



**Introducing *Poesie scelte* (2003-2021) by Edoardo Olmi:  
translation with commentary of ‘un anno e sedici mesi’, ‘poesia elbana’ and ‘Ulisse’**  
by Antonella Sarti Evans

*Poesie scelte* (2003-2021) by Affluenti author Edoardo Olmi, published by Edizioni Ensemble, Florence, in September 2023, comprises some of the most crucial poems from three previously awarded collections: *Il porcospino in pegaso* (Premio Carver 2011), *R:exist-stance* (Premio Nabokov, 2017) and *Stagioni scalene* (Premio Il Delfino, 2021). Olmi’s poems are witty games challenging the structures of our language and psyche, while seeking free ways to create poetry – poetry meant in the ancient Greek etymology of *poiesis*, or else the ability to shape and inhabit new worlds through words. One of the main textual features of the collection is anarchy, especially expressed through layout and punctuation: the refusal of the capital letter after a full stop is inspired to the *beat* experiments, as the author pointed out, and to the ‘anarchic’ concept that no letter is more important than another.

What I enjoyed the most about *Poesie scelte* is their exquisitely metaphorical texture: audacious metaphors and similes are produced in great abundance, along with onomatopoeias, synaesthesias and personifications. I can comment that Olmi’s poetry is characterized by intentional, swift blackouts in meaning and language, as well as in space and time, aiming to depict fresh visual intuitions. Its intrinsic continuity means a poem doesn’t usually end, nor sounds final, yet it develops into another one, while reflecting the author’s demiurgic curiosity and inquisitiveness. Olmi intended each poem like “a room opening up into the next creative space, synchronically”.

*Poesie scelte* is a mixture of introspective, descriptive and reactive poetry, sharing the common tool of provocation throughout two decades of research and evolution. It showcases a multitude and diversity of poems in a chronological order insofar as composition, while offering a synchronic link in poetical styles, places and events. An example of this is ‘un anno e sedici mesi’, from the early collection *Il porcospino in pegaso*, which reads so up-to-date, both in themes and imagery, in our present time sadly characterized by epidemics, persecutions, and starvation.

**un anno e sedici mesi**

li troverete ancora  
agli angoli dei bar;  
o persi per i vicoli che annaspano  
le viuzze, ai capillari della comprensione.

li troverete, ancora  
splendenti di luce non vista  
agli occhi di chi  
li ha saputi ascoltare:

essi, soltanto, vegliano.

sulla notte febbrile del Vecchio Appestado  
come madre paziente carezza; paziente  
la fronte del bimbo che sa  
non potrà mai sfamare  
l’adulto che sa di poter scivolare...



è incredibile cosa ci regalano.  
un anno e sedici mesi di lavaggio del cervello  
non bastano di certo, per poterli scaricare

→ li troverete ancora i poeti, nelle strade  
**one year and sixteen months**

you will still find them  
either at the corners of a pub;  
or lost in the alleys groping up  
the streets, around capillaries of understanding.

you will still find them  
shining with unseen light  
to the eyes of those  
who are listening:

the only ones who keep vigil.

on the feverish night of the Plagued Old Man  
as a patient mother caressing; patiently  
her child's forehead knowing  
she won't be able to feed  
the adult who is slipping away...

it's amazing what they give.  
one year an sixteen months of brain washing  
surely are not enough to dump them

→ you will still find the poets, on the streets

One of the most beautiful descriptive poems I would like to recommend from *Poesie scelte* is 'poesia elbana', which was read at the Elba Poetry Festival in summer 2022. 'poesia elbana' has been written and edited during five-year long poetical research on the Elba Island, Tuscany, where the author dwells in the summer. It was first published in Olmi's previous collection, *Stagioni scalene*, under the title 'amore epilessi (canti elbani)', within the section dedicated to 'Estatì' ('Summers'). The following extract is set in Chiessi, at the bottom of Mount Capanne, on the western coast of the Tyrrhenian island. Chiessi used to be a fishermen's village, and it is still one of the least contaminated spots on the island but also a renowned destination for its crystalline sea and mountain tracks. Olmi's poems set on Elba Island are inspired to centuries of history, while synchronizing distant places and time frames: from a geographical place, Elba changes into a new Ithaka, or else the allegory of a new human condition beyond the contradictions and alienation of the contemporary age.



