

REWIND 013

Roberto Sanesi

The Sign and the Voice

Fondazione Antonio Ratti
Archive 21.01.1989

REWIND 013

Fondazione Antonio Ratti
Archive 21.01.89

Roberto Sanesi
The Sign and the Voice

🔊 [Listen in Italian](#)

Roberto Sanesi: So, it is not very easy to summarize in a real and proper lesson - which I always hope not to do - the speech that came to my mind as a possible one. The request was to talk about myself, in a certain sense, which is extremely flattering and, I must admit, also extremely embarrassing. So, to avoid reducing the conversation to a kind of self-criticism or, even worse, to a kind of public confession or analysis, we chose the title - and then I must say that this title chosen two days ago is obsessing me because it creates difficulties for me every time - *The Sign and the Voice*. The difficulties are precisely in the definition or clarification of these two terms. Without thinking too much about it, the two terms intuitively seemed to convey many topics, trying to vary from literature to visual arts and translation as an attempt to intuit what actually connects the sign to its meaning, sometimes apparent, and the sign to the voice. The latter is - and I still try not to rationalize because if I rationalize too much, I miss the subtle sense that appeared to me at first - something we should really consider when we translate from another language.

Now, I realize that I have made several statements that are still quite vague. I'll start over, to try to define them a little better and to see if we can grasp this common ground. The sign. We all know what the sign is. First of all, the sign seems interesting as a starting point because it concerns both literature - in the sense of writing - and the sign intended as drawing; therefore, it concerns the visual arts.

What is a *sign*? What does a sign do, however it presents itself? The sign tends by its nature to describe, to delimit, to give boundaries, to establish, if not to stabilize. In writing, the sign is a trace that evolves through or by means of a predetermined code. In visual arts, this sign - which becomes a drawing - remains as a trace that still delimits, but does so according to a code that is very different from the code of writing. It is in doing such that it finds its expressive reason. It is always profoundly changeable, it does not go by stereotypes, it cannot go by stereotypes. What I'm saying is not, in my opinion, even new, but I'm saying it because it seems to me that it's worth thinking about, thinking about what we do when—with a pen or a pencil or with means that are in any case very similar means and that I would largely define as means of writing—we try to leave this trace so that it means something.

What is *voice*? Voice is a little more difficult to define. With respect to the sign, and for example, with respect to the sign of writing, I would dare to say that the voice is not a trace but a reflection, a reverberation, an echo, a halo. It is the mental result of the operation we have carried out using the sign, and, at the same time, it is a result that moves with respect to the sign. I always say with respect to the sign of writing in particular. This doesn't mean that the same thing doesn't happen in painting, more or less. For example, when we observe any work of visual art, the gaze makes a round trip. The gaze rests on what it sees, it sends what it sees back to the gaze - we could say - or to what is behind the gaze. This operation, if we think about it, we could, with some courage, begin to define it as a sort of translation of what we have seen.

What we have seen is what we have seen. But is it not what we have believed more than what we have seen? For this operation to be accomplished, at the moment of return, we make a sort of translation. For example, we capture images and, more or less voluntarily - but more often involuntarily - we modify them. Because what we are left with is an interpretation of what we have seen.

If this concept does not appear completely obscure, and it is, I repeat, a bit intuitive - these are ramblings that I am making out loud with some difficulty - I would perhaps say that the voice is something that resembles the look, as we cannot say exactly that the look can be seen. What in the sign was a trace, disappears when we look. The look is not seen looking. The gaze performs this operation, which captures the reflections of what the sign has done. In a certain sense, we could also say that the voice resembles a shadow. We could say that it is the shadow of the witness. It does not prevent it from being transparent. It does not prevent it from being perhaps that aspect that the sign has aroused, but which it has not been able to fully define. That is, the shadow or the voice has more freedom than the sign. The sign provokes. The voice has been provoked. In this sense, there is some obscurity in the voice, in this sense, the voice resembles a shadow that does not lack transparency.

I said before that it is a kind of halo of what the sign does. What we grasp, I believe, is that halo that causes the aesthetic object that we have executed, or that has been executed by others and we observe, to somehow lose its boundaries. For example, it is said that poetry is sometimes obscure. It is obscure because its essence is not exactly what the poet wanted, nor what all readers grasp. Because it is a mechanism that is set in motion, which has its own precise and autonomous structure, but which at the end meets, through our reading and our gaze, a series of modifications. Those modifications make this aesthetic object — I call it an aesthetic object so as not to differentiate a poem from a painting—emanates something that is always the same, because of its core, of its structures, but also manages to speak individually. This means that individually, each one of us, when we read a text or observe a work of visual art, we add, we vary, we make it somehow alive. And this is one of the reasons why you can read a book centuries later. If the text said the same things, and if the reactions of the readers were always the same - both the readers through the centuries and the readers themselves after years - that text, that work of art would be dead. We would find absolutely no enjoyment in re-reading it, in re-seeing it. We will not be able to feel the same exact emotion over and over again. This means that we feel each time and that readers feel different emotions each time, years later, and sometimes even centuries later. Emotions arise, I believe, from this very capacity that has the sign to emit shadows or the capacity that has the word, which is also spoken word - and we get there - to emit voices.

