

THE SIGH PRESS

ISSUE 8 • SPRING 2016

NOTE FROM THE EDITORS

The itch and scratch of spring. If it hasn't caught up with you yet, it will, and this issue might help that along. There is always a slightly frisky nature to spring: John Gerard Sapodilla and JJ Piglet's *The Vain Elephant and the Parrot Evaristo* explores this with an unconventional love story, while Erzsébet Gilbert's *March Air* looks to first love, in its many (sometimes furry) forms. Alice-Catherine Jennings brings us on a journey of seasons, both inward and out, through the *The Imagined Diary of Julian of Norwich*, while Jeff Shapiro debates the merits of Mozart and Beethoven from his kitchen window. You'll find photography by Lillian Rodriguez and, for our Cultural Commentary, an excerpt from *The Risotto Guru* by bestselling-author Laura Fraser. Laura's interview with Contributing Editor, Jalina Mhyana, will inaugurate TSP interview series we'll be launching later this month.

Open Mic Poetry Night will be the 7th April at St Mark's. This time we will have a musical interval with Derek Mattuchio singing some of his own work. The traditional Negroni will be served too, to help combat stage jitters.

TSP is collaborating with Florence Writers on a Publishing Day on the 14th May. This promises to be a fantastic event for would-be writers or those with a book already under their belt. The panel will include Literary Agents Kimberley Cameron and Andrea Cirillo, Harpercollins Editor Martha Ashby, and writer Nuala O'Connor, who will all lend their years of experience to discussions and one-on-one meetings. See TSP Facebook page for more info.

This June marks the second anniversary of TSP and we have a special event in the pipeline for that, which will coincide with the release of the Summer Issue. More to follow! Please visit www.thesighpress.com for our Summer Issue theme and deadline, and our Facebook page for updates and news.

Lyall Harris & Mundy Walsh

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LILLIAN RODRIGUEZ



!

THE VAIN ELEPHANT AND THE PARROT EVARISTO

JOHN GERARD SAPODILLA & JJ PIGLET

Thin rings of smoke rise like a spiral staircase from the cigar of Evaristo, who dangles on a branch pretending to read his magazine “Colourful Quills Flying High.” There are some days that Evaristo is tormented by visions of the curved shapes of Ariosta, which have delighted and shocked the young adventurous parrot and left him absorbed, bound in murky delights and fantasies.

The first yellow and green orchid came to rest on the water, without being noticed, between the feet of the vain elephant Ariosta. Sitting in the shallow water of the shore, Ariosta continued to rub her skin with a smooth stone. My God, what wrinkled skin I have this morning, thought the elephant, it must be the humidity of the lake. The second black and red orchid spiralled around the trunk of Ariosta and bobbed up and down, barely noticeable, next to the first orchid. Maybe it would improve if I take a mud bath. This smooth stone is useless, she thought again.

The third white and blue orchid floated in a respectful loop in the air and came to rest between the first two, always between the feet of Ariosta. The elephant arched her eyebrows, feigning indifference. She began to roll her big eyes, but forced herself not to turn around. Now that

she thought about it, for a few minutes she had noticed what felt like a rustle, a current of air above her head. No one was ever allowed to spy on her while she was in the bathroom, yet someone was spying. Who dared? Behind Ariosta, two little eyes, daring and fearful at the same time, continued to admire her from a well-hidden spot among the branches near the shore. Below those eyes, the bold and proud parrot Evaristo's beak munched peanuts and muttered words of admiration for the beautiful shapes of the elephant, quite unlike those other flibbertigibbets, all painted feathers and scrawny bones. Finally, a satisfied Evaristo set off in flight and began to swoop and glide in front of Ariosta.

"My dear, I hope you liked my sweet floral tribute, or perhaps you would prefer a small bunch of fresh shoots?" A startled Ariosta pricked up her ears and her trunk.

"Who are you, how dare you?" she cried indignantly at the parrot.

Furious, she hauled herself out of the water and fled to the shore, reaching a placid herd of elephants.

All of this happened on a warm sunny late morning at the lake. Throughout the afternoon, Ariosta, much to the surprise of the herd, did nothing more than rubbing and preening on tree bark, regarding her reflection in flat pools of water on the trail of the herd and looking up through the branches at the slightest rustling. None of the elephants said anything explicit about it, and there was nothing to worry about. Soon the low shoots on the lakeshore would finish and the whole herd would move elsewhere, far, far away.

Ariosta would follow. She couldn't bear some parrot's nest. And so the herd pretended indifference and continued to tear off the shoots in

silence. However, when Ariosta began to flap her big ears, running toward the lake and leaping into the water with a big splash, so many times in succession, the herd couldn't help but turn around to stare at her with curiosity. Ariosta felt compelled to explain aloud:

"I needed to freshen up. What did you think, that I wanted to learn to fly?"

