang it all**, Cousin, you'll be all right with my sister. I'll tell you the way: do you know Long Alley? Right, the next door after the tobacconist, go to the mezzanine. Don't worry, you won't meet anyone on the street. Above all, be careful with her. Don't tell her who you are, or that I sent you. Tell her you work in the "Todt", and that you are passing through. Ah, Cousin, then you'll talk so badly about women. Off you go; my sister is a brunette who is liked by many.

How wonderful it is to have found Cousin, who is interested in spiders' nests.

"Say, Pin."

"Yes, Cousin?"

"Say, Pin, there's something I want to tell you. I know you understand these things. You see, it's months and months since I've been with a woman. . . . You understand these things, Pin. Listen, they say that your sister . . ."

Pin is grinning his old grin; he is the grown-ups' friend, is Pin; yes, he understands these things and is willing to help out his friends about them when he can. "Hell, Cousin, you'll be all right with my sister. I'll show you the way. D'you know Long Alley? Well, it's the door after the carpenter's, about half way up. Don't worry, you won't meet anyone in the street. But be a bit careful with her. Don't say who you are, nor that I sent you. Tell her you work at the 'Todt' and are just passing through. Ha, Cousin, yet you're always talking against women. Go on, then, she's dark, my sister is, and men like her a lot."



Il Cugino abbozza un sorriso con la sua grande faccia sconsolata.

- Grazie, Pin. Sei un amico. Vado e torno.

- **Mondoboia**, Cugino, ci vai con il mitra? Il Cugino si passa un dito sui baffi.

- Vedi, non mi fido a girare disarmato.

A Pin fa ridere vedere come il Cugino è impacciato, in queste cose. -

Piglia la mia pistola. Tè. E lasciami il mitra che gli faccio la guardia.

Il Cugino posa il mitra, intasca la pistola, si toglie il berrettino di lana e intasca anche quello. Ora cerca di **ravviarsi i capelli**, con le dita bagnate di saliva.

- Ti fai bello, Cugino, vuoi far colpo. Fai presto se vuoi trovarla in casa. - Arrivederci, Pin, - dice Cugino, e va

A hint of a smile appears on Cousin's big disconsolate face.

- Thanks, Pin. You are a friend. I am going and I'm coming back.

- **Hang it all**, Cousin, are you going with the machine gun? Cousin runs a finger over his moustache.

- Look, I don't like going unarmed.

It makes Pin laugh to see how clumsy Cousin is in these things.

- Take my gun, you tit! And leave me the machine gun so I can look after it.

Cousin puts down his machine gun, pockets the pistol, takes off his woollen hat and pockets that too. Now he tries to **straighten his hair**, with his fingers wet with saliva.

- You look beautiful, Cousin, you want to impress. Hurry up if you want to find her at home. -
Goodbye, Pin, - says Cousin, and goes.

A slight smile passes over Cousin's big disconsolate features.

"Thank you, Pin. You're a real friend. I'll be back soon."

"God, Cousin, are you taking your tommy-gun with you?"

Cousin passes a finger over his moustaches.

"Well, you see, I don't like going around unarmed."

Cousin seems so embarrassed about this that it makes Pin laugh. "Here, take my pistol. Leave me the tommy-gun and I'll keep guard over it."

Cousin puts down the tommy-gun, thrusts the pistol into his pocket, then takes off his woollen cap and puts that into his pocket too. Then he tries to tidy his hair with two fingers wet with spittle.

"You're making yourself look your best, I see, Cousin. You want to make an impression. Be quick, now, if you want to find her at home."

"See you soon, Pin," says Cousin, and off he goes.



Pin ora è solo nel buio, alle tane dei ragni, con vicino il mitra posato per terra. Ma non è più disperato. Ha trovato Cugino, e Cugino è il grande amico tanto cercato, quello che s'interessa dei nidi di ragni. Ma Cugino è come tutti gli altri grandi, con quella misteriosa voglia di donne, e ora va da sua sorella la Nera e s'abbraccia con lei sul letto sfatto. A pensarci, sarebbe stato più bello che al Cugino non fosse venuta quell'idea, e fossero rimasti a guardare i nidi insieme ancora un po', e poi il Cugino avesse fatto quei suoi discorsi contro le donne, che Pin capiva benissimo e approvava. Invece Cugino è come tutti gli altri grandi, non c'è niente da fare, Pin capisce bene queste cose.

Pin is now alone in the dark, at the spiders' dens, with the machine gun resting on the ground nearby. But he is no longer desperate. He has found Cousin, and Cousin is the much sought after great friend, the one who is interested in spiders' nests. But Cousin is like all the other grown-ups, with that mysterious desire for women, and now he goes to his sister the Black and embraces her on the unmade bed. Thinking about it, it would have been better if that idea hadn't come to Cousin, and they had watched the nests together a little longer, and then Cousin had made his speeches against women, which Pin understood very well and approved of. Instead Cousin is like all the other grown-ups, there is nothing to do about it, Pin understands these things well.

Now Pin is alone in the darkness, by the spiders' nests, with the tommy-gun on the ground near him. But he is no longer in despair. He has found Cousin, and Cousin is the great friend he has sought for so long, the friend who is interested in spiders' nests. Yet Cousin is like all other grown-ups, with that mysterious desire for women, and now he has gone to visit his sister and is embracing her on the unmade

bed. Thinking it over, Pin decides that it would have been nicer if Cousin had not thought of that, and stayed there instead looking at the spiders' nests a little longer, and made his usual remarks against women which Pin approved and understood so perfectly. Instead of which Cousin is like all other grown-ups; there's nothing to be done about it, Pin understands these things.



Degli spari, laggiù, nella città vecchia. Chi sarà? Forse pattuglie che girano. Gli spari, a sentirli così, di notte, danno sempre un senso di paura. Certo è stata un'imprudenza, che il Cugino per una donna sia andato solo in quei posti da fascisti. Pin ora ha paura che caschi in mano di una pattuglia, che trovi la casa di sua sorella piena di tedeschi e che sia preso. Ma gli starebbe bene in fondo, e Pin ne avrebbe gusto: che piacere si può provare ad andare con quella rana pelosa di sua sorella?

There are gunshots over there down in the old town. Who will it be? Maybe patrols going around. The shots, to hear them like that, at night, always created a sense of fear. Certainly it was foolhardy for Cousin to go those places where the fascists are, just for a woman. Pin is now afraid that he will fall into the hands of a patrol, that he will find his sister's house full of Germans and that he will be taken. But it would be good for him in the end, and Pin would relish it: but what pleasure could there be in going with that hairy frog, his sister?

Shots, down in the Old Town. Who can it be? Patrols, perhaps, on their rounds. Shots, at night like that, are always frightening. Cousin was really rather rash to go alone into that nest of Fascists, for a woman. Pin is worried he may fall into the hands of a patrol, or find his sister's room full of Germans and get captured. Deep down, though, Pin feels that would be only just. What pleasure can he get from going with that hairy frog of a sister of his?



Ma se il Cugino fosse preso, Pin rimarrebbe solo, con quel mitra che fa paura, **che non si sa come si maneggia**. Pin spera che il Cugino non sia preso, lo spera con tutte le sue forze, ma non perché il Cugino sia il Grande Amico, non lo è più, è un uomo come tutti gli altri, il Cugino, ma perché è l'ultima persona che gli resti al mondo.

Però c'è ancora molto da aspettare, prima di poter cominciare a pensare se si deve stare in pensiero. Invece ecco un'ombra che s'avvicina, è già lui.

But if Cousin were taken, Pin would be left alone, with that scary machine gun, **that you don't know how to handle**. Pin hopes that Cousin isn't caught, he hopes with all his might, but not because Cousin is the Great Friend, he isn't that any longer, he is a man like everyone else, Cousin, but because he is the last person left in the world for him.

Yet there is still a lot of waiting before having to think about whether you have to worry or not. On the other hand, here is a shadow approaching, it is already him.

But if Cousin is captured, Pin would be all alone, alone with that tommy-gun which frightens him and he doesn't know how to handle. He hopes Cousin won't be captured, he hopes it with all his might, not because Cousin is the Great Friend he was looking for, no, he's not that any more, he's just a man like all the others, but because he is the last person Pin has left in all the world.

He needn't begin worrying, though, for some time, he must wait. Instead of which he now sees a shadow coming nearer, and there he is already.



- Come mai così presto, Cugino, già fatto tutto? Il Cugino scuote la testa con la sua aria sconsolata:
- Sai, m'è venuto schifo e me ne sono andato senza far niente.
- **Mondoboia**, Cugino, schifo, t'è venuto!

Pin è tutto contento. È davvero il Grande Amico, il Cugino.

Il Cugino si rimette il mitra in spalla e restituisce la pistola a Pin. Ora camminano per la campagna e Pin tiene la sua mano in quella soffice e calma del Cugino, in quella gran mano di pane.

- How come you're back so soon, Cousin, already done everything? Cousin shakes his head with his disconsolate air:
- You know, I was disgusted and I got out of there without doing anything.
- **Hang it all**, Cousin, you were disgusted!

Pin is happy. He really is the Great Friend, Cousin.

Cousin puts the machine gun back on his shoulder and returns the pistol to Pin. Now they are walking in the countryside and Pin holds his hand in that soft, soothing hand of Cousin, in that big hand of bread.

"How ever were you so quick, Cousin, have you already done it?"

Cousin shakes his head with that disconsolate air of his.

"No. You know, I got disgusted and came away without doing anything."

"Hell, Cousin, you got disgusted?"

Pin is delighted. He really is the Great Friend, Cousin is, he understands everything; even how filthy women are.

Cousin puts the tommy-gun back on his shoulder and hands the pistol back to Pin.

They walk off into the country, with Pin holding Cousin's big soft calming hand.



Il buio è punteggiato di piccoli chiarori: ci sono grandi voli di lucciole intorno alle siepi.

- Tutte così, le donne, Cugino... - dice Pin.
- Eh... - consente il Cugino. - Ma non in tutti i tempi è così: mia madre...
- Te la ricordi, tu, tua mamma? - chiede Pin.
- Sì, è morta che io avevo quindici anni, - dice Cugino.
- Era brava?
- Sì, - fa il Cugino, - era brava.
- Anche la mia era brava, - dice Pin.
- C'è pieno di lucciole, - dice il Cugino.
- A vederle da vicino, le lucciole, - dice Pin, - sono bestie schifose anche loro, rossicce.
- Sì, - dice il Cugino, - ma viste così sono belle. E continuano a camminare, l'omone e il bambino, nella notte, in mezzo alle lucciole, tenendosi per mano.