I do not know if this kind of digression can be useful to us or not. More and more in my life, I have been quite impressed by this kind of gap or difference — which is the title of my last book of poems — that exists between a text, a visual work of art, and what this text or this visual work gives to each of us individually. Because there is a difference: we all look at the same work, we all read the same text, and we all have certainly commensurate reactions—I would find it unthinkable that a sad text becomes cheerful or vice versa—but then we add. Because signs, which are defined by codes, evoke precise images through words. Because it is precise to say bottle, green, glass, and garden. But, at the same time, it is frighteningly inaccurate. Because there are infinite ways, infinite forms that can be defined as a bottle - perhaps not infinite, but many — many forms that can be defined as a bottle, many forms and many places that can be defined as a garden. So, this is elusiveness, which in the end is the true essence, is the one that speaks, not the sign, and is the one that refers to the unity of the code. Or, if you would like, it refers to that unity, which is the meaning. I read two or three days ago, by chance, in an Arabic book. Don't ask me by whom. An Arabic thinker and philosopher of many centuries ago. A sentence struck me very much for what it may suggest. This phrase was, not literally, something of this kind: do not look for the meaning in writing, the meaning is in ink, and ink is the point.

I find this metaphysical reasoning very suggestive. It seems to me that it gives us quite well the idea of a movement that is similar to the movement of a sponge. It emits what penetrated itself, and once the grip of use is abandoned, it reabsorbs what it had emitted. All in all, the sign - that is the writing - would almost seem to be a kind of emission, of extension, and of movement that organizes itself. Going on with the metaphor, it comes out so much that it creates an aesthetic object, whose meaning is still in the sponge. The ink infuses this meaning.

I would dare say the truth, probably the Arabic text was allusive to the sacred. Without needing to translate it in terms of sacredness and divinity, it seems to me that, in this sentence, there was a well-delineated movement. The mechanism is what I thought interesting as an object of reflection.

After all, the voice could say that it is that point or that ink that comes out and comes back and that it needs support, of course, as long as there is no misunderstanding about this term. That support it needs is not an external support. It is exactly, in turn, the ink. It is not a means to an end. I mean perhaps a little more clearly, but I'm not sure, that the real subject, the real theme, the real substance of a poetic act, for example, is not a certain thing that is said and can be paraphrased because it is outside. It is not outside. The body of a poetic text is the language with which a poetic text expresses itself. The true meaning of a work of visual art is in its being, what it is with means, with forms, with the substance that composed it. Those who make sculpture know even better, that the same form in different material changes and changes its meaning. Because precisely the meaning lies in the ink, the form lies in this body, I believe.

The reasoning then goes into the translation and ends up wondering what is that we translate when we translate. Should we translate the letter? At least it seems to me that in general, we have been taught that we must be literal! But what does it mean in poetry to be literal? But literal to what? If that object is not defined except through that medium, that body is a body of language. If we change it in translating it, we are still operating a betrayal, but above all, we create a betrayal if we stick to a letter that in the end is only the means to be translated and not the object. Because the object to translate is that voice, that shadow, that sense that comes directly from the work and that therefore is different from work to work or at least certainly is different from genre to genre. I mean that if I were asked about the rules for a good translation, I would not be able to give an answer and at least I would ask "to translate well what? What text?". It is the same operation that is done in the critical exercise. We cannot apply unless there are generically prefixed schematic methods. There are no methods, there are many of them, and, above all, there is the method that the work of art requires, otherwise it would not even explain the possibility of survival in the sense of understanding a new work, because a work, if it is new, cannot be read or understood with a methodology based on different principles, that is, on the principles of previous works, which in this case are different.

I'm saying that they are ramblings, and it seems to me that they are more and more... What do they have to do with my latest books? Maybe we will have time to see it, maybe not, but since this is a conversation, it would seem appropriate to me to continue more on this road of mutual stimuli that you give me by listening, because you provoke me to say. I was saying earlier, if I'm not mistaken, that this difference and this gap have always fascinated me so much. Why the hell does one write or paint? Who knows? You start. You're caught up in something that escapes you, and it's while you're doing it that it gets organized, and if it makes sense, in the end, it makes sense. Well, on some motivations that at this moment I do not remember, I wrote some things that, we could say, are things of theater. They are unpublished, and it would be the first time I read them. So, forgive me if maybe it will be a disappointment later on. They are a short dialogues between two people.