Naturally, the tribe of parrots also had followed the progress between Ariosta and Evaristo since their first meeting. If an elephant is an animal considered to be serious and reserved, none of this can be said of parrots.

Nature has endowed the parrot with a beak as hard as steel, to enable it to grind down its prey. From each branch, in the treetops, every parrot began to gossip with its neighbour, heard by all.

"Evaristo's family" said Green Beak "has always been really weird. Do you remember his first cousin? Her name was Evarista. She was dating a blackbird and all the time was saying that a judge was after her. If anyone asked her for an explanation about the small yellow beak of her blackbird, Evarista would reply seriously that it was due to the fact that the Blackbird was a member of the High Court."

Now came the turn of narcissistic Rainbow. He, after seeing his tail feathers in a mirror, appeared to remind them: "What would we say about Blessed Badgerigar, the uncle of Evarista, who wanted, through his prayers, to train monkeys to fly so that they could become like us?"

Professor Dryfeather remembered a distant relative of Evaristo, Doctor Subtlepeak, who had studied abroad and published the essay "Parrots and Monkeys Together; A Future in Imitation."

The parrots went on like this for hours on end, the beat and the squawk of their beaks was like an orchestra of vibrating hammers. The glowing sunset, after the heat of the day, left the herd of elephants gently blowing and sighing softly during the tepid night. Halfway through the next morning, a garland of flowers rested on Ariosta's head, but this time it was not a surprise like the previous morning. In fact, in the water Ariosta saw the reflection of Evaristo's open wings as he glided slowly toward her head from the tall treetops, with a twisted, circular petal held in his beak.

"A Crown for you, my little Queen" whispered Evaristo into one of Ariosta's big ears.

Ariosta did not know what to say. It was a highly unusual situation. How to behave in such a case? As everyone knows, elephants have specific rules for each occasion. No one has ever seen one of them improvise or behave in an unpredictable manner. A herd of elephants is like an exclusive club, only open to their fellows. Have you ever seen one of them chase another animal, or even greet them? This intervention by Evaristo was quite unexpected, an embarrassing situation. What strange comportment, thought Ariosta, and why pick me? She thought that his short colourful tail gave him a regal air. Could he be a Prince in disguise?

Indeed, she still did not know what to do. Should she keep quiet and leave, bristling, or respond with courtesy? Elephants are guided by the rules of their own instincts in every circumstance. Where do you find instinct when you're dealing with a parrot? There were no precedents. Eventually, she decided on a reserved attitude and behaviour. Ariosta slowly rose from the water with all the dignity she could muster and

headed for shore. She had already almost repented and was about to turn around when a terrible trumpeting made her wince.

“Is there ever a goddamn time one can stay quietly in the same place?” It was the leader of the herd of elephants, who was giving a fatal kick to a tree from which he had just snatched the last bud in trunk range.

Ariosta shivered when she heard the trumpeting. It was time for the herd to depart from the lake. The shoots to eat were over. The leader of the herd began marching first, trumpeting two blasts from his raised trunk, and onward.

One by one the elephants turned their backs on the lake and moved into the woods behind their leader. Ariosta moved last, with a strange gait. She dawdled and sometimes stopped with her big ears open, on the off chance she might hear a rustle in the trees.

Then she turned, pretending to rub against a log to dry off her wet skin. Eventually, so as not to lose sight of the herd, Ariosta resigned herself to trot along with her trunk to the ground.

She proceeded in silence, when suddenly a bud, warmed by the sun, came to rest on her back and sent a thrill of pleasure along her spine. Then another bud followed, by another, and more and more.

Evaristo, who previously perched on a branch, had followed her and broken off the shoots of the treetops, where the sun is hottest, to place on Ariosta’s back.

In the beginning this was enough; Ariosta remained silent and just smiled. Later the elephant whispered these words unto him:

“My Lord parrot, I see you insist on following me. Would you mind removing the insect stuck between the folds of skin inside my left ear?”

The parrot flew gently around Ariosta's ear and disappeared inside. Ariosta felt the soft feathers and the thin beak on her skin, and sighed in a sensation of mild shivers. Next time I have to dry myself more carefully after bathing, she scolded herself.

The parrot stepped reluctantly out from Ariosta's ear. Ariosta saw him circling around her head and assumed a casual attitude, but eventually decided to talk to him again.

"Now, after this do not think that you have talent, my Lord Brightfeather. However, since I have seen you hanging around me, you fill my head with peanut shells. There would seem to be a better use of your time. Perhaps you could break me a coconut in half, with which I could smooth a few little skin folds?"

The parrot replied, "Oh, I will tone you up very well, my lady. Let me handle everything."

