

LETTERATURA STRANIERA

TRANSPOSING MEANING INTO IMMANENCE:  
THE POETRY OF FRANCIS WEBB  
(With a Selection and Translation of His Poetry in the Appendix)

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**I**ntroduction

Robert Adamson's first lesson of his Chair of Poetry at UTS, entitled "Something Absolutely Splendid", looked closely at the life and work of Francis Webb and discussed how he influenced his first book. Michael Griffiths attending the lesson commented:

Adamson spoke eloquently and passionately about Webb's importance to continuing generations of Australian poets about the fierce originality of his language and the breadth of his mind breaking through barriers of personal suffering and engaging creativity with a vast array of subjects: mental illness, Australian exploration, music and the natural landscape.

Michael Griffiths was one of the participants in the first public tribute to Francis Webb after his death. The Seminar to Commemorate Francis Webb was held in the Western Tower of the University of Sydney and was organized by the members of the English Department in 13-14 May, 1974. The other participants were: Douglas Stewart, R. D. Fitzgerald, Judith Wright, Rosemary Dobson, David Campbell, G. A. Wilkes, Vincent Buckley, R. F. Brissenden, Chris Wallace Crabbe, H. F. Heseltine, Robert Adamson, Sister Mary Francisca, W. D. Ashcroft, Rodney Hall and James Tulip. There were readings from *Collected Poems*, and *Recordings of Francis Webb* which deeply moved everyone. There were also the poet's sisters, Claudia Snell and Mrs. Leonie Meere. I was also invited and was somewhat shocked at the experience: I had just arrived from Europe and my plans were to do a Ph.D. on Patrick White. But Chris Wallace Crabbe and Philip Martin, my mentors and thesis supervisor warmly offered – and strongly advised me – to work on poetry. Of course I loved poetry but I didn't know much about Australian poetry. Besides, my work on Patrick White's highly elaborate prose style and language was regarded as a sufficient guarantee of success. The poets included Webb, so I was asked to take part in the seminar. After the Seminar, I developed the necessary empathy with Webb's poetry to make it the most

important chapter of my thesis and to continue writing about it afterwards, back in Europe, with the same enthusiasm.

Francis Webb is famous for his unique poetic style. As Vincent Buckley wrote in his essay "A Poet of Harmony":

He was a great phrase maker and there are phrases, sentences, cadences in poem after poem that are quite unforgettable. He was a great master, and sometimes a victim, of metaphor, the most metaphor addicted poet in this country, I would say, and it is noticeable that time and time again the energy of those very ample driving rhythms is also the energy with which metaphors are picked up, created and extended through the stanza.

This article will be focusing on Webb's poetic style, and in particular on the use of words and the creation of metaphors. In the preface to his first *Collected Poems*, by the famous literary critic Herbert Read, we are told that "There is a remarkable coherence in this substantial body of work – published over sixteen years – a steady development of technical virtuosity and a deepening of intellectual and emotional content" (Read, *Collected Poems*, v). There are comparisons that are made with Rilke, ("but not essential, for its stillness and intensity are quite unique"), for "A Death at Winson Green", and at end of the preface this is his comment:

Browning and Hopkins are perhaps obvious influences, but we need not seek further for the sources of his prosody, which is not "modern" except in its psychological and metaphysical intensity. From the Beginning Webb has been concerned with the same tragic problems as Rilke, Eliot, Pasternak, and to mention a contemporary who presents a close parallel, Robert Lowell. I cannot, after long meditation on his verse, place his achievements on a level lower than that suggested by these names". (Read, *Collected Poems*, ix)

But when is a poem really worth reading? We know that a poem is such when it does not just "tell" us something but "suggests" it, by stimulating our imagination, our feelings and our emotions, while at the same time remaining anchored in reality, in real experience. A quotation by Christopher Brennan, which has also been used by Chris Wallace Crabe in his book *Read It Again*, illustrates my point well:

Let us then say that poetry is the expression of imagination in language, acknowledging that this is not a definition, but a text for explanation. Imagination, then, as manifested in art, is a perceptive act; the perception of analogies and correspondences, whereby things which in ordinary

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consciousness led a separate existence are fused into unity, so that sensuous facts become symbols.

(Christopher Brennan, quoted by Crabe in *Read It Again*, p. 12)

In other words a poet – as Webb illustrates in his poetry – while describing a real experience, which may also encompass ideas and abstract worlds, at the same time suggests or inspires feelings and emotions. The poet in fact wants us to share these feelings in order to conceptualize the poem in another level of consciousness – at a metalevel. This is usually done through a careful usage of words and their meanings, or perhaps I should say by the "transposition" of their meaning at a metalevel, the one wrought especially for the reader in the poem by means of rhetorical devices and carefully structured syntactic constructions. In this respect we agree with Lyn Jacobs' remarks in her review of "Socrates": what is relevant is "Webb's investigation of the relation of world and word and recognition of language as a conceptual structure, artifact and tool of the prevailing culture". Webb's poetry is intense, complex, sometimes "unfathomable" as T. Davidson<sup>1</sup> comments in his preface to the *Collected Poems*. Also revealing are comments by Tina Giannoukos: "Throughout his work Webb's language is intricately rich, not with empty verbal play, but in the sense that it gestures constantly to the sublime tension of living, not as a burden, but as a profound obligation"; and elsewhere, "Even at its most dense his language retains its suppleness. Webb should be read out loud for the musicality of his language which never overwhelms the poetry". And about his creative imagery, "Webb is a poet of awesome inquiry. It is through the richness of his metaphor-making that Webb places an original strain on the language such that he creates a world of rich inquiry". James Tulip, Australian poetry critic, wrote that "reading Francis Webb is like wrestling with an angel". No one would disagree that wrestling is involved: just decoding the syntax can be a challenge in many of these poems, then there are compacted metaphors, elusive rhyme schemes, buried religious references, and an expectation that the reader will be as deeply erudite as the poet.

Again quoting from T. Davidson: "Webb's poems are not light-weight,

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<sup>1</sup> Many thanks to Toby Davidson for kindly providing me with an electronic version of Webb's **Collected Poems**, which I have used to evaluate various quantitative aspects of his poetic work. Cfr. Toby Davidson, "Introduction to the Poetry of Francis Webb", **Rivista di Studi Italiani**, Anno 31, n. 1 (2013), pp. 828-830 and Gianluca Alimeni, "Introduzione alla poesia di Francis Webb," **Rivista di Studi Italiani**, Anno 31, n. 1 (2013), pp. 831-834.

landscape poetry [...] but complex, challenging pieces which blend location and intense poetic vision". Further on in Davidson's preface we read: "It is also fair to say that some of his work is quite impenetrable. One wonders, as one does when reading Sylvia Plath, whether it is genuine poetic inspiration or the product of a distressed mind". We will now look closely into his poems focusing on the choice of words and phrases that build imagery and style.

### 1.1 Transposition and metaphor

If we look at the definition or meaning of the word "transposition", we see that it may refer to a process of "transferring from one place or period to another" that is spatiotemporal dislocation; or else it can be referred to music and in this case it means to "put a piece of music from one key into another (to be played by a different instrument)". In fact, this is what happens with a poem, when the reader is ideally transferred in an abstract spatiotemporal dimension, by using the words in another "key".

Now this is the essence and the magic of Francis Webb's poetry and in this he is a master, perhaps the greatest or certainly one of the greatest poets, because his style is mainly based on this technique. Of course we know that poetry uses words in a special way, differently from prose writing, by means of a wealth of rhetorical devices that are directed to divert the reader from assigning to words their common meaning. I will comment on this point at length below with plenty of examples taken from his poetic work. Here I just want to emphasize the point expressed in the title and reported above: Webb's poetry is characterized by a laborious and highly specialized technique that, starting from usual rhetorical and rhythmic devices –like the use of metaphors and similitudes, and a richness in assonances, alliterations and rhymes – converges from a certain moment onward to recreate in the poem sensations and feelings directly from the poetic texture and this is done "by an introjection of point of view". The reader is thus taken from an objective point of view – the one guided by the poet – into a subjective internal and "immanent" perspective that serves the same aim, but in a much deeper manner (see also Ashcroft, 1974). There are usually two ways of making metaphors (see Shutova *et al.*, 2013): one patent, explicit and another hidden, implicit that I will clarify below. But then Webb has invented a new way to produce metaphors which is what I define "immanent": and this is partly done intentionally by inducing a change of perspective, a transposition in the level and type of metaphoric awareness.

The normal, explicit or extended way is the one that is achieved by means of external grammatical or linguistic links – conjunctions such as, "like" and "as", simple coordinating or disjoining conjunctions – between members of a metaphor, similitude, analogy, or any other figure of speech; the other way is achieved by the deletion or erasure of these external, explicit linguistic elements, and as a result the two or more members of the metaphor are now

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adjacent, juxtaposed. It's partly the result of a stylistic change from an explicit (to the reader) use of rhetorical devices into an asyndetic style where synaesthesia is the rule. And the words play a different role from the norm, realizing completely the sense of "estrangement", defamiliarization or "Ostranene" as Viktor Schlovsky (or Shklovsky, Sklovskij) defined it<sup>2</sup>, which is typical of a true work of art. But as I said, this is one side of the coin: what really makes the difference is the new perspective or internal point of view offered to the reader. I will delve deeply into this topic in a section below.

## 2. The quest for meaning

As Chris Wallace Crabbe comments in his book<sup>3</sup>, words have a double function:

This loved medium, then, may be used as message, as expressive stuff or as sheer play-dough. Such verse as we take seriously will incorporate both communication and expression. (Crabbe, p. 3)

In particular, then, after having equated poetry with painting and declaring that all that really matters are "images", he comments:

The essence of post-romantic poetry is the endeavour to bring it up rich. Like van Gogh, or Cezanne, or the cubists, they are working their medium so that the whole surface is active, vivacious, animating. Webb, Hart Crane, Lowell, Murray, these are potent examples. (Crabbe, p. 4)

where Webb comes first in the list of poets. I am not here referring to abstract and religious notions of meaning which were certainly also part of Webb's main inspiration. What I really want to tackle is the question of characterizing meaning from a linguistic point of view. Further on in his essay Chris W. Crabbe reaches the core of the main theme related to poetic language, where he writes:

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<sup>2</sup> In studying poetic speech in its phonetic and lexical structure as well as in its characteristic distribution of words and in the characteristic thought structures compounded from the words, we find everywhere the artistic trademark – that is, we find material obviously created to remove the automatism of perception; the author's purpose is to create the vision which results from that deautomatized perception. A work is created "artistically" so that its perception is impeded and the greatest possible effect is produced through the slowness of the perception. (Shklovsky, 1970: 19)

<sup>3</sup> Chris Wallace Crabbe, pp. 3-4.

Wisdom poetry is metamorphic. The task of its language is to transform the grainy facts of temporal discourse into gems whose facets are capable of reflecting a glimpse of some eternal truth. Under this aspect, the aims of poetry can be seen to be paradoxical. It employs and energizes verbal structures in order to create a temporary home for that which is by definition not a part of language: that is to say, for the mystical.

Now, words and meaning were always an important theme in Webb's poetry and constitute part of his imagery. So I will start our exploration of Webb's *Collected Poems* by looking into a number of themes starting from the use of "word/words" and "meaning". This can be revelatory of Webb's internal attitude and feeling. Then I will look into other important components of his poetic imagery.