As a dialogue of two people, I thought it was about theater, then I thought about it again seeing what had come out and I gave the most obvious answer that could be given in this case. Since nothing happens on the scene, it is not theater in the sense of the spectacularism of theater, in the sense of the theater movement-management-action. Here we are in the area of the word. These two characters are characters who speak to each other. The most obvious answer: it is for the radio; it is something radio. Then, the answer did not satisfy me. The radio is not theater, I was saying, but I did not give myself a precise answer. Perhaps the radio is not theater, I said to myself because theater is a ritual that takes place, it is a repetition of something that is witnessed, that must be attended by a large audience that participates in this ritual together. The theater is like all the rites of this world, it is like the mass. It needs collective participation. But in collective participation, what appears as a gesture-action of theater has a clear physiognomy, because it is repetition. But if there is no gesture, if there is no action, if the two people who speak do nothing but only speak, how can they be seen, what will be seen of what they say?

Here, too, I try to explain myself a little better. If we go to the theater, do we see two people talking or do we see—and this is the question—what the two people are saying? I am afraid that in the theater we see people talking and what they are saying is somehow lost, or at least it is not what we see. Except that we cannot erase the two people and only hear the voice and through the voice, we can see the action, which is not the action of the two people speaking, but the action of the language. It must be the language that evokes the images, that evokes what happens, that is, the action is only in the language. At this point, taken by subtle madness, I imagined that these dialogues should be represented. In what way? The theater must be naked, bare and violently illuminated while the audience enters, sits down, and waits for the performance to take place. Then, when the audience is seated, suddenly and lights go out, the theater is in total darkness and finally this is the unique condition that makes me finally see the action happen. That is what the theater does. When the dialogue is over, the lights will come back on violently. The performance is over and the audience goes away, the lights shooting at the author, probably, but this is not said.

What was going through my mind, in short, was a kind of theater of the mind. Because it does not escape me that a hundred people who witness a

dialogue in the dark are in the best condition to see what is evoked by language, to see the shadow, to see - literally see - the voice. To give concreteness to the voice. The voice will say things: things, precisely, objects, actions. Collectively heard, but individually perceived. And therefore probably differentiated from person to person who listens by participating in this ritual. In other words, the great effort was to make people understand that the sign is only a means, that the sign can be erased by leaving the voice. And that the voice is an action, and it is exactly the action that the theater intended to expose. I stop here because I also realize that intentions are one thing, these theories - like all questionable theories - may work, may not work. But the fact remains that this theory has at least highlighted some apparently absurd aspects of making poetry or, even worse, of making theater, in short, of going in search of a voice. I can try to read one. I don't ask you to turn off the lights, I don't demand it, let's not exaggerate. I don't know. It's an attempt. I've never done it. I don't know if it will work. But is there light here? There is a problem that raises a problem or maybe clarifies it: I cannot read, it is very uncomfortable. Just close your eyes. Whoever opens them will be disbarred.

Intervention from the audience: The important thing afterward is to wake up.

Roberto Sanesi: This is another problem. It is a mental theater that needs bouncers, people who take the sleeping spectators and put them outside the door. With a little irony, there is a problem, which in itself clarifies, another problem in turn. And that is a dialogue, and I have one voice and that is a problem. Probably it is not really a problem, it is also to be established here what the variation of the voice means, compared to the author. For example, I can stage twenty-five characters. To what extent do these twenty-five characters have an autonomous life? To what extent I, or the authors in general - I am a very modest author - can we say that the link between the author and the characters has been broken? Because there is a link between the author and the character. But between the author and 25 characters? What does it mean? Are there 25 authors? An author divided into 25 facets? Is there an autonomy of the character, as it has often been said? Joyce, for example, dreamed it. Joyce's dream, in *Dedalus*, is that the author would be cleaning his nails, looking at what his characters are doing. That is, once they were set in motion, he would have wanted them to hurry because he felt that for better or worse the fate of these characters was conditioned by the presence of the author. So, the fact that the voice is a "maybe" is not a problem or gives us an aspect of the problem. Here we don't have to imagine anything. On the contrary, we have to imagine everything, pardon. Which is the same thing. There are two voices. I will try to make it clear where one begins and where the other ends.

Voice 1: Ce ne hai messo di tempo per tornare.

Voice 2: Sono confuso ormai, sai com'è, ho dovuto farmi strada tra i cespugli, c'era vento, una specie di bisbiglio incessante.