So the parrot broke a coconut and with a rough edge in its beak, brought it to skim and file her skin, delicately turning vertical circles with this tool and causing even more of a thrill, similar to the one you achieve when grating cheese.

Ever since then, when Ariosta complained about the heat, Evaristo would fly up and blow a small cloud until it came to rest above the elephant and leave her in the shade. The other elephants in the herd were complaining all the time, because they could not understand where their peanuts had gone. The tribe of parrots took Evaristo's departure in a practical spirit. Fewer parrots meant more peanuts to share. This put an end to their gossip for the moment.



MY CAT SMELLS LIKE BRUCE WILLIS

!

MARCH AIR

ERZSÉBET GILBERT

It was around the same time that my sister found her first violin (O, springtime of our discord! torment of the treble clef!), and I enrolled in elementary chemistry (those uproarious families of ions and isotopes, all flinging electrons at one another and exploding)—it was around this time when we heard the scratching beneath the floor. My youngest brother swore it was the ghosts he'd seen playing whist in the stairwell, their hands formed of mildew and regret—but Michelino was always telling lies. You knew never to believe him when he'd wipe the shimmer of snot from his nose and declare *this-is-so* or *I-saw-that* or *this-is-what-I-really-want*. Everything he said was a trick mirror which meant its opposite.

It's the ghosts! He nodded with the immense gravitas which all children know. Ghosts under your shoes!

You're a liar, my sister told him crossly.

Well, there's nothing there, Michelino claimed. I don't hear a thing.

But you knew that he did—we all heard that noise under the floor. The March air was so strangely hot, I recall, and the afternoon of perspiration and ill-fated ice cream was just sliding into evening's relief. Beyond our windows the rooftops appeared to swoon into their buildings,

the fatigue of terracotta. Leaning out over the street five stories below, you could see the people sloping from workaday clamor into inevitable wine, and every flagstone took on a curious, woozy blue. Our own shabby, small, browned apartment remained quiet, for my father had one of those nagging headaches I always suspected to be a ploy to hush us up (this was fortunate, given Veronica's execrable violin).

Do you hear that? Being the second-youngest son, my brother Cristoforo was always trying to be the boldest of us all (he'd fought a mastiff, once). Fresh acne had rendered his face like the surface of the sun, but he and I always got along. Don't you hear that noise?

With her halo of intellect and uncombed hair, my mother turned from the stovetop at which she indifferently stood. Don't be silly, she told Cristoforo. You'll scare your brother.

Veronica looked up from her attempts to knot ribbons into a cats'-cradle (which created instead a geometrically improbable snarl). No, she said. I hear it too! Under the boards!

Cross-legged upon the ragamuffin rug, Michelino sniffed. Ghosts!

I caught the sound too, a peculiar scritch-scratch of the sort usually described to rhyme with *pandemonium* in children's poems. Though our building was somewhat dilapidated and always smelled of petroleum, I did not believe it could be anything wrong with the wiring—it was too spasmodic, erratic, preoccupied with something in the dark. You could admit it had something of the uncanny to it, like moonshine with claws.

But that evening I was far too concerned with something else; this was also around the time that I met Serafina. As the eldest child I felt

myself to be aware of a ripening world of cocoons and imaginings my siblings could not know, and at sixteen felt myself exploring a secret science my parents could never understand. Serafina seemed to know everything about protons and phosphorus and phosphorescence, and how pretty she was! I told her I wanted to be friends, and now dawdled at the telephone and twisted my braid, waiting for her to call.

What are you doing? My father grumbled in his armchair, yesterday's yellowing news upon his belly. Haven't you any homework? And what is that damnable scratching, anyhow?

My father always pretended to be crankier than he really was, but mostly he was only full of concern. He had been a sincere, woebegone researcher into the possibility of alternate universes where nothing made any sense, but never had his theories proved fruitful; we all knew he was composing a grandiloquent treatise upon the subject with no conclusion in sight. Still he remained proud of his disorderly children, and never jealous of his wife.

At twenty-three my mother had published a highly praised article regarding the quintessence of melancholy in interminable novels, which had earned her a professorship at the university (her office a closet). Years later, her lectures had waxed prophetic and her salary remained the same, which was why we lived here and only had clothes previously worn by somebody else. But my mother believed that whatever it is that keeps us human can only endure in the presence of little tragedies.

I did not feel the same. Why wouldn't Serafina call? Nobody could understand, I was sure.

Ai! Ai! There came a bellowing from the washroom. Ai! What's that sound?

My uncle Pancrazio had not left the bathtub in seven years. I remember him lying there, draped in a sopping bathrobe beneath an imperial beard which may or may not have been foam, soap for his signet in his clawfoot throne. Heaven knows how he did more squalid things! The rest of us were forced to scrub ourselves with despicable sponges in a barrel by the lavatory—but we all accommodated him, for after all, family is family and we must stand by them, even should the ground open up beneath our feet.

