Barbara Carle. *Tangible Remains/Toccare quello che resta (Poesie in inglese e in italiano)*. Formia: Ghenomena Edizioni, 2009. Pp. 123.

We are accustomed to seeing reviews of critical texts in these pages. In this case, our primary source is poetry by Barbara Carle, who has previously given us *Don't Waste My Beauty* (trans. Antonella Anedda [Caramanica, 2006]), a series of poems that contemplate aesthetics and solitude, filtered through the first-person voice of a Renaissance Venus; and, *New Life (a fictitious autobiographical story)* (trans. Marella Feltrin-Morris [Gradiva, 2006]), which presents bilingual prose and poetry modelled structurally on Dante's *Vita nuova* and thematically on her own teaching of Italian in an American university. This latest work, *Tangible Remains*, is equally idiosyncratic and daring, though one might question my use of the latter adjective. Why daring?

With facing Italian-English translations, one is tempted to make Carle's work a lesson in 'good' or 'bad' translation. However, to find the translation flaws in this book is to take part in the strength of it. Even when we find the 'flaws', the issue is not poetry but how one poet functions bilingually in her everyday world. From its inception, Carle wrote it as a bilingual text, but which is the departure and which the target language? Neither and both. In many cases, each text's counterpart can be viewed as a separate entity. Conceptually related to, but not necessarily a translation of, the other, these are not 50 poems in translation, but a series of 50 double poems. At times they are 'faithful' translations; at others, Carle plays each language against the other.

The poems are a set of *indovinelli* – brainteasing poetry – where the reader 'guesses' the object described/remembered. And why not? Much poetry is but a collection of verbal images that leave the reader to intuit the general meaning amid the unintentional ambiguities of language and the intentional ambiguity of tropes. But, if Carle's is a game, it is an essential one. Each poem-*indovinello* does not mention the name of the thing – eponymous titles are "deliberately omitted," the poet tells us, "in order to refrain from conditioning the reader" (118). (For the impatient, the table of contents, as if it were an answer key, includes the title, and thus the identity, of each poem's featured object.) This is a wise strategy for protracting the game of 'guessing', but it allows Carle's focus to come through. She is concerned with the pre-lingual experience of the phenomena around us, even before they are given names. In this 'game', we rediscover the simplicity of function, whether in objects or in the poems themselves.

This omission of titles works quite well. In poem 15 (pp. 38 and 39), we are given words such as "Stem:: stelo"; "cork:: sughero"; "cherry depth:: fondo di ciliegia"; "steel coil:: spirale di acciaio"; and even the very word "Sangiovese:: sangiovese." Clearly, when we read the title at the end of the book, we are not deluded to realize that it is "Corkscrew and Cork:Cavaturacciolo e Tappo." But without the title preceeding the first verses, we are rather encouraged to place ourselves in – entrust ourselves to – the phenomenon. Thus, Carle allows the poetry to do what it does best: bring us in directions that are not part of our preconceived paradigms, even with regard to common 'rituals'.

Carle's translations are not equal renderings: she does not try to translate directly, preferring to let the expression happen more naturally from one language to the other, as each accommodates the objects in unique ways. We consider her use of "foglie" (technically, *tree leaves*) and not *fogli* for her "sheets" of paper (48-49). In English, no play is made on "sheets." Yet, it seems that the Italian took over and dictated the inclusion of "foglie": paper does, we are reminded, come from the tree; furthermore, the word *foglio* – which, would have constituted a more 'correct' choice – etymologically comes from the word *foglia* (in Latin *folium*, or leaf). This sort of word-play is often not two-directional: if the occasion presents itelf, Carle takes it; if not, she does not force the language. For example, in poem 7, she employs "hic iaciunt" (21) in the Italian version, but there is no hint of this in the English. Furthermore, she did not mean "here lies" (from *hic iacent*) but a playful coinage, as if to say 'here one throws down . . . the foundations of . . .' (Cfr. Horace, *Ode* 3.1.33-34).

Another example of non-equivalent translation is poem 28. The English includes four verbs conjugated in the progressive: "matching / closing / attaching / patching into shape"; the Italian includes three verbs in the present indicative (which, clearly, could function as a pure indicative or as am implied progressive): "accorda / chiude / rattoppa / verso una forma" (66-67). The poet is more clearly after an equivalence in the rhyme – "-ing" in the English is replaced by three Italian verbs that play on the use of double consonants, assonances and rhythms. Carle appears to be reminding us not to forget to listen, even as we read. But why not give four equivalents of four verbs? Simple: this is not a translation but a different poem.

A final example of the lack of equivalence and the use of word-play is found in poem number 43, which treats a spoon. The subject "rolls joyously in concave hollow / snugly upholds its silver belly::volteggia gioiosamente nella paletta concava strettamente appoggia la sua pancia d'argento" (98-99) It could be that something roles in the concave hollow of the spoon – in the concave "paletta," like a 'little shovel'; or that the spoon itself roles in the concave hollow of the mouth. Yet, at the same time, it could the use of "paletta" (not a metaphorical stretch) is a subconscious phonetic association with "palato," or palate in English, the place where this is taking place.

I mentioned that this book is daring, for one might miss her point and ONLY focus on the presumable inconsistencies of the renderings from English to Italian and back again, not realizing that she had never intended to be a faithful translator...even of her own works. But, if it is daring, then it is paradoxically so: it tests language and human complacency in the sereneness of a quiet wood-panelled study. Read this rare little book, allowing yourself to laugh and to be teased; but don't forget that this laughter – like life itself – is serious business.

I recommend this book to those scholars and readers who are interested in translation issues, to be sure. (Her book is a meditation on the question of faithful translation: it does not exist, Carle seems to say.) But, moreover, this book represents the new generation of poetry and the tendency of its many writers to work between two cultures and languages. We have Italians writing as

Italians and those who write (whether in English or in Italian) as Italians living in North America. Carle, born in Peshawar and citizen of the world, tests the limitations of each language, even as she draws personal strength from both.

Gregory Pell in *Forum Italicum*, Anno 2009, no. 2, Fall: 535-537.