V1: Sei sicuro di aver disposto tutto secondo le istruzioni?

V2: Sicuro, ho appoggiato a terra il triangolo. Era diventato più scuro.

Strano. più pesante. Si guardava attorno sospettoso, aveva un'aria curiosa, messo lì, di traverso, sulle pietre.

V1: Non gli avrai parlato, spero. Non si può essere mai sicuri delle reazioni che hanno.

V2: E come avrei potuto? Faceva freddo.

V1: Già, ma non è detto che si una scusa sufficiente per loro. Come sai, non mancano di una certa logica.

V2: A essere sincero, i sembrava più interessato alle cose che si muovevano sull'acqua. O, per lo meno, non ha fatto domande.

V1: Sull'acqua? Cosa intendi per "cose"? Foglie, insetti, bottiglie, legni, cosa galleggia sul torrente, di questa stagione?

V2: Ombre. Solo ombre. Minuscole, veloci, vibranti, come di notte. Sì, come di notte quando c'è un po' di luna.

V1: Ma non c'era luna stanotte, non si vedeva niente. Com'era possibile vedere ombre?

V2: Eppure le vedevo. non saprei come ora che penso. Ma le vedevo, chiarissime, lui spingeva da quella parte. Ho fatto fatica a trattenerlo. È così che mi sono accorto che era diventato più pesante.

V1: E più scuro?

V2: Sì.

V1: L'ho già sentito. ma non sarà che stava spuntando l'alba?

V2: No, non ho tutta quella pazienza. avevo fretta di metterlo lì e di venirmene via.

Endnotes

1 The dialogue is a transcription from the audio recording. It doesn't follow the same punctuation and spacing of text version written by the author (Editor's note).

2 From the book *La Differenza*, Garzanti, Milano 1988.

V2: Ma che importanza ha? A giudicare dall'occhio era tranquillo. ha tirato fuori un occhio, all'improvviso, uno solo e guardava fisso.

V1: Può succedere, l'importante è che non si metta a pascolare. Avremmo problemi se si allontanasse.

V2: Già. e se diventasse quadrato come faremmo a riconoscerlo?

V1: Non è mica questo che mi preoccupa. Ti avrei detto di legarlo, altrimenti.

V2: Sai che non ti seguo? È tutta una questione di rapporti fra spazio e tempo a sentire Max. Ma invece dimmi di quel bisbiglio.

V1: Bambini, molto vecchi secondo me. Una specie di girotondo: "metti la fiamma in bocca alla faina, prendi la scala per scendere in cantina". Questo che cantavano?

V2: Sì, qualcosa del genere, ma non ha senso.

V1: Non c'è mai niente che non abbia senso.

V2: Comunque tirava vento. Ho avuto paura.

V1: E non c'era nessuno?

V2: Non lo so, non credo. Te l'ho detto. I cespugli erano fittissimi. Mi domando come si faccia a chiamare deserto un posto simile. Non riesci a vedere più al di là di un metro in tutto quell'intrigo, soprattutto se devi strisciare.

V1: Sai, prende a fuoco a volte.

V2: Sì e ci sono schianti, scricchiolii a volte.

V1: Poteva essere Max, da qualche parte, a spiarmi.

V2: E la fotografia? L'hai portata la fotografia?

V1: Certo, gliel'ho messa sopra, non gli assomigliava per niente, se vuoi la mia opinione.

V2: Dimmi di quelle ombre sul torrente, erano quelle le voci?

V1: Non so può essere.

V2: Allora non preoccuparti. Pare che sia normale. O vuoi che andiamo a controllare?

V1: Che altro dovevo fare?

V2: Niente niente, va bene così

V1: Ciao, ci vediamo la primavera prossima? 1

There, that's it. I don't know what it is. I hope you understand the attempt. Well, at this point I've talked a lot. I have a lesson on translation ready...I think I only have ten minutes, a quarter of an hour. That's it. Sincerely, I believe that nothing exists if we do not make it useful, or if we do not use it, so to speak. I believe that we should use poetry, that we should do something with it. It doesn't have to be a monument. It doesn't have to be something that stands there. It doesn't have to have any particularity. Everything is transmitted if it is used. In fact, all I do is to use things that have already been done. There is nothing new in certain aspects.

I can skip my poetry, it doesn't matter. I can read one of them before closing. But if you want me to do it, I'll do it right away, because what I'd like to say about translating could open up another discourse, and it will probably take too long. The temptation of the theater has been with me for a long time, for some years now, and perhaps it's even taking shape in my poems. Not particularly the one I am reading now. I don't know if I should read a more theatrical one, but I don't think so. This one, however, perhaps has something to do with what I have tried to say. Maybe it has something to do with the passage, with the transit. With this elusiveness due to an apparent - and perhaps not even apparent - displacement of everything all the time.