The darkness is dotted with small flares: there are large clouds of fireflies around the hedges.

- All this, women, Cousin ... - says Pin.
- Yeah ... - agrees Cousin. - But it's not like this all the time: my mother ...
- Do you remember her, your Mum? - asks Pin.
- Yes, she died when I was fifteen, - says Cousin.
- Was she nice?
- Yes, - says Cousin, - she was nice.
- Mine was nice too, - says Pin.
- It's full of fireflies, - says Cousin.
- To see fireflies up close, - says Pin, - they are also disgusting creatures, reddish.
- Yes, - says Cousin, - but these sights are beautiful. And they continue to walk, the big man and the boy, in the night, in the midst of the fireflies, holding hands.



The darkness is punctured with tiny spots of light; numberless fireflies are flickering over the hedges.

"Filthy creatures, women, Cousin . . ." says Pin.

"All of them . . ." agrees Cousin. "But they weren't always; now my mother . . ."

"Can you remember your mother, then?" asks Pin.

"Yes, she died when I was fifteen," says Cousin.

"Was she nice?"

"Yes," says Cousin, "she was nice."

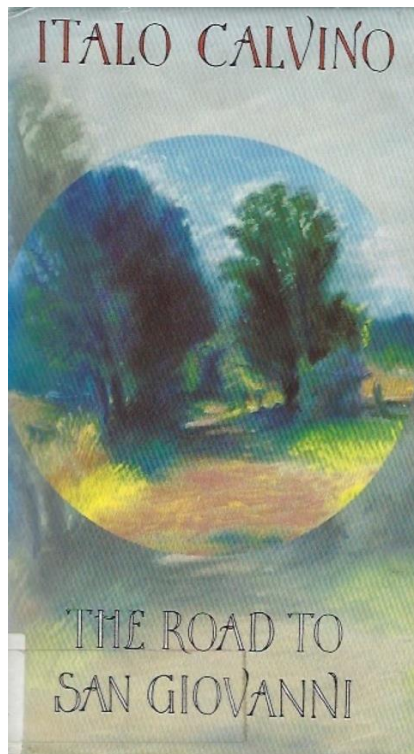
"Mine was nice too," says Pin.

"What a lot of fireflies," says Cousin.


"If you look at them really closely, the fireflies," says Pin, "they're filthy creatures too, reddish."

"Yes," says Cousin, "I've never seen them looking so beautiful."

And they walk on, the big man and the child, into the night, amid the fireflies, holding each other by the hand.



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THE ROAD
TO
SAN GIOVANNI

Italo Calvino
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BY TIM PARKS
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Dovevamo accompagnare nostro padre a San Giovanni a turno, una mattina io e una mattina mio fratello, (non in tempo di scuola, perché allora nostra madre non permetteva che fossimo **distratti**, ma nei mesi delle **vacanze**, proprio quando avremo potuto dormire fino a tardi), e aiutarlo a **portare** a casa le ceste di frutta e di **verdura**. (Parlo di quando eravamo già più **grandi**, giovanetti, e nostro padre vecchio; ma l'età di nostro padre pareva sempre uguale, tra i sessanta e i settanta, un **accanita infaticabile** vecchiaia). Estate e inverno, lui si alzava alle cinque, si vestiva rumorosamente dei suoi panni di **campagna**, **s'allacciava** i gambali, (vestiva sempre pesante, in qualunque stagione portava giacca e gilè, **soprattutto** perché a servivano moltissime tasche per le varie **forbici** da portare e coltelli da innesto e **matasse** di spago o di raffia che **aveva** sempre con se; **solo d'estate al posto della cacciatore** di **fustagno** e del berretto a visiera col passamontagna metteva una **tenuta** di tela gialla sbiadita dei tempi del Messico e un casco coloniale da cacciatore di leoni), entrava in camera nostra per svegliarci, con **bruschi richiami** e scuotendoci per un braccio, poi scendeva le scale con le suole chiodate sui gradini di marmo, girava per la casa **deserta**, (nostra madre s'alzava alle sei, poi nostra nonna, e per ultime la cameriera e la cuoca), apriva le finestre della cucina, **faceva scaldare** il caffelatte per se, la zuppa per il cane, parlava col cane, **preparava** le ceste da portare a San Giovanni vuote, o con dentro sacchi di semente o d'insetticida o di concime, (i rumori ci arrivavano attutiti nella semi coscienza, perché dopo la sveglia di nostro padre eravamo ripiombati di colpo nel sonno), e già apriva l'uscio del beudo, era in strada, tossendo e **scatarrando**, estate e inverno.

We had to go to San Giovanni with our father in turn, one morning me and the next morning my brother (but not in school time, because then our mother did not allow us to be **diverted**, but in the **holiday** months, just when we could otherwise sleep late) and help him **bring** the fruit and **vegetable** baskets home. (I speak of when we were already **older**, adolescents, and our father growing old; but our father's age always seemed the same, between his sixties and seventies, an **obstinate, indefatigable** old age). Summer and winter, he got up at five o'clock, got dressed noisily into his country clothes, **tied** his leggings (he always dressed heavily: in any season he wore jacket and waistcoat, above all because a lot of pockets were needed to carry the various **scissors** and grafting knives and **skeins** of twine or raffia that he always **had** with him; **only in summer instead of the moleskin shooting jacket** and the peaked cap that he wore on top of his balaclava, he wore a faded yellow **canvas safari suit** from his time in Mexico with a pith helmet on his head) came into our room to wake us up with **terse barks** and by shaking us by the arm, then went down the stairs with his hobnail boots on the marble steps, wandered around the **deserted** house (our mother got up at six,



then our grandmother, and lastly the maid and the cook) opened the windows of the kitchen, warmed the coffee for himself, fed the dog, spoke to the dog, prepared the empty baskets to take to San Giovanni, or the ones with sacks of seeds or insecticide or fertilizer in them (the noises came muffled to our semi-consciousness, because after our father's alarm clock went off we fell back to sleep) and he was already opening the door to the *beudo*, he was in the street, coughing and expectorating, summer and winter.

We had to go with my father to San Giovanni, one day me and one day my brother (not during school time, because then Mother wouldn't allow us to be distracted, but in the summer months, just when we could have slept late), to help him carry home the baskets of fruit and greens. (I'm talking about when we were bigger now, teenagers, and Father old; though Father always seemed to be the same age, between sixty and seventy, a dogged, tireless old age.) Summer and winter, he would get up at five, noisily pull on his farming clothes, lace up his leggins (he always dressed heavily, jacket and waistcoat whatever the season, mainly because he needed so many pockets for all the pruning shears and grafting knives and balls of string or raffia he always took with him; except that in summer he'd change his fustian hunting jacket and

peaked-cap-with-attached-balaclava for faded yellow cloth fatigues left over from Mexico days and a colonial lion-hunter's hat), come into our room to wake us up, with gruff shouts and shoulder-shaking, then go downstairs with his hobnail shoes on the marble steps, wander round the empty house (Mother got up at six, then Grandmother, and last of all the maid and the cook), open the kitchen windows, heat up some coffee for himself, slops for the dog, talk to the dog, get together the baskets to be taken to San Giovanni, empty or with bags of seeds or insecticide or fertilizer in them (the noises sounded muffled to us in our semiconscious state, since no sooner had Father woken us up than we had fallen right back to sleep again), and already he would be opening the back door to the *beudo*, was out in the street, coughing and clearing his catarrh, summer and winter.



Al nostro dovere mattutino eravamo riusciti a strappare una tacita dilazione: anziché accompagnarlo **finivamo per raggiungere nostro padre** a San Giovanni, mezz'ora o un'ora dopo, cosicché i suoi passi che s'allontanavano per salita di San Pietro erano il segno che ancora ci restava un **rottame** di sonno cui **aggrapparci**. Ma subito veniva a darci una seconda sveglia nostra madre. «Su, su, è tardi, babbo è già andato da un pezzo!», e apriva le finestre sulle palme **mosse** dal **vento** del mattino, ci tirava le coperte, «Su, su, che babbo vi aspetta per **portare** le ceste!» (No, non è la voce di mia madre che ritorna, in queste pagine **risuonanti** della rumorosa e lontana presenza paterna, ma un suo dominio silenzioso: la sua figura si affaccia tra queste righe, poi subito si ritrae, **resta** nel margine; ecco che è **passata** nella nostra stanza, non l'abbiamo sentita uscire, ed il sonno **è finito** per sempre). Devo alzarmi in fretta, **salire** fino a San Giovanni prima che mio padre si sia messo sulla strada del ritorno, carico.

We managed to quietly delay starting our morning tasks: instead of accompanying him **we would end up meeting our father** in San Giovanni half an hour or an hour later. It meant that the sound of his steps receding as he went up the San Pietro ascent was the sign that we still had a **bit** of sleep to **hold** on to. But straight away our mother came in to give us a second wake-up call. “Come on, get up, it's late, Dad has already been gone a long time!”, and she would open the windows onto the palm trees **moving** in the morning **breeze**, and throw the covers off us, “Come on, get up, Dad is waiting for you to **bring** the baskets!” (No, it is not my mother's voice that comes back to me; these pages **resounding** with the noisy and distant paternal presence, but her silent dominion: her figure appears between the lines, then immediately withdraws, **remains** in the margins; here she **passes** into our room, we haven't heard her go out, and sleep **is gone** forever.) I have to get up in a hurry, **go up** to San Giovanni before my father, laden, is on the way back.



We had managed to extract a tacit reprieve from our morning duty: instead of walking along with Father we would catch up with him in San Giovanni, half an hour or an hour later, so that his footsteps marching away up San Pietro hill told us we still had a scrap of sleep to cling to. But immediately my mother came to wake us up again. "Get up, get up, it's late, Dad went ages ago!" and she would open the windows onto palm trees rustling in the morning wind, pull

the bedclothes off us, "Get up, get up, Dad's waiting for you to carry the baskets!" (No, it's not so much Mother's voice that comes back to me, in these pages echoing with my father's noisy and distant presence, but a silent authority she had: she looks out between these lines, then immediately withdraws, is left in the margin; there, she came into our room and is gone, we didn't hear her leave and our sleep is over forever.) I must get dressed in a hurry, climb up to San Giovanni before my father starts back, laden.