### 2.1 Using the WORD/WORDS and MEANING

As will become clear from the excerpt reported below, Webb uses "word/words/meaning" very sparingly and with an alternating but overall negative general feeling: words are the ingredients of poetry but choosing the right words is a struggle which may be painful. The poet is depicted as a "word-haunted" man in *On First Hearing a Cuckoo*. But then "word" is then equated with "World" thus acquiring an all-embracing value. We find the first use in *A Tip For Saturday*,

The navigator's task affords  
Small safety from a spate of words.

where "words" seem to play a positive role. In *Images in Winter* "word" is a member of a strong metaphor, where it becomes "stray" and is compared to a "stoned" bird, no longer a positive image: "A stray word fell like a stoned bird from the lips."

In *From Leichhardt Pantomime* "words" fall again "glibly" from "motionless" lips, again non positive image, "Words fall glibly enough from motionless lips", or further on in the same poem

Which is pertinent:  
Our Prince towering through anguish to purpose, or our Prince  
Bombarding blockhead stars with curious words?

where "words" become "curious" and are the object of a rhetorical question in which they are hypothetically bombarding "blockhead" stars. A conflicting image is the one associated with "words" in *Author's Prologue*:

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nor will her love  
Flicker and throb from the smoulder of fine words.

words are "fine" but are the object of "smoulder". Again specifically indicated as negative feeling in *A Whaler*, "They give you a smile and words like knives when behind you": here words have become like "knives". In *Two on the Map* it seems that "words" have recovered positive value:

You may write words or ride in omnibuses,  
Give lectures, name a river, kill a man.

It is in the poems dedicated to the Leichhardt expedition that we find the most inspired uses of "words" in his poetry. In *The First Expedition* "words" are again the first part of a metaphor which has positive import:

But loose rock's singing on the cliff-face, flurry of words  
Parting the dried lips of a watercourse?

However when we look at *The Second Expedition* we find again a negative flavour:

A vapid trickle of fever  
Seeps into the men: they brandish at each other  
Dulled edges of words.

Eventually, in *The Third Expedition*, "words" become equated with "world", and in fact for the poet the world is in the words he uses in his poems:

Cross to the field pitched beyond world and words.  
[...]  
yield to the pressure  
And silence of their fate. World, words, are closer.

More specifically in the following stanzas we find the most revealing verse:

It is where sun and world blossom into words  
As a tree's lovely frenzies of bloom divide  
Winter from winter, month from month of birds.

The world "blossoms" into words: this is certainly true of Webb's poetry where his craftsmanship is always focused on the search of the right words to forge and mould his metaphors. Further on in *Serenade to the Favourite Movie-Actress*, words are "dead"; in *Melville at Woods Hole* words are "like firebreaks", again a positive value. Words become "antiphonal" in *The Telescopes* and then they are the transposition of the cuckoo's typical call, "two words" in *On first hearing a cuckoo*. Two "unchanging" words, always the "same two words". But then towards the end of the poem, words recover their negative import:

Not spring, not Surrey, no, nor merely  
 A dead word-haunted man. Two words remained—  
 The language foreign, childish perhaps, or pitiable—

The poet is a "word-haunted" man. In *The Gunner* words are "those of the dream" and are spoken by the world, again the union of these two images to deliver a concept of wholeness: words are as the world a unity of all possible senses. Finally in *Harry* words are unspeakable:

Comes the day when his mother realizes all.  
 Few questions, and a chaos of silence. Her thin eyes  
 Are emptied. Doors rattle in the house,  
 Foundations stagger. The Beginning becomes us;  
 And he is mulcted of words, remain to him only  
 The words of sin, escape, which is becoming all of life.

On the contrary, the word "meaning" is used only few times and mainly with a negative import, and sometimes in the form of the adjective "meaningless". Only in one of his early poems, the word "meaning" is used in a positive literal way, the poem is *An Old Record*, and the citation is this:

This jaded earth props and staggers – give me meaning  
 For spur, or a call from the garbled scrub of the night;

Until the very end of his production, the word becomes capitalized, "Meaning" thus transformed into a religious symbol. We find it clearly in *Light*:

Time labours towards a meaning upon the wrist  
 – Never His meaning; can He be risen?

Then in *Self-portrait* as a predication of the subject "creation":

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An outline of fullness soberly embraced  
By shadow of widest meaning is creation.

and in *Before Two Girls*:

They forsook the amorous dust for immaculate Meaning,  
Only to find that same dust.

### 3. Images, Metaphors, and Immanence

As stated above, Webb's poetry is full of metaphors, similitudes and other rhetorical devices that we will look into more extensively in this section. Extended or explicit metaphors are enacted in a poem basically by the use of two grammatical linguistic markers: **LIKE** and **AS**. These two conjunctions are the intermediary linguistic and grammatical means to assert the poet's presence, his/her command of the communicative goal the poem may have in the reader. In other words they make patent, apparent the presence of the point of view of the poet. In Table 1 we present data from a number of contemporary poets which have been partly made object of enquiry in previous works by myself (Delmonte 1981, 1983); but are also currently being the object of study by other researchers like D. M. Kaplan, who worked on a thesis to build a computer program called "American Poetry Style Analyzer", documented in a number of papers (Kaplan *et al.*, 2010). Later in the paper, I will be using this tool to show the analysis of some of Webb's poems, in particular the ones that have been judged by the tool, as deviant from the norm. Another contribution by Kaplan, was making available the *corpora* of a number of American poets which we may now compare to Webb in order to better evaluate the linguistic properties of his work. In the same Table 1 I also added figures for the use of the two other conjunctions, **AND/OR** which are commonly used to conjoin or disjoin alternate linguistic items in normal prose writing. This is not so in poetry and Webb uses the two conjunctions as a substitute to a null marker of adjacency: two or more concepts are thus juxtaposed to communicate synaesthetic images by means of asyndetons. There is no room here to show examples but it is quite normal that poets coordinate or disjoint images rather than concepts or semantic propositions in

their poems. The other important construction that is used by Webb to produce metaphors are list structures, that is lists of images or concepts separated by commas repeated in a sequence of two or three. We counted both single words and also two words or bigrams, again separated by commas in a sequence. This is an artifice that achieves the same result of asyndetic juxtaposition by proposing parallel structures to the reader.

Poets/ Markers	LIKE	AS	AND	OR	LISTS	Total Like/ As	Ratio WMM	Total And/ Or
<b>Francis Webb</b>	221	345	2355	251	298	566	30.36	139.81
<b>Anne Sexton</b>	170	148	643	63	66	318	20.21	44.88
<b>Emily Dickinson</b>	49	135	390	78	61	184	13.02	33.12
<b>T.S.Eliot</b>	26	54	651	107	124	80	4.64	43.91
<b>Sylvia Plath</b>	111	93	404	44	118	204	9.34	20.51
<b>Elizabeth Bishop</b>	124	83	656	110	61	207	9.49	35.11
<b>Robert Frost</b>	86	167	72	78	49	253	16.58	9.83
<b>Walt Whitman</b>	37	245	1757	301	925	282	19.60	143.02
<b>Total</b>	824	1270	6928	1032	1702	2094	2094	7950
<b>Mean</b>						261.7	261.7	993.7
<b>Weighted Mean</b>						15.60	15.60	59.23

**Table 1.** Grammatical Markers for Metaphor and Synaesthesia

In Table 1 we show absolute and weighted frequency values of the occurrence of the conjunctions used to objectively build metaphors. If we look at totals, we understand that Francis Webb is the poet that uses most of explicit markers, **like/as**. Together with Whitman, they are the two poets using most similar devices. However, since total number of occurrences are different from one poet to another, absolute counts need to be interpreted and relativized in order to acquire a comparable value, and this is done by weighting absolute figures by the number of types making up their *corpus* of poems. This is what we do in the two final columns where we report the ratio of absolute totals by

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the value of Vocabulary Richness that is computed in the section below, dedicated to quantitative measurements. Weighted Metaphor Markers (or WMM for short) indicate clearly Webb's primacy in the richness of explicit metaphoric constructs as testified by the amount of **LIKE** and **AS** occurrences. In fact, the same applies to the other two conjunctions: Webb is by far the most frequent user followed by Whitman. List structure on the contrary are found in a greater number in Whitman followed by Webb. Another syntactic construction often used to produce metaphoric meaning is by copulative structure, where the conjuncts **like/as** are omitted, thus generating a "strange" property assignment process to the subject of the copula. One example – which is valid for all – (there are about 600 occurrences of IS – and the majority of auxiliaries), is from *Author's Prologue in A Drum for Ben Boyd*: "Yet truth itself is a mass of stops and gaps".

Metaphors are all made of and are supposed to generate images: generally speaking, the poet's imagery is made up of the content of metaphors he uses. These two words "image" and "metaphor" are present in his poetry and are worth exploring their usage. At first I will look at the use of this important word "image": there are 23 occurrences as a whole. It is in one of early poems that the word "image" becomes full of interior meaning: *Images in Winter*. This poem contains one of the most beautiful metaphors and a revealing verse related to the word "image". Here is the metaphor:

This is why  
(In an era of free-verse, poor company)  
I pin my faith on slipping images  
Twisting like smoke or a fish caught in the hand.

Images are "slipping", they are "twisting" like smoke or a fish "caught in the hand". Very powerful and very suggestive. The poet's faith is pinned on images: but this is clearly what all poets would do. But Webb's strength is certainly special with respect to the use of images. Further on in the same poem, comes the presence of "metaphor":

That tattered swagman, Death on a Friday night  
May pop in with the appropriate metaphor,  
And then our talk is of momentous things.

Here Christ's presence pops in, and transforms the meaning of "metaphor" into something religious. Friday night at six o'clock is when Christ was crucified. Metaphor is used directly in the poem *In Memoriam: Antony*

*Sandys, 1806-1883*, where Webb tries to objectify the process of metaphor making by the poet:

Bird-song is your reverberating touch.

But metaphor is the enormous second frozen,  
Reduced behind courtly glass, and laid in stores  
Out of the public view for certain years.  
Let my ungainly icicled pencil search  
Down below zero: you are temperate, risen.  
[...]  
Mixing all colours, the December bird.  
I rear my glass facade of metaphor.

Further down in *Self-Portrait*, another example of the immanent metaphor where we are taken inside the subjective point of view of the poet:

Fullness, shadow: what to tell again  
But the so tender voyaging line of truth.  
Time shuffles a timid foot, will linger  
While the tired cockcrow of your lifted finger  
Opens dawn and a worn album of love and pain.  
Brown eyes and hair flow humbly from the earth.

More examples in the same poem, this time *Death*:

Painterly greens of Norfolk in a dance  
That is in some wise the ambitious buried heart:  
Your metaphor is this picture: I am taken  
By words from the crevasse and icefall spoken,  
Ingenious but simple eloquence.  
Mild weathers unloose the arrested and set apart.

Norfolk, be greenness winter and summer, shine  
Above the enkindled outstretched light returning  
Homeward laboriously in the right direction.  
Metaphor and flesh await a resurrection.

In *Middle Harbour* images are used to express a beautiful metaphor:

The hour's a graven depth; all images gather  
To a giant balance, a level climax and height.  
You speak of colour—here's where all colour sleeps

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Misted by the breathing of wedded dimness and light.  
Each poised oar trails its phosphorescent feather,  
The curving brilliance leaps  
And shivers back to the dark lungs of the water.

The scales are even and tremble; the glass trembles;  
The image ripens, shudders away and tumbles  
Down long furrows of perspective to the eye.

The sea, the fisherman and colours of the water: "Be one with the cormorant, or the fisherman" says the poem toward the end. The poems continues with another metaphor:

O fingers of thought, not captive to the heart,  
Why jangle these chords of loveliness for a theme,  
With a bird, a quiet fisher, a twitching gleam,

and it is on a boat that one can leave all thought behind: "Nothing for the head but a haul" says the poem. In *An Old Record* we find again two beautiful metaphors one with intermediary LIKE and another without it:

The metronome like that inquiring clock  
Niched in a heart's grey tower, as I might say  
Allotting its due of panic to each day,  
Huge traffic of life and death, the lapse and shock  
Of derelict thought, event.  
[...]