This is a poem called *Le tre del mattino* (*Three o'clock in the morning*). I will read it - You can't, you shouldn't paraphrase poems. They are a body of language, they are what they are, linguistic analysis is another matter. And once it is done, a critical analysis must return to the point that is that point of the ink. So it must recompose itself and it must remain as it is. Well, I will try to read it:

Le tre del mattino 2

*Verso le tre del mattino la dorsale azzurra
di un grande pesce, di trotto, balzò sopra le acque
precipitando il nero al di là della porta.*

Non era

*nulla di imprevedibile, già più di un anno o due
che lo stavamo osservando, l'ultima volta
di fra le canne, piegati, piedi nel fango e calura
che ci imbrattava umidosa; perfino gli occhi strisciavano
con nostalgia della notte, come le tortore, e sempre*

*di abbandonare lo scopo, felici
e stupefatti che alcuna parola, o riverbero
dolce denso, alla maniera di un suono nel sonno,
dovesse avvicinarsi.*

*Le acque restavano assortite, la porta
una barriera soltanto un po' più luminosa rispetto
a quel deserto di intrichi, e le voci, a distanza,
un po' più irresolute.*

*Ma appena la pinna
guizzò nell'aria pesante e vedemmo la luce, la povera
luce nostra compagna ritrarsi, e cadere, e l'immenso
corpo del nero gettato al di là dello sguardo, più avanti,
e non c'era più nulla alle spalle, palude, o collina
da attraversare, tutto sembrò, finalmente, inatteso.*

Here. What should I do now in these ten minutes that I have left?

Giuliano Collina: You can read another one and then we leave the floor to the public.

Roberto Sanesi: I don't know if I have to read a completely different one. I am uncertain, excuse me a moment.

Come se fosse una vita, vivendo ³

*Era verso qualcosa di semplice, oggetti
del tutto naturali, ma di metallo, di pietra, che avessero
una loro esistenza irreprensibile contro
il balbettare di un acero, o il brivido
grigio di uno scoiattolo.*

*in qualche modo
era verso un inganno organizzato, di forme
che avessero nel freddo la sostanza, una specie
di silenzi solonne; oppure là sotto la neve,
come se fosse una vita, vivendo a tornare precisa
in superficie, nel grande brusio;*

*era in queste
misure separate che andavo ricercando qualche indizio
di ciò che resta;*

*ora morendo è verso
la perfezione fuggevole, un'estensione
dentro di me di me che faticosamente, tracciando
un solo segno per molti percorsi, mi vado
a ricercare nel punto in cui la luce addensa
l'indecifrabile inverno futuro.*

Well, as for this shade, it is mine, it has been mine for some time recently. These are poems from three, four years ago. Since you ask to talk about me, I would not want to give the feeling of being monotonous, as was perhaps the result of these digressions. Perhaps in recent times I have tried to safeguard the ironic aspect that is missing here. I believe that irony is very important and even more important is self-irony. I tried to keep it by looking for some congenial aspects in the translations.

Just to say a few words, and would deserve more - not the translation but the text - on the last book, called *The Hunting for the Snark* is a mock-heroic poem by Lewis Carroll, the author of *Alice in Wonderland*, and is considered a masterpiece of nonsense, irony, mocking, and grotesque. The problem that was posed here, which is very different from the problem that arises when translating Milton or Elliot or others, was fidelity, as always when translating, and the method of translating above all. Why fidelity? Fidelity to what? Fidelity to meaning - it is generally said, with reason. Yes, but what is the meaning of nonsense? i.e. where is this voice to be translated, where is it?

Well, here I believed, unlike the decisions I take in other cases...how to translate a fake? Let's take an example, Chatterton, a poet who died at the age of eighteen in the middle of the eighteenth century, he said that he found some manuscript's fifteenth-century codes. That is to say, it is he who falsified them. He, in the middle of the eighteenth century, made it with a language that apparently belongs to the fifteenth century, but a language that doesn't exist in the fifteenth century because it's clear that it's so aptly heard, mixed with the language of the sixteenth century, of the seventeenth

century, and with his own. He made a mess and even managed to get away with it, many people believe that a Bristol priest had written these texts... But it is a fake. Already in the eighteenth century, Chatterton wrote with a fake language, imagining a fifteenth-century language that does not exist. How can one in the twentieth century translate an eighteenth-century text that pretends to be a fifteenth-century text? If not trying to be faithful even here to the voice, which is fake, that is literally reconstructing a fake in the Italian language that does not exist. That looks like a fifteenth-century language that is not, like:

La densata tempesta ormai matura, a grandi gocce il cielo stilla e l'immensa piova fumigina in un velo, su da prati riarsi invade la pianura una spettrale fuliggine e toto l'animale s'impaura, tal che lo grege intiero se perde e fugge via lungi le calli. E dalle nubi scroscia l'acqua e fiotta nella gran volta aperta e la folgore gialla e ne svia, caldo vapore ardente entro la vampa.

