



OUR LADY OF THE TURKS



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Bène, CARMELO. – Attori
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64; *Faust e Margherita* da
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L.D.E., 1974; *Otello*, 1978;
cio da De Musset, 1986;
Tra i film: *Nostra Signora*
vanni, 1970; *Salomè*, 1972.

OUR LADY OF THE TURKS

Camel Benz

OUR LADY OF THE TURKS

A Novel

Carmelo Bene

Translated & with a preface by

Carole Viers-Andronico



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Translator's Preface

For my husband

My light in the darkness.

TURKS-TOURISTS, SAINTS, & A KNIGHT: APPEARING AND DISAPPEARING FROM THE ACT

“What matters is that we liberate ourselves from language,
that we concentrate only on its black holes.”

— Carmelo Bene, “CB versus Cinema”

To say that Carmelo Bene defies classification would be an understatement. As an actor and author, he spent the better part of his life subtracting himself from the tenets & genres of Western representation (i.e., tyrannical, conformist power structures) that he unabashedly despised and ridiculed. Nevertheless, his rather unique approach to creative production, infused with an erudition as profound as it was original in its (re)elaboration, left an indelible scar on the multiple domains in which he (surgically) intervened during the course of his career: theater, film, radio, prose, & poetry — nothing survived his artistic fury.

His incursions into such disparate domains may seem peculiar, if not simply impossible (as he notes in his “An Autographical Portrait,” one life was not enough to accomplish all he attempted). The breadth of these endeavors, however, corresponds to a lucid and meticulously pursued path of research into the possibilities — and therefore the role — of every domain of art. Rather than dealing with representations and conveying messages — what Bene spitefully calls

the History of (the patronage of) Art — artists should relinquish the constraints of logic & the “tyranny of meaning,” offering to the witness-spectator only an incomprehensible and thus incommunicable sound-vision experience. According to Bene, the work of art loses its traditionally prominent role to become no more than an empty vessel through which the artist (the real masterpiece) pierces a hole into the fabric of meaning.

The sundry conceptual devices that Bene utilizes in his unorthodox artistic practices originate predominately in his theater. The centerpiece of these devices is undoubtedly his concept of the *actorial machine* — what he defines as “shredding language-representation-subject-object-History.” It is Bene’s answer to the conventional figure of the actor: instead of performing a role by memorizing a text and parroting it on stage, the *actorial machine* is first and foremost an amplification of the voice, the aural blow-up, or enlargement, of its dynamics and modulations in an attempt to obliterate the image-representation and reinstitute a sort of natural order of things — as Bene reminds us in his “Portrait”: “In our physiological adventure [...] the aural precedes the visual.”

The *actorial machine* is also the singular instrument that allows Bene to short-circuit the mechanics of representation via the act. In Bene’s lexicon, actor originates from the Latin *agere* (imploring, longing

for) and therefore the act is antagonistic to the action (in Italian *agire*, or keeping busy): while the action is what belongs to History (i.e., a chronology of intentions, projects, and plans), the act is the eternal present in which the actor is able to lose his "self." In a trance-like state he sheds the burden of representation, of meaning, and ultimately of identity. The subject itself (as Bene emphasizes, the word "subject" comes from the Latin *subiectum*, or slave) consequently disappears. In his narrative version of *Lorenzaccio*, Bene writes: "History is numeration and nomination; it is the historiography of the dead that excludes me. Alive, I am incomprehensible to History; just as History does not concern me."

Since History and representation are deemed suspect, Bene's theater must become a "theater without performance," where all that matters is irremediably on the margins of the scene (what Bene would call, via a play on words, the "ob-scene"). Hence the importance he accords to "un-staging the play": Bene does not proceed by building or adding; his *modus operandi* is always that of a surgical subtraction. A case in point is his un-staging of Shakespeare's *Richard III*: as Gilles Deleuze points out in "un manifeste de moins," what Carmelo Bene excises from this play are all the figures of power. Only Richard III and the women are left, so that the original tragedy, amputated of its fundamental political core, can become something

entirely other: an un-staging echoed in the continuous dismemberment and stripping away of clothing and prosthetic limbs.

