

Tuttu a postu

di Isaac Leib Peretz

Traduzioni in Sicilianu di Eryk Wdowiak

Non abbannunati mai li vostri radici!

Vossia addumanna com'è ca ristai Giudeu? Di cui è lu meritu? Nun pî me meriti nè pi chiddi dî me antinati. Era un carusu Cheder di sei anni. Me patri era un campagnolu fora Wilna, pruprietariu di na casa nica.

No, ristai Giudeu grazzi ô nannu Schpol.

Comu mi veni l'idea di parrari dû nannu Schpol? Chi havi lu nannu Schpol a chi fari cu stu fattu, vi addumannati?

Lu nannu Schpol nun era allura u nannu Schpol. Iddu era un giuvini ca pateva l'esiliu dâ so casa e dî parenti, vacabbunniannu cu na truppa di mindicanti di na cungrigazioni a nautra, di na lucanna amichevuli a nautra, comu si fussi unu d'iddi. Chi differenza lu so cori putissi aviri mustratu, cui lu sapi? E doppu sti anni di spirienza, lu tempu dâ rivilazioni nun era ancora arrivatu. Si prisintau ô cunzigghiu rabbinicu a Wilna, ottiniu un cirtificatu, e divintau un Shochet ntôn villaggio. Nun vacabbunniannu mai chiù, nveci ristau ntô quarteri di Wilna. Li Misnagdim, però, hannu un talentu miravigghiusu, e avevanu suspitti. Cuminciaru a prioccurarisi e calunniarlu, e â fini lu dinunziaru a li autoritati rabbinichi comu trasgrissuri dâ liggi, di tutta la liggi! Li Misnagdim sunnu capaci di fari tantu mali, e comu!

Comu dissi, aveva sei anni. Iddu vineva pi macillari bistiami picciulu, oppuru sulu pi passari la notti, e iu sinteva tantu affettu p'iddu. A cui âtru, fora ca a me patri e a me matri, avissi pututu vuliri beni? Avia un maistru, un omu di passioni, un distruggituri d'animi, ma l'âtru era na criatura simpatica e giniusa. Faceva sentirsi cuntentu a tutti quannu li taliava. Ma li calunnii facianu lu sò travagghiu, e ci livaru lu cirtificatu. Lu me maistru s'appi a mmiscari e cuntribbuiu a l'aggitazioni picchè l'avia saputu prima di tutti, e la prossima vota ca vinni lu Shochet, gridau: "Apostata!", lu pigghiau pû cullettu dû cappottu e lu jittau fora dâ casa. Mi tagghiau ô cori comu un cuteddu, ma lu maistru mi scantau assai e ristai fermu. Ma nanticchia doppu, quannu lu maistru taliava luntanu, scappai e accuminciaî a curriri appressu lu Shochet, attraversu la strata ca nun luntanu dâ casa scumparsi ntôn voscu ca cuntinuava finu a Wilna. Zoccu iu proposi di fari pi aiutarlu, nun m'û ricordu, ma quacchi cosa mi faceva curriri appressu a ddu poviru Shochet. Vuleva dirici addiu. Vuleva taliari nta li sò occhi beddi e gintili pi l'urtima vota.

Curreva e curreva, mi firivi li pedi supra li petri dâ strata, e nun vitti a nuddu. Scinnivi a destra ntô voscu, pinzannu di ripusarimi pi un mumentu

All Is Well

by Isaac Leib Peretz

Translation by Helena Frank

Don't Ever Change Who You Are!

You ask how it is that I remained a Jew? Whose merit it is? Not through my own merits nor those of my ancestors. I was a six-year-old Cheder boy, my father a countryman outside Wilna, a householder in a small way.

No, I remained a Jew thanks to the Schpol Grandfather.

How do I come to mention the Schpol Grandfather? What has the Schpol Grandfather to do with it, you ask?

The Schpol Grandfather was no Schpol Grandfather then. He was a young man, suffering exile from home and kindred, wandering with a troop of mendicants from congregation to congregation, from friendly inn to friendly inn, in all respects one of them. What difference his heart may have shown, who knows? And after these journeyman years, the time of revelation had not come even yet. He presented himself to the Rabbinical Board in Wilna, took out a certificate, and became a Shochet in a village. He roamed no more, but remained in the neighborhood of Wilna. The Misnagdim, however, have a wonderful flair, and they suspected something, began to worry and calumniate him, and finally they denounced him to the Rabbinical authorities as a transgressor of the Law, of the whole Law! What Misnagdim are capable of, to be sure!