It really looks like the Incredible Army of Brancaleone, now that I read it. But the effort is really to adapt every time. Here, the snark. The snark is an imaginary animal upon which the whole mock-heroic poem is divided, as the author says, "an agony in eight fits". Therefore, the poem is an agony in eight fits, and each piece of the poem is a fit. The snark is an animal that never appears, it's not there. But there are some incredible characters who hunt it down. There is a captain who leads these kinds of insane ships to hunt the snark. But...what is the snark? Why is it called a snark? Like all monsters you can't see, there isn't one. Snark is a crossbreed composed in English of snake and shark, that is, snake and shark, or shark and snake. A correct Italian translation should be either "serqualo" or "squarpente". But Carroll says that words are like the trunk for laundry. Carroll wrote this in 1876, when the suitcases were divided. On the one hand, there was linen and on the other hand the clothes, the evening dresses. It was only one trunk with two compartments. And he said: all the words are like that, they are double. Then it depends on mood and personality. If one wants to say quivering and smoky, one day it may incline to "quivering" and one day it may incline to "smoky". If they are absolutely balanced people, they will say "smovering" or something like that. This is a decision for which I have not translated neither "squarpente" nor "serqualo". Because perhaps I have a variable temperament. I did not want to block this variable animal in one name. Saying "serqualo" prevented me from saying "squarpente", and vice versa. So I translated the rest. And here is the nonsense... where is the nonsense? In my opinion, the nonsense was in the chant. It was in the rhythm. The rhythm is the method. That is, if you translate this into prose, I dare say it has no sense, while the nonsense has a sense where you try to stay tied to this slightly obsessive and slightly hallucinatory rhythm. The captain's crazy speech because of the captain...Carroll provided the booklet - this agony in eight fits - even a map for navigation. The map for navigation - I don't know if you can see it - is this one. That is, there is north-south, east, and west, and absolutely nothing else. It is completely empty. The freedom of navigation is total, so the words intersect and pass. The nonsense is in the captain's speech that also explains it, which is not bad:

*Era considerato eccelso quel grande Capitano
con l'eterna campana appiccicata in mano:
che portamento, che grazia, che naturalezza,
e che solennità! È sufficiente rimirarlo in viso
per comprenderne l'intima saggezza!*

*Aveva comperato una mappa del mare
dove nemmeno un frammento di terra
era dato a qualcuno rintracciare;
ma l'equipaggio fu lieto nell'apprendere
che era così più semplice da intendere.*

*"A che diavolo servono i Poli di quel Mercatore,
e i Tropici e le Zone e i Meridiani,
per non parlare poi dell'Equatore,"
argomentava il Capo a quei sottili ingegni,
e loro a lui: "Soltanto convenzioni, puri segni!"*

*"Tutte le altre mappe hanno forme un po' strane
con quelle isole e quei promontori!
Per questo il Capo li ha tagliati fuori,"
osannava la ciurma. "Grazie al suo abile fiuto*

Below, Lewis Carroll's original text:

The Bellman himself they all praised to the skies—
Such a carriage, such ease and such grace!
Such solemnity too! One could see he was wise,
The moment one looked in his face!

He had bought a large map representing the sea,
Without the least vestige of land:
And the crew were much pleased when they found it to be
A map they could all understand.

'What's the good of Mercator's North Poles and Equators,
Tropics, Zones, and Meridian Lines?'
So the Bellman would cry: and the crew would reply,
'They are merely conventional signs!

'Other maps are such shapes, with their islands and capes!
But we've got our brave Captain to thank'
(So the crew would protest) 'that he's bought us the best—
A perfect and absolute blank!'

This was charming, no doubt: but they shortly found out
That the Captain they trusted so well
Had only one notion for crossing the ocean,

ci ha riforniti di un nulla perfetto e assoluto!"

*La si sarebbe detta una cosa gradevole,
non fosse che ben presto si resero conto
che il fido Capitano non aveva che
un'unica nozione
per traversare l'oceano in modo ragionevole,
e cioè d'agitare il campanone. 4*

I'd say that's enough... Perhaps the most logical conclusion for this conversation was "that he's bought us the best— A perfect and absolute blank!". I hope you can make something of it.
Thank you.

Question from the audience: I really liked what you said. But going back to the end, when you were speaking, when you were doing theater with your voice, I understood that you are a painter and a poet because you create a lot of synesthesia, you mixed colors with subjects, with words, so you are a draughtsman.