The battlefield where Bene's iconoclastic furor is on full display is his filmography (& later in television): four short and five feature-length films directed between 1968 & 1973 made to "demolish the image" via schismatic editing, repetition, overexposed sequences, and hyper-saturated colors. An iconoclasm that also explains his interest in radio and live recitations: the written text was for him only a "deceased oral," and reading was to be intended as "non-memory." Forgetting the written text is the only way to resurrect the oral from the tomb to which writing had condemned it.

The themes briefly touched upon above can be found in his uniquely singular novel, *Our Lady of the Turks* (1966), which Bene describes as "a perverse novel on the *idiolect*" that portrays a "merciless parody of 'interior life,' risibly entrusted to the third-person narrative form: a monody peopled by a thousand and one voices." In Bene's handling of it, however, the novel eschews its pedestrian genre, to favor the phantasmagoric poetry of his protagonist's staged (mis) adventures, rather than a prosaic narrative that captures some kind of quotidian reality. The protagonist does, however, follow a theatrical routine insofar as he uses his quotidian interior space to exercise his art,

with things like imaginary guests and apparitions & repeatedly throwing himself off the second-floor balcony of his home — extreme pratfalls Bene practiced in real life.

Indeed, the novel's imaginary characters and apparitions (Turks-Tourists and Saints, alongside Monks and Priests, and even a Moorish villa) aside from the many roles Bene himself plays, including a martyr confined to an urn in the Cathedral of Otranto, a candidate for sainthood, and a knight in the manner of the crusaders, are all conjurings in the diegesis that permit him to stage in prose a series of scenarios in and around Otranto, a place that suffered a gruesome past.

Near the end of the 15th century, the Ottoman Empire waged a campaign in the port town of Otranto in hopes of eventually conquering all of Italy and converting the Christians to Islam. The Turks invaded in the summer of 1480 and laid siege to Otranto, whose inhabitants were either beheaded or enslaved, though they spared 800 men in an attempt to convert them to Islam. Given the choice between Islam or death, these men chose death and became martyrs of their faith. The siege lasted 13 months before the Turks were defeated and returned home. The martyrs' remains were later placed in the Cathedral of Otranto, where they remain to this day.

Since history does not exist in Bene's world, the siege waged by the Turks in this narrative is outside

of historical time, but it is perpetrated in a particular season. The invaders are the summer Tourists who descend on Otranto en masse. In his autobiography, *I Appeared to the Madonna*, Bene notes that “*Our Lady...* is not only ‘an amusing parody of interior life,’ a Des Esseintes deflated & ridiculed. No sir. It is definitely something else. It is the most beautiful piece, in the form of an historical novel, on my south of the South.”

Our Lady of the Turks was (re)elaborated on stage (1966; 1973) and in images in an eponymous film, which Bene calls “a 1968 film, or better yet, the ‘anti-1968 film’ par excellence [that was] misunderstood to the bitter end.”

Much like Bene’s autobiography, *I Appeared to the Madonna*, *Our Lady of the Turks* is a statement of method, of a philosophy of art & of being, or rather of *not being*, in the world.

This translation project seeks to incite the reader to follow Bene down his deep rabbit hole. A word of caution: there will be no consolation at the end of the journey. Certainly not a happy ending. But instead of a descent or a fall, the reader can expect an ascent, hopefully a levitation. Like San Giuseppe Desa da Copertino, the idiot saint who “went around the world with his mouth hanging open” and who unknowingly flies, terminating his ascensions in the most improbable of places. These impossible and unrepresentable flights of the Saint are the prime example of what

Bene calls “unthinking,” which, as Piergiorgio Giacché beautifully explains in his *Antropologia di una macchina attoriale*, is the abandonment that allows the actor to surrender the process of thinking *et* by extension to shed his identity. It is what will enable him to finally offer himself as a pure vision. To simply appear, this time as a martyr, a saint, a knight, and, above all, an idiot.

A BRIEF NOTE ON THE TRANSLATION

This translation is not a repeat performance; it is an “other” performance that attempts its own disappearance from the act. If not always successful in that disappearance, it endeavors to stare into an empty mirror identical to the one Bene embodied. To accomplish this translator’s task, the translation often employs unconventional syntax & jarring word choices to disrupt the English language and to work on its margins, or its black holes.

To remain faithful to the author’s work, and to present Anglophone readers with a similar literary experience to the readers of the original Italian, the translation includes neither footnotes, nor endnotes. There are no explanations given, nor any elucidation provided. There are only black holes.