Tornava sempre carico. Era in punto d'onore per lui non fare mai il viaggio a mani vuote. E poiché per San Giovanni non passava la carrozzabile, non c'era altro modo di portar giù i prodotti della campagna che a forza di braccia, (di braccia nostre, perché **le ore dei giornalieri costano e non si possono buttar via**, e le donne quando vanno al mercato sono già cariche della roba da vendere). (C'era stato pure il tempo – ma questo è un ricordo d'infanzia più lontano – del mulattiere Giuà con la moglie Bianca e la mula Bianchina, ma da un pezzo la mula Bianchina era morta, a Giuà era venuta l'ernia, e la vecchia Bianca invece vive ancor oggi mentre scrivo). D'ordinario era verso le nove e mezza o le dieci che mio padre faceva ritorno dalla sua gita mattutina: si sentiva il passo ne beudo, più pesante che all'andata, un colpo alla porta di cucina (non suonava il campanello perché aveva le mani ingombre, o forse più ancora per una specie d'imposizione, di enfasi del suo arrivare carico), e lo si vedeva entrare con **un cento infilato a ogni braccio**, o una sporta, e sulle spalle uno zaino o addirittura una gerla, e la cucina era subito invasa d'insalata e di frutta, troppa sempre per il fabbisogno dei pasti familiari (ora sto parlando dei tempi abbondanza prima della guerra, prima che coltivare il podere diventasse il mezzo quasi esclusivo per procurarsi il necessario), con la disapprovazione di nostra madre, preoccupata sempre che nulla andasse sprecato, nelle cose, nel tempo, negli sforzi.

He always came back laden. It was a point of honour for him to never make the journey empty-handed. And since the vehicular road did not pass through San Giovanni, there was no other way to bring down the products of the countryside than in one's arms, (in *our* arms that is, because **the cost of paying someone by the hour is money that cannot be thrown away**, and the women are already loaded with stuff to sell when they go to the market.) (There had also been the time - but this is a distant childhood memory - of the muleteer Giuà, his wife Bianca and Bianchina the mule, but then Bianchina had been dead for a while, Giuà had developed a hernia, and old Bianca is still alive today while I write). It was usually around half past nine or ten o'clock that my father returned from his morning trip: you could hear his step on the *beudo*, heavier than on the way out, a knock on the kitchen door (he didn't ring the bell because his hands were full, or perhaps even more to make it clear to everyone that he had come back loaded up), and you would see him entering with a **hundred things crammed between his arms**, or a bag, and on his shoulders a backpack or even a hamper as well, and the kitchen was immediately overrun with salad vegetables and fruit, always much more than was needed for family meals (now I'm talking about the abundant times before the war, before the time when cultivating our piece of land became the almost exclusive means of providing for our



needs), with the disapproval of our mother, always concerned that nothing was ever wasted, either goods, time, or effort.

He always came back laden. It was a point of honour for him never to make the trip empty-handed. And since the proper road didn't go up as far as San Giovanni, there was no other way of getting the produce home than to carry it by hand (our hands, that is, since a labourer's time costs money and can't be thrown away, and when the women go to market they are already loaded up with things to sell). (True, there had once been – but this is a memory from earlier infancy – Giuà the muleteer with his wife Bianca and mule Bianchina, but Bianchina the mule had been dead a long time, and Giuà had got a hernia, though old Bianca is still alive today as I write.) Usually it was towards half-past nine or ten that my father got back from his morning trip: you would hear his footsteps

along the *beudo*, heavier than when he set out, a bang on the kitchen door (he didn't ring the bell because he had his hands full, or perhaps more out of a kind of declaration, of emphasis of his coming back laden), and you would see him come in with a basket under each arm, or a hamper, and a haversack on his back or even a pannier, and the kitchen would suddenly be swimming in greens and fruit, there was always more than one family could eat (I'm talking here about the times of plenty, before the war, before tending the land became almost the only means of getting the food we needed), and my mother would disapprove, worried as ever that nothing should be wasted, things, time, energy.



(Che la vita fosse anche spreco, questo mia madre non l'ammetteva: cioè che fosse anche passione. Perciò non usciva mai dal giardino etichettato pianta per pianta, dalla casa tappezzata di bougainvillea, dallo studio col microscopio sotto la campana di vetro e gli erbari. Senza incertezza, ordinata, trasforma le passioni in doveri e ne viveva. Ma cioè che muoveva mio padre ogni mattina su per la strada di San Giovanni – e me giù per la mia via – più che dovere di proprietario operoso, disinteresse d'innovatore di metodi agricoli, - e per me, più che le definizioni di doveri che via via mi sarei imposto -, era passione feroce, dolore a esistere – cosa se non questo poteva spingere lui a arrampicarsi per i gerbidi e i boschi e me a addentrarmi in un labirinto di muri e carta scritta? – confronto disperato con ciò che resta fuori di noi, spreco di sé opposto allo spreco generale del mondo).

(My mother did not acknowledge that life itself was also wastefulness: that is to say, wastefulness was also passion. Due to her passion she never left the garden, labelled plant by plant, or the house covered with bougainvillea, or the study with its microscope under the glass bell and its herbariums. With total certainty and with order, she transforms passions into duties and they become her life. Passion, too, is what moved my father every morning up the road to San Giovanni - and me down my road to the city – it was passion more than the duty of an industrious owner, passion more than the objectivity of an inventor of agricultural methods, - and for me, it was passion more than defined obligations that I would little by little impose on myself - his was a fierce passion, an existential pain - what else but this could push him to climb up to the barren moorland or the woods, or me to penetrate a labyrinth of walls and written paper? – a desperate contest with that which is on the outside of us, a waste of self, as opposed to the general waste of the world.)

(That life is partly waste was something my mother would not accept: I mean that it is partly passion. Hence she never left the garden where every plant was labelled, the house swathed in bougainvillea, the study with its herbariums and the microscope under the glass dome. Always sure of herself, methodical, she transformed passions into duties and lived on those. But what pushed my father up the road to San Giovanni every morning – and me downwards along my own road – was not so much the duty of the hardworking landowner, the altruism of the agricultural innovator – and in my case not so much those definitions of duty that I would

gradually impose on myself – but passion, fierce passion, pain of existence – what else could have forced him to scramble up through woods and wilderness and me to plunge into a labyrinth of walls and printed paper? – desperate confrontation with that which lies outside of ourselves, waste of self set against the waste of the world in general.)



Mio padre non faceva mai risparmio di forze, ma solo di tempo: non evitava la salita più erta se era la più breve. **A San Giovanni da casa nostra si poteva arrivare in molti modi a seconda di quali tratti di mulattiera e scorciatoie e ponti si sceglievano:** il percorso che mio padre seguiva era certamente frutto d'una prolungata esperienza e di miglioramenti e rettifiche successive; ma ormai era diventato come le scale di casa, un seguito di passi da compiersi a occhi chiusi, che nel pensiero occupano solo l'intervallo d'un secondo, come se l'impazienza abolisse lo spazio e la fatica. Bastava pensasse: «Ora vado a San Giovanni» (aveva ricordato a un tratto che una fascia di topinambur non era stata irrigata, che un semenzaio di melanzane doveva già mostrare le prime foglie), e già si sentiva trasportato lì, già la sgridata ai manenti o ai giornalieri che gli ribolliva dentro prorompeva dal petto in una valanga d'impropri a uomini e donne, dove l'oscenità aveva perso ogni calore di complicità ed era divenuta austera e squadrata come un muro di pietra. Questa impazienza, quest'insofferenza a trovarsi altrove che nella sua campagna, lo prendeva talvolta anche a mezzo della giornata, quand'era già disceso dalla solita ispezione mattutina a San Giovanni e s'era cambiato con i vestiti da città, il colletto duro, il gilè con la catena argento, in testa il fez rosso, comprato in Tripolitania, che teneva in casa e in ufficio per riparare la testa calva, e a un tratto, in mezzo ad altre faccende, gli veniva in mente – perché sempre il pensiero che l'occupava era quello – d'un lavoro di San Giovanni non portato a termine o non eseguito come si doveva o d'un operaio che per mancanza d'ordini forse stava in ozio, ed ecco lo vedevamo levarsi dalla scrivania, salire in camera sua, scendere bardato di tutto punto dal casco ai gambali, slegare il cane e prendere per la porta del beudo, magari nell'ora più calda d'un pomeriggio estivo, guardando fisso davanti a sé, in mezzo al sole.

My father never spared his energy, but only time: he didn't avoid the steepest climb if it was the shortest. **You could get to San Giovanni from our home in many ways depending on which stretches of mule track and shortcuts and bridges were chosen:** the path my father followed was certainly the result of prolonged experience and subsequent improvements and adjustments; but by now it had become like the stairs of the house, a series of steps you could take with your eyes closed, which in thought occupies only the interval of a second, as if impatience abolished space and fatigue. It was enough to think: "Now I'm going to San Giovanni" (he had suddenly remembered that a row of Jerusalem artichokes had not been watered, that an eggplant seedbed had already shown the first shoots), and he already felt transported there, already the vituperation towards contractors or to daily



labourers that seethed inside him burst out from his chest in a flood of abuse to men and to women, where obscenity had lost all warmth of complicity and had become as harsh and straight-cornered as a stone wall. This impatience, this intolerance of finding himself anywhere but in his own piece of countryside, sometimes seized him even in the middle of the day, when he had already returned from the usual morning inspection in San Giovanni and had changed into city clothes, hard collar, waistcoat with silver chain, on his head the red fez, bought in Tripolitania, that he wore at home and in the office to cover his bald head, when suddenly, in the midst of other chores, it came to mind - because the thought was always there - of a job in San Giovanni not completed or not carried out properly or of a worker who, for lack of orders, perhaps was idle, and then we would see him get up from his desk, go up to his room, come down fully decked out from helmet to leggings, untie the dog and head to the door to the *beudo*, even in the hottest hour of a summer afternoon, staring straight ahead into the sun.