Roberto Sanesi: Yes.

Question from the audience: Then you talked in your speech about the point, which could be considered the example of the artist because it is the point from which your images and all your realities derive. It seems to me that with the speech of theater and voice, you described exactly the figure of the painter who is a bit of a poet, who is a bit of a writer. It seems to me that when you say that it is a kind of theater of the mind, the painter is exactly that. The other day, I saw Collina's catalogs and read in that drawing, and it was a theater of the mind, it was an effort, but whose? For example, illustrating the language. Who doesn't have a mind trained in this theater of the voice, which is narrated here, can't be an illustrator, can he?

Roberto Sanesi: No, because it risks paraphrasing the text. While, precisely, the problem is not the paraphrase of the text.

Intervention from the public: The real interpreters of the voice are the ones who know how to translate it into an image or to weigh it. In fact, to me, the real artists are the illustrators. Those who know how to illustrate a poetic world that is made of voices and silences. They hear, who express them and then make them into paintings, writings, stories, and visions. They know how to interpret this voice they hear inside - the voice that sees nature.

Roberto Sanesi: Yes, this is the point. Unfortunately, we tend to differentiate literature from other arts too much. Arts among them always seem to be circumscribed, subdivided, as if it was not forbidden, but certainly disdainful to make literature with visual arts, to make literary music or pictorial music. I would say that every art has its own language which is clearly and definitely its own, there is no doubt. However, this does not mean that the sign and the voice do not have a total commonality. This is why I think that literature can lead us to visual arts. For example, let's think of the use of words such as timbre and tone in criticism when judging a painting. This is not by chance... We always use a language that comes from music for visual arts. I am not saying that everything is a cauldron or that there should always be an exchange. I'm saying that there is a point that connects the arts. So, I think that knowledge of all the arts is useful, for those who practice one. Because it is possible that in concordance, you can use analogies, unpredictably, not mechanically, nor passively and heavily. In other words, what I would like to emphasize is the need for acquisition of the means, of the tools of doing. Then you do things rather than others. It is obvious. But there isn't a separation from the point of view in knowledge, there isn't the separation that one would often want to place or impose. I do not know how to say it better. You were saying "painter" and "poet". In fact, I do visual poetry, but simply because it seems to me that writing can go horizontally and, why not, vertically. It is always this sign that is made, that is composed, that is undone, that becomes some things rather than other things. So, I strive to use the medium. Then the results... Those are another matter. That's why I was interested in this attempt to do theater, in which only the words describe what happened including the images. While the text remains as it is, the words allow each individual to make their own theater, their own mental theater. Because the purpose is precisely in this act of translation. Hence the possibility to express themselves precisely in their art. If I can give a verbal image, I believe that a painter can grasp it, that a hundred painters can grasp

it, doing very different things with that image that remains.

Intervention from the public: Not only that but also the image becomes an additional voice.

Roberto Sanesi: Sure, because in turn, it reverberates. That is, in turn, it provokes. There is no painting that does not provoke other paintings. I would say inevitably. On the other hand, I believe that painting is precisely this movement. From a sort of deposit that gets richer and richer and comes out and returns. It goes out and comes back in.

Question from the audience: I wanted to ask if in your opinion the sign in the sense of drawing is more limiting than poetry.

Roberto Sanesi: No, it's just different. It's neither poorer nor richer. It is organized in another way. That is the word I would say. It has this apparently wider reverberation, but it is narrower because it is a code.

Intervention from the public: Because we all use it.

Roberto Sanesi: But it's not that I want to mean home and say another word. If I want to say home, I have to say home. It is an untouchable piece. If I want to mean home I cannot say hime, hume, or heme. I am forced by a code. In the sign of the drawing, this code is not there. As it is formed, this kind of writing is continuously self-shaping, which evokes objects not because it alludes to them as a word but because it represents them. However, I must say that while it represents them, it does not block them, because, again, the look that observes them puts them back in motion. So, they are only two different ways of using the sign, writing. i.e. once again I believe that the Arab philosopher was right: do not go looking in the writing but look in the ink.

Giuliano Collina: If no one has a question I have one, much more technical and much more down to Earth than what you said, but it is about translation. I know two definitions that two poets have given, two artists of translation. I believe that Mallarmé said, "what is poetry? it's that thing that is lost in translations". Then, Bontempelli said, "what is poetry? it is that thing that resists the worst translations". Well, it seems to me that both of them were right because they were talking about two different poems. Mallarmé evidently speaks of a poem that is all matter that is all, precisely, voice, while Bontempelli refers to more conceptual poetry, more of a story, more of content. In translating this last book, this last thing or in any case in translating the English of the nineteenth and twentieth century, which is similar to your environment, I think.

