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RACHEL BLAU DUPLESSIS: A TRANSLATION PROPOSAL

ANNY BALLARDINI – *Bolzano*

The contribution proposes two of Rachel Blau DuPlessis's poems along with their first Italian translation. The poems were chosen by DuPlessis and translated by Anny Ballardini. The first one is an excerpt from *Writing* (1984-1985), while the second is DuPlessis's celebrated *Draft 5: The Gap* (August-September 1988). The parallel texts are introduced by a brief explicatory note.

Il contributo propone la prima traduzione italiana di estratti dalle opere della poetessa americana contemporanea Rachel Blau DuPlessis, scelti dall'autrice stessa e tradotti da Anny Ballardini. Il primo estratto è tratto dalla *Writing* (1984-1985), mentre il secondo estratto è da *Draft 5: The Gap* (agosto-settembre 1988). La traduzione è preceduta da una breve nota introduttiva.

The world that revealed itself in the book and the book itself were never, at any price, to be divided.

Walter Benjamin, *A Berlin Chronicle*, in *Reflections*, trans. by Edmund Jephcott, New York, Harcourt Brace Javanovich, 1974, p. 55

Feminist essayist, critic, and poet, Rachel Blau DuPlessis stands out on the American scene as one of the major authors of our times. Her greatest accomplishment in the poetic field is undoubtedly *Drafts*, a series of 114 poems she wrote based on a grid that starts with 19 Donor Drafts, out of which another five ensue in a horizontal reading; the vertical order is chronological. As argued by Ros Zimmerman in *Incomplete Closures*, *Drafts* «addresses issues of history, gender, politics, philosophy, ecology, identity, boundary and scale, [...] a collage of writings that [faces] what is, for DuPlessis, the inadequacy of the lyric poem to express the political and social struggle of the poet, poetry, and poetics».¹ Daniel Bouchard mentioned the spherical dimension of *Drafts*, with «the recurrence of its themes, its interrogations, glosses, and commentary; its borrowings, appropriations, and writing through old drafts. [...] each draft in the work is autonomous and capable of standing alone» although it is only «through a collective reading of *Drafts*» that the «reader [will] attain the enormously rich, unquestionably challenging but inevitably satisfying experience it offers».²

DuPlessis's work-in-progress can be traced back to the 1960s, initially to the New York School, but one of her two actual turning points took place in 1968: «So the ferment of the 1960s exploding in spring 1968 and beyond was a combustible politicization that made me both '68er and feminist».³ She also gave the date of her very first poem,

¹ ROS ZIMMERMANN, *Incomplete Closures. A Reading of 'Draft 84: Juncture' by Rachel Blau DuPlessis*, in «Journal of Poetics Research» (September 2016), poeticsresearch.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/zimmermann-drafts.pdf.

² DANIEL BOUCHARD, *A Little Yod and a Rocking Enormity*, in *Jacket 2*, ed. by Patrick Pritchett, 14 December 2011, jacket2.org/article/little-yod-and-rocking-enormity.

³ RACHEL BLAUD DUPLESSIS, *Blue Studios: Poetry and its Cultural Work*, in Tuscaloosa (AL), University of Alabama Press, 2006, p. 23.

or better, as she stated: «on January 2, 1973, I awoke to my own poetry», through a re-visitation of Orpheus and Eurydice's myth, «he the figure of the poet, she a dead nothing» who, reflecting DuPlessis's fears and disappointments, is not only receptive to Orpheus's wish to come back, but at the same time «wants to go deeper into the underground cave».⁴ Her other veering arrived with her meeting with George Oppen in 1965 that projected her onto the Objectivist scene. Alan Golding in *Macro, Micro, Material* writes of Drafts as being a «major experiment in post-Objectivism» by explaining how «macro, micro, and questions of gender» together with «concerns with monumentality and its shattering into rubble»⁵ return us to her Objectivist roots. Naomi Shulman points out *At the critical/poetic boundary*⁶ while analyzing DuPlessis's *Draft 52: Midrash* (2004), her attempt to offer a sustained response to Adorno's famous statement that «to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric.»⁷ She quotes the same poet with the following:

His statement comes from the most wrenching revulsion, grief and human anguish. Therefore, because it was so absolutist, I respected it as such. However, because it was so absolutist (plus annihilating, as morally wrong or uncivilized, my desire to write poetry), I felt it had to be discussed. Not answered, discussed. Opened out. Exfoliated. Looked at again and again from any number of angles or facets. That is what my serial poem does. Each time I approach the statement, in the 27 sections of this poem, I try to honor the level of ethical revulsion and grief from which it came. So each of the sections tries to invent an answer to the question why did he say this in the immediate post-war context. What was he getting at by singling out poetry.⁸

In *Drafts and Fragments*, Golding highlights DuPlessis's debt to Ezra Pound right from the title she has given to her vast work, taken from Pound's late book of *Cantos*, *Drafts and Fragments of Cantos CX-CXVIII*, and shows how she turns and returns to his work. Golding underlines that Pound «wanted things settled once and for all», to which he opposes DuPlessis's own use of the fragment and quotes her from *Blue Studios*: «Drafts is pleased to be an unclean, female-penned poem filled with jots and titles and thoroughly contaminated by traces of the Hebraic. Drafts is a poem filled with debris, rot, fragment, corners in which collages of trash collect».⁹ Golding adds: «We know what the 'Poundian mytho-informational model' demands of its readers. The 'notational' mode of *Drafts* will not only operate via brief, contingent observations –

4 *Ibid.*, p. 24.

5 ALAN GOLDING, *Macro, Micro, Material: Rachel Blau DuPlessis*, in *Blackbox*, ed. by Alex Houen and Adam Piette, 2006, www.manifold.group.shef.ac.uk/issue16/AlanGoldingEssayBM16.pdf.

6 NAOMI SHULMAN, *At a Critical/Poetic Boundary*, in *Jacket 2*, ed. by Patrick Pritchett, 14 December 2011, jacket2.org/article/criticalpoetic-boundary.

7 THEODOR W. ADORNO, *Cultural Criticism and Society*, trans. by Samuel Weber and Shierry Weber Nicholson, in *Can One Live After Auschwitz? A Philosophical Reader*, ed. by Rolf Tiedemann, trans. by Rodney Livingstone, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2003, p. 162.

8 SHULMAN, *At a Critical/Poetic Boundary*, cit.

9 ALAN GOLDING, *Drafts and Fragments: Rachel Blau DuPlessis's (counter-) Poundian Project*, in *Jacket 2*, ed. by Patrick Pritchett, 14 December 2011, jacket2.org/article/drafts-and-fragments#1.

notations or notes – but will also provide notes to its notes».¹⁰ Her writings have been developing by mirroring the Judaic Midrash. In fact, the Hebrew Bible, Tanach, is not only read, but literally annotated on the margins of the text.

Ron Silliman in *Un-scene, ur-new* sets *Drafts* in the history of the long poem and underlines how DuPlessis questions rather than answers by «sensing that the right answers need to be further questions».¹¹ He qualifies it as being «one of the major poetic achievements of our time».¹² Her ‘poethics’ (coinage DuPlessis uses, taken from Joan Retallack) «involves investigation, examination, critique, resistance», as the same poet explains in «Gender Arcades».¹³ The same concept of seriality has to be analyzed. It is the poet who defines it: «Seriality accounts for itself by a heuristic sense of even-in-language that becomes a rhythm of thought, accountability via accumulation».¹⁴

The first extract from her vast work suggested in the present context is taken from *Writing* (1984-1985). Hank Lazer asserts that «the palimpsestic overwriting of *Writing* [is] a provocative poem of considerable genius».¹⁵ The second extract is *Draft 5: Gap* (August-September 1988), which has been chosen for its formatting.¹⁶ The poem runs in double columns and acknowledges DuPlessis’s note taken from «writing on Writing» on how the reader can be dislocated in not knowing how to read the poem: «the reader», she states, «as much as the poet» is «at large, we are strained companions».¹⁷ *Draft 5* refers to the death of a relative, as DuPlessis indicated. In perfect agreement with Maria Damon, «[DuPlessis] is more Dante’s pilgrim, than Milton’s God».¹⁸ She expounds further:

DuPlessis asks us to take seriously Olson’s call for the poetry-page as a wide-open field on which historical, theoretical, social and aesthetic problematics unfurl, twist, evolve and mutate dialectically and/or dialogically, bouncing off each other in collision or play, interlocking in agonistic intensity or affectionate rapprochement.¹⁹

The translations I propose below have been revised by the same author, Rachel DuPlessis, who also selected the poems to be translated into Italian.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ RON SILLIMAN, *Un-scene, ur-new: The History of the Longpoem and ‘The Collage Poems of Drafts’*, in *Jacket 2*, ed. by Patrick Pritchett, 17 November 2016, jacket2.org/article/un-scene-ur-new.