My father groaned, rising from the armchair now to grope for his glasses (ocular pranksters hiding behind the milk pitcher). Yes, yes, he admitted. I hear it too. What in mercy's name is that?

The scratching had amplified now, so that it seemed to taunt us with its own unlikelihood, daring you to believe this was more than a moment of shared hysteria. Almost I could believe Michelino was right about the ghosts, had I not known he was such a liar.

I'm hungry, my brother whined. This, of course, meant he'd already stuffed himself upon sweets and would refuse to eat anything tonight.

The soup will be ready soon, my mother said (she always performed housework in the most lackadaisical way, for she simply didn't care about kitchens). Barley with onion.

We all grimaced, having supped upon nothing else for a whole week.

Well, it was on sale! My mother shrugged. What else am I to do with all this barley?

I noticed Cristoforo toying with something in his lap: a porcelain bowl, adorned with asphodels for rich people.

I lowered my voice. Did you steal that?

Ssshhh!

Of course I would never, ever have told on my brother, not for anything.

Veronica wrinkled her pert nose. What's that smell? It's awful.

Crawling from cupboard to corner, Michelino pointed. It's there.

We all peered between the muddle of used furniture and dowdy laundry to see tiny pellets by the baseboard, the wet grapes of our dismay.

Smells like crap, Cristoforo said.

Watch your mouth! My father glowered (though he himself employed the poetical curses of a buccaneer). Get away from the telephone! he barked at me.

Why wouldn't Serafina call? She's driving me mad, I thought.

The scratching seemed all over the place, now here by the broken radiator, now there by the stool which was Veronica's makeshift music stand, now scraping ridicule under your toes. In mismatched slippers my father began following it around our single room. I could see that he believed it to be evidence, auspicious proof of his harebrained hypotheses of infinite moonlit worlds.

There! Cristoforo pointed to the dust-balls beside the pile of books.

No, Michelino insisted, it's over here. Liar!

My father knelt to heave aside a piteously outdated dictionary, revealing a splintered hole in the floorboards with their witchy eyes. He reached in (I did not know he was so brave) to retrieve a tiny body of dun fur, two drooping ears, a rosy nose, eyes of watery black fear.

A rabbit! Veronica clapped her hands. Let's name it!

My father was trembling; though first I believed him to be weeping, I saw now that it was laughter that shook him.

Coney! Uncle Pancrazio wobbled from the washroom, dripping suds as a wedding train. We'll eat coney tonight!

Mad as a March hare, my mother chuckled.

Michelino stood. I want to eat coney tonight.

But we all knew this was utterly untrue, which is how my family first acquired our bunny.

This is just what we need, my mother sighed. Another mouth to feed. But she was smiling, pouring barley into Cristoforo's misdemeanor bowl.

Veronica untangled her ribbons, tying a crimson one gently around the rabbit's neck.

You're all skipping school tomorrow! my father declared. We're off to the countryside, to take our bunny for a walk!

Serafina never did telephone me, though what happened when I grew up is a different story of its own. Once, my mother quoted some famous line from a highly significant book whose doleful symbolism she understood well, which I was supposed to read but never did—something about all happy families being exactly alike. Maybe it's true, but I don't

know about that. The following day I skinned my knee in the meadows of baby animals and poor asphodels, acting like some crazy kid.



GEMINATE

,

selections from

NOTATIONS: THE IMAGINED DIARY OF JULIAN OF NORWICH

ALICE-CATHERINE JENNINGS

Notation No. 131

A winter afternoon—
the waning moon gains its bed.
I submerge myself in blankness.
Entry: December 28, 1375

Notation No. 257

The sweet eye of pity
pallid and ignoble
like a kestrel, it rises.
Entry: November 22, 1378

Notation No. 214

The threads, the floss,
the swan quill pens—
the muddle I sort
in this fair space.

Entry: May 6, 1377

Notation No. 445

In the dimpled water
my chin unwrapped of linen
appears as white as an albino bat.

Entry: September 26, 1383

Notation No. 337

After the rain—
the rye grass shivers
in a doily of tears.

Entry: April 21, 1380

Notation No. 842

The day came yellow with a swallow in time.
She is that which is all to her chicks,
her chiffon puffs. She is almond,
aqua and fawn.

Entry: April 16, 1413

Notation No. 301

My point of faith, the pyx
blessed bilberries, my bliss.

Entry: August 31, 1379

Notation No. 92

A freckled frog
the sphagnum fields
the secret smell of wet.