Yet death, hungry for fragments, switches back a long  
Tentacle from that storm: the bell swept out so far  
Is quarry for the throttling wind; so your fading song  
Swings out in cadence like a falling star.

The first metaphor depicts the heart as a place where a tower is "niched" and has an "inquiring" clock which is like a metronome allotting panic to each day. Very powerful image, but consider also the chiasms, the conflicting images he uses: life and death, lapse and shock. However, the most important part of the poem is devoted to memories of shipwrecks and people's deaths. This is clearly presented in the verses below, where death is depicted as "hungry for fragments". Other cases of synaesthesia which is religiously driven, in *Song of Hunger*:

I lie extended on my canvas bed.  
I must be dead,  
But not while one cloud is loafing in my brain

As that fragrant unleavened Bread  
Which may not die.

Again in *Ward Two and the Kookaburra* we find another type of "immanent metaphor":

And then the Yard was empty: snap of the thick thumb  
From somewhere, and the moon with the lined face,  
Old voyageuse, dined on her continental crumb  
And sea-sauce, and then portmanteau'd every trace  
Of knick-knacks and a world.

The image of the MOON dining on earth and sea is powerful, and drives the reader into the poet's subjective view of the world and feelings, as depicted in the poem. Consider another example in *Wild Honey*, where the "immanent" metaphor is again occupying the whole stanza:

Saboteur autumn has riddled the pampered folds  
Of the sun; gum and willow whisper seditious things;  
Servile leaves now kick and toss in revolution,  
Wave bunting, die in operatic reds and golds;  
And we, the drones, fated for the hundred stings,  
Grove among chilly combs of self-contemplation  
While the sun, on sufferance, from his palanquin  
Offers creation one niggling lukewarm grin.

And finally from *The Hulks at Noumea*:

The sun's for youth and harshness, a flung stone  
Echoing around the four iron walls of the brain,  
Sharp to expose and batter the fractured bone.  
The dry, yellow throat of dawn is eager to drain  
Draughts of legend and kindness that night spills.

### 3.1 Metaphor and Immanence

We saw already examples in the previous section: here we look into what can be regarded the most beautiful immanent metaphors. I will not be able to include all existing cases of this type of metaphor but only show few examples. The magic of his supreme mastery of language can be found in particular in two of his latest poems, *At Twofold Bay* and *Lament for St Maria Goretti*. In the first poem the use of colour BLUE leads the transformation from the actual, the real into the imaginary, the subconscious:

Some force, one must imagine, stacked them here  
Around a random sort of village hill  
That could be meaningless or full of guile.  
All is the same: the bay's blue shadow clings

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To the brain's swaying trestle. But all is well:

[...]

The blue, pressing at nightfall, will not dowse  
The flippant crimson weathervane that glides  
Above the filling–station, nor the lights.

Upon the beach at afternoon the blue  
Is of corruption, and the swooping rain  
Flaps on the yellow, muddied wings of air,  
Slashing the sea to ribbons, barging through  
The railing's coop around the headstones – white  
And cringing things, like chickens.

The sky tilts forward with a shallow grin...

At first we are told that "the blue shadow clings to the brain's swaying trestle", letting the colour blue stay in the background. But then it reappears and is much stronger: "The blue will not dowse the flippant crimson weathervane", a powerful image; and towards the end "The sky tilts forward with a shallow grin", an absolutely fantastic image. The blue should be giving a feeling of reconciliation with the world, but it is used in a different manner. Back again from Chris W. Crabbe's essay, we learn that "Oxymoron is often the energizing trope for this endeavour... oxymoron or the deepest tangle of metaphorical discourse".

And here is the main theme of his poetic work: conflict and consequently truce which is armistice, cease-fire between two conflicting powers, frequently occurring in Webb's poetry: Darkness and Light, Sea and Earth, Life and Death. And the figure which is the embodiment of this concept: Christ. Christ is at the same time God and Man, Dead and Alive through resurrection. He is the unity of the opposites: a swagman and a god. This is what we find for instance in the other poem, *Lament for St Maria Goretti*,

Six o'clock. The virginal belly of a screen  
Winces before the blade, the evening wind:  
Diluted, a star  
Twitches like a puddle on scoured hygienic stone.  
All of the documents signed and countersigned  
And truce to a cruel war:

Wreckage gesticulates, toothless broken ships,  
Meteorite, cherubim, Horseman, in the wash of space  
Round the pretty bays of this child's face.

The hour is again reminiscent of Christ's death. Maria Goretti was a child and a virgin. The stanza is delicately balancing images which should amalgamate and solve the conflict, like TRUCE and CRUEL WAR. Ships are broken but toothless, there's wreckage, the wind is equated by asyndeton to a blade; and a star, diluted, "twitches on scoured stone". The overall imagery has now been built and drives the reader into the story. Further on we read:

Six o'clock. There may be a moon tonight.  
At dead Ferriere twitches the comatose star.  
A peasant knows the early mosquito bite  
Like a stiletto into his wincing ear.  
The suave impersonal light  
Trails its skirts over marshland: no mourners here,  
And Nothing mourns at Nettuno: feel the embrace  
Of Nothing scrambling ashore at this child's face.

[...]

But your breast is our little pet hill, your hair like shadows  
Of clouds on our grain, your mouth like a watercourse.  
Have you spoken? have words of water been truly uttered  
To my thirst – it's this drumming, drumming in my ears.  
Teresa, I am going. Teresa, to the last be Corinaldo,  
All life writing me on earth:  
Let my hands reach you – I can hardly sign my name:  
My signature, my scrawl: no wait, Teresa, Teresa. . .

Six o'clock. And the Miserere. Final Grace.  
And Death and the Woman, strangely at one, will place  
Ambiguous fingers on all of this child's face.

Here is the most beautiful use of WORDS: words of water come out of her mouth, which is like a watercourse. And words have been uttered "to my thirst".

### 3. A quantitative analysis

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One of the most valuable element in the evaluation of a poet's careful treatment of meaning and words derives from the analysis of the so-called Vocabulary Richness, also referred to as Type-Token Ratio. This is derived from the ratio computed on the basis of Types and Tokens. Tokens are the total number of words considered, in this case all the words used by Webb as documented in his *Collected Poems*, in their actual number of occurrences, single or repeated. Types are those same words but taken only once. Words are in this case corresponding to wordforms and not to *lemmata*, that is there are still types that duplicate the same *lemmata* in the case of nouns, because they include both singular and plural forms, if existent in the frequency count. As for verbs, there are usually 4 different forms for regular verbs and there may be up to 6 different wordforms for the same *lemma*. To compute Vocabulary Richness (henceforth **VR**) one needs then two quantities: total number words or tokens, after erasing punctuation; total number of types that is tokens taken only once. I did this for a number of different poets and for a number of *corpora* available which contain non poetic writing, this in order to get a baseline for comparison. Of course we expect there to be a great difference between the two realms: normal prose writing should have a much lower value than poetry. It is also important to note that the Type/Token Ratio by itself is not a good indicator of VR. Two other pieces of information should be considered: number of Hapax/Dis/Tris *Legomena* and their distribution in the *corpus*. This is something I have done in another publication (Delmonte, 1983), where I studied in detail Vocabulary Growth and distribution. I will include this study in another Table 3 below.

Poets/Occurrences	Tokens	Types	VR
<b>Francis Webb</b>	66965	12363	18.64
<b>Anne Sexton</b>	36501	5471	15.73
<b>Emily Dickinson</b>	31873	4503	14.13
<b>T.S.Eliot</b>	29144	5026	17.24
<b>Sylvia Plath</b>	28239	6166	21.84
<b>Elizabeth Bishop</b>	19047	4156	21.82
<b>Robert Frost</b>	21306	3251	15.26
<b>Walt Whitman</b>	76047	10946	14.39
<b>W.B.Yeats</b>	131485	10666	8.11
<b>Wall Street Journal</b>	1061166	28219	2.71
<b>Total/Mean Poets</b>	440607	62548	14.20

Table 2. Quantitative evaluation of Vocabulary Richness (1)

From Table 2, it is quite easy to see that Sylvia Plath has the highest ratio or VR, followed by Elizabeth Bishop, then Webb and Eliot. Other poets are placed lower in the graded scale and of course written prose is placed at the lowest. Even if VR computed with absolute number is not very indicative, we can easily see that Webb has the highest number of Types of all poets. In the following table we further delve into the area of Vocabulary Richness by examining Low Frequency Word distribution in the 6 poets. From Table 3 we can easily see that the Plath *corpus* is now the poet with highest number of Hapax.

Poets/ Occurrences	Hapax	Bis	Tris	Rare	Types	Hapax	Rare
<b>Francis Webb</b>	6662	1961	909	9532	12363	0.575	0.77
<b>Anne Sexton</b>	3144	924	395	4463	5471	0.575	0.81
<b>Emily Dickinson</b>	1716	1164	403	3283	4503	0.381	0.72
<b>T.S.Eliot</b>	2239	1365	366	3970	5026	0.445	0.79
<b>Sylvia Plath</b>	3686	982	384	5052	6166	0.598	0.82
<b>Elizabeth Bishop</b>	2471	631	334	3436	4156	0.594	0.82
<b>Robert Frost</b>	1730	548	240	2518	3251	0.532	0.77
<b>Walt Whitman</b>	5318	1753	845	7916	10946	0.486	0.72
<b>W.B.Yeats</b>	4698	1821	874	7393	10666	0.440	0.79
<b>Total/Mean Poets</b>	31664	11149	4750		62548	0.498	

Table 3. Quantitative evaluation of Vocabulary Richness (2)

This second Table evaluates Vocabulary Richness on the basis of words repeated only once, twice or three times, and Rare Words, that is their sum. From this second evaluation we see the primacy of Sylvia Plath and Elizabeth Bishop with the highest percentages of less repeated words. Values indicated in the column Hapax, when subtracted from 1, will give the so-called Repetition Rate, which is complementary to number of once words. However the computation still suffers from the influence of a Zipfian variable, that is, the fact that by increasing the number of occurrences or tokens, number of types are meant to decrease in an incremental fashion. To better understand this point we should have made available for all poets, the Table of Vocabulary Increase which is however only available for Webb and has appeared in one of my previous publications (Delmonte, 1980). We report this table together with the values of Standard Deviations for the six Phases or Folds into which Webb's *corpus* had been subdivided. Consider that these data

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are slightly different from current ones, because they were derived from previous version of *Collected Poems*.

Types/Phase	Ph1	Ph2	Ph3	Ph4	Ph5	Ph6	Total
<b>Tokens</b>	10540	10540	10540	10540	10540	10538	63238
<b>Types</b>	3606	3526	3260	3096	3626	3205	20319
<b>New Words</b>	1422	1276	1189	999	1401	1144	7431
<b>Hapax Leg.</b>	1246	1151	1089	897	1263	1021	6667

Table 4. Vocabulary Increase in Webb's Poetic Corpus

Types/Phase	Ph1	Ph2	Ph3	Ph4	Ph5	Ph6	Means	Var.C.	St.Dev.
<b>Types</b>	.884	.181	-.239	-1.154	.783	-.455	3386.5	.168	207.5
<b>New Words</b>	.915	.270	-.158	-1.454	1.031	-.612	1236.5	.133	147.3
<b>Hapax Leg.</b>	.287	.183	-.165	-.380	.314	-.238	1111.2	.115	127.4

Table 5. Vocabulary Increase in Webb's Poetic Corpus expressed in Standard Error

As can be easily gathered from these Tables, 4 and 5, Vocabulary Increase has been quite high in the first two Phases of Webb's poetic production, and in the second last. It suffered a slow down in the other three Phases, but was nonetheless quite sustained.