My father never attempted to save energy, only time: he wouldn't shirk the steeper slope if it was the shorter. Depending on what stretches of mule track you chose, what shortcuts and bridges, there were all kinds of ways of getting from our house to San Giovanni: the route my father took was doubtless the result of long experience and numerous improvements and second thoughts; but by now it had become like the stairs at home, a series of steps you could climb with your eyes closed, taking up barely an instant of mental space, as if impatience had abolished both distance and effort. He only had to think: "Now I'll go to San Giovanni" (he'd suddenly remembered that a strip of Jerusalem artichokes hadn't been watered, that some aubergine seeds should be sprouting their first leaves) and it was as if he'd already been transported there, already he was seething inside with the scolding he was planning to give his workers or day labourers and the words

would be bursting from his breast in an avalanche of insults for men and women alike, insults whose obscenity had lost all the warmth of complicity to become as austere and compact as a stone wall. This impatience, this intolerance at finding himself anywhere but on his own land, would sometimes seize him halfway through the day, when he'd already got back from his regular morning inspection at San Giovanni and changed into his town clothes, his starched collar, the waistcoat with the silver chain, a red fez he had bought in Tripolitania and wore in the house and the office to cover his bald head, and all of a sudden, in the middle of doing something else, he would think - because it was the estate that was always on his mind - of some job that hadn't been finished up at San Giovanni or that hadn't been done properly or of some worker who for lack of instructions might be standing idle, and immediately we would see him get up from his desk, go upstairs to his room, come down all toggled up from hunting hat to leggings, untie the dog and go out by the door to the *beudo*, even in the hottest moments of a summer afternoon, staring straight ahead of him, the sun beating down.



Dal beudo si usciva nella scalinata di Salita San Pietro, a ciottoli e mattoni. **Vi si incontravano i vecchi dell'Ospizio** Giovanni Marsaglia col berretto grigio e le iniziali rosse, (tra loro, si sapeva, erano anche principi russi caduti in rovina, lord che avevano scialacquato patrimoni in Riviera), le monache e le bambine in fila delle «colonie milanese», i parenti dei malati che salivano al Nuovo Ospedale. **L'abitavano di quella regione** – percorrevamo adesso un tratto di carrozzabile – presentava sedimenti diversi: in antico come dappertutto era stata una distesa d'orti custoditi da casolari; poi al volgere del secolo anche il intorno era sorta qualche villa signorile con giardini sventaglianti di palme, come quelle abitata da noi (primo acquisto dei miei genitori al ritorno dall'America), e un'altra un po' più a monte, in stile indiano, tutta guglie e cupole fusiformi, chiamata «Palais d'Agra» (nome per me misterioso finché non lesse *Kim* di Kipling), un'altra ancora adibita a lazzaretto civico, con le persiane sempre chiuse; in seguito le zone residenziale agiate della città si erano disposte altrove e qua s'era stabilito un regno di villette modeste, palazzine familiari con un piccolo terreno coltivato a semenzai e col casotto del pollaio o della conigliera. Così si andava fino al ponte di Baragallo in una periferia mezzo campestre ma già presa d'assalto dalla città, dove alla tracce della vita agricola più antica (un vecchio frantoio d'olive, che scrosciava acqua e muschio sulle ruote arrugginite; una cantina con le tine e torchi, violacea), si affiancavano garages, magazzini di fioristi, segherie, depositi di mattoni, una centrale elettrica tutta vetrate che incombeva illuminata vuota e ronzante nelle mattine avanti l'alba, e là in fondo il massiccio parallelepipedo delle case popolari, primo e unico lotto d'un progettato villaggio, «opera del Regime» iniziata di slancio e rimasta senza seguito, ma sufficiente a ricordare che **la civiltà delle masse già occupava l'Europa.**

From the *beudo* we went out onto the Salita San Pietro, steps of cobblestone and brick. **The old men of the Giovanni Marsaglia Hospice with their grey caps with red initials you met there** (it was thought that amongst them were Russian princes who had fallen on hard times and lords who had squandered their inheritances on the Riviera), the nuns and girls of the “Milanese colonies” in a row, and the relatives of the sick who went to the New Hospital. **They lived there, they were of that region** - we were now travelling on a stretch of the vehicular road – it showed various remains: in ancient times as everywhere else it had been an expanse of gardens watched over by farmhouses; then at the turn of the century a type of stately villa appeared around here, with waving gardens of palm trees, like those inhabited by us (first purchased by my parents on their return from America), and another a little further upstream, in Indian style, all spires and spindle-shaped domes, called “Palais d'Agra” (a name mysterious to me until I read Kipling's *Kim*), another one still used as a civic leper hospital,



with the shutters always closed; later the wealthy residential areas of the city were established elsewhere and here a realm of modest villas had been established, family apartment buildings with a small piece of land with cultivated planting beds and a henhouse or rabbit hutch. So you went up as far as the Baragallo bridge in the half-rural outskirts but already invaded by the city, where there were traces of the earliest agricultural life (an old olive oil mill, where the water rushed and moss grew on rusty wheels; a cellar with the vats and presses, purplish), complemented by garages, florists' warehouses, sawmills, brick stockpiles, a glazed powerhouse which loomed, illuminated and empty and buzzing in the mornings before dawn, and there at the end the massive bulk of the working-class houses, the first and only lot of a planned village, a "work of the Regime" that started from an impulse and remained without a follow-up, but was sufficient to remind one that **Europe is already engaged in the advancement of the masses.**

From the *beudo* you went out onto the brick and cobbled steps of Salita San Pietro. Here you would meet old folks from the Giovanni Mar-

and domes, called "Palais d'Agra" (a name I always found mysterious until I read Kipling's *Kim*), and yet another converted into a municipal quarantine station, its shutters always closed; later on, the wealthy residential districts of the town moved elsewhere and the area was taken over by more modest little houses, homely cottages with small pieces of land used for seedbeds and sheds for chickens or rabbits. So that as far as the Baragallo bridge you were walking through a district that was half rural but already under fierce attack from the town,

saglia Home in their grey caps with red initials (including, as everybody knew, Russian princes fallen upon hard times, lords who had gambled away fortunes on the Riviera) and nuns leading lines of little girls from the holiday camps for the Milanese and people climbing up to visit sick relatives in the New Hospital. The housing in this area – there was a stretch of paved road now – was the result of various stages of sedimentation: like everywhere else the place had once been a stretch of fields watched over by farmhouses; then at the turn of the century a few expensive villas had sprung up, their gardens waving with palms, like the house we lived in (my parents' first purchase on their return from America) and another a little further up the hill, built Indian style, all spindly steeples

the remains of the traditional agricultural life (an old olive mill where water and moss roared on rusted wheels; a winery, stained purple, with vats and presses) rubbing shoulders with garages, flower wholesalers, sawmills, brick storage yards, an electric-power plant full of windows that loomed bright empty and humming in the mornings before dawn, and beyond all these the huge rectangle of the housing project, first and only completed lot of a planned village, an "achievement of the Regime" begun with enthusiasm and left without sequel, but sufficing to remind you that this was already the Europe of the masses.



Al ponte di Baragallo lasciavamo la carrozzabile che continuava verso la Madonna della Costa (là passavamo soltanto quando si andava a trovare lo zio Quirino detto Titin, nella casa ottocentesca dei Calvino che affiorava col vecchio intonaco rosa dalla nuvola grigia degli olivi in cima alla collina, dove erano state le fornaci di mattoni dei miei bisavoli), e si costeggiava il torrente. Qualche cosa era cambiato all'improvviso, e il primo segno era questo: che fino a Baragallo le gente si incontrava era come sempre la gente per la strada che nemmeno ci si guarda; dopo Baragallo incontrandosi tutti si salutavano, anche tra sconosciuti, con una «Bona» ad alta voce o con un'espressione generica di riconoscimento dell'esistenza altrui come: «Andamu andamu» o «Semu careghi, ancoei», o un commento al tempo che fa, «Mi digu ch'a va a cioeve», messaggi di riguardo e amicizia pieni di discrezione, pronunciati com'erano senza fermarsi, quasi tra sé, alzando appena gli occhi. Anche mio padre dopo Baragallo cambiava, smetteva quell'impazienza nervosa nel passo che avevo mostrato fin lì, quella scontentezza nello sgridare il cane, nel dargli strattoni se lo teneva alla catena; ora il suo sguardo correva attorno più sereno, il cane di solito veniva slegato, ed ammonito con parole e fischi e schiocchi più bonari e quasi affettuosi. Questo senso di ritrovarmi in luoghi più raccolti e familiari prendeva me pure, ma sentivo insieme anche il disagio di non potermi più credere il passante anonimo della carrozzabile; di qui in poi ero «u fiu du professù >> sottoposto al giudizio di tutti gli occhi altrui.

At the Baragallo bridge we left the vehicular road that continued towards Madonna della Costa (which we only passed through when we went to visit Uncle Quirino, called Titin, in the nineteenth-century Calvino house that, with its old pink plaster, emerged from the grey cloud of olive trees at the top of the hill, where my great-grandfathers' brick kilns had been), and skirted the stream. Something had changed suddenly, and the first sign was this: that up to Baragallo the people you met were, as always, people on the street who do not even look at each other; after Baragallo, when anyone met, they greeted each other, even strangers, with a "Bona" aloud or with a generic expression of recognition of the existence of others such as: "Andamu andamu" or "Semu careghi, ancoei", or a comment about the weather which my father makes, "Mi digu ch'a va a cioeve" – something like "I think it'll be nice day today", messages of respect and friendship full of discretion, pronounced as they were without stopping, almost to himself, just raising his eyes. Even my father changed after Baragallo, that nervous impatience in his step that I had noticed up to that point



disappeared, the way he would discontentedly scold the dog, how he would tug on its chain if he was on the leash; now his gaze was more serene, the dog was usually untied, and admonished with more kind and almost affectionate words and whistles and clicks of the fingers. I also felt this sense of finding myself in more intimate and familiar places, but I also felt the discomfort of no longer being able to pretend to be that anonymous passer-by of the main road; from here on I was “*u fiu du prufessù*” – “the professor’s son” – and subject to judgment in the eyes of all the others.