Entry: August 31, 1375

Notation No. 568

The shoots of crocuses
grass-like green—
the tassels of Spring.
Entry: February 25, 1387

Notation No. 78

A mistletoe thrush
perches on a bare branch
an oak leaf rustles
dusk settles on grey hills,
I jump to grab the sun.
Entry: March 21, 1375

the waning moon had gained its bed
from Dante's *Purgatorio* translated by Hollander and Hollander



BEETHOVEN'S EARS

JEFF SHAPIRO

Mozart on my stereo. *Sinfonia Concertante* in E-flat, second movement. Since I was a teenager, the piece had shined as my paradigm of love. Perfectly in equilibrium, neither voice overpowering, the violin and viola sang to each other—calling, answering, whispering, intertwining. Humans should learn to dialogue so well.

Today, a spring morning, I had moved the table and chairs in my apartment to sweep the floor, still not used to the post-separation experience of cleaning house for no one but myself. This particular morning, cleaning became somehow exhilarating, a truce from more habitual sadness. Everything appeared a possible hypothesis, a case of wait-and-see. Mozart on the stereo, the air in my apartment smelling of furniture polish and lemon-scented soap, sunshine breezing in the window, welcome and soft. This spring I had no idea of what might happen next. Maybe something new.

Voices outside my kitchen window, a man's and a woman's voice talking in an Italian, a language which remained a challenge. Focusing, I realized they were discussing my name.

For the villagers who knew me, my name was no easy matter. When I had first arrived the previous autumn, they figured Jeff must be a form of Joseph, which is Giuseppe, which gets shortened to Beppe.

"Come si pronuncia?" the man asked again.

"Jeff-e," the woman told him, putting emphasis on the extra syllable. I smiled to hear my landlady get my name so nearly right.

"O, JEFF-E!" the man called.

I leaned out. Luisa twisted her head up from her kitchen window one storey below mine. "O, Jeffe! Ezio here wants to talk to you."

I recognized Ezio and his impressive, professional streetsweeper's broom. A big, natural-looking thing made from bush branches lashed to a pole. A medieval broom to sweep a medieval town.

"O JEFF-E!" Ezio smiled up, enjoying himself.

I liked Ezio, even though he had come to tell me off once at the start of winter. One day I had chopped firewood by the shed across the stone pathway from house. The next morning at a quarter to seven, my doorbell rang and Ezio stood there to say I had to sweep away the woodchips. I started to explain they were so few that the next rain would wash them down the gutter. "Oh!" he cut me off. "We can't leave the ground disordered here in Chiusure. We're not hardly in the country." I thought about the village of ninety-three people on a hilltop with countryside all around. If this didn't count as country, what did? But it was no good arguing with Ezio because he was one of those people who have a point when they have a point. So at quarter to seven in the morning I put on shoes and stepped out to the ice, taking my store-bought broom with me to sweep up my woodchips. Ezio watched, his big broom at rest.

When the pathway was clean, he shook my hand, thanked me, and gave out a terrific laugh.

Springtime now, and he stood below my window, chatting with Luisa, leaning on his broom in the sunlight, playing with my name. "JEFF-E-E-E!"

I smiled back. "What can I do for you?"

"Tell me a thing, Jeffe," he said. "Which music is this, that you're always playing, that comes out of your window?"

"This? Now? It's Mozart."

He tilted his head to hear better. "Could you raise the sound?"

I turned up the stereo.

He listened. "Sad," he decided. "A little slow and sad."

I didn't tell him about paradigms of perfect love. "Yes, the *andante*, this movement. The next one is more—more *allegro*," I said, getting a kick out of the chance to utter a musical word in its native context.

To the stereo once more to fast-forward to the next track.

"See?"

He listened. "More *allegro*, sì, but—" He shook his head. "I don't know. This Mozart. He's too light. Kind of music the wife likes if they make a concert in Asciano. She could listen forever, but I, as soon as they start to play, close my eyes and sleep. I need heavy music. Music with more—" He made forceful gestures with his hands.

"Heavy music?" I said. At the stereo I took off Mozart in favor of a Bach organ fugue.

"*Madonnina!*" scowled Ezio when I leaned out. Luisa below had her fingers in her ears. "This," Ezio said, "this is for the church when you're dead."

"You said you wanted heavy."

"Heavy, yes! But not like this. Heavy strong. I want heavy strong."

I ducked inside and looked at my CDs, searching. Finnick chamber music wouldn't do, nor anything thin-voiced for solo instruments. We needed an orchestra here. A big one. A chorus as well. Ezio wanted heavy, I'd hit him with the works.

"Right." I returned to the window, the music starting up. "Try this."

The opening of Beethoven's ninth symphony, the strings testing out notes as if the instruments had to search for language before deciding what should be said. Ezio listened with his head to one side. Several older men from the bar around the corner came and clumped near him, waiting to hear his judgment.

"Heavier, yes," he nodded. "But it's lacking something still. It lacks—" He made the motion of striking the air with sticks.