As I said, I was then six years old. He used to come to us to slaughter small cattle, or just to spend the night, and I was very fond of him. Whom else, except my father and mother, should I have loved? I had a teacher, a passionate man, a destroyer of souls, and this other was a kind and genial creature, who made you feel happy if he only looked at you. The calumnies did their work, and they took away his certificate. My teacher must have had a hand in it, because he heard of it before anyone, and the next time the Shochet came, he exclaimed "Apostate!" took him by the scruff of his coat, and bundled him out of the house. It cut me to the heart like a knife, only I was frightened to death of the teacher, and never stirred. But a little later, when the teacher was looking away, I escaped and began to run after the Shochet across the road, which, not far from the house, lost itself in a wood that stretched all the way to Wilna. What exactly I proposed to do to help him, I don't know, but something drove me after the poor Shochet. I wanted to say good-by to him, to have one more look into his nice, kindly eyes.

But I ran and ran, and hurt my feet against the stones in the road, and saw no one. I went to the right, down into the wood, thinking I would rest

supra a terra morbida dû voscu. Stava pi assittarimi, quannu ntisi na vuci (comu la so vuci) ca vineva di dintra dâ furesta, ca parrava un pocu e poi cantava. Caminai chianu chianu versu la vuci, e lu vitti di luntanu, unni stava drittu in pedi, unniannu e unniannu sutta un arvulu. M'avvicinai -- stava recitannu lu Canticu dî Cantici. Taliai di chiù vicinu e vitti ca l'arvulu sutta lu quali stava era diffirenti di l'âutri arvuli. L'âutri eranu ancora nudi dî fogghi, ma chistu era virdi e li so fogghi brillavanu comu lu sulì, e stinneva li sò rami ciuruti supra la testa dû Shochet comu na tenna. E un gruppu di aceddi ca sautavanu ntra li ramuzzi si junceru a cantari lu Canticu dî Cantici. Era d'accussì sbalurdutu ca stava câ vacca aperta e cu l'occhi chiantati comu l'arvuli.

A la fini dû so cantu, l'arvulu si stutau, li aceddi smisiru di caantari, e iddu si vutau nni mia e mi dissi cu affettu:

“Senti, Yudeli,” - mi chiamu Yudeli: “Haiu na richiesta pi tia.”

“Ma daveru?” Rispuisi cu gioia, e suppunennu cu vuleva ca ci purtassi di manciari, era dispostu a curriri e purtarci tutta la nostra cena dû Sabatu, quannu mi dissi:

“Senti! Nun parrari di zoccu vidisti.”

Divintai chiù seriu, e prumisi cu gravità e fedeltà di nun parrarinni.

“Senti nautra cosa. Tu ha jiri assai luntanu, e la to strata è longa longa.”

Mi dumannai com'è ca iu avissi a viaggiari accussì luntanu? E iddu cun-tinuau, dicennu:

Iddi ti scippirannu la Torah dû Rebbe fora dâ testa, e tu ti scordirai a to patri e a to matri, ma ha manteniri sempri lu to nomu. Ti chiami Yudeli—resta sempri Giudeu!”

Mi spagnai e dû funnu dû me cori gridai:

“Certu! Certu finu a quannu campu!”

E poi, picchè mi ricurdau di prima, dissi:

“Nun voi manciari quacchi cosa?”

E prima ca finissi di parrari, iddu avìa già scumparutu.

Du' simani doppu, ni vinneru a pigghiari e mi purtaru a viviri comu Cantonista, a crisciri ntô menzu dû Cristiani e poi mi ficiru surdatu.

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Lu tempu passau, e mi scurdai tuttu, comu iddu avìa predittu. Scipparu tuttu dâ me testa.

Sirveva luntanu, ntâ Russia luntana, ntra nivi e geli spavintusi, e nun misi mai occhiu supra un Giudeu. Forsi c'eranu giudei ammucciati; ma nun ni sapeva nenti. Nun sapeva nenti di Sabatu e di festi, nenti di dijunari. M'avìa scurdatu tuttu.

Ma mantinni lu me nomu!

Nun canciai munita.

a little on the soft earth of the wood. I was about to sit down, when I heard a voice (it sounded like his voice) farther on in the wood, half speaking and half singing. I went softly towards the voice, and saw him some way off, where he stood swaying to and fro under a tree. I went up to him—he was reciting the Song of Songs. I look closer and see that the tree under which he stands is different from the other trees. The others are still bare of leaves, and this one is green and in full leaf, it shines like the sun, and stretches its flowery branches over the Shochet's head like a tent. And a quantity of birds hop among the twigs and join in singing the Song of Songs. I am so astonished that I stand there with open mouth and eyes, rooted like the trees.