At the Baragallo bridge we would leave the road, which went on towards Madonna della Costa (we only walked that way when we went to see Uncle Quirino, nicknamed Titin, in the Calvinos’ eighteenth-century house, its old pink stucco rising from a grey cloud of olive trees on top of the hill where my great-grandparents had once had their brick kilns), and follow the river. Immediately something changed, and the first sign of it was this: that as far as Baragallo, people, like people on suburban streets anywhere, didn’t so much as look at one another, whereas after Baragallo everybody greeted everybody else as they passed by, even people they didn’t know, with a loud “Mornin’,” or

some other generic expression indicating recognition of the existence of their fellow man, like: “Keep it up, keep it up,” or “Aren’t we carrying a lot today,” or a comment on the weather, “Looks like rain to me,” messages of consideration and friendship full of discretion, spoken as they went along, without stopping, almost to themselves, barely raising their eyes. My father too would change after Baragallo; that nervous impatience that had marked his step so far would disappear, likewise his irritation when he shouted at the dog or tugged on the leash; now he would look around more calmly, the dog would usually be let loose and the shouts and whistles and fingersnapping directed its way were more good-natured, even affectionate. This feeling of being back in more isolated, familiar places had its effect on me too, but at the same time I would also feel uneasy at no longer being able to think of myself as the anonymous passerby of the street; from now on I was “one of the professor’s boys,” subjected to the scrutiny of every eye.



Oltre un assito si scontravano strillando i maiali (vista insolita da noi) allevati da una famiglia di piemontesi che avevano messo su una cascina come nei paesi loro. (Già per via avevamo incontrato il carro col vecchio Spirito a cassetta che andava a consegnare i bidoni del latte ai clienti). Dall'altro lato la strada dava sul torrente scosceso, e affacciate a una specie di parapetto-canale c'era la fila delle donne che lavavano i panni. Più in là si poteva scegliere tra due strade, a seconda se si riattraversava o no il torrente su un antico ponte a schiena d'asino. Non passando il ponte, si prendeva per certi tratti di beudo e scorciatoie fiancheggiati fasce coltivate, e si raggiungeva la mulattiera di San Giovanni attraverso una salita a gradini, recente di costruzione (o riattamento) che andava su così diritta ed assoluta ed era da mozzare il fiato. (Dopo quest'ultima guerra, una mano aveva scritto su di un muro in cima alla salita in enormi lettere di catrame una parola laida, a scherno della pazienza e del sudore di chi va su carico, forse per risvegliare un istinto di ribellione, o solo per chiedere conferma alla propria mancanza di speranze). Poi la mulattiera s'addentrava verso San Giovanni per un bel tratto in piano; il mare, era alle nostre spalle; di là dal torrente la riva del Tasciaire era squarciata da un lungo un vasto dirupo, prodotto da un'antica frana, azzurro nella pietra scheggiata e color terra. Da una certa svolta in poi già si vedeva in fondo alla valle aprirsi di sbieco la valletta di San Giovanni, nitida da poterla distinguere fascia per fascia – dove gli olivi non annuvolavano la vista -, e chi vi lavorava, e il fumo dai tetti rossi dei casoni.

On the other side of a wooden wall, pigs crashed about, squealing, (a unusual sight for us) raised by a family of Piedmontese who had set up a farmstead like those in their own villages. (Already on the way we had met old Spirito and his cart, loaded with crates of milk cans that he was going to deliver to his customers). On the other side, the road overlooked the steep-sided stream, and facing a sort of canal embankment there was a row of women washing clothes. Further on, you could choose between two roads, depending on whether or not you crossed the stream on an ancient humpback bridge. Not crossing the bridge, you took certain stretches of *beudo* and shortcuts flanking cultivated strips, and you reached the San Giovanni mule track by climbing some steps, recently built (or refurbished), that were so straight and sunbaked that they took your breath away. (After the last war, someone had painted an obscene word in huge letters of tar on a wall at the top of the ascent, in order to mock the perseverance and sweat of those who went up it carrying a load, perhaps to reawaken an instinct for rebellion, or just to seek confirmation of one's hopelessness). Then the mule track went on towards San Giovanni for a nice flat stretch; the sea was behind us; beyond the stream, the bank of the Tasciaire river was split by an huge, long cliff, caused by an ancient landslide, blue of the



fractured stone and colour of earth. From a certain turn of the path onwards you could just see the small valley of San Giovanni opening up sideways at the bottom of the valley, clear enough to be able to distinguish it strip by strip - where the olive trees were not clouding the view - and people working, and the smoke from the red roofs of the huts.

On the other side of a wooden fence pigs shrieked and fought with each other (an unusual sight in our part of the world), bred by a Piedmontese family who had set up the kind of dairy farm typical of their home country. (On the way up we would already have passed by

old Spirito driving his cart loaded with milk churns for his customers.) Opposite the pig farm the road gave onto a rocky stream, and there would be a row of women leaning over a sort of long raised trough washing clothes. Further on you could choose between two different

paths, depending on whether or not you went back across the river over an ancient hump-backed bridge. If you didn't go over the bridge you followed some ditches and shortcuts running beside strips of farmland until you reached the San Giovanni mule track via a flight of recently built (or restored) steps which climbed so sharp and steep in bright sunlight it took your breath away. (After the last war, someone wrote an obscenity in huge tarred letters on a wall at the top of the steps, in mockery of those climbing up carrying things, perhaps to reawaken an instinct of rebellion, or just seeking confirmation of his own hopelessness.) Then the mule track pushed on toward San Giovanni on the flat for a good while; the sea was behind us; on the other side of the river, the Tasciaire bank was slashed by a huge long gorge, testimony to an old landslide, a splash of blue in the splintered, earth-coloured stone. After rounding one particular bend you'd be able to see the little valley of San Giovanni opening up obliquely from the end of the main valley and

so sharply lit that you could make out each separate strip of land and - where the olives didn't cloud your view - who was working there, and the smoke from the red roofs of the barns.



Questo percorso era preferito per la discesa; salendo eravamo più attratti dall'altro: passato il ponte, la salita era quella di mulattiera di Tasciaire, ripida e soleggiata anch'essa, ma ritorta e varia, e selciata di vecchie pietre logore e sbilenche, da apparire in confronto comoda e familiare. Ci se ne distaccava a un certo punto per inoltrarsi in un lungo beudo che percorreva a mezza costa la vallata, ai piedi di quell'enorme dirupo che si vedeva dall'altra riva. Il beudo era sopraelevato sulle fasce e per non mettere un piede in fallo bisognava guardare bene ai propri passi e talvolta appoggiare una mano al muro storto e panciuto. Il cane di solito trovava la sua via sicura nel canaletto, zampettando nell'acqua. Alberi di fico sporgevano qua e là dalle fasce e un'ombra verde proteggeva il beudo; alcuni casolari ne erano proprio a ridosso e camminando quasi ci si entrava dentro, mescolandosi alle vite di quelle famiglie, tutti sul lavoro dall'alba, donne e uomini e ragazzi a rivoltare la terra della fascia a sordi colpi di «mangaiu» (il bidente a tre becchi) o, sempre col «mangaiu», facendo «girar l'acqua nel loro», cioè abbattendo i rinalzi di terra del beudo e ribadendone altri per condurre il rivolo a serpeggiare in mezzo ai semenzai.

This route was preferred for the descent; going up we were more attracted to the other: after the bridge, the climb was that of the Tasciaire mule track, just as steep and sunny, but twisted and varied, and paved with old worn and lopsided stones, seeming by comparison comfortable and familiar. We broke away from it at a certain point to follow a long *beudo* that ran halfway up the valley, to the foot of that huge cliff that could be seen from the other bank. The *beudo* was raised on to its flank and in order not to trip you had to watch your feet carefully and sometimes place a hand on the crooked, rounded wall. The dog usually found his own safe path in the gutter, scampering through the water. Fig trees protruded here and there from the sides and a green shadow protected the *beudo*; a few farmsteads were right next to it and when walking you almost went into them, mingling with the lives of those families, all at work from dawn, women and men and children turning over the land of the strip with dull blows of the *mangaiu* (the three-pronged hoe) or, always with the *mangaiu*, "turning the water into theirs", that is, by breaking down the earth banks of the *beudo* and building up others so as to direct the rivulet to meander through the middle of the planting beds.



We liked to use this route going down; climbing up we found the other more attractive: having crossed the bridge, you climbed the hill along the Tasciaire mule track, likewise steep and exposed to the sun, but twisting and varied and paved with old, crooked, worn-out stones, so that it seemed painless and homely by comparison. Then you left the track to follow a long *beudo* which ran across the side of the valley halfway up, just below that huge gorge you could see from the other side. The *beudo* was raised over the farmed strips and you had to watch your step so as not to slip and sometimes you had to hang on to the crooked, bulging wall beside. The dog usually found that the safest way to go was in the ditch, padding along in the water. Here and there fig trees rose from the strips on either side and a green shadow shaded the *beudo*; some farmhouses had been built right up against it and walking along you could almost be inside them, mixed up in the lives of those families, all out at work since dawn, women and men and children digging the earth of their strip with dull blows from

their *magain* (a three-pronged fork), or, using their *magain* again to "turn in the water", which meant knocking down the earth bank of the ditch and building other banks to lead the water twisting and turning through the seedbeds.



Più il là il beudo si perdeva in una macchia di canne fitte e fruscianti, ed eravamo arrivati al torrente. Occorreva guardarlo, con salti a zig-zag tra gli scogli bianchi, secondo un disegno a noi ben noto ma sempre soggetto a cambiamenti, quando le giornate piovose ingrossavano la corrente e facevano sparire qualche appoggio. Risalendo dal torrente si tagliava per passaggi privati, tra le fasce, fino a una scorciatoia che era un mezzo torrente anch'essa, e si raggiungeva anche qui la mulattiera di San Giovanni, ma in un punto molto più avanti che per l'altra via.

Further on, the *beudo* was lost in a dense thicket of rustling reeds, and we had reached the stream. It was necessary to watch it, with zigzag jumps between the white rocks, according to a pattern well known to us but always subject to change, when rainy days swelled the current and made some of their footing disappear. Going up from the stream one cut through private tracks between the strips, up to a shortcut which was also half a stream, and you also reached the San Giovanni mule track, but at a point much further on than the other way.

Further on, the *beudo* disappeared into a dense thicket of rustling reeds, and we had reached the river. This had to be forded with a zigzag of jumps across white stepping-stones following a pattern we knew by heart but which could always change when rainy days swelled the river and carried off one of the stones. Climbing up away from the river you cut across between the strips along private paths till you reached a shortcut that was itself half a stream, and as with the other path you now joined the San Giovanni mule track, but at a point much further on.