As a final note, I consider Webb's poetic production always very innovative, imaginative and full of inspiration. The vocabulary he used was always very appropriate to the theme and style of the poem.

Here below is a semantic evaluation of his poetry: I also wanted to account for the use of semantically positive vs negative words in Webb's poetry, even if just with simple counts, and we show the results in the following section.

### 3.1 Positive vs Negative Images

Affective valency is a very common research area and theme in Information Retrieval and Computational Linguistic in general. In order to account for Webb's use of affective vocabulary, I collected a list of what I regard positive vs negative words used in the *Collected Poems*. I also collected separately, words which I see as neutral in their affective valency. I present the lists and the occurrency counts. The results are quite interesting and confirm the idea that Francis Webb was a positive, optimistic visionary.

#### POSITIVE WORDS – Total Counts = 1763

good, silver, gold, warm, white, star, dawn, sun, moon, light, morning, day, green, bright, clear, brilliant, love, joy, pure, birth, born, life, sleep,

mother, father, friend, bless, truth, laughter, flower, holy, grace, passion, summer

NEGATIVE WORDS – Total Counts = 1469

bad, mist, cold, grey, fog, dark, cloud, black, twilight, sunset, sundown, shade, nightfall, night, hate, gloom, dusk, dim, grief, wreck, blood, bleed, die, death, dead, pain, false, pale, ghost, pity, shiver, winter

Words have been counted considering their possible inflections and derivations. And of course homographs have been eliminated from the count. It would seem that number of inherently positive words are higher than negative ones.

#### 4. A short note on translations

Translating poetry is in general regarded as a difficult task. In our case, translating a poet like Webb becomes really much harder for all that has been said above. The poems that have been chosen reflect some development in Webb's style, which is in line with the process that goes from normal objective metaphors, to what I have defined as subjective "immanent (extended) metaphor". The other difficulty lies with rhymes and rhythm. These two components of any poem are essential to the individual style of the poet and should be preserved in the translation. However, this is almost impossible to reproduce and in any case requires a *recreation* of the poem rather than simply a translation.

So, what I decided to do is to make available to the Italian reader both a *translation* (see **APPENDIX A**) and a *recreation* (see **Appendix B1 and APPENDIX B2**). In the first case, attention is paid to preserve the unity of the verse, disregarding problems related to rhythm. In the second case instead verse unity is no longer the focus, and the translation aims at capturing the inner rhythm and wherever possible, the rhymes. The reason for this duplication lies deeply in the nature of the two languages, Italian and English, which differ among other things, in the way in which rhythm is organized. English is regarded a "stress-timed" language, like many other languages possessing "reduced" vowels in their phoneme inventory, and the additional ability to generate "reduced" vowels by applying phonological rules, when increasing speaking rate, thus modifying the overall syllabic organization at word and phrase level. English – like other similar languages – can modify syllable structures both within the words and without at word boundaries, applying phonological rules: an utterance like "How do you do" if pronounced slowly would be made up of four separate syllables. However, when pronounced in fluent quick speed, it will be reduced to three syllables. These

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processes are almost absent in a language like Italian – or Spanish, Portuguese, but also Japanese and Arabic. These other languages have been defined "syllable-timed" because they preserve the identity of the syllable even in fluent quick speech.

Metrical issues are also treated differently in the two languages. English has mainly been described as a language that prefers the rhythm of the "iambic pentameter", that is five iambs, where a "iamb" is a sequence made up of one stressed syllable followed – but sometimes also preceded – by one (typically) or more unstressed syllables. This rhythm has governed English poetry up to the mid-twentieth century, starting to be defied solely by Hopkin's "sprung rhytm", then adopted by modern poets like T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound, among others. Also our poet Francis Webb uses this rhythm in quite a number of poems. The Italian corresponding metre would be the "endecasillabo" /elevensyllable which is however rather "heavy" stylistically speaking.

Other issues related to translating are grammatical and mainly concerning syntactic structure. English has a much stricter grammar than Romance languages, and requires propositional structure to be organized almost always in a canonical manner. As a general rule, Subject comes before the verb and Object immediately after. In addition, adjective modifiers are always positioned in front of their noun head. This is almost always true even though Webb's poetry is daringly borderline in this sense. We find many cases of Object preposal and Subject inversion. These cases would be quite commonplace in Italian verse. But Italian in some cases requires Subject to come after the verb, and this may apply also to adjective modifiers, depending on their semantic type.

As to the *recreation* modality, it introduces a totally different criterion in the way in which verse rhythm is modified. The underlying idea is to turn a iambic English verse into a five/six *main* syllable verse, where **main** refers to the need to distinguish between content and function words when counting syllables. The second type of words, are lacking semantic substance and have less weight in the overall rhythmic pattern. Specific phonological artifices to reduce number of syllables are truncation and sometimes, when possible, external sandhi rules. Truncation can be applied to verbs ending in a so called "sonant" sound (those sounds belonging to nasals, liquids that can be made into syllable nucleus if needed). Sandhi rules applied at word boundaries may reduce two syllables into one as for instance in "la famiglia Agnelli"/Agnelli

family, where we count 5 syllables in fluent quick speech, thus omitting the last syllable of the word "famiglia" which is absorbed by the first of "Agnelli".

## 5. Linguistically and Statistically Based Visualization

At this point it might be useful to show the output of D. Kaplan's program called *Poetry Style Analyzer*, for the evaluation and visualization of poetry. The program works on the basis of an extended number of features, starting from word length, type and number of grammatical categories: if adjective, noun, proper noun; up to rhythmic issues related to assonance, consonance and rhyme, slant rhyme vs perfect rhyme. The output of the program is a graphic visualization for a set of poems of their position in space, indicated by their title. The position is computed by comparing values associated automatically to features.

In Figure 1 below I show the output of the system for almost the whole of Webb's production: I uploaded 130 poems dividing them up into 13 separate subsection. As the image indicates, in the majority of cases, poems follow a common thread, and are thus mainly overlapping around a centre image. I then selected those poems regarded as deviant from the norm, represented in the second Figure 2 by *Five Days Old*. The other poems are: *A Sunrise*, *The Gunner*, *The Explorer's Wife*, *For My Grandfather*, *Idyll*, *Middle Harbour*, *Politician*, *To a Poet*, *The Captain of the Oberon*, *Palace of Dreams*, *The Room*, *Vancouver by Rail*, *Henry Lawson*, *Achilles and the Woman*.

I am currently developing a similar computer program that has a similar task, but more deeply linguistically-based. I have called it "Semantic Density Index" (SDI). With this definition I refer to the possibility of classifying poems according to their intrinsic semantic density in order to set apart those poems which are easy to understand from those that require a rereading and still remain somewhat obscure. An intuitive notion of SDI can be formulated as follow:

- easy to understand are those semantic structures which contain a proposition, made of a main predicate and its arguments
- difficult to understand are on the contrary semantic structures which are filled with nominal expressions, used to reinforce a concept and as such they are simply juxtaposed in a sequence
- also difficult to understand are sequences of adjectives and nominals used as modifiers, union of such items with a dash.



# American Poetry Style Analyzer

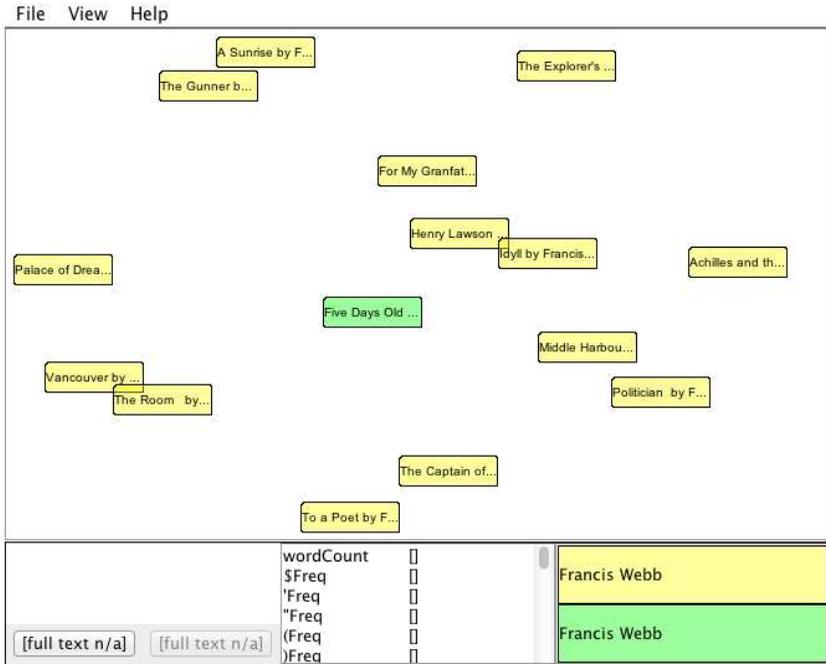


Figure 2. A Selection of poems regarded as deviant from the norm.

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## APPENDIX A

FRANCIS WEBB  
 A TRANSLATION BY RODOLFO DELMONTE

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*VENTO D'ALBA SULLE ISOLE*

*L'ago dell'alba le ha drogate, vita  
E morte, austere e arcaiche, in un unico  
Sgretolarsi, ammutolite, senza  
Missione o direzione, pencilanti  
Sotto una pesante acconciatura. Quando  
Il sole fantoccio si scuoterà, non ci  
Saranno convergenze: i morti  
Saranno i morti, piroettati in un  
Giallo, fragile e fosco vortice.  
Queste mie mani che potrebbero  
Esser pietra e neve, metà ossa,  
Metà silente polvere caduta, si  
Spargeranno decomposte e fioriranno  
Col primo gabbiano scintillante.*

*L'alba sull'ampio campo d'atterraggio  
S'empie abbandonato e il vento muta  
E cresce e ammassa. Se la luce  
Dell'aurora il senso di vita e morte  
Bilancia, controlla appeso a un uncino,  
Poi sgocciolando avanzerà e vivo  
Si emergerà da questo blù nodoso  
Del mare che non ha nome Mentre  
La luna muore sui rami come foglia,  
Sbiancata come la pancia del corallo  
Rifluirà verso la terraferma prima  
Del sorgere del sole in fiamme  
Solleverà il mercantile incagliato  
Riverso sugli scogli.*

*Qui, dove morirono, l'oblio brucerà  
Del bombardiere lepidottero-alato  
Il vetro e la cartilagine; dighe del  
Tempo scoppieranno, seppellendoli;  
Il sole casualmente deriderà una  
Croce di stelle. E io li ho guardati  
Morire, incuneato stretto, qui sotto  
Le casematte che ruzzolano e la pagina*

*Che ingiallisce, Ogni giorno più  
Impotente e più disperato. All'alba  
Queste agonie si staccano libere e  
Crescono fuori dalle tavole marce,  
Le voci infuriate: Piangi, piangi, ma  
Senti, ma mai dimenticherai.*

*Il sole sorgerà, e con la sua rotazione  
Verso terra i morti saranno i morti,  
Rassegnati a un'oscura annessione.  
La vita appenderà rosse lanterne  
D'avvertimento sulla nave fatiscante.  
Ci sarà solo vita e morte. Il lento  
Rollio di levante, il passaporto del  
Giorno abbagliante rilascio, pur  
Continuando quest'attimo a trovarsi  
Sull'isola, questo. Non posso sapere  
Se è la vita che si sveglia, affamata,  
E girando scuote la baia, in cerchio,  
In lavoro per sorgere.*

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DAWN WIND ON THE ISLANDS

The needle of dawn has drugged them, life and death,  
Stiff and archaic, mouldering into one,  
Voiceless, having no mission and no path,  
Lolling under a heavy head-dress. When  
The puppet sun jerks up, there will be no  
Convergences: the dead will be the dead,  
Twirled in a yellow eddy, frail and dull.  
These hands of mine that might be stone and snow,  
Half bone, half silent fallen dust, will shed  
Decay, and flower with the first glittering gull.