¹² RON SILLIMAN, *Silliman’s Blog*, http://ronsilliman.blogspot.it/2004_04_18_archive.html.

¹³ BLAUD DUPLESSIS, *Blue Studios: Poetry and its Cultural Work*, cit., p. 53.

¹⁴ RACHEL BLAUD DUPLESSIS, *Considering the Long Poem: Genre Problems*, in «Readings: Response and Reactions to Poetries» (3 March 2009).

¹⁵ HANK LAZER, *Travelling many direction’d crossings: The Poetry of Rachel Blau DuPlessis*, in *Opposing Poetries*, Evanston (IL), Northwestern University Press, 1996, vol. II, ronsilliman.blogspot.it/2004_04_18_archive.html, p. 35.

¹⁶ RACHEL BLAUD DUPLESSIS, *Draft 5: Gap*, in *Drafts 1-38, Toll*, Middletown (CT), Wesleyan University Press, 2001, pp. 28-32.

¹⁷ RACHEL BLAUD DUPLESSIS, *Writing*, in *Tabula Rosa*, Elmwood (CT), Poets & Poet, 1987, p. 84.

¹⁸ MARIA DAMON, *Pledge, with Draft Unnumbered Precis; Review of Drafts 39-57*, in «How2», II (2006).

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

Imbedding some extruding some the interplay between selection,
 Imbedding, and loss. Some few words, chosen, and why; but are also
 Chosen from, once the day was awash in pinpricks, a pull in the back
 Muscle, overlay and no experience. No experience because all. Say.

Saw. **Operations. Addictions. And no** shadow and it was dark within
 This icy **one knows** brightness all disappearing all intense
 Writing **what**; does it save it? “diaristic” in impulse, but
 Unbargained, imponderable. Over written. Written then over written,
 Over ridden, the selection is one thing, this (the globule, clot) another.
 Different plans and different pictures.

Most poetry something-	Uneven picture patterns,
imagery, structure.	irregular blocks, a rebus
	Trued, held in a rose-pink
	border.

Dreaming I'm crying
 it's she's crying.

DRAFT 5: GAP

Notes to Draft 5 by Rachel Blau DuPlessis: Gap. The deleted and blackened materials suggest the FBI files of George Oppen, received under Freedom of Information Act when I was editing Oppen's Selected Letters. “The little child self” from Mallarmé's *The Tomb of Anatole*, specifically Paul Auster's translation. “An Activity...” is Regina Schwartz explaining interpretation; the notion of memory as interpretation recently in Mary Jacobus. “It is proper” from Irigaray. The black books are by Anselm Kiefer. “Someone” is the dancer Sharon Friedler; “the form” occurs in Japanese music: “jo”—introduction; “ha”—the scattering; “kyu”—the rush to finish.

Includendo alcuni escludendo alcuni l'interazione tra la selezione,
Inclusione e perdita. Solo poche parole, scelte e perché; ma sono anche
Scelte da, appena il giorno era inondato da punture di spillo, uno strappo al
Muscolo della schiena, strato e nessuna esperienza. Nessuna esperienza perché
[tutto. Dì.

I.

████████ photograph.
A man within a day
of dead

estranged in light, that
flat
flash struck,
half-holds his present

Strange ██████████
██████████
██████████
██████████

eyes whitened behind glass

Right on the edge.

lets a child
rip it open

...