Mio padre, più ci avvicinavamo a San Giovanni, più era preso da una nuova tensione, che non era solo un ultimo scatto dell'impazienza del trovarsi nel suo luogo che sentiva suo, ma anche come il rimorso d'esserne stato per tante ora lontano, la certezza che in quelle ora qualcosa si fosse perso e guastato, l'urgenza di cancellare tutto quello che nella sua vita non era San Giovanni, e insieme il senso che San Giovanni, non essendo tutto il mondo ma solo un angolo del mondo assediato dal resto, sarebbe stato sempre la sua disperazione.

My father, the closer we got to San Giovanni, the more he was seized by a new tension, which was not only a last surge of the impatience he felt finding himself in the place that he felt was his, but was also like remorse for having been away from it for so many hours, the certainty that during those hours something had been lost and spoiled, the urgency to erase everything that was not San Giovanni from his life, and at the same time the sense that San Giovanni, not being the whole world but only a corner of the world besieged by the rest, would always have been his despair.

The nearer we got to San Giovanni, the more my father would be overcome by a new tension, which wasn't just a last burst of impatience to arrive at the only place he felt was his own, but also a sort of remorse at having been away for so long, his conviction that something must have been lost or have gone wrong during his absence, his urgency to cancel out everything in his life that was not San Giovanni, and at the same time a feeling that since San Giovanni was not the whole world but merely a corner

of the world besieged by the rest, it would always spell despair for him.



Translating *Sentiero* and *Strada*: analysis

My translations of the chosen passages, that commence on Page 4, are set out underneath the original Italian and are followed by the published translations by Colquhoun and Parks. Comparison of my work with the latter has been a very useful exercise as it clearly indicates a number of things: lexical and semantic difficulties and errors, particularly in areas of person, voice, and text organisation, grammatical equivalence and punctuation, difficulties with idioms and dialect, different judgements with respect to substitution and ellipsis, lexical cohesion, and on the need to stray from the original – and if so, on the permissible distance of straying. Examples will be presented of these issues, along with others, and referenced to our standard reference *In Other Words*, Mona Baker, London and New York: Routledge, 2018.

i. Lexical decisions

This is by far the largest category with many instances of variation on every page. I will note here the instances just from the first two pages of each work. Examples of my translation are set out in table form below, with page numbers so that the context of the words can be seen, along with the source text and the published translation.

Page No.	Source word	My chosen equivalent	Colquhoun / Parks choice	Comment on my choice, compared with that of Colquhoun or Parks
4	pistola	gun	pistol	The utterance is of a child, so a more general equivalent chosen. ⁵
4	terribile	fearsome	terrible	Pin's aim is to strike fear in others
4	grandi	adult	grown-ups	Spoken from narrator point of view: <i>grown-ups</i> is preferable if from child's point of view
4	sapere	know	learn	Closer to original
5	notte	night time	dark	Closer to original
5	ha scantonato	has avoided	turns out of	Closer to original. Keep past tense. Colquhoun's choice means something different and I think is probably incorrect.

⁵ Mona Baker, *In Other Words*, 2.3.2.2 (a) p. 25



5	mucchio	cluster	huddle	An English idiom or metaphor is required – either of these choices works.
5	stradine	narrow streets	paths	<i>paths</i> is more economical, but I am reserving <i>path</i> for translating <i>sentiero</i>
5	scoscendimenti ingombri d'immondizie	steep slopes cluttered with rubbish	rubbish-pits	Close to original with no loss of fluency in English. <i>Rubbish pits</i> strays unnecessarily far from the original.
5	semenzai	seedbeds	crops	This word crops up a lot: I used <i>seedbeds</i> and <i>planting beds</i> . <i>Crops</i> less closely equivalent.
5	torrente	stream	torrent	Another frequent word: I use <i>stream</i> consistently. Colquhoun also translates it as <i>riverbed</i> , and Parks as <i>stream</i> (3 times) and <i>river</i> (4 times)
27	distratti	diverted	distracted	Closer to author's intention
27	vacanze	holiday	summer	The author's intention was to indicate the months when children were not at school – i.e. <i>on holiday</i> . No need to choose a word further away from this. (Perhaps these choices reflect a difference between NZ and English usage.)
27	portare	bring	carry	Equally correct translations of <i>portare</i> but <i>bring</i> implies <i>carry to a destination</i> , which is the case in this instance.
27	verdura	vegetables	greens	<i>Verdure</i> means <i>vegetables in general</i> , (closer to author's intention) while <i>greens</i> means only <i>leafy vegetables</i> .
27	grandi	older	bigger	Both correct but <i>bigger</i> closer to original
27	accanita	obstinate	dogged	Equally valid alternatives.
27	infaticabile	indefatigable	tireless	Equally valid alternatives.
27	campagna	country	farming	Both words work well. But Parks uses <i>town</i> to apply to the other set of clothes later on, so <i>country</i> would be more consistent with that.
27	s'allacciava	tied	laced	Equally valid alternatives.
27	soprattutto	above all	mainly	Closer to original.
27	forbici	scissors	pruning shears	Closer to original. <i>Pruning shears</i> would be <i>cesoie</i> or <i>forbici per potatura</i>
27	matasse	skeins	balls	Equally valid alternatives.
27	aveva	had	took	Equally valid alternatives.



27	fustagno	moleskin	fustian	<i>fustian</i> a very uncommon word in English. <i>Moleskin</i> is a common type of fustian, as is <i>corduroy</i> , and these words are well-known so would be preferable choices.
26	cacciatora	shooting jacket	hunting jacket	<i>Hunting jacket</i> is closer.
27	tenuta	safari suit	cloth fatigues	Reflects NZ speech: <i>fatigues</i> not used in this sense in NZ.
27	bruschi richiami	terse barks	gruff shouts	<i>Terse</i> closer in meaning to <i>brusque</i> which is the exact English equivalent. <i>rischiamo</i> or <i>call</i> could be replaced with either <i>bark</i> or <i>shout</i> – depending on what has the best collocation equivalence with the previous word.
27	deserta	deserted	empty	Closer to original.
27	faceva scaldare	warmed	heat up	Equally valid alternatives.
27	preparava	prepared	got together	Closer to original.
27	scatarrando	expectorating	clearing his catarrh	Closer to original.
28	rottame	a bit	a scrap	<i>scrap</i> closer to original.
28	aggrapparci	hold on to	cling on to	Equally valid alternatives.
28	mosse	moving	rustling	<i>moving</i> closer to original, but <i>rustling</i> more evocative.
28	vento	breeze	wind	<i>Breeze</i> more evocative, but <i>wind</i> closer to original.
28	portare	bring	carry	As before – we are both consistent!
28	risuonanti	resounding	echoing	Equally valid alternatives.
28	resta	remains	is left	Equally valid alternatives, but <i>is left</i> also carries the connotation that she is in the margin by agency of the writer.
28	è passata	passes	came	<i>came into</i> is a preferable collocation than <i>passes into</i> .
28	è finito	is gone	is lost	Equally valid alternatives.

There are certainly many instances of varied lexical choices just in these four pages, just as there are in the rest of them. Some choices are equally valid, but – though often a matter of opinion – one or other is preferable. Where the **propositional meanings** differ, only one is correct: for example



torrent is not a correct equivalent for *torrente* instead of *stream* which is correct.⁶ A *torrent* in English can only be a fast, rushing body of water, and there is no indication that this is the case in the source text. Another example of false propositional equivalence is the use of *dark* for *notte* instead of *night time*.

Where different choices are made in terms of **expressive meaning**, neither can be said to be incorrect, though one may be felt to be preferable to the other. Examples of this type of variation include *obstinate* or *dogged* for *accanita*, or the use of *indefatigable* or *tireless* for *infaticabile*.

Presupposed meaning arising from co-occurrence restrictions include **collocational restrictions**.⁷ Where I have used *terse* for *bruschi*, I am almost compelled to follow it with *barks*, whereas when Parks uses *gruff* for *bruschi*, he could have happily followed it with several different options: *shouts*, *barks* or *bellows* for instance.

Strategies employed – Mona Baker’s list:

- a) Translation by a more general word: pistola / **gun** / pistol
- b) Translation by a more neutral/less expressive word: s’allacciava / **tied** / laced
- c) Translation by cultural substitution: tenuta / **safari suit** / cloth fatigues
- d) Translation using an explanation
e.g. le ore dei **giornalieri** costano e non si possono buttar via / the cost paying
somebody by the hour is money that cannot be thrown away (p. 31)
- e) Translation by a paraphrase using a related word
e.g. un **cento** infilato a ogni braccio / hundred things crammed between his arms/ with
a basket under each arm (p. 31)
- f) Translation by omission
e.g. la **civiltà delle masse già occupava l’Europa** / Europe is already engaged in the
advancement of the masses / this was already the **Europe of the masses** (pp. 36-37)

ii. Equivalence above word level

⁶ Baker, 2.2.1, p. 12

⁷ Baker, 2.2.2, p. 13



There are a number of instances in these translations where a phrase with collocated words in the source language is translated with phrases that also contain words that are conventionally collocated in the target language. The tension between accuracy and naturalness is the most likely cause of the different choices that have been made in my translation and that of Parks. As a general rule, in my opinion, I have tended to err on the side of accuracy or closeness to the source text, while Parks errs on the side of naturalness. Naturalness, however, can be influenced by the environment of the translator or reader: what may seem natural speech to an Englishman may not seem as natural to the ears of a New Zealander.⁸

Examples:

- i. **La pistola rimane a Pin e Pin non la darà a nessuno** / **The gun stays with Pin, and Pin won't give it to anyone** / **So Pin decides that he will keep the pistol himself and not give it to anyone**
(p.4)
- ii. **che non sa prender parte ai giochi né dei grandi né dei ragazzi** / **who can play neither adult games nor games for boys** / **and cannot take part either in the games of children or grown-ups**
(p.4)
- iii. **Finivamo per raggiungere** nostro padre / **we would end up meeting** our father / we **would catch up with** him (p. 29)
- iv. **Devo alzarmi** / **I have to get up** / **I must get dressed** (p. 29)

In example (i), my translation sticks closer to the source, but more importantly reflects the thought of Pin, his stream of consciousness – reflecting a child saying “it’s *my* gun!”. On the other hand, Parks’ translation is a third-person description of what Pin is doing – i.e. “Pin decides”. So although Park’s version is more like natural English speech, it misses this thread of Pin’s consciousness which weaves in and out of the whole novel – ignoring an important layer in Calvino’s writing.