Dawn on the wide deserted airstrip swells  
And the wind shifts and gains and gathers. If  
The point of daylight balances, controls  
The sense of life-and-death as on a gaff,  
Then dripping it will come, and living-show  
From this sea's knotted blue that has no name  
While the moon dies on its branches like a leaf;  
As coral's whitening belly it will flow  
Inland before the sunrise, hang with flame  
The tilted freighter breaking on the reef.  
Here, where they died, oblivion will burn  
The moth-winged bomber's glass and gristle; weirs  
Of time will burst, burying them; the sun  
Casually mock a cross of stars.  
And I have watched them die, wedged fast, below  
The tumbling barracks and the yellowing page,  
Each day more helpless and more desperate.  
At dawn these agonies break loose and grow  
Out of the rotted boards, the voices rage:  
Cry, cry, but feel – but never forget.

The sun will rise, and with its landward swing  
The dead will be the dead, surrendered up  
To a dark annexation. Life will hang  
Red lights of warning on the crumbling ship.  
There will be only life and death. The slow

Roll of the east, the passport of the day  
Blazing release, while still this moment lies  
Over the island, this. I cannot know  
If it is life that wakes, shaking the bay,  
Hungry, and circling, and labouring to rise.

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THE POETRY OF FRANCIS WEBB  
(With a Selection and Translation of His Poetry in the Appendix)

---

A ETHEL

*Non sentirsi al meglio, avrei davvero dovuto dire.  
Sì, dell'eucalipto eretto lo spirito impavido  
Colonna solare e felce dispiegata; intatto  
Il pane di una pozza nascosta - né dita  
Né lame qui; e il mendico oscuro attirava  
Senza malizia l'illuminato. Ma...  
E poi che un futile sole s'insinuasse  
Inesplicabile dei tuoi occhi nell'  
Azzurro candido - una sorta d'aurora,  
Ché i tuoi capelli son oro da ricordare:  
E qui tu siedì.*

*Inferisci sul relitto, diciamo, sui rottami  
di un umore: ma qui c'è un salvataggio,  
facile e pieno di grazia. Miglia di mare  
perplesso e ciarliero hanno ostacolato  
un attimo solo la più semplice delle  
tue voci, il tuo viso. Benché solo un  
secondo ancora, adesso posso trattenere  
un'immagine emersa da un rompicapo,  
ricordando oro.*

FOR ETHEL

Not feeling the best, I should truly have said.  
Yes, the gum's erect and shudderless wit  
Deployed sun-column and fern; the unbroken bread  
Of a locked pool-finger nor blade here; and the unlit  
Scrub engaged without malice the lighted. But. . .  
And then that a futile sun should accede to your eyes'  
Guileless uncanny blue – a sort of sunrise,  
For your hair is gold to remembering: and here you sit.

Spit on the wreck, we say, the timbers of a mood;  
But here is a salvaging, easy and full of grace.  
Miles of perplexed and chattering sea withstood  
Only a second your simplest of voices, your face.  
Though only a second longer, now I may hold  
An image risen from conundrum, remembering gold.

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---

*PREAMBOLO*

*Noi non dimentichiamo come uccidere.  
La nostra aula è pulita, alquanto  
Vecchia, così pudicamente pratica  
E squisitamente pattugliata da  
Così tanti insegnanti - da un  
Insegnante. Il suo accento, l'occasione  
Può variare; non i temi del suo mondo.  
Domato, compromettente, freddo,  
L'Esterno con i suoi fulmini e sole  
Baratta tutta la passione da  
Ricreazione per scivolare furtivamente  
Attraverso vetri ben strofinati.  
Poche inezie estranee son nascoste  
Sotto i banchi, e di passare  
Appunti è severamente vietato.*

*Possiamo dimenticare come amare.  
L'Esterno possiamo dimenticare,  
Il turbolento. Rigoroso guanto,  
Occhiello, questi incitano  
L'Interno all'odio e paura  
E crisi, che ci insegna.  
Sui loro pascoli infiammabili o  
Bagnati quel bestiame al pascolo  
Non è vero bestiame, dunque, ignaro.  
Da un ponte ordinato di comando  
Trattare la confusione da panico -  
Corna, pupille, non-natura,  
Una storia emozionante da narrare.  
Odio e morte hanno una loro statura.  
L'amore è così banale.*

*Eppure l'amore può reclamare la mandria.  
Vetro freddo dar brividi; perché lo stile  
E' il secolo, misura: una Parola  
Imbroglia Greenwich e un miglio mappato.  
E la Parola è stata pronunziata, si pronunzia,  
Incurante di istitutori e orologio.*

*Diciamo, la precisione d'acciaio  
Di un bombardiere deride  
Il campanile che sta sprofondando:  
Un suo simile sarà frantumato,  
Uno saluterà la somiglianza - roccia.  
Risata finale non è con la morte  
Per la deificazione di tutti i tempi;  
Giace con un amante, il cui respiro  
Era, ed è, risata, creazione.*

TRANSPOSING MEANING INTO IMMANENCE:  
THE POETRY OF FRANCIS WEBB  
(With a Selection and Translation of His Poetry in the Appendix)

---

FOREWORD

We do not forget how to kill.  
Our classroom is clean, quite old,  
So demurely practical  
And exquisitely patrolled  
By so many teachers - by one  
Teacher. His accent, occasion  
May vary; not themes of his world.  
Tamed, compromising, cold,  
The Outside with its lightning and sun  
Surrenders all playtime passion  
To sidle through well-scrubbed glass.  
Few foreign trifles are hidden  
Under our desks, and to pass  
Notes is strictly forbidden.

We can forget how to love.  
The Outside we can forget,  
The disorderly. Rigorous glove,  
Buttonhole, these abet  
The Within of hatred and fear  
And crisis, who teaches us.  
On their tindery pastures or wet  
Those grazing cattle are not  
True cattle, then, unaware.  
From an orderly deck deal the fuss  
Of panic - horns, eyeballs, un-nature,  
An exciting story to tell.  
Hate and death have a stature.  
Love is so trivial.

Yet love may reclaim the herd.  
Cold glass be shivered; for style  
Is the century, yardstick: a Word  
Cheats Greenwich and plotted mile.  
And the Word was spoken, is spoken,  
Reckless of tutor and clock.  
Say, a bomber's precision of steel  
Mocks the foundering campanile:  
One by its like shall be broken,  
One greet its likeness - rock.  
Last laugh is not with death  
For all the times' deification;  
It lies with a lover, whose breath  
Was, and is, laughter, creation.

*FORMICHE DEVASTATRICI*

*Il mondo, il puntuale tranquillo giroscopio,  
È a modo suo più o meno in pace,  
Lavorano le spaziose viscere, gioiscono  
Creature o si lamentano, in tutta la tenace  
Creazione c'è scontro d'interessi, quando  
Con un colpo sordo di grancassa cala  
Il silenzio, Ed ecco!  
Arrivano i guerrieri.*

*Per primo, fremono via gli uccelli, tutto uno  
Sfaldarsi, librandosi fuori portata e tutti  
Dimentichi dei loro piccoli, piangendo  
All'oscuro inquietante avanzare furtivo  
Sulla loro terra; e poi non lasciandosi  
Guidare dall'istinto. Ora tutto è in silenzio  
La schiuma dell'onda  
S'infrange sulle zolle sott'assedio.*

*Vengono. E l'orecchio di chi può indovinare  
Onde terribili? Segnali di comando anelati  
Da quale demagogo? Ruzzolano nelle orge  
Dell'impegno, queste schiave nere, tutto  
Attività, ma insensibili come legno  
Marcito. La loro folle assorta unione  
Di fame e allegria  
È il sollevamento del ventre della terra.*

*Il mammifero ferito si lamenta, si scontra  
Corre, scintillante, mangiato vivo.  
Il pulcino di tre giorni strilla di paura, e  
Come un paradigma di pistole l'anarchia  
Si rimpinza e la vita è malata. Guarda  
Da vicino per un attimo, straniero,  
Troverai paradigmi  
Offuscati anche della nostra mente.*

*Perché questa è la nostra mente per  
L'oggi - mai creazione ma tutta nudità.  
Odori e colori si sposano e suoni  
E forme, girando in tutta quella  
Razione di nervi di base, come oscurità*

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*Imminente; ma a volte nei momenti  
Di ritiro si sentono  
Certe ruote sotterranee.*

*Mentre la loro nuvola progredisce può  
Assumere forme sconosciute: membro  
E amante divorante può piangere come  
Mandibole di pioggia e qualunque cosa  
Stupri il frutto e la carne della vita  
Nel profondo sonno. Il sonno è sempre  
Il nemico, sembra,  
Per tutti quelli che sognano questi sogni.*

*Ma ora la notte puntigliosa spazza via  
Ogni lussuria roteante e un altro,  
Un benedetto silenzio si annida  
Su molte ossa abbandonate scintillanti  
Nella polvere. La terra dibatte amaramente  
In queste solitudini se osare rimpiazzare,  
Rovesciandoli,  
Il farneticare dell'amore il cantare.*

LEGIONARY ANTS

The world, the tranquil punctual gyroscope,  
Is more or less at peace after her fashion,  
Broad bowels work, creatures rejoice or mope,  
There is clash of interests in all dogged creation,  
When silence comes as at noiseless thwack of a drum,  
And look! the warriors come.

First shudder away the birds, all flaking, wheeling  
Out of range and all forgetful of their young,  
Crying at the ominous shadowy floor stealing  
Over their earth; and then not giving tongue.  
Now all things hold silent, and the surf  
Breaks on beleagured turf.

They come. And whose ear can divine the awful waves,  
Signals of command suspired by what demagogue?  
They tumble in orgies of commitment, these black slaves,  
All activity, but insensible as rotted log.  
Their mad absorbed unity of hunger and mirth  
Is the belly-heave of earth.

The wounded mammal whimpers and butts and runs,  
Glazing, eaten alive. The three-days' chick  
Shrills fear, and like a paradigm of guns  
Anarchy gorges itself and life is sick.  
Look close for a second, stranger, you will find  
Blair paradigm also of our mind.

For this is our mind for today - never creation  
But all nakedness. Odours and colours blent  
And sounds and shapes, swivel throughout that ration  
Of basic nerves, like darkness imminent;  
But sometimes in moments of withdrawal one sees, feels  
Certain subterranean wheels.  
As their cloud progresses it may assume strange shapes:  
Of devouring lover and organ, it may weep  
Like mandibles of rain and whatever rapes

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The fruit and flesh of life in very sleep.  
Sleep is ever the enemy, it seems,  
To all who dream these dreams.

But punctilious night now sweeps away all lust  
On wheels, and another, a blessed, silence broods  
Over many bones left twinkling in the dust.  
Earth debates bitterly in these solitudes  
Whether she dare replace, below, above,  
The singings, ramblings of love.