He ends his chant, the tree is extinguished, the little birds are silent, and he turns to me, and says affectionately:

“Listen, Yüdele,”—Yüdel is my name— “I have a request to make of you.”

“Really?” I answer joyfully, and I suppose he wishes me to bring him out some food, and I am ready to run and bring him our whole Sabbath dinner, when he says to me:

“Listen, keep what you saw to yourself.”

This sobers me, and I promise seriously and faithfully to hold my tongue.

“Listen again. You are going far away, very far away, and the road is a long road.”

I wonder, however should I come to travel so far? And he goes on to say:

“They will knock the Rebbe's Torah out of your head, and you will forget Father and Mother, but see you keep to your name! You are called Yüdel—remain a Jew!”

I am frightened, but cry out from the bottom of my heart:

“Surely! As surely may I live!”

Then, because my own idea clung to me, I added:

“Don't you want something to eat?”

And before I finished speaking, he had vanished.

The second week after they fell upon us and led me away as a Cantonist, to be brought up among the Gentiles and turned into a soldier.

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Time passed, and I forgot everything, as he had foretold. They knocked it all out of my head.

I served far away, deep in Russia, among snows and terrific frosts, and never set eyes on a Jew. There may have been hidden Jews about, but I knew nothing of them, I knew nothing of Sabbath and festival, nothing of any fast. I forgot everything.

But I held fast to my name!

I did not change my coin.

Chiù mi scurdava, chiù pinzava di livarimi dî turmenti e trivuli—pi farli finiri c’un accordu a un nomu cristianu, ma ogni vota ca mi vineva in testa sta mala pinzata, cumparia davanti a mia sempri lu stissu Shochet e sintìa la so vuci ca mi diceva: “Manteni lu to nomu, resta Giudeu!”

E sappi pi certu ca nun era un sonnu vacanti, picchè ogni vota lu videva sempri chiù vecchiu e chiù vecchiu. La so barba e li so basetti chiù griggi, la so facci chiù pallida. Sulu li occhi ristavanu li stissi occhi gentili. E la so vuci ca sunava comu un violinu, ca nun canciau mai.

Na vota mi desiru nirvati, e iddu, stannumi vicinu m’asciucavu lu suduri friddu dâ me frunti, mi accarizzau la facci, e dissi sottavuci: “Nun gridari! Nui avemu a soffriri! Resta Giudeu!” E iu stesi mutu, senza chianciri, senza lamenti, comu si davanu li corpa a nautru omu e nun a mia.

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Na vota, durante l’annu scorsu, appi a jiri comu sintinella a na casa pubblica darrerri lu paisi. Era sira, e c’era na timpesta di nivi. Lu ventu criavu accumulazioni di nivi, e li macinava comu fussiru agugghi, li macinava comu pulviri. E sti pulviri di nivi in forma di agugghi giravanu nta l’aria, sbattevanu ntâ facci comu punturi. Nun si putìa teniri un occhju apertu o riciatari! A l’impruvvisu un gruppu di pirsuni passau davanti a mia, nun luntanu, e una d’iddi dissi in jiddisciu: “Chista è la prima notti dâ Pasqua.” Si fussi la vuci di Diu o si certi pirsuni daveru passassiru, nun sacciu diri a stu rnu, ma li palori mi caderu ntô cori comu chiummu, e appena arrivai â taverna, accuminciaì a caminari avanti e arrieri; mi vinni n’ansia, na speci di duluri di cori ca non pozzu descriviri. Vuleva recitari la Haggadah, e nun mi putìa mancu ricordari na palora! Mancu li Quattru Dumanni ca addumannava a me patri. Ma sintìa ca tuttu si trovava ntô funnu dâ me cori. Iu lu sapìa quasi tuttu quannu avìa sulu sei anni. Pinsava ca si avissi pututu sulu ricordari na semplici palora, lu restu avissi nisciutu dâ me mimoria, na palora doppu l’altra, comu acidduzzi di sutta la nivi. Ma sta prima palora era chidda ca nun mi puteva ricordari! “Signuri di l’Universu,” gridava cu caluri, “na palora, sulu na palora!” Comu ora pari, fici la me prighera nta n’ura filici picchè la frasi “eramu schiavi” mi vinni in testa comu l’avissi mormuriatu lu Celu. Jo era filici! Era accusò chinu di gioia ca quasi scuppiava. E lu restu mi vinni di novu, e siccomu caminava avanti e arrieri facennu guardia, cu la me carrubbina suprâ na spada, ricitai e cantai la Haggadah a lu munnu chinu di nivi attornu a mia. Tirava li palori di dintra a mia, palora doppu palora, comu na catina d’oru, comu na cullana di perli. Oh, ma Vuautri nun mi capiti. Nun mi putiti capiri senza aviri statu purtatu nta ddu postu.