⁸ Baker, 3.1.2, p. 58



In example (ii), in the **first clause** I recognise the Italian idiomatic use *sapere* to mean *know how to* or *able to* and I find economy by rendering *prender parte ai giochi* as *play*. In the **second clause** I stick close to the source by translating *né ... né* as *neither* though this requires *can* rather than *cannot*. Parks follows the source closely in the **first clause**, then moves away slightly from it in the **second clause**. His use of *cannot* lacks the implication that the reason for Pin's not being able to play is because he *doesn't know how to*, which, though a slight difference, is important in my opinion. There seems to be no advantage in reversing the order of *children* and *grown-ups*: it doesn't increase the naturalness of the translation – they seem equally natural to me.

In example (iii), neither translation lacks naturalness: mine is closer to the source, but Parks' is more economical.

In example (iv), both are natural: mine reflects the source exactly while Parks strays a good step away, to no particular advantage in my opinion.

iii. Idioms and Fixed Expressions

To the inexperienced translator, idioms and fixed expressions can be nasty traps. I fell into on such trap on p. 17: *Tienila da conto.* / **Keep that in mind.** / *Look after it carefully.* There were warning bells over the choice *Keep that in mind* but I ignored them – Cousin was commenting on Pin's gun which he identified as a P.38, with the advice that Pin should bear in mind that it was a P.38. On reflection, this didn't make an awful lot of sense, and the alternative translation of *tenere da conto, to carefully look after*, used by Colquhoun is obviously the correct interpretation. This error might have been avoided with more consideration of the context in which the clause appears. Mona Baker points out that translation of idioms and fixed expressions causes difficulties particularly when there is no equivalent in the target language, where the context of use differs in the target language, or when in the source the expression is used for both its literal and idiomatic senses and in the target language one or other is not appropriate.⁹ In particular, she points out that the context of the idiom plays a very

⁹ Baker, 3.2.3 p. 73.



important part, and this is certainly the case in my own example. The cause of the problem with *tienila da conto* is that there are the two common English equivalents, and only reference to the context can guide the decision as to which is the correct one to use.

The idiom *ravviarsi I capelli* resulted in different choices for the translators: *straighten his hair* and *tidy his hair* (p. 20). The latter is possibly slightly more natural-sounding.

An issue appears with *mocciosi*, meaning *snotty*, from the noun *moccio* or *snot*, *mucus*, *bogey* (p. 9). Pin is disparaging other boys when he refers to them as *mocciosi*, and the my translation of *snotty-nosed kids* fits perfectly with both the context and natural English. However, Colquhoun chooses *silly fools* which seems less natural and an unnecessary step away from the source.

There is a case of the unnecessary introduction of an English idiom for translating a non-idiom in the source: *ha distrutto tutto* / *has destroyed everything* / *mucked everything up* (p. 17). I guess that Colquhoun intended to mirror the more likely vocabulary of the boy – responding to context.

The other problem with idiom that I encountered in these translations was with Pin's habitual swear-word *Mondoboia!*. The word does not appear in dictionaries, but *mondo* translates as *world* and *boia* as *hangman*, *executioner*, or *scoundrel*. The context tells us it is a mild curse, such as *damn!* or *blast!* Because of the connection of *boia* to the hangman and *mondo* all the world, I chose *Hang it all!* as my translation as it nicely connects a mild English curse to both of these. (pp. 19, 20, 24) Colquhoun is not consistent: he uses *Hell* (pp. 19, 24), and *God* (p. 20). Elsewhere in the novel he uses *By God*, *God help him*, and either *God* or *Hell* as number of times. I was unable to see any pattern in these choices – they seemed arbitrary – but I suspect a feeling for naturalness determined the choices.

iv. Grammatical equivalence



Not many problems of grammatical equivalence appeared in this translation exercise. A few differences in tense choices are present our extracts from *Sentiero* but none in that from *Strada*:¹⁰

- i. Quei rumori gli **fanno paura** / those noises **scare** him / and then those sounds **have frightened** him (p. 11). The source is present tense, I follow this, but Colquhoun switches to past perfect, adding *and then* to complement his switch. The difference between the two is that in my choice the being afraid is continuing, while Colquhoun's reading is that Pin's being afraid is "completed". The difference in effect is extremely slight.
- ii. Che **venga** un essere umano / that a human being like him **will come** / that a human being like him **might come along** (p. 8). The Italian verb is the present subjunctive; my choice was for the future tense; *might* is a modal verb followed (as usual) by the infinitive but without *to*. Both translations seem natural.
- iii. Ora va a sua sorella / now he goes to his sister / now he has gone to visit his sister (p. 21). The source is present tense, as is my choice – though present continuous (*is going*) would also work – while Colquhoun has chosen the past tense, as well as adding *to visit*. The latter choice enhances the naturalness of the sentence while staying true to the source even though the tense has been changed.

There are a few changes in voice as well:

- i. che si può aprire e chiudere / which can **be opened and shut** / which **can open and shut** (p. 6). Mine is passive, Colquhoun's is active – the Italian source, however, is ambiguous as to voice, so both are acceptable alternatives.
- ii. **si può arrivare** fino in fondo / **you can push** a long stick all the way / **he can probe** right into (p. 7). This example matches (ii) exactly.
- iii. che non si sa come **si maneggia** / that **you don't know** how to handle / **he doesn't know** how to handle (p. 23) This situation appears frequently in these translations. The passive voice is used when Pin's thoughts are expressed, as in this case, and I have used the English form *you* as equivalent to *one* as the subject, trying to be consistent with this approach. Colquhoun is also consistent, but his choice is to step outside of Pin's stream of consciousness and to use the active voice in third person.

¹⁰ Baker, 4.2.4, p.110



- iv. questo percorso **era preferito** / this route **was preferred** / **we liked to use this route** (p. 42). In this long sentence, Calvino himself swaps between active and passive voice: I follow him in this, while Parks used active voice for the first two clauses, swapping to passive voice for the third: la salita **era quella** di mulattiera / the climb **was that** of the mule track / **you climbed** the hill along the mule track. This latter is certainly preferable for its naturalness: by comparison, my choice is clunky.

Baker, in this chapter, points out that word order is extremely important in translation “because it plays a major role in maintaining a coherent point of view”.¹¹ In the following chapter, she discusses three possibilities facing translators when the thematic patterning in the source language cannot easily be matched in the target language: (a) the patterning can be preserved without sacrificing clarity or naturalness, (b) the thematic patterning of the source has to be abandoned because of the way it distorts the target text, or (c) develop a thematic pattern that develops logically from a clause placed at the beginning.¹²

There were no significant problems encountered with these translations, though couple of minor examples illustrate this structural problem:

- i. **Mio padre**, più ci avvicinavamo a San Giovanni, **più era preso** da una nuova tensione / **My father**, the closer we got to San Giovanni, **the more he was seized** by a new tension / **The nearer we got to San Giovanni**, the more **my father would be overcome** by a new tension (p. 44). Parks’ choice here is much more natural and fluent than mine which follows closely the Italian. My version is a nice illustration of the way the source language patterning distorts the target language, and that to fix the problem, the initial clause should be the clause that comes first – *first* ‘we get nearer to San Giovanni’, *then* ‘my father becomes seized with a new tension’. Only a minor change in position, but this approach delivers the naturalness that is sought after.
- ii. In the same short passage:
- l’urgenza di cancellare tutto quello che **nella sua vita non era San Giovanni** / the urgency to erase everything **that was not San Giovanni from his life** / his urgency to cancel out everything **in his life that was not San Giovanni** (p. 45). In this instance, Parks’ word

¹¹ Baker, 4.3, p. 123.

¹² Baker, 5.1.1.2, pp. 140-144.



order varies only slightly from the Italian source, while mine changes significantly. I'm not clear why I made this change, but I now believe Parks' version is better.

v. Thematic and information structures

Italian sentences can be much longer than English ones and the rules of punctuation are not always the same. Written speech is the major instance of the latter, and here there was a major difference in the two translations: I kept to the Italian punctuation while Colquhoun adapted it to the English conventions (that are not, however, always followed in fiction and poetry).

i. An example of a long sentence restructured:

Chi ha una pistola vera dovrebbe fare dei giochi meravigliosi, dei giochi che nessun ragazzo ha fatto mai, ma Pin è un ragazzo che non sa giocare, che non sa prender parte ai giochi né dei grandi né dei ragazzi. (p.4)

(Colquhoun) Whoever owns a real pistol must be able to play wonderful games, games which no other boy has ever played. But Pin is a boy who does not know how to play games, and cannot take part either in the games of children or grown-ups.

ii. Another:

Ci sono strade che lui solo conosce e che gli altri ragazzi si struggerebbero di sapere: un posto, c'è, dove fanno il nido i ragni, e solo Pin lo sa ed è l'unico in tutta la vallata, forse in tutta la regione: mai nessun ragazzo ha saputo di ragni che facciano il nido, tranne Pin. (p.6)

(Colquhoun) Here there are paths which he alone knows and which the other boys would love to be told about. There is a place where spiders make their nests. Only Pin knows it. It's the only one in the whole valley, perhaps in the whole area. No other boy except Pin has ever heard of spiders that make nests.

(My translation – single sentence construction maintained) There are tracks that only he knows and that the other boys would yearn to know: and that there is a place where spiders make their nests, which only Pin knows and he alone in the whole valley,



perhaps the whole region, knows: no boy has ever heard of spiders making a nest, except for Pin.

This is another example of stream of consciousness in the Italian source text which I think is lost in Colquhoun's translation, though it is perhaps in more natural-sounding English. He has given more weight to each element of the sentence, or as Baker puts it, they are more marked. It is an illustration of her point that "meaning, choice and markedness are interrelated concepts".¹³ My choice to retain the long sentence of the source keeps the stream of consciousness going, presenting Pin's child-like thinking and character which is a crucial feature of the whole novel. Parks' decision to give weight to each clause by separating them into sentences of their own is to support what Calvino chose to title the novel: this he does successfully, but he loses this reinforcement of the charm of the Pin character and the element of fable in the writing.

The setting out and punctuation of speech, where conventions differ between source and target languages creates the need for decisions on the part of the translator. In this exercise, Colquhoun and I made completely different decisions, while Parks and I made decisions that were very similar. There is, however, a difference in the amount of speech contained in the works.

i. Example from *Sentiero*: (p. 18)

Il Cugino s'è accoccolato vicino e aguzza gli occhi nell'oscurità: - Guarda guarda.