A MIO NONNO

*Quando le corde attorcigliate s'allentano,  
 E vien meno il refolo un po' per volta  
 Su una pace che s'allarga, cadono respiro  
 E spirito; contro l'albero ossuto s'incollano  
 Come pelle le vele sfilacciate e lasche.  
 Nel dondolio verde dove coste e chiglia  
 Giacciono naufragate, ravvolte nella fradicia  
 Sabbia enigmatica, cose che si dolgono verso  
 Il sole, verso il mare, con lui rinchiuso,  
 Strappano al sartame della morta mano  
 Dell'amante di navi. Benché del vento  
 Nessun'eloquenza abbacinante possa colmare  
 Le vele annegate col rigonfiare saldo  
 Del respiro doppiato il passato, il futuro,  
 Mai sono tuttavia ambigue le ossa  
 Davanti a morte o vita.*

*Imbrunire su Capo Bradley; esile  
 Un gabbiano, il suo corpo a picco  
 È il passato sul crinale tra la forma  
 E il nulla; è qui che la bellissima  
 Letona lontano dalla scogliera, stramba  
 Sbattuta dalle onde. E a quegli anni  
 L'imbrunire non giunge se non come  
 Squarcio nella carne del sole,  
 Richiuso dalla memoria; conchiglie  
 Mantecate dalla scia dell'acqua,  
 Levano fragili facce sante al cielo.  
 I miei anni e i tuoi son scarabocchi su  
 Quest'aria assillata dal martelletto del  
 Mio fiato vivente: invece del tempo  
 Al polso indosso il quadrante,  
 I quattro quarti della vostra morte.*

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---

FOR MY GRANDFATHER

When the ropes droop and loosen, and the gust  
Piecemeal upon a widening quietness fails,  
Fail breath and spirit; against the bony mast  
Work in like skin the frayed and slackened sails.  
In the green lull where ribs and keel lie wrecked,  
Wrapped in the sodden, enigmatic sand,  
Things that ache sunward, seaward, with him locked,  
Tug at the rigging of the dead ship—lover's hand.  
Though no wind's whitening eloquence may fill  
Drowned canvas with the steady bulge of breath,  
Doubling for past, for future, are never still  
The bones ambiguous with life and death.

Dusk over Bradley's Head: a feeble gull  
Whose sinking body is the past at edge  
Of form and nothing; here the beautiful  
Letona gybes, off the spray-shaken ledge.  
And to those years dusk comes but as a rift  
In the flesh of sunlight, closed by memory;  
Shells stir in the pull of water, lift  
Fragile and holy faces to the sky.  
My years and yours are scrawled upon this air  
Rapped by the gavel of my living breath:  
Rather than time upon my wrist I wear  
The dial, the four quarters, of your death.

*IL FRINGUELLO GIALLO*

*Guerra, volto tambureggiante, ruzzolante  
 Che avanza, nebbia che invade senza  
 Tuoni una contea in tensione. Nell'intrigo  
 Di colline intimorite venti mercenari,  
 Abili e cinici informano il grigio  
 Stagnante, le ruote erranti. L'età  
 Sgocciola dalle linee docili delle  
 Terre. Colori striscianti, il fradicio  
 Logo del sole dallo scialbo sciaquò e  
 Baluginò balbetta un'ultima parola.  
 Si sbriciolano senza suoni della ragione  
 Le nuvolestrutture: è il canto,  
 Il frullío del fringuello giallo  
 Non si ritirerà davanti a terra,  
 Cielo, giorno e notte, richiusi su stessi.*

*Per conoscere della fratellanza l'antico  
 Rituale di luce dispersa e risucchiata a  
 Frammenti, muta, questo è il ratto grigio  
 Che rosicchia l'anima: perché tutto  
 Quel sangue urgente, communiqué del  
 Cuorefringuello di Dio, inondando  
 Le membra avvizzite balzerebbe oltre il tempo,  
 Andando senza fronzoli a un armistizio.  
 Con la nevicata, ore piccole lanciano  
 Le ultime notizie all'alba al fronte da un  
 Corpuscolo minuscolo. Plasma in catene,  
 Qui non si intersecano le vene.  
 – È il tallone dell'estate, è il canto,  
 Il frullío del fringuello giallo,  
 Balza d'un tratto oltre l'intelletto.*

*Satellite nebbia, il lampione, non può che  
 Narrare futili parabole della volontà  
 Eretica del potere conquistatore: ogni  
 Cortile uno sciame di atomi furiosi, esangui,  
 Vagano impotenti l'uno strozzato  
 Alla gola dell'altro. Abbiamo conosciuto  
 Nuvole sobrie come queste correre  
 Impazzite, ma l'assurdo gemito, di ricerca  
 E agonia a volte artigli bluacciaio*

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*Raschiare la terra qua e là, stringere  
Frenetici centro e forma - a cercar  
L'oro: un tale scavare non poteva  
Che finire con la morte. Profilo di  
Nebbia inutile, clamore. È il canto,  
Il frullío del fringuello giallo  
Continua la marcia.*

*Spettri di bestiame abbandonati in  
Fila la luna circonda questo perdigiorno  
Soffocato di un albero, non l'abbiamo  
Mai visto così disperato come adesso,  
Braccia in espansione verso il nulla  
Ostile, cigolío e balbettío assecondano  
Sopravvento, al di fuori della mappa  
Vivente. E' il canto,  
Il frullío del fringuello giallo, suggerisce di  
Spuntare il verde invecchiato, caraffa  
Di linfa; sì, è vero  
Anche di questo albero parruccone  
Saccheggiato: mondi addietro, la vita  
Ha cucinato la sua cena con zelo  
E per certe ore lo ha agghindato di blu.*

THE YELLOWHAMMER

Working, tumbling, doddering face of war,  
Fog overruns without thunder a taut shire.  
Deft and cynical mercenary winds  
Inform the slewing grey, the errant wheels  
Into intrigue upon browbeaten hills.  
Age trickles from the docile lines of lands.  
Colours grovel, the soused logos of the sun  
Lisps a last word from fallow wash and glimmer.  
Cloud-structures of reason crumble without sound:  
It is the song, the footfall of the yellowhammer  
Will not give ground  
To earth, sky, day, and night crouching as one.

To know the ancient ritual brotherhood  
Of light dispersed and sucked up piecemeal, dumb,  
This is the grey rat nibbling at the soul:  
For all that urgent blood,  
Communiqué of the hammer-heart of God,  
Flooding the wizened limb  
Would leap past time, go spangling into truce  
With snowfall, small hour, toss the ultimate news  
To frontal dawn from tiny corpuscle.  
Plasma in chains, here no veins intersect.  
– It is the heel of summer,  
It is the song, the footfall of the yellowhammer,  
Leaps of a sudden past the intellect.

Fog satellite, the street-lamp can but tell  
Petty parables of the heretical will  
Of power as conquerer: every yard's a swarm  
Of furious atoms, bloodless, directionless,  
At one another's throats in helpless harm.  
We have known sober clouds run mad as this,  
But sometimes the steep groan, steel-blue claws of search  
And agony hither and thither scratched at earth,  
Frantic to clutch the centre and the form –  
Such fossicking could only end in death.  
Outline of fog has no objective, clamour.  
It is the song, the footfall of the yellowhammer  
Continues on the march.  
Wraiths of derelict cattle in a row  
Moon round this muffled loiterer of a tree,

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We never saw him so forlorn as now,  
Arms asprawl to hostile nothing, creak and stammer  
Pandering windward, off the living map.  
It is the song, the footfall of the yellowhammer  
Suggests trim elderly green, flagon of sap;  
Yes, it is true  
Even of such a ransacked fogey tree:  
Worlds back, life cooked his supper zealously  
And breasted him for certain hours with blue.

*IL GIORNO DELLA STATUA*

*Cerchi prodigi affacciato sul davanzale  
Dell'uragano o a tuo agio nel giallo  
Incavo alla base della candela, ma qui  
La pazienza s'invera: al largo nella baia,  
Le lancette dei minuti scandiscono lavoro  
E silenzio dei pescatori.*

*Attraccata con lo spinnaker cullata tra  
Sole e ombra, con un tremore impotente  
Nelle vele, la tartana, con un lungo affondo  
Nei flutti, infilava giù il muso si levava  
Stillante, boccheggianti come fosse  
Avida di ispirare aria nuovamente.*

*E gli uomini, accomodati in questa nicchia  
Casuale di tempo, i gesti aggruppati e  
Ristretti e concatenati la rete sentono  
Cocciuta alla mano, e strappato  
Dalle ferrose gengive del letto marino,  
Un dente canino fremente e dolorante.*

*Chiara si ricompone la superficie, acquee  
Nervature smeraldo spenzolano e  
Ricadono giù. Con lo schioccar dei  
Cavi qualcosa nella trappola della  
Sua dissoluzione si tende, scialbi  
Secoli di pressione e lussuria di alghe.*

*Un giovane bronzeo, come una poesia o  
Una preghiera modellato ma deriso dal mare,  
Deformato nella sua scotta grigia, sguaiato  
Come una cicatrice sulla carne chiazzata  
Delle tavole mentre gli scopritori  
Bestemmiano per le maglie lacerate della rete.*

*C'è chi rotola indietro la pietra pesante  
Del mare ma non c'è nessuno ad ammirare  
Il resto mortale, il pegno vivente. Ma poi  
Altri uomini levigano, incidono, decidono  
Al fine ciò che quella mano alzata  
Stringeva un tempo e gli anni hanno rotto.*

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THE DAY OF THE STATUE

You look for prodigies leaning on the sill of storm,  
Or loose in the yellow gap at a candle's end,  
But here was patience: fishermen out on the bay,  
Work and silence inching with the minute-hand.

Moored in a lulled spinny of sun and shadow,  
With an impotent tremor in the sails, the ketch nosed down  
To the long lunge of the swell, rose dripping, gasping  
As if with eagerness to suck in air again.

And the men, snug in this casual pediment of time,  
Their gestures grouped and restricted and interlocking,  
Felt the haul stubborn to their hands, an eye-tooth wrenched  
From the iron gums of the sea-bed, shuddering and aching.

As it cleared the surface, green sinews of water  
Dangled and fell away. With the bursting of cords  
Something strained at the trap of its dissolution,  
Dull centuries of pressure and lust of weeds.

A bronze youth, moulded as a lyric or a prayer  
But mocked by the sea, deformed in his grey sheet,  
Sprawled like a scar on the mottled flesh of planks  
While his finders cursed at the torn strings of their net.

There were some to roll back the heavy stone of the sea;  
There was none to ponder the mortal, the living token.  
But later, men polished, incised, established at last  
What that raised hand once clutched and years had broken.