Lu ventu, ntantu, smisi di ciusciari. La timpesta di nivi finìu. E apparsi un celu chiaru lampanti e un munnu di diamanti ca brillabvanu. C’era silenzju tuttu attornu, ed era accusò vastu, accusò biancu, cu na duci bianchizza paci-

The more I forgot, the more I was inclined to be quit of my torments and trials -- to make an end of them by agreeing to a Christian name, but whenever the bad thought came into my head, he appeared before me, the same Shochet, and I heard his voice say to me, “Keep your name, remain a Jew!”

And I knew for certain that it was no empty dream, because every time I saw him older and older, his beard and earlocks greyer, his face paler. Only his eyes remained the same kind eyes, and his voice, which sounded like a violin, never altered.

Once they flogged me, and he stood by and wiped the cold sweat off my forehead, and stroked my face, and said softly: “Don’t cry out! We ought to suffer! Remain a Jew,” and I bore it without a cry, without a moan, as though they had been flogging not-me.

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Once, during the last year, I had to go as a sentry to a public house behind the town. It was evening, and there was a snow-storm. The wind lifted patches of snow, and ground them to needles, rubbed them to dust, and this snow-dust and these snow-needles were whirled through the air, flew into one’s face and pricked -- you couldn’t keep an eye open, you couldn’t draw your breath! Suddenly I saw some people walking past me, not far away, and one of them said in Yiddish, “This is the first night of Passover.” Whether it was a voice from God, or whether some people really passed me, to this day I don’t know, but the words fell upon my heart like lead, and I had hardly reached the tavern and begun to walk up and down, when a longing came over me, a sort of heartache, that is not to be described. I wanted to recite the Haggadah, and not a word of it could I recall! Not even the Four Questions I used to ask my father. I felt it all lay somewhere deep down in my heart. I used to know so much of it, when I was only six years old. I felt, if only I could have recalled one simple word, the rest would have followed and risen out of my memory one after the other, like sleepy birds from beneath the snow. But that one first word is just what I cannot remember! Lord of the Universe, I cried fervently, one word, only one word! As it seems, I made my prayer in a happy hour, for “we were slaves” came into my head just as if it had been thrown down from Heaven. I was overjoyed! I was so full of joy that I felt it brimming over. And then the rest all came back to me, and as I paced up and down on my watch, with my musket on my shoulder, I recited and sang the Haggadah to the snowy world around. I drew it out of me, word after word, like a chain of golden links, like a string of pearls. Oh, but you won’t understand, you couldn’t understand, unless you had been taken away there, too!

The wind, meanwhile, had fallen, the snow-storm had come to an end, and there appeared a clear, twinkling sky, and a shining world of diamonds. It

fica senza fini. E supra sta bianchizza tranquilla e vasta, a l'antrasatta, apparsi na cosa ancora chiù bianca, chiù chiara e chiù brillanti. Ammugghiatu ntôn mantellu e nta na sciarpa di prighera, cu la sciarpa di prighera supra li spaddi, e davanti e supra la sciarpa, na barba biancu-argentina; e supra la barba, du' occhi lucenti, e supra d'iddi, na curuna brillanti, un cappellettu cu ornamenti d'oru e d'argentu. Mi avvicinai sempri chiù vicinu cu ogni passu, e mi passau davanti, ma dissi mentri passava:

“Tuttu a postu!”

Sunau comu un violinu, e poi la figura scumpariu.

Ma eranu li stissi occhi, era la stissa vuci.

Turnannu a casa, purtai a Schpol cu mia e jivi a vidiri ô Vecchiu, picchè ô Rebbe di Schpol lu populu lu chiamava *Der Alter*, lu “Nannu Schpol.”

was silent all round, and ever so wide, and ever so white, with a sweet, peaceful, endless whiteness. And over this calm, wide, whiteness, there suddenly appeared something still whiter, and lighter, and brighter, wrapped in a robe and a prayer-scarf, the prayer-scarf over its shoulders, and over the prayer-scarf, in front, a silvery white beard; and above the beard, two shining eyes, and above them, a sparkling crown, a cap with gold and silver ornaments. And it came nearer and nearer, and went past me, but as it passed me it said:

“It is well!”

It sounded like a violin, and then the figure vanished.

But it was the same eyes, the same voice.

I took Schpol on my way home, and went to see the Old Man, for the Rebbe of Schpol was called by the people *Der Alter*, the “Schpol Grandfather.”