### **poesia elbana**

a Chiessi il pesce arrivava la mattina dal mare  
dopo i tramonti della Costa del Sole,

dove si fa l'amore a strapiombo sul Tirreno  
scansando le cadute di massi dal Capanne.

giochi a gara di pesca con i cormorani  
mentre il libeccio ne frantuma l'eco sugli scogli

e capisci perché la Corsica non si vede mai  
dalle rive francesi

– sentieri arrampicati sui vitigni  
che sanno di oleandro e di ginepro

fra i fichi d'india sparsi nei terrazzamenti  
che salgono sui ruderi di San Bartolomeo –

ma una volta che accetti la sfida  
sei solo tu, davanti l'orizzonte

dalla cresta delle montagne  
anche i giganti se ne sono innamorati  
e passano le epoche perduti negli abissi

con la tristezza  
poggiata su un fianco.

### **Elba poem**

in Chiessi the fish arrived from the sea in the morning  
after the sunsets off Costa del Sole,

where people make love on the Tyrrhenian's shear cliffs  
while dodging boulders falling from Capanne.

you play fishing games with cormorants  
as the Libeccio wind shatters echoes on the rocks

and understand why you never see Corsica  
from French shores



– paths climbing over vine fields  
smelling of oleander and juniper

amidst prickly pears scattered on the terraced land  
rising above the ruins of San Bartolomeo –

yet, once you've accepted the challenge  
it's only you, facing the horizon

from the mountain crests  
even the giants fell in love with it,  
thus, passing aeons lost in the abysses

with sadness  
leaning on a flank.



In reading Olmi's poem 'Ulisse', I was fascinated by the brilliant calque of the crucial lines from *Inferno's* Canto XXVI, in which Dante encounters the spirit of Ulysses, amidst fraudulent advisers. While depicting his own Ulysses within the eighth circle (*ottavo cerchio*), Dante imagined that the ageing protagonist of *Odyssey* had decided to set up for a new voyage towards the Unknown, leaving native Ithaka once again and for good:

*“Noi ci allegrammo, e tosto tornò in pianto;  
ché de la nova terra un turbo nacque  
e percosse del legno il primo canto.*

*Tre volte il fé girar con tutte l'acque;  
a la quarta levar la poppa in suso  
e la prora ire in giù, com'altrui piacque,*

*infîn che 'l mar fu sovra noi richiuso”.*

(*Inferno*, Canto XXVI, lines 136-142)

Notably, Dante envisaged an ultimate, fatal voyage through the southern hemisphere, and towards the mountain of Purgatory, where Ulysses and his fellow mariners were caught in a punitive storm. The mountain in the middle of the southern seas did not represent a safe shore but death, the price to be paid for transgression of the limits set by God to human knowledge.

In Olmi's poem, Ulysses stands as a symbol of viciously cunning mankind, exploiting and usurping the Earth's resources for generations, while polluting the land, sea and sky for pecuniary profits. Instead of the retaliatory storm sent by God, Olmi imagines one unleashed by Mother Nature, which will encumber all of us. As the poet commented, his literary provocation didn't aim to convey any mistrust in mankind's unlimited pursue of knowledge, yet the awareness that our self-centred culture is changing such precious knowledge into a means of destruction and death – instead of guiding us towards freedom and more humanity.



## **Ulisse**

Da tre generazioni inquinì lidi e tutte l'acque;  
e percuoti del merlo il primo canto.

A la quarta levar l'oceano in suso  
e la terra ire in giù, come a nessuno piacque

infin che 'l mar  
è sovra noi richiuso.

## **Ulysses**

For three generations you've polluted the shores and all waters;  
and struck the black bird's early song.

On the fourth, the ocean is rising  
while the Earth goeth down, as no-one wanted

till the seas are  
above us sealed.