APPENDIX B1

A VERSE-LENGTH COMPLIANT TRANSLATION BY MARCO FAZZINI  
Università Ca' Foscari Venezia

LEGIONARY ANTS / *FORMICHE DEVASTATRICI*

The world, the tranquil punctual gyroscope, / *Il mondo, il placido preciso giroscopio,*  
Is more or less at peace after her fashion, / *È più o meno in pace, a modo suo,*  
Broad bowels work, creatures rejoice or mope / *Gran lavoro di viscere, creature che gioiscono o si rattristano,*  
There is clash of interests in all dogged creation / *C'è conflitto di interessi in tutta l'accanita creazione*  
When silence comes as at noiseless thwack of a drum, / *Quando il silenzio cala, al muto pulsare d'un tamburo,*  
And look! the warriors come. / *Ed ecco! giungono i guerrieri.*

First shudder away the birds, all flaking, wheeling / *Prima, d'un fremito, volano via come fiocassero, gli uccelli,*  
Out of range and all forgetful of their young, / *A librarsi altissimi, dimentichi della prole,*  
Crying at the ominous shadowy floor stealing / *Levando strida per il nefasto, oscuro raid a tappeto*  
Over their earth; and then not giving tongue / *Sulla loro terra; poi, non un richiamo.*  
Now all things hold silent, and the surf / *Tutto è silenzio, ora, e l'onda*  
Breaks on beleaguered turf. / *Si frange sulla vessata sponda.*

They come. And whose ear can divine the awful waves, / *Vengono. E quale udito può divinare le onde orrende,*  
Signals of command suspired by what demagogue? / *Segni di comando sospirati da quale demagogo?*  
They tumble in orgies of commitment, these black slaves, / *Tonfano orgiastiche senza remissione, queste schiave nere,*  
All activity, but insensible as rotted log. / *Tutta attività, ma insensibili come legno marcio.*  
Their mad absorbed unity of hunger and mirth / *La loro folle avvinta unità di fame e gioia*  
Is the belly—heave of earth. / *Solleva il ventre della terra.*

The wounded mammal whimpers and butts and runs / *Ferito il mammifero cozza, uggia, corre,*  
Glazing, eaten alive. The three-days' chick / *Glassato, mangiato vivo. Il pulcino di tre giorni*  
Shrills fear, and like a paradigm of guns / *Stride paura, e come un paradigma di pistole,*  
Anarchy gorges itself and life is sick / *Anarchia s'abbuffa e vita è inferma.*  
Look close for a second, stranger, you will find / *Guarda un istante da vicino, straniero, e scoprirai*  
Blar paradigm also of our mind. / *Anche nella tua mente confuso paradigma.*

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---

For this is our mind for today – never creation / *Ché questa è la nostra mente oggi – mai creazione*  
But all nakedness. Odours and colours blent / *Ma nudità integrale . Odori e colori mescolati*  
And sounds and shapes, swivel throughout that ration / *E suoni e forme, s'impennano attraverso la razione*  
Of basic nerves, like darkness imminent / *Di nervi base, come tenebra imminente*  
But sometimes in moments of withdrawal one sees, feels / *Ma a volte in attimi di rinuncia vedi, senti*  
Certain subterranean wheels. / *Certi ingranaggi sotterranei.*

As their cloud progresses it may assume strange shapes: / *Come la loro nube cresce assume forme strane:*  
Of devouring lover and organ, it may weep / *Di amante divorante e membro, può gocciare*  
Like mandibles of rain and whatever rapes / *Come mandibole di pioggia e ogni cosa che viola*  
The fruit and flesh of life in very sleep. / *I frutti e la carne di vita in pieno sonno.*  
Sleep is ever the enemy, it seems, / *Sonno è l'eterno nemico, sembra,*  
To all who dream these dreams. / *Per tutti quelli che questi sogni sognano.*

But punctilious night now sweeps away all lust / *Ma ora notte pignola spazza via ogni bramosia*  
On wheels, and another, a blessed, silence broods / *Su ruote, e un altro, un beato, silenzio grava*  
Over many bones left twinkling in the dust. / *Su molte ossa lasciate nella rena a luccicare.*  
Earth debates bitterly in these solitudes / *In queste solitudini la terra discute amara*  
Whether she dare replace, below, above, / *Se debba - sotto, sopra – rinnovare*  
The singings, ramblings of love. / *I canti, e i farneticamenti dell'amore.*

## RODOLFO DELMONTE

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FOR MY GRANDFATHER / *PER MIO NONNO*

When the ropes droop and loosen, and the gust / *Quando corde s'allentano e si sciolgono, e il refolo*  
Piecemeal upon a widening quietness fails, / *Vien meno poco a poco sopra la tranquillità che si sarga,*  
Fail breath and spirit; against the bony mast / *Cadono spirito e respiro; contro l'albero ossuto*  
Work in like skin the frayed and slackened sails. / *S'appiccicano come pelle le vele sfilacciate e allascate.*  
In the green lull where ribs and keel lie wrecked, / *Nel verde dondolio dove coste e chiglia stanno naufragate,*  
Wrapped in the sodden, enigmatic sand, / *Ravvolte dalla fradicia sabbia enigmatica,*  
Things that ache sunward, seaward, with him locked, / *Cose che si dolgono verso il sole, verso il mare, con lui rinchiuso,*  
Tug at the rigging of the dead ship—lover's hand. / *Strappano al sartiame della mano morta dell'amante di navi.*  
Though no wind's whitening eloquence may fill / *Benché l'eloquenza sbiancante del vento non possa colmare*  
Drowned canvas with the steady bulge of breath, / *Vele annegate col rigonfiare del respiro saldo*  
Doubling for past, for future, are never still / *Doppiando il passato, il futuro, mai sono tuttavia*  
The bones ambiguous with life and death. / *Le osse ambigue davanti alla morte o alla vita.*

Dusk over Bradley's Head: a feeble gull / *Imbrunire è sopra Capo Bradley; qui un esile gabbiano,*  
Whose sinking body is the past at edge / *Col corpo che affonda, è il passato sopra al confine*  
Of form and nothing; here the beautiful / *Tra forma e nulla; e la bellissima Letona*  
Letona gybes, off the spray-shaken ledge. / *Fa unastrambata, oltre l'orlo spruzzato di schiuma.*  
And to those years dusk comes but as a rift / *E a quegli anni l'imbrunire non è che squarcio*  
In the flesh of sunlight, closed by memory; / *Nella carne del sole, rinchiuso dalla memoria;*  
Shells stir in the pull of water, lift / *Conchiglie rimestate nella spuma, levano*  
Fragile and holy faces to the sky. / *Il loro volto fragile e santificano al cielo.*

My years and yours are scrawled upon this air / *I miei anni, i tuoi anni sono scarabocchiate*  
Rapped by the gavel of my living breath: / *Sopra quest'aria martellata dal mio vivo fiato:*  
Rather than time upon my wrist I wear / *Invece del tempo, al polso indosso*  
The dial, the four quarters, of your death. / *Il quadrante, i quattro quarti della vostra morte.*

TRANSPOSING MEANING INTO IMMANENCE:  
THE POETRY OF FRANCIS WEBB  
(With a Selection and Translation of His Poetry in the Appendix)

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FOR ETHEL / *PER ETHEL*

Not feeling the best, I should truly have said. / *Non sentirsi in forma, avrei in realtà dovuto dire,*

Yes, the gum's erect and shudderless wit / *Si, lo spirito eretto e impavido dell'eucalipto*

Deployed sun-column and fern; the unbroken bread / *Dispiegata colonna e felce del sole; il pane non spezzato*

Of a locked pool-finger nor blade here; and the unlit / *D'un laghetto chiuso, né dita né lame qui; e il cespuglio*

Scrub engaged without malice the lighted. But . . . / *Non illuminato attirava senza malizia l'illuminato. Ma...*

And then that a futile sun should accede to your eyes' / *E che quindi un futile sole debba avere accesso al misterioso*

Guileless uncanny blue – a sort of sunrise, / *Schietto azzurro dei tuoi occhi – una sorta d'aurora,*

For your hair is gold to remembering; and here you sit. / *Poiché i tuoi capelli sono oro da ricordare: e qui tu siedi.*

Spit on the wreck, we say, the timbers of a mood; / *Sputaci sul relitto, diciamo sui rottami di un umore:*

But here is a salvaging, easy and full of grace. / *Ma qui c'è un salvataggio, facile e pieno di grazia.*

Miles of perplexed and chattering sea withstood / *Miglia di mare perplesso e ciarliero hanno resistito*

Only a second your simplest of voices, your face. / *Solo un secondo alla tua più semplice delle voci, il tuo viso.*

Though only a second longer, now I may hold / *Benché solo un secondo di più, ora mi resta da conservare*

An image risen from conundrum, remembering gold. / *Un'immagine emersa da un enigma, memore dell'oro.*

DAWN WIND ON THE ISLANDS / *VENTO D'ALBA SULLE ISOLE*

The needle of dawn has drugged them, life and death, / *L'ago dell'alba le ha drogate, vita e morte,*  
 Stiff and archaic, mouldering into one, / *Austere e arcaiche, in un unico sgretolarsi,*  
 Voiceless, having no mission and no path, / *Ammutolite, senza missione o direzione,*  
 Lolling under a heavy head—dress. When / *Pencolanti sotto una pesante acconciatura. Quando*  
 The puppet sun jerks up, there will be no / *Il sole fantoccio si scuoterà, non ci saranno*  
 Convergences: the dead will be the dead, / *Convergenze: i morti saranno i morti,*  
 Twirled in a yellow eddy, frail and dull. / *Piroettati in un vortice giallo, fragile e fosco*  
 These hands of mine that might be stone and snow, / *Queste mie mani che potrebbero essere pietra e neve*  
 Half bone, half silent fallen dust, will shed / *Metà ossa, metà silente polvere caduta, si spargeranno*  
 Decay, and flower with the first glittering gull. / *Decomposte e fioriranno col primo gabbiano scintillante.*

Dawn on the wide deserted airstrip swells / *L'Alba sull'ampio campo d'atterraggio abbandonato s'empie*  
 And the wind shifts and gains and gathers. If / *E il vento muta e cresce e ammassa. Se*  
 The point of daylight balances, controls / *Il punto di luce bilancia, controlla*  
 The sense of life—and—death as on a gaff, / *Il senso di vita e morte, come un uncino*  
 Then dripping it will come, and living – show / *Poi sgocciolando avanzerà e vivo si mostrerà*  
 From this sea's knotted blue that has no name / *Da questo blu nodoso del mare che non ha nome*  
 While the moon dies on its branches like a leaf; / *Mentre la luna muore sui rami come una foglia,*  
 As coral's whitening belly it will flow / *Come la pancia sbiancata del corallo esso rifluirà*  
 Inland before the sunrise, hang with flame / *In terraferma prima del sorgere del sole solleverà in fiamme*  
 The tilted freighter breaking on the reef. / *Il mercantile riverso incagliato sugli scogli.*

Here, where they died, oblivion will burn / *Qui, dove morirono, l'oblio brucerà*  
 The moth-winged bomber's glass and gristle; weirs / *Il vetro e la cartilagine del bombardiere lepidottero-alato; dighe*  
 Of time will burst, burying them; the sun / *Del tempo scoppieranno, seppellendoli, il sole*  
 Casually mock a cross of stars. / *Casualmente deriderà una croce di stelle.*  
 And I have watched them die, wedged fast, below / *E io li ho guardati morire, incuneata veloce, qui sotto*  
 The tumbling barracks and the yellowing page, / *Le casematte che ruzzolano e la pagina ingiallita,*  
 Each day more helpless and more desperate. / *Ogni giorno più impotente e più disperato.*  
 At dawn these agonies break loose and grow / *All'alba queste agonie si staccano libere e crescono*  
 Out of the rotted boards, the voices rage: / *Fuori delle tavole marce, le voci infuriate:*  
 Cry, cry, but feel—but never forget. / *Piangi, piangi, ma senti, ma non dimenticare mai.*  
 The sun will rise, and with its landward swing / *Il sole sorgerà, e con la sua rotazione verso terra*  
 The dead will be the dead, surrendered up / *I morti saranno i morti, arrendetevi fino*

TRANSPOSING MEANING INTO IMMANENCE:  
THE POETRY OF FRANCIS WEBB  
(With a Selection and Translation of His Poetry in the Appendix)

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To a dark annexation. Life will hang / *A un'annessione oscura. La vita appenderà*

Red lights of warning on the crumbling ship. / *Luci rosse di avvertimento sulla nave fatiscante.*

There will be only life and death. The slow / *Ci sarà solo la vita e la morte. Il lento*

Roll of the east, the passport of the day / *Rotolare di levante, il passaporto del giorno*

Blazing release, while still this moment lies / *Ardente rilascio, pur continuando questo momento a trovarsi*