“I guess I’ll never see you again” I had almost said

“little child self”
folds child soi(e)
pink silk, tan silk
stroked electricity.

you for a while”
–dried–

enamel a “modern” kind of minimal
mural: indelible black rectangles;
who coded the deletions,

giving

special numbers, offering a sheet of
explanations to translate

why the deletions had occurred.
but I meant “I guess I won’t see
it was careful and exacting work

many entirely black pages
many black squares framed by

grids of half-chucked writing
had been created

by ████████████████████
make golden “needles” engaged.

ma avevo detto la verità
di alcune pagine nulla puoi dire
ammassate. quell'apertura abortita. si sbircia quelle annerite.
una corrente elettrica che cerca di leggere ciò che non può essere letto
da non toccare
soprattutto
con le "mani bagnate dalle lacrime." "sono state eliminate"

2.

Megaliti neri della memoria
Sono forse troppo vuoti o compattati, protetti

Decifrando “evocano per me CORPO” un oscuro
brillio nel quadrato “attività del reprimere
ciò che potrebbe essere il rifabbricare del fare e
perdere” se questa è memoria

un’oscillazione ho una memoria eccellente.

di luce
luce? fogliame? lievito? luogo?
una dissoluzione apre una dispersione delle ombre più leggere
dell’ombra ma se davvero significa ricordare...

nell’oscurità il muro più scuro...

Ogni segno deve toccare un nervo
in un riflusso
di silenzio un ruggito di cicale “è giusto ritornare

di silenzio: ricopre e articola
gli insetti si lamentano tra loro alle ombre”

un suono ben compatto, i loro
impasti di distanza
fluttuante.

The poem's poem
a secret
voice muttering porous you

Black pages of gigantic books, tarred
glutinous with erasure as if
asphalt food were spread
on burlap bread.

sprawled and fragrant

in a webbing of the gaps
woven disclosure...
Low late pre-dawn freight
moans, or seems to
"J-w"
as it rushes the grade crossing

Something read that cannot be
deciphered.

its track shining ahead
and away into unfillable

space.

I said I had spoken the

On which plot

half wrapped in a sweaty sheet

a sheer drop:

one small point, one of the smallest,
if points had sizes,
yet such, that still
can barely imagine its densities and extensives
if all could be factored and scattered over the breadth
that is

and that
it is.

3.

Someone said this form:
one, start
two, "the scattering"
three, a "rush to finish"

but where is it?

La poesia della poesia
un segreto
una voce borbottante porosa tu

Pagine nere di libri giganteschi, incatramati
colloso con cancellatura come se
asfalto cibo fosse spalmato
su pane di canapa.

liscio e fragrante

in una membrana che unisce i divari
divulgazione intessuta...
Lento, sordo, prima dell'alba, treno
geme, o sembra
"Eb-i"
nel suo correre al valico

Qualcosa di letto che non può essere
decifrato.

il binario brilla davanti
e lontano nell'incolmiabile

spazio.

Dissi di aver parlato

Di quale trama

mezza avvolta in un drappo sudato

una caduta a strapiombo:

un puntino, uno dei più minuscoli,
se i punti avessero dimensioni,
pertanto, immobile
a malapena se ne immaginano le densità ed estensioni
se tutto potesse essere fattorizzato e disperso oltre il fiato
ciò che è

e così
è.

3.

Qualcuno disse che questa forma:
uno, partenza
due, "la dispersione"
tre, un'"accelerazione al finale"

ma dov'è?







even
 metal link-
 knot's unfathomable
 ecliptic

swerving

stars–

Call that point “R” on some
 scroll of unrolling:

that I “was once there”
 all right

and in what language of uneasy rapture.

Grass stars, tree stars, dog stars
 misty labyrinth
 sores, spots, pocks, fats, jolts
 teeming
 constellations, and fecund milky spore
 of galaxies on darkling sky

or pinked by the city
 which dims the stars by local plethoras of light:

There, with

little swinging words knots
 bits bugs
 bite or shine

little guttering words...



















the there–

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

pure
legame di metallo-
eclittica insondabile
del nodo

divulgando

stelle–

Dato il punto “R” su qualche
pergamena da srotolare:

sotto un quadrato nero

che io “fui una volta là”
va bene

non lo si riesce a trovare o leggere

e in che lingua di scomoda estasi.

Stelle erba, stelle albero, stelle cane
labirinto nebbioso
piaghe, macchie, butteri, protuberanze, scosse
pullulano
le costellazioni, e spore lattiginose feconde
delle galassie sul cielo che si volge al nero

o al rosa nei pressi della città
che oscura le stelle con pletore locali di luce:

Là, con

piccole parole oscillanti nodi
pizzichi bestiole
mordi o brilla

piccole parole vacillanti...

