

LOST IN TRANSLATION

L'Italie, L'ondon, Ariadne Radi Cor (47pp, £10, KFS)

This is a lovely looking production, a slim paperback with 14 poems in Italian and English, a foreword, afterword and four images – which for some reason the blurb refers to as ‘objects’. The poems tell the story of a person moving to London and recalling their Italian homeland. At times it is witty and accomplished, yet it can also be clunky and awkward, though this may be due to the translation – it’s hard to know. It also feels a little (physically and content-wise) thin to be considered a whole book, even with the additional material.

So, what do we make in 2020 of a phrase like ‘London is a fax’, which opens one of the poems set in ‘L’ondon’? Should that be facsimile, or is this a deliberate reference to the arcane telephone/text device of decades gone by? I feel similarly about the phrase ‘duplicating machine’ which occurs later in the same poem, and about another poem which references Mary Poppins: it feels like a desperate attempt to be ‘English’ that simply ends up outdated and irrelevant.

The awkwardness of some phrases isn’t confined to the poetry. Valetina Bin’s Afterword opens by referencing Radi Cor’s line ‘London is a fax’ and then goes on to comment ‘It’s an idea which, being myself an uprooted matrix clinging to the tubes of the tube, I share.’ What is ‘an uprooted matrix’? I have no idea, nor why later in the same piece Bin suggests that a person is ‘probably a fax, a tangible forgery’. Again, does she mean facsimile? Neither a fax nor facsimile is the same as a forgery. It’s all rather confusing.

The Foreword is more straightforward but Giovanni Coppola can’t quite decide whether to introduce the sequence of poems as a confessional narrative or a poetic fiction; nor can he resist the chance to offer some cod philosophy and commentary: ‘the future doesn’t have to exist in order for you to evolve’, he says. Righteeho.

The poetry, when we finally get to it, has many good parts, with strong images and ideas:

I’m still living in a Burano globe
when I twirl, the snow falls
(from ‘Inhale deeply...’)

is gorgeous, as is the author’s comparison of the Thames and Venice when you ‘inhale deeply’.

We have to behave like roots, be invisible
and hold the world together.
(from ‘Mary Poppin’s bag...’)

is perhaps trying a little too hard to be deep and profound, but I rather like it, just as I do

The plaster cast of our embrace is at the British Museum

among the ancient civilizations

which closes (and rescues) a poem which starts with the awkward 'Citizenship is the anaesthesia of a mystery'.

I may be missing the point (I did wonder if the Foreword and Afterword were both fictional and part of the creative writing) but really this feels like an overwrapped present. I think this sequence should actually *include* the images, especially the wonderful photo of a small box within which a figurine, a plastic fish, a tiger and other animals jostle with a false eyelash, a foil lid and a pencil stub. It is labelled 'Fig. 4 Ma population intérieure', which literally and awkwardly translates as 'My interior population', which I interpreted to mean 'what lives inside me'. It's a witty and engaging piece of art.

I so want to like this collection more, but it would work much better as a short sequence within a full collection, with the visuals embedded rather than as add-ons, and without the Foreword and Afterword. Let it stand on its own; and please work some more on the translation.

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