Over the island, this. I cannot know / *Sopra l'isola, questo. Non posso sapere*

If it is life that wakes, shaking the bay, / *Se è la vita che si sveglia, affamata, e girando*

Hungry, and circling, and labouring to rise. / *Scuotendo la baia, in cerchio, in lavoro per sorgere.*

FOREWORD / *PREAMBOLO*

We do not forget how to kill. / *Non dimentichiamo come uccidere.*

Our classroom is clean, quite old, / *la nostra aula è pulita, alquanto vecchia,*

So demurely practical / *così pudicamente pratica*

And exquisitely patrolled / *e squisitamente pattugliata*

By so many teachers – by one / *da così tanti insegnanti – da un*

Teacher. His accent, occasion / *insegnante. il suo accento, occasione*

May vary; not themes of his world. / *può variare; non i temi del suo mondo.*

Tamed, compromising, cold, / *Domato, compromettente, freddo,*

The Outside with its lightning and sun / *L'Esterno con i suoi fulmini e sole*

Surrenders all playtime passion / *Cede tutta la passione a ricreazione*

To sidle through well-scrubbed glass. / *Per scivolare furtivamente attraverso vetri ben sfregati.*

Few foreign trifles are hidden / *Poche inezie estranee sono nascoste*

Under our desks, and to pass / *Sotto i nostri banchi, e di passare*

Notes is strictly forbidden. / *Gli appunti è severamente vietato.*

We can forget how to love. / *Possiamo dimenticare come amare.*

The Outside we can forget, / *L'Esterno si può dimenticare,*

The disorderly. Rigorous glove, / *il disordinato. Guanto rigoroso,*

Buttonhole, these abet / *l'occhiello, questi incoraggia*

The Within of hatred and fear / *L'Interno di odio e paura*

And crisis, who teaches us. / *e crisi, che ci insegna.*

On their tundry pastures or wet / *sui loro pascoli infiammabili o bagnati*

Those grazing cattle are not / *quel bestiame al pascolo non è*

True cattle, then, unaware. / *bestiame vero, dunque, ignaro.*

From an orderly deck deal the fuss / *Da un ponte ordinato di comando trattare la confusione*

Of panic - horns, eyeballs, un-nature, / *Da panico - corna, pupille, non-natura,*

An exciting story to tell. / *Una storia emozionante da narrare.*

Hate and death have a stature. / *Odio e morte hanno una loro statura.*

Love is so trivial. / *L'amore è così banale.*

Yet love may reclaim the herd. / *Eppure l'amore può reclamare il gregge.*

Cold glass be shivered; for style / *Vetro freddo da brividi; per lo stile*

Is the century, yardstick: a Word / *è il secolo, il metro: una Parola*

Cheats Greenwich and plotted mile. / *imbrogliava Greenwich e il miglio tracciato.*

TRANSPOSING MEANING INTO IMMANENCE:  
THE POETRY OF FRANCIS WEBB  
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And the Word was spoken, is spoken, / *e il Verbo è stato pronunziato, si pronunzia,*

Reckless of tutor and clock. / *Avventato dell'istitutore e dell'orologio.*

Say, a bomber's precision of steel / *Ad esempio, la precisione d'acciaio di un bombardiere*

Mocks the foundering campanile: / *deride il campanile sprofondato:*

One by its like shall be broken, / *uno per la sua somiglianza sarà spezzato,*

One greet its likeness - rock. / *uno saluterà la sua somiglianza - roccia.*

Last laugh is not with death / *L'ultima risata non è con la morte*

For all the times' deification; / *per la deificazione di tutti i tempi;*

It lies with a lover, whose breath / *Giace con un amante, il cui respiro*

Was, and is, laughter, creation. / *era ed è, la risata, creazione.*

APPENDIX B2

A VERSE-LENGTH COMPLIANT TRANSLATION  
BY ANGELA D'AMBRA  
Firenze

THE DAY OF THE STATUE / *IL GIORNO DELLA STATUA*

You look for prodigies leaning on the sill of storm, / *Prodigi tu cerchi protesa sul ciglio della tempesta,*  
Or loose in the yellow gap at a candle's end, / *O libera nella gialla insenatura fondo d'una candela*  
But here was patience: fishermen out on the bay, / *Ma qui sta la pazienza: pescatori al largo nella baia,*  
Work and silence inching with the minute-hand, / *Lavoro e silenzio scanditi dal braccio dei minuti.*

Moored in a lulled spiny of sun and shadow, / *Ormeggiata nella culla d'un mulinello d'ombra e sole,*  
With an impotent tremor in the sails, the ketch nosed down / *Con fremito impotente nelle vele, va di prua la tartana*  
To the long lunge of the swell, rose dripping, gasping / *Al lungo affondo d'onda, e ne riemerge, ansante, sgocciolante,*  
As if with eagerness to suck in air again. / *Come bramosa di ritornare ad ispirare aria.*

And the men, snug in this casual pediment of time, / *E gli uomini, ripiegati in questa fortuita cornice del tempo,*  
Their gestures grouped and restricted and interlocking / *I loro gesti intrecciati, e ristretti e riservati,*  
Felt the haul stubborn to their hands, an eye-tooth wrenched / *Sentono alle mani la rete ostinata, un canino strappato*  
From the iron gums of the sea-bed, shuddering and aching. / *Alle ferree gengive del fondo, fremente e dolente.*

As it cleared the surface, green sinews of water / *Emersa che fu, verdi nervature d'acqua,*  
Dangled and fell away. With the bursting of cords / *Fluttuarono e svanirono. Col frangersi di funi*  
Something strained at the trap of its dissolution, / *Qualcosa si tese nella trappola della sua dissoluzione,*  
Dull centuries of pressure and lust of weeds. / *Scialbi secoli di pressione e brama d'alghè*

A bronze youth, moulded as a lyric or a prayer / *Un giovane bronzeo, forgiato come poesia o preghiera*  
But mocked by the sea, deformed in his grey sheet, / *Ma dal mare schermato, sformato nella sua grigia guaina,*  
Sprawled like a scar on the mottled flesh of planks / *Sdraiato come sfregio sulla screziata carne d'assi*  
While his finders cursed at the torn strings of their net / *Mentre gli scopritori bestemmiano le maglie lacerate della rete.*

There were some to roll back the heavy stone of the sea; / *C'è chi respinse in acqua la greve pietra del mare;*  
There was none to ponder the mortal, the living token. / *E nessuno ci fu che capi il pegno mortale, vivente.*  
But later, men polished, incised, established at last / *Ma poi, alcuni polirono, incisero, e decisero infine*  
What that raised hand once clutched and years had broken. / *Ciò che quella mano levata un tempo aveva stretto, e gli anni*  
*avevano distrutto.*

TRANSPOSING MEANING INTO IMMANENCE:  
THE POETRY OF FRANCIS WEBB  
(With a Selection and Translation of His Poetry in the Appendix)

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THE YELLOWHAMMER / *LO ZIGOLO GIALLO*

Working, tumbling, doddering face of war, / *Volto di guerra attiva, distruttiva, dubbia,*  
Fog overruns without thunder a taut shire. / *Nebbia senza tuono dilaga in una tesa contea.*  
Deft and cynical mercenary winds / *Lesti, cinici venti mercenari*  
Inform the slewing grey, the errant wheels / *Plasmano il grigio insidioso, le ruote erranti*  
Into intrigue upon browbeaten hills. / *In intrigo su colli intemoriti.*  
Age trickles from the docile lines of lands. / *Tempo stilla dalle docili linee delle terre.*  
Colours grovel, the soused logos of the sun / *Colori strisciano, il logo fradicio del sole*  
Lips a last word from fallow wash and glimmer. / *Biascica un'estrema parola da lustro lavacro giallastro.*  
Cloud—structures of reason crumble without sound. / *Nubi di strutturerazionali in silenzio si sfaldano.*  
It is the song, the footfall of the yellowhammer / *È il canto, il calpestio dello zigolo giallo*  
Will not give ground / *Non arretrerà dinnanzi*  
To earth, sky, day, and night crouching as one. / *A terra, cielo, notte e di ripiegati in uno.*

To know the ancient ritual brotherhood / *Conoscere l'antica fratellanza rituale*  
Of light dispersed and sucked up piecemeal, dumb, / *Di luce spersa e risucchiata in frantumi, inebetita,*  
This is the grey rat nibbling at the soul: / *Questo è il grigio ratto che rode l'anima:*  
For all that urgent blood, / *Ché tutto quel sangue pressante,*  
Communiqué of the hammer—heart of God, / *Comuniqué dello zigolo-cuore di Dio*  
Flooding the wizened limb / *Che inonda le avvizzite membra*  
Would leap past time, go spangling into truce / *Balzerebbe oltre il tempo, finirebbe in brillio di tregua*  
With snowfall, small hour, toss the ultimate news / *Con neve che cade, ore piccole che scrollano le ultime notizie*  
To frontal dawn from tiny corpuscle. / *All'alba frontale dal corpuscolo minuto.*  
Plasma in chains, here no veins intersect. / *Plasma in catene, qui nessuna vena s'interseca.*  
—It is the heel of summer, / — *È il tacco d'estate,*  
It is the song, the footfall of the yellowhammer, / *È il canto, il calpestio dello zigolo giallo,*  
Leaps of a sudden past the intellect. / *Balza d'un tratto oltre l'intelletto.*  
Fog—satellite, the street—lamp can but tell / *Satellite della nebbia, il lampione non può che dire*  
Petty parables of the heretical will / *Parabole piccine di volontà eretica*  
Of power as conqueror: every yard's a swarm / *Di potere conquistatore: ogni cortile è uno sciame*  
Of furious atoms, bloodless, directionless, / *D'atomi furiosi, esangui, senza senso*  
At one another's throats in helpless harm. / *L'un dell'altro alla gola in danno impotente.*  
We have known sober clouds run mad as this, / *Abbiamo visto sobrie nubi impazzire così,*

But sometimes the steep groan, steel-blue claws of search / *Ma a volte un ripido gemito, artigli blu acciaio di ricerca*  
And agony hither and thither scratched at earth, / *E agonia qua e là graffiavano la terra,*  
Frantic to clutch the centre and the form – / *Nella frenesia di stringere il centro e la forma –*  
Such fossicking could only end in death. / *Una tale prospezione? finirebbe solo in morte.*  
Outline of fog has no objective, clamour. / *Profilo di nebbia senza obiettivo, clamore.*  
It is the song, the footfall of the yellowhammer / *È il canto, il calpestio dello zigolo giallo*  
Continues on the march. / *Continua la marcia.*

Wraiths of derelict cattle in a row / *Spettri di bestiame derelitto in fila*  
Moon round this muffled loiterer of a tree, / *Luna intorno questo ottuso bighellone d'un albero*  
We never saw him so forlorn as now, / *Mai l'avevamo visto tanto desolato come ora,*  
Arms sprawl to hostile nothing, creak and stammer / *Braccia abbandonate al nulla ostile, stridio e balbettio*  
Pandering windward, off the living map. / *Concilianti sotto-vento, fuori dalla mappa vivente.*  
It is the song, the footfall of the yellowhammer / *È il canto, il calpestio dello zigolo giallo*  
Suggests trim elderly green, flagon of sap; / *Suggerisce cingere il verde vecchio, caraffa di linfa;*  
Yes, it is true / *Sì, è vero*  
Even of such a ransacked fogey tree: / *Persino di questo depredato matusa d'albero:*  
Worlds back, life cooked his supper zealously / *Mondi che tornano, la vita zelante gli apprestò la cena*  
And breasted him for certain hours with blue. / *E lo affrontò in certe ore con l'azzurro.*