Author's Introduction

Following the un-writing of the stage, we cannot renounce the necessity of verifying the *in-glorifying* of the *auto-actorial body* (apraxia-aphasia) in the exercise (agraphia) of the *typographic body*. Just as the theater is *removed from the stage*, the praxis of writing is also a *removal* from the stage of the page.

If the *oral* of the *theatric non place* (♣ of the search for the do not wish to find) is *possible* because unrepresentable, the *written* is mere *impossible* representation, because it is already completed.

The *theater without performance* is a *non place* of *author without world*; this *volume* is a *world without author*: author without work, work without author.

The *word before words*, in the dismemberment of the body in Antonin Artaud, is the obsessive laceration and inconsolable loss of *originary unity*. The *automatism* of the *sincere parody* in the *theater without performance* of the actorial machine is a joyful regression into the desert of forms, above and beyond the *before* and *after of the word*, is an inhuman refusal to *express anything*; anti-humanist and anti-artistic, is the breaking of the language ♣ of the History of the symbolic cadastre; the tickling blindness of the *inorganic*, crystallized refractory matter subject to the caprices of the mold, in-sensibly veiled by a *nostalgia of things that never had a beginning*.

The theory-praxis of the Artaudian stage, from the idea of the texts to the positively choreographic execution of their performances, was a true failure (Artaud remains in representation), an “accident of the journey” in his painful and brilliant un-writing of the French language, never so *madly* un-thought and tortured, from Rabelais to our squalid æsthetic times. Never was *euro-art* so *rejected*. Despite any authorial paternity, Artaud is his own work vivisected.

My papery incursions are, instead, the umpteenth confirmation of a surgical practice (*antiheroic* and therefore *pornographic*) that, indifferent, tortures painted cadavers (from the revisers of tradition and the neo-avant-garde) of the twentieth-century mortuary; and, in any case, materials dissolved in a shipwreck in a glass of water — splinters glosses detritus — *un-authored, inter-dicted*.

Here you have one example scribbled by he who is a *stranger in his own tongue*:

Our Lady of the Turks (1964) is the *jeu de cartes* of a perverse novel on the *idiolect*. It is an amusing and merciless parody of “interior life,” risibly entrusted to the third-person narrative form: a monody peopled by a thousand and one voices.

A setting and a vision of a *south of the south of the saints* (the “homegrown” baroque, the Moorish kitsch of a palace, the cathedral-ossuary of the Otranto martyrs, etc.), “crusts” summoned to feed an ethnic fire... The music is elsewhere.

Our Lady of The Turks

A Novel

To my father

Love me! It's a miracle, you know, it's a miracle that we saved the eyes! Flora, get dressed and go! There was no Flora. Or she got dressed & left. Returning to the mirror: adore me!

Bottles, candles, and chalices of geraniums were smoldering on the table. He let the garments he'd gathered up in his lap fall to the floor, and they were roses. He poured himself a Pernod, 70 proof.

He picked out a top hat, one of the many he used for the theater, and pulled from its depths a crown of thorns. He crowned himself and returned to the mirror.

Turning away from the mirror, he switched on the gramophone: "Amado mio!" played at full blast.

He returned to the mirror again, but only for a second. He walked backwards until he reached the table, all the while observing his image, and blindly felt for the bottle of Antiquary behind him. His hand struck a glass, which he had broken earlier, and wounded him. Immobilized, he felt the blood running down his fingers. He decided to examine it and compare it to the geraniums.

He approached the mirror as a myope and traced with the tip of his bloody finger the essential features of his image reflected there. Only the essential ones.

Like on stage, when he invariably exploited similar accidents. He then placed two candles on the shelves on either side of the mirror and attempted to frame his face within the boundaries of the bloody lines he'd previously drawn, until the contours of his oval were inscribed and coincided. He planned to remain immobile in that position for an hour.

Five minutes later, his eyes, fixed on the eyes, began to water. It reminded him of the interminable conjunctivitis that had afflicted him as a child, and the glasses worn by the ophthalmologists who treated him. He thought back on Des Esseintes and at how mental connections of that kind made his experiment dry up, like drops of water suddenly falling from the ceiling. He wanted to smile, but he did so restrainedly