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PAROLE CHIAVE

Contemporary American Poetry; Rachel Blau DuPlessis; Translation; Feminism.

NOTIZIE DELL'AUTRICE

Anny Ballardini recently ((2017) received a degree in Euro-American Languages and Literatures at the University of Trento, her dissertation was focused on Rachel Blau DuPlessis; she completed her PhD (2013) at the University of Verona, her dissertation explored Charles Sanders Peirce's philosophy in relation to contemporary American Poetry. Her MFA (2008) at the University of New Orleans was earned with a specialization in poetry. She first graduated as an Interpreter and Translator. She has published two collections of poetry: *Ghost Dance in 33 Movements* (Otoliths, 2009) and *Opening and Closing numbers* (Moria, 2005). Her writing appears also in online collections. She translated *Thinking Singing: Selected Poems of Hank Lazer* (QuiEdit, 2015), Henry Gould's *In RI* (2010), and several other poets from English into Italian and from Italian into English, among whom: Dennis Barone, Landis Everson, Ruth Fainlight, James Finnegan, Fan Ogilvie, Ann Fisher Wirth, and Michele Pierri. Ballardini works as a translator and interpreter, and teaches English in Bolzano, South Tyrol.

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Sommario – Ticontre. Teoria Testo Traduzione – VII (2017)

NARRAZIONI DEL SÉ E AUTOTRADUZIONE		v
a cura di Giorgia Falceri, Eva Gentes e Elizabete Manterola		
<i>Narrating the Self in Self-translation</i>		vii
GARAZI ARRULA RUIZ, <i>What We Talk About When We Talk About Identity in Self-translation</i>		1
MARÍA RECUENCO PEÑALVER, <i>Zodorís Califatidis y la ventana del ladrón o de cómo la autotraducción le hace a uno menos extranjero</i>		23
MELISA STOCCO, <i>Negociación lingüística e identitaria en las autotraducciones de tres poetas mapuche</i>		41
ELENA ANNA SPAGNUOLO, <i>Giving Voice To The Hybrid Self. Self-Translation As Strategy</i> By Francesca Duranti / Martina Satriano		67
MARIA ALICE ANTUNES, <i>Autobiographies, Self-translations and the Lives In-Between: the Cases of Gustavo Pérez Firmat and Ariel Dorfman</i>		85
CHIARA LUSETTI, <i>Provare a ridirsi: l'autotraduzione come tappa di un processo migratorio in Amara Lakhous</i>		109
VALERIA SPERTI, <i>Traces de l'auto/traduction dans les romans de Nancy Huston</i>		129
NAMI KANEKO, <i>¿Quién puede hablar por los de Obaba? Una relectura de Obabakoak de Bernardo Atxaga en vista de un cuento perdido en la autotraducción</i>		149
ALAIN AUSONI, <i>Et l'autotraduction dans l'écriture de soi ? Remarques à partir de Quant à je (kantaje) de Katalin Molnár</i>		169
SAGGI		183
MARIAGRAZIA FARINA, <i>Germanica: la travagliata nascita di un'antologia di narratori tedeschi nell'Italia degli anni Quaranta</i>		185
BRUNO MELLARINI, <i>Modelli eroici e ideologia della guerra in Dino Buzzati</i>		201
SERGIO SCARTOZZI, <i>Il 'Fu Eugenio Montale'. Derubare il tempo tra memoria e delitto</i>		225
TEORIA E PRATICA DELLA TRADUZIONE		249
GIULIO SANSEVERINO, <i>Les cymbales du soleil: sulle rese della luce nelle traduzioni italiane de L'Étranger di Albert Camus</i>		251
ANNY BALLARDINI, <i>Rachel Blau DuPlessis: a Translation Proposal</i>		269
ANDREA BINELLI, GIORGIA FALCERI e CHIARA POLLI, <i>Bardi, streghe e altre creature magiche. Tradurre l'Irlanda di Lady Wilde</i>		285
REPRINTS		301
PAOLO CHIARINI, <i>Alle origini dell'intellettuale moderno. Saggio su Heine</i> (a cura di Fabrizio Cambi)		303
<i>Introduzione</i>		311

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