Roberto Sanesi: Lately. Lately, I have also translated *Paradise Lost* by Milton, so...

Giuliano Collina: Here. Of the two definitions, you probably don't like either of them, but in your opinion, they both fit or not?

Roberto Sanesi: In my opinion, the problem once again is the one I am avoiding. That is, to always give the ultimate definitions. "The translation is..." "I am convinced that every text must be interpreted and requires its own translation. The same thing cannot be applied to two different texts of a different nature. For example, if you take *La pioggia nel pineto* by Gabriele D'Annunzio and translate it into any other language, including Japanese, Mallarmé is right. In this case, Mallarmé is right. Poetry is that thing that is lost in translation. It is clear. But why? Because *La pioggia nel pineto*'s essence is in the sound. Sound as its substance. It no longer works in another language. However good it may be, it is no longer the same. As if it were raining in Japan with other words in another way, with another noise, with another kind of sound. But if you take a poem by Pavese...

Giuliano Collina: or by Dante

Roberto Sanesi: No, Dante is quite incredible. Dante is able to fascinate us with sounds even though he doesn't stand only on sound. For example, in Elliot's *Wasteland*, there is a verse that is the English translation of a verse by Dante. Well, when you translate it in Italian, if you don't realize that it is a verse by Dante, you might end up just translating the meaning. It's not that you translate it wrong. You just say "I didn't think that death had killed so many". It is correct because that's the concept. Or "I didn't believe that there were so many deaths". However, Dante's words *Ch'io non credea che morte tanta n'avesse disfatta*...it gives you shivers. From what? Not from the

concept. Dante is a universe, for which you have concrete things, metaphysical things. It is said that Dante's *Paradiso* is devoid of images. But no. *Paradiso* is full of images different from those of *Inferno*. Dante's *Paradiso* is full of mental images, and *Inferno* is full of earthly images, concrete ones. But they are always images. Therefore, I would say that it depends...

Roberto Sanesi

Roberto Sanesi (Milan 1930 - Milan 2001) was an Italian art critic, art historian, poet, and essayist. His multifaceted activity was characterized from the beginning by an interest in the translation of American and Anglo-Saxon literature, literary criticism, and contemporary art. In 1957, his attention to the symbiotic relationship between words and art led him to found the Edizioni del Triangolo, a publishing house dedicated to the publication of poems and drawings by contemporary artists. He collaborates with several magazines, among which *aut aut* (magazine founded by Enzo Paci on which Sanesi publishes the first essays of his career), *Inventario*, *La Fiera Letteraria*, *L'Approdo*, *Il Verri*, *Poesia e critica*, and *Origini*. He translated poems and works by Dylan Thomas, Thomas Stearns Eliot, William Butler Yeats, Conrad Aiken, Christopher Marlowe, Hart Crane, Percy Bysshe Shelley, Archibald MacLeish, William Blake, John Milton, Lewis Carroll, William Shakespeare, Séamus Heaney, Harold Pinter, James Joyce, Vernon Watkins, Walt Whitman. From 1970 to 1975, he was the artistic director of the "International Center of Arts and Costume" of Palazzo Grassi in Venice. He was the author of numerous works in prose and poetry and several essays. Among the many: *Il feroce equilibrio* (1967), *Alterego & altre ipotesi* (1974), *La cosa scritta* (1981), *La differenza* (1988), *Visible* (1991) for poetry, *La polvere e il giaguaro* (1972), *Lettera seconda* (1980) and *Carte di Transito* (1989) for prose and the essays and *Dylan Thomas* (1960), *T. S. Eliot* (1966), *Byron* (1966), *Saggi sul linguaggio organico di Henry Moore* (1977), *Annotazioni sul linguaggio di Hans Richter* (1978), *La trasparenza dell'ombra* (1995).

Fondazione Antonio Ratti
Villa Sucota, Via per Cernobbio 19
Como, Italy

info@fondazioneratti.org
+39 031 3384976
fondazioneratti.org

Soundcloud Instagram
Facebook Vimeo

Rewind

The temporary closure becomes an opportunity for the Foundation to reactivate its archive. Over the past 35 years FAR has presented numerous conferences, workshops, seminars and publications inviting thinkers from different fields: contemporary art, textile history, anthropology, literature and more.

Our *Rewind* project aims to spread and share this amazing resource. The selected materials, presented on a biweekly basis, range across different times and disciplines, offering a new perspective on themes and ideas that are still relevant today.

Looking back, re-hearing, re-learning become strategies to move forward and the archive is activated as a fundamental tool to imagine ourselves in the future.