"A drum," I said. "You're right. Beethoven thought precisely the same thing. So listen to what he does."

"Beethoven, this music?"

"His last symphony, yes." I skipped ahead to the second movement. The orchestra pounded its theme, everything percussive. The drum replied, an echo stronger than the sound itself.

Ezio and the men from the bar seemed impressed. "*Ci siamo quasi*," he said. "We're almost there. However—" His face was unconvinced. "There's still something that lacks."

"But it's coming! After this movement with the drums, there's the softer one. Wait—" A fast trip to the stereo. The murmur of strings.

Ezio shook his head in disgust. "This one is for the wife."

"Beethoven must have put that in for contrast," I apologized. "Let's jump to the end. See what you think of this." And there we were, about to hear the finale.

Themes came in from the earlier movements. Ezio, I could tell, started to get bored. "*Aspetta*," I said. "You might know this melody."

The strings intoned the Ode to Joy.

Ezio listened. So did the old men from the bar. Luisa, in her kitchen window, inclined her ear. "Don't know it," Ezio said of the melody. "Very pretty though." He nodded. "*Bellino davvero. No?*" The other men agreed.

"But still," he continued, "it's light. Could be heavier. It's lacking—"

"Here comes the rest of the orchestra," I said.

Yum-tum-tee-ta-da-da-da-dum—

Licia, the woman who ran the bar, came to listen, her hands in the pockets of her smock.

"Fuller yet?" I asked Ezio.

"More full, yes." The trumpet rippled its run between the bars of the repeat, and all the orchestral ranks squared off to belt out the theme, strong and proud, as if greeting the end of the world. "Yes," said Ezio. "In Asciano they never play anything this big. However, there's something missing. It still lacks—"

"Gets better!" I shouted to be heard over the din. "Chorus enters in a second."

The baritone interrupted the waves of sound which had suddenly grown fraught. He summoned the chorus, commanding everyone to turn away from discord and to rejoice instead.

On the sunlit street, Ezio and Licia and the men from the bar listened along with Luisa in her kitchen window as Beethoven's chorus sang of the Elysian joy that united all mankind. Mozart may have left Ezio cold, but there was no way Beethoven could disappoint.

"*Allora?*" I asked when the music quieted for a moment.

"Good," Ezio passed sentence. "*Parliamoci chiaro*. It's good, this stuff. Very good. Pretty, with the orchestra and the chorus and the solo singers. But still, I have to say—" He held out his hands, then let them drop to his sides. "There's something it lacks."

"Tell me," I surrendered. "What does this music lack?" Behind me, the soloists sang in quartet, soaring through variations of ever-living bliss.

Ezio concentrated, listening this time not to the manifest sounds but to the notes not present. "Ah!" he said, having found what he sought. "*Te lo dico io*. I'll tell you myself. What isn't here is what makes music music. You see—" with his hands he expanded and contracted the instrument seen only by him "—you see, *la fisarmonica* isn't present in this music at all."

"That's what's missing?" I asked. "The accordion?"

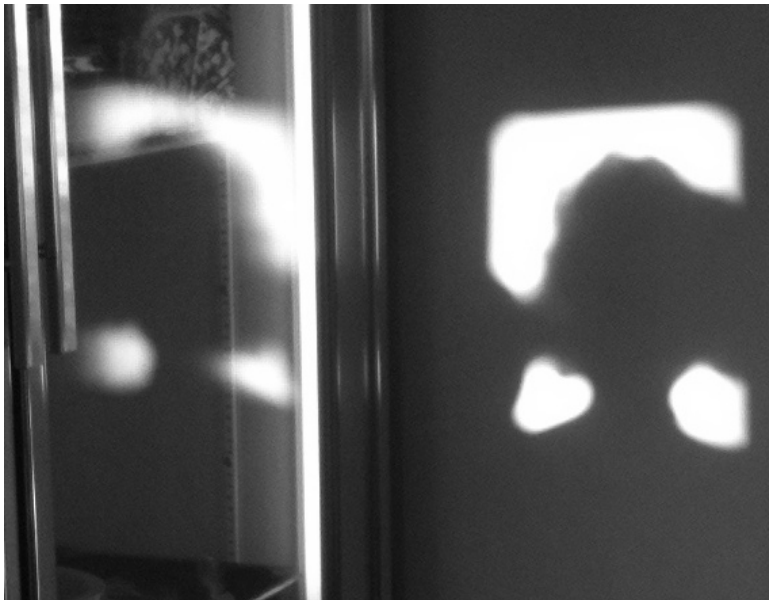
"*La fisarmonica*. Sì. That is the lack."

The people from the bar listened for a moment and decided Ezio was right.

"But you have to remember," I said in mitigation, "Beethoven was deaf."

