

Translating Dino Buzzati

Victoria Grotti (November 02, 2012)



Oftentimes translators do not get the attention they deserve, so i-italy interviews Natasha Lardera* an Italian journalist and translator who has worked on *No Escape*, 4 monologues by Dino Buzzati to be presented by Kairos Italy Theater at the Cherry Lane Theater.



... months passed, years passed, and I wondered if it would always continue this way, if the wishes, the dreams of my youth would atrophy little by little, and fade, if the big opportunity would come or not, and around me I was seeing other men, some of my age, others much older, who let themselves be carried away by the same slow river.

This is a quote from an interview to Dino Buzzati by fellow journalist Alberico Sala, featured in the introduction to the 1966 Oscar Mondadori edition of his famous novel *The Tartar Steppe*.

There are people who have been able to fulfill the wishes of their childhood, and i-italy's contributing writer Natasha Lardera is one of them.

Since 2004, she has translated for [KIT, Kairos Italy Theater](#) [2], an Italian company based in New York City known for doing bilingual theater, and the two collaborated on several projects. The latest result of this collaboration is *No Escape*, 4 monologues by Dino Buzzati.

This is just a chat, a few thoughts on Buzzati and translating. Oftentimes translators do not get the attention they deserve, so here we go.

What is the action plan when facing a text that needs to be translated and what are the main issues to tackle?

I believe that the first important thing is to be familiar with the author and his/her style and language. In this case I was very familiar with Buzzati's work, being one of my favorite authors. I grew up hearing stories about him, being my father (the singer Tony Dallara) a close friend of his. Unfortunately they were just stories and I never had a chance to meet him. I loved to hear of my dad and him hanging out in Via Solferino at the headquarters of *Il Corriere della Sera* or of my dad inviting him to his studio to show him some paintings he had worked on eager to get his feedback. Buzzati never really liked his style but nevertheless he kept encouraging him. Wherever Buzzati went, Sweden, Belgium or even the outskirts of Milan he used to send my dad a postcard with a sentence in Milanese dialect that said "be brave, painter!"

One of my favorite quotes by Buzzati is from the intro to *Poema a Fuumetti* (Poem Strip) and it says "These are the facts: I am the victim of a cruel oversight. I am a painter who has also worked as a writer and journalist. The world believes it's vice versa and does not take my paintings seriously." They had this in common, my father, a singer who really wants to be a painter, and Buzzati... but I am losing focus.

La Famosa Invasione degli Orsi in Sicilia (The Bears' Famous Invasion of Sicily, a delightful children's book about a bear king who leads his army to invade the world of the wicked humans) is something I enjoyed when I was little... the story was fun but I loved to look at the drawings, every little detail. Years later, after hearing of *Il Deserto dei Tartari* (The Tartar Steppe) over and over I bought my own copy and read it. I don't think I really got it all, I was too young and I got bored easily, but I enjoyed it enough to read it again years later to finally understand it.

I have read a good amount of his work. I also read his short stories, some of his theater and his *cronaca nera*. As a reporter, I particularly admire how his articles were a scrupulous and clean chronicle of the facts yet they had a special poetic touch. Carlo Bo, poet, literary critic and professor wrote, "Buzzati was a reporter of absolute accuracy, yet he was always going beyond and described everything with the miracle of poetry."

When I was given the four monologues I read them a few times in order to figure out what the right approach was. And I read them as a woman, without forgetting that it was a man who wrote them. I dove into the text and basically turned into a medium who is given a text and gives it back different in language but the same in spirit and form. Obviously, most difficulties come from linguistic and stylistic complexities. Buzzati's writing is meticulous in pointing out terms, tones and details that express moods and specific yet different meanings.



When you translate, it would be wonderful to have the opportunity to speak with the author in order to ask questions and get feedback but that has never really happened to me when working on big translation projects, only when translating some short articles. I have been lucky enough to work on writings by some of the greatest, like Pasolini, for Accattone in Jazz and Totò for the book A Prince Named Totò (both projects in collaboration with KIT), so I am happy...yet having worked on Buzzati's writing was a bit emotional just because of the personal background.

Tell us about the four monologues presented by KIT with the show No Escape, at the Cherry Lane Theater

These monologues were written in the late '50s and 60's and tell the stories of four women "trapped into their lives like passionate and proud victims of a fate they can't control. Solitude, magic, absurd, wait and death are the dominant themes of these ironic and at the same time dramatic monologues."

Spogliarello (Striptease) tells, in seven episodes, the story of Velia, a woman who is looking for financial stability through a relationship with a married man. After his death, things get pretty tough but even in front of death Velia doesn't lose her biting wit.

L'orologio (The Clock) tells, using a magic realism tone, the story of Irma. Because of a diabolic clock this woman is forced to live and re-live moments of her painful cohabitation with her late husband. These jumps in time make the audience understand what happened and what changed her life thus trapping her in a never-ending cycle.

Sola in casa (Alone at home) is the story of Iris, a fortune-teller who's locked herself into her apartment because she is afraid of a serial killer who's loose in her neighborhood. One night she lets a man into the apartment because she thinks he is someone she knows. He wants his fortune told and the cards reveal something very disturbing. The noir ending of this monologue becomes a moment of personal confrontation with life and solitude.

La Telefonista (The Operator) tells the story of Luisa, a switchboard operator at work in a large hotel. The text is written in two parallel alternate levels: on one side we have the insistent voices of the hotel's guests while on the other we peek into her personal life through a difficult conversation with her lover. The monologue is brief yet very intense, the protagonist's moods vary significantly with each word.

When I was translating each monologue I said to myself "this is my favorite one." They all are so good. What strikes me the most is that even though they can be mysterious and surreal, like The Clock for example, they are so real too. I have been Luisa, busy at work in my old office at Transperfect Translations translating the new consumer manual for Mac while texting the man I thought was the love of my life trying to figure out if he should move away or not. How I wanted to drop everything and just take care of what really mattered to me right then. And I have been Iris, locked in my apartment, my safe haven when what's out there scares me so much that I'd rather speak with my cat. I've had the hopes of Velia and I have been humiliated just like Irma. I think these monologues speak to every woman. Buzzati lets anxiety and restlessness subtly infiltrate a domestic context that is otherwise reassuring.

In the end I do not have a favorite monologue, but I have a favorite memory of when I was translating them. I was working on Alone at Home, and I literally was home alone. But not at my place, I was house sitting. I was staying in this huge and luxurious villa. It had dozens of rooms and I was sitting at the desk in the studio on the third floor translating. I was all alone... at night of course. And I tried setting the alarm but I was not successful, so the alarm was off. Needless to say I really identified myself with Iris...and the more I was translating the spookier the whole situation was getting. I am so lucky nobody rang the doorbell or called me because I really would have jumped out of my skin. I believe that the ambiance really helped me in choosing the right words to tell Iris's story, words and thoughts.

The monologues are presented by two different actresses in two languages: in English followed by the original in Italian.



For dates please check [KIT's web site](#) [2], shows have been rescheduled because of hurricane Sandy.

*Natasha Lardera has a degree in Film and Creative Writing from Emerson College, Boston, MA, and a Master in Journalism from NYU. She is a journalist, translator and writer, who has been the managing editor of various Italian and American publications focused on cinema, food, wine, and tourism.

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