La porticina che s'apre e si chiude. E dentro la galleria. Va profonda?

- Profondissima, - spiega Pin. - Con erba biascicata tutt'intorno. Il ragno sta in fondo.

- Accendiamoci un fiammifero, - fa il Cugino.

[...]

- Dai, buttaci dentro il fiammifero, - dice Pin, - vediamo se esce il ragno.

- Perché, povera bestia? - fa il Cugino. - Non vedi quanti danni hanno già avuto?

¹³ Baker, 5.1.1.3, p. 144.



(My translation) Cousin crouches close and squints in the darkness: - Look, look. The little door that opens and closes. And inside the gallery. Does it go deep?
- Very deep, - explains Pin. - With matted grass all around it. The spider is at the bottom.
- Let's light a match, - says Cousin.
[...]
- Come on, throw the match in, - says Pin, - let's see if the spider comes out.
- Why, poor creature? - says Cousin. - Can't you see how much damage they've already suffered?

(Colquhoun) Cousin has knelt down nearby and is peering into the darkness. "Look, look, a little door that opens and shuts. And a tunnel inside. Is it deep?"
"Very deep," explains Pin, "with bits of grass stuck all round the sides. The spider is at the end."
"Let's light a match," says Cousin.
[...]
"Here, throw the match inside," says Pin, "let's see if the spider comes out."
"Why, poor little thing?" says Cousin. "Don't you see how much harm has been done to them already?"

ii. Example from *Strada*: (p. 29)

Ma subito veniva a darci una seconda sveglia nostra madre. «Su, su, è tardi, babbo è già andato da un pezzo!», e apriva le finestre sulle palme mosse dal vento del mattino, ci tirava le coperte, «Su, su, che babbo vi aspetta per portare le ceste!»

(My translation) But straight away our mother came in to give us a second wake-up call. "Come on, get up, it's late, Dad has already been gone a long time!", and she would open the windows onto the palm trees moving in the morning breeze, and throw the covers off us, "Come on, get up, Dad is waiting for you to bring the baskets!"

(Parks' translation) But immediately my mother came in to wake us up again. "Get up, get up, it's late, Dad went ages ago!" and she would open the windows onto palm trees rustling in the morning wind, pull the bedclothes off us, "Get up, get up. Dad's waiting for you to carry the baskets!"

In the first example, the source punctuation is very different from the English convention, while that in the second example is almost the same – just the difference



in « » / “ ”. On reflection, retaining the Italian structure of the first example in my translation was not the wise choice as there is some reduction in readability compared with Colquhoun’s version. In the second example, the choice was easy, and both Parks and I agree.

Baker has a number of suggested strategies that translators can choose to overcome problems caused by the tensions between syntactic and communicative functions.¹⁴ There are examples in our translation exercise of all of these. They include voice change (for examples see above, p. 53-54), change of verb – replacing a verb with one that can be “used in a different syntactic configuration”, nominalisation – “replacing a verbal form with a nominal one”, and extraposition – “changing the position of the entire clause in the sentence”.¹⁵

- i. Example of verb change: Ecco che **è passata** nella nostra stanza / here she **passes** into our room / here she **came** into our room. (p. 29) The switch Colquhoun makes of *came* for *passed(s)* overcomes the collocation difficulty caused by *nella*, meaning *in* or *into* – *pass* in English is usually followed by *through* or *by*.
- ii. Example of nominalisation: **L’abitavano** di quella regione / They **lived** there, they were of that region / The **housing** in this area (p. 36). Parks very neatly introduces the subject of the next few sentences which concern the houses and buildings in the area by changing the verb *abitavano* (3rd person plural of *abitare*, to live or inhabit) to the noun *housing*, (*lived* -> *were housed* -> *housing*) simplifying a rather clumsy construction in the source, which also was followed in my translation.
- iii. The strategy of changing the order of clauses in a sentence was employed by Parks at least once in our exercise. There may be a slight advantage in his choice in terms of clarity and naturalness, but this may not be enough to justify the degree to which he strays from the source: (p. 34)

A San Giovanni da casa nostra si poteva arrivare in molti modi **a seconda di** quali tratti di mulattiera e scorciatoie e ponti si sceglievano:

¹⁴ Baker, 5.2.4, p. 179.

¹⁵ Baker, pp. 179-184.



(My translation) You could get to San Giovanni from our home in many ways **depending on** which stretches of mule track and shortcuts and bridges were chosen:

(Parks' translation) **Depending on** what stretches of mule track you chose, what short-cuts and bridges, there were all kinds of ways of getting from our house to San Giovanni:

vi. Textual equivalence: cohesion

Baker summarises cohesion as “the network of lexical, grammatical and other relations that provide links between various parts of a text”.¹⁶ She discusses the five main cohesive devices identified by Halliday and Hasan, reference, substitution, ellipsis, conjunction and lexical cohesion.¹⁷ Here I draw a blank: I have been able to find very few, if any, examples of these devices in our translations. Perhaps the reason is that the Italian and the English of these extracts and translation are very closely aligned, or perhaps I have been unable to discern them. Examples in the previous part of this analysis have been found by examining all the places where my translation differs from either Colquhoun or Parks: perhaps this method is inadequate in showing up examples of cohesive devices. Perhaps a couple of examples:

i. A problem of reference:¹⁸

Vi incontravano i vecchi dell'Ospizio / The old men [...] **met** you there / Here **you would meet** the old folks (p. 36)

This problem arose because of the difficulty in identifying the subject of the verb *incontravano* – *to meet, present tense, 3rd person plural*. I thought that the verb referred to *the old men*, i.e. its subject was *I vecchi*, where *the old men* (subject) *met* (verb) *you* (object). However, Parks (probably correctly) identifies the verb reference was to *you*, an impersonal pronoun employed to indicate passive voice,

¹⁶ Baker, Chapter 6, p. 195.

¹⁷ Michael A. K. Halligan and Ruqaiya Hasan, *Cohesion in English*, London: Longman, 1976.

¹⁸ Baker 6.1, P. 194.



you (subject) *would meet* (verb) *the old folks* (object). Overall, there is a minor difference in meaning, but it is inconsequential.

ii. Example of omissions: ¹⁹

Dev'essere brutto essere una piccola bestia, **cioè** essere vede **e fare la cacca a gocce**, e aver sempre paura (p. 8)

(My translation) It must be tough to be a small creature, **that is**, to be green **and to crap in droplets**, and to always be afraid

(Colquhoun) it must be horrible to be an insect, **to be green**, **and** and always to be frightened

Colquhoun omits two things, *that is* and *to crap in droplets*. The first makes no real difference except to associate the following three clauses to *being an insect* which is implied when *that is* is omitted – this is ellipsis, when the reader provides that information, having been pointed to it by the grammatical structure. However, the second omission in the sentence is not ellipsis because there is no way for the reader to have understood this without it being said here explicitly. Colquhoun was presumably of delicate sensibilities.

iii. Recognising ellipsis in the source. (p. 10)

sono essere schifosi come **[sono]** gli uomini / they are disgusting beings like men **are** / they are as filthy as men **are**

In this example, there is ellipsis in the source, and both translations replace the missing verb – but why we did that I am unsure – it seemed more natural.

iv. Example of conjunction (p. 27).²⁰

solo d'estate al posto della cacciatore / **only** in summer instead of the shooting jacket / **except that** in summer he'd change his hunting jacket

The adversative conjunction *solo* is there to relate together clauses before and after. It produced no problem for the translators who used two equally effective equivalents, *only* and *except that*.

¹⁹ Baker 6.2, p. 200

²⁰ Baker 6.3, p. 204.



v. Examples of lexical cohesion.²¹

[...] quei silenzi e quei rumori gli **fanno paura**. Però un'altra notte tornerà e non ci sarà nulla che **potrà spaventarlo** [...] (p. 11)

(My translation) [...] those silences and noises **scare** him. But another night he will come back and there will be nothing that can **scare** him [...]

(Colquhoun) [...] that silence and then those sounds have **frightened** him. But he'll come back another night and nothing will **frighten** him then [...]

This is an example of lexical cohesion by reiteration – utilised by the translators – the source text uses a synonym (*gli fanno paura* – has “caused him fright”, *spaventare* – to frighten or scare). The device neatly links Pin's present fear with his thoughts about what he will do in the future.

girava per la **casa deserta** / wandered around the **deserted house** / would [...] wander around the **empty house** (p. 27)

This example is of lexical cohesion by collocation. The two words set an important scene for the rest of the paragraph: they caused no problems for the translators who found two equivalents with the same effect.

These two examples, although causing no problems for the translator in these cases, nicely illustrate how lexical reiteration and collocation can effectively be used to enhance the cohesion of the text.

Reflections

The challenge of analysis is at least equal to the challenge of translating. Both can be taxing and laborious, the final result a goal undefined until reached. The exercise of translating extracts from two works by a single author, then comparing the results with published translations by eminent translators has been not only enlightening but also fascinating, and to some extent surprising in how much the work of Mona Baker was illuminated. One develops

²¹ Baker 6.4, p. 215



a very close acquaintance with the texts and it is hard not to become judgemental, though an assessment of what is ‘natural’ or ‘correct’ is often subjective or partly so.

The big lesson from this exercise, as a translator, was a better understanding of how to judge the best route from source to target: whether it’s best to stick as closely as possible to the source text, or whether to move further towards the needs of the reader. Obviously this varies from situation to situation and the variables are many, but my impression overall is that it is very easy to unnecessarily leave the side of the original author in the direction of what seems better for the target language reader. It can take courage to do this, and experience to know when to do so. I felt at times both Colquhoun and Parks included additions or omissions that were not strictly necessary, but all the time, when comparing the translations, I was hotly aware that most of my mistakes were due to following the Italian constructions too slavishly and failing to take enough account of the needs of natural English.

Finding exemplars for Baker’s key concepts was very revealing, particularly because most of the variation between the translations was due to lexical differences. However, when delving into other aspects of equivalence, unexpected strategies were revealed, including many instances of which I had been unaware when preparing my own translation. It was always a temptation when I got stuck to take a peek at the published translation, but I managed to resist. I knew that many silly or ignorant mistakes of mine would be exposed, but when I finished the translation, then revealed to myself the work of Colquhoun and Parks and compared it with my own, I was relieved to find fewer mistakes than I anticipated. I even felt confident enough to criticise and find fault with the masters.