"La dice lunga," said Ezio. "That would explain it." Then his face grew thoughtful while the chorus continued its song. "Imagine. If this Beethoven could have heard his music," Ezio conjectured, "imagine what he might have written instead."

What could I say? Ezio was one of those people who have a point when they have a point.



ORTHURUS



from

THE RISOTTO GURU

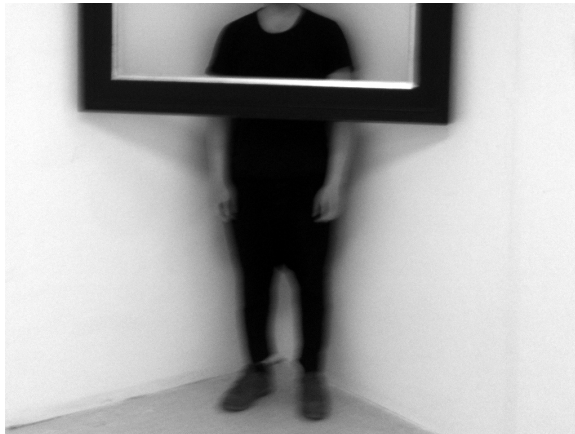
LAURA FRASER

For over 10 years, I have been trying to make the perfect risotto. It sounds easy, and a lot of Italians make it look easy: You sauté some onions in a little butter or olive oil, toss in some rice, glaze it, add a splash of wine, then broth, one ladle at a time, stirring all the while, until the rice absorbs or your arm gives out. When it's almost ready, you throw in a few condiments (mushrooms, shrimp, asparagus, fresh peas, pancetta, whatever), and grate a little cheese on top at the end. Voilá. Risotto.

But risotto can go terribly wrong. You could use brown rice, for instance, and end up with a dish that not even the hippies in your college communal house would eat when they were stoned. You could use bouillon cubes instead of real stock and produce gruel that tastes thin and metallic. You could cook it too long and make glop. You could add the condiments at the wrong time, making them tough and over-cooked, or raw and crunchy. You could use old wine that had turned bad and wind up with risotto that tasted like old wine that had turned bad. You could, as most restaurants do, cook it halfway, then fire it up before serving it, ruining its consistency.

Risotto is all about learning from failure.

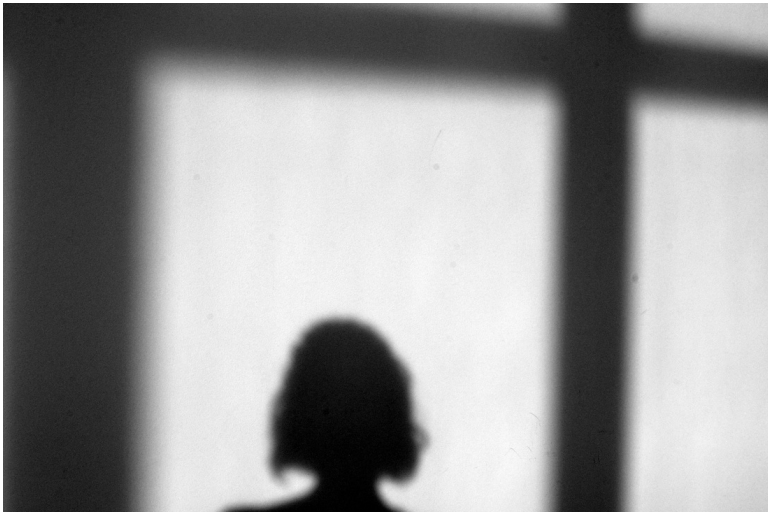
Risotto is a practice, one that requires patience, letting go of regrets about past attempts and expectations of the future. To make risotto, you have to be in the moment. You have to be alive to the ingredients, honor and understand them, and wait while their true natures are revealed. Risotto is egoless. To the degree that you have mastered risotto—and there is no perfection, only striving—you have mastered yourself.



YOU KNOW WHO

?

What itch needs scratching?



SOLE/SOUL

CONTRIBUTORS

BIOS & TSP QUESTION

TO OUR CONTRIBUTORS: *Tell The Sigh Press about an itch you'd like to scratch.*

✱

LILLIAN RODRIGUEZ: I have many pursuits that occupy my time, and many more obsessions that occupy my mind. I suppose this makes me an artist, so after receiving my BFA from Alfred University, New York in 2015, I moved to Florence, Italy, for an artist residency. I spend my days observing, writing, photographing, and collaging it all together in constant search of some clarity.

[HTTP://LILLIANIRODRIGUEZ.WEEBLY.COM/](http://lillianirodriguez.weebly.com/)

WHY IS MORE VALIDITY given to life in front of open eyes than life behind eyes closed?

!

"JOHN GERARD SAPODILLA, when and how did you start writing short stories?"

"From time to time I was far from home during the week, at night I used to call home and tell a fairytale I had invented to my then little daughter. My stories were recorded and later I put them on paper."

[HTTP://SAPODILLA.ILCANNOCCHIALE.IT/](http://SAPODILLA.ILCANNOCCHIALE.IT/)

SCRATCHING AN ITCH CAN BE DANGEROUS. I always intended to visit Victoria Falls. What if I fell in the Zambesi? So, I am going to Naples in the spring, where they make the proper Pizza Margherita and on the way I will stop in Florence, for Fiorentina di Razza Chianina. Scratching two itches is better than one.

JJ PIGLET: I was trained as a geologist, appropriate given the mining history of the north of England, but I have always preferred spangles and diamonds, so I became a burlesque dancer on the 'Miners and Working Men's Clubs' circuit. Sadly these were closed due to Health & Safety regulations and I now resort to secretarial duties and mole-catching.

IN THE REAL WORLD my time is spent in the wild rural Pennines of northern England so accordingly I feel the need to experience more culture, beautiful architecture, glorious wines, milder weather and fewer sheep. Italy is where I choose to satisfy these needs and stretch my imagination.

!

ERZSÉBET GILBERT. THINGS I'VE DONE: dwelt in Florence for three years, gotten an impractical degree in the Philosophy of Science, and almost died. I've also published one book, entitled *Logodaedaly, or, Sleight-of-Words*, released by Wolverine Farm Publishing, which earned

IndieFab/Foreword Reviews' 2011 Nonfiction Book of the Year. Things I adore: astrophysics, memory, cats, words, and love.

[HTTPS://INDIEFAB.FOREWORDREVIEWS.COM/BOOKS/LOGODAEDALY-OR-SLEIGHT-OF-WORDS/](https://indiefab.forewordreviews.com/books/logodaedaly-or-sleight-of-words/)

AN ITCH I'D WISH TO SCRATCH? I love that feeling of dust between the toes, but, as of yet, I have not visited the moon.

,

ALICE-CATHERINE JENNINGS holds an MFA in Writing from Spalding University. She is the author of *Katherine of Aragon: A Collection of Poems* (Finishing Line Press, 2016) and her poetry has been published worldwide in various literary journals. A summer residency at *Tenuta di Spannocchia* near Siena, Italy, sparked an interest in medieval mystical writers. Jennings divides her time between Oaxaca, Mexico, and Texas, where she lives with her husband, photographer and historian, John Mark Jennings.

WWW.ALICECATHERINEJ.COM

SPRING IN THE DESERT of Far West Texas is the driest, hottest and windiest season of the year. I hate it. It is the time when I stuff my pillow with minty herbs and dream of water and rain and all things green.

[]

JEFF SHAPIRO, born and raised in Massachusetts, is a former columnist for the UK edition of *Cosmopolitan* and has had nonfiction articles published

in *New Society* and *International* magazine. He has authored two novels, *Renato's Luck* (with movie rights optioned to Mango Productions, Inc.) and *Secrets of Sant'Angelo*. He teaches English at the Università Popolare Senese, and Creative Writing at Siena School for Liberal Arts and the Siena Art Institute. A resident of Italy since 1991, Jeff and his wife, Italian singer Valeria Indice, live outside Siena. He is currently at work on his third novel.

WWW.SIENASCHOOL.COM

WWW.SIENAART.ORG

WWW.UPSENESE.IT

I ONCE ASKED a British friend whether she, too, noticed the extraordinary intensity of springtime here in Tuscany. "Absolutely," she said. "Makes you want to shag a tree." More than an itch I'd like to scratch, my sincerest wish is to never ever lose the itch.

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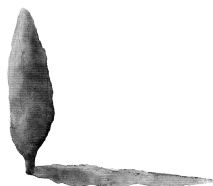
LAURA FRASER is a San Francisco-based freelance writer who is the author of the NYT-bestselling memoir *An Italian Affair*, as well as the memoir *All Over the Map*, along with hundreds of national magazine articles, some of which you may have read when you had your highlights done. Although she's never pulled up stakes and moved to Italy (hate to give up that rent-controlled SF flat), she visits as often as she can. She is the co-founder of Shebooks.net, which publishes e-books by and for women. Her latest book, *The Risotto Guru*, is available there. Laura also teaches writing

workshops in Italy and Mexico, which you can find out about at laurafraser.com.

LAURAFRASER.COM

SHEBOOKS.NET

I'M ITCHING TO GO to an Italian island, sit on a terrace overlooking the sea, and eat a lunch of stuffed *totani* followed by a pasta of fresh fennel fronds and sardines, accompanied by the light local wine. Then, after an espresso and some conversation, I'd like to go jump into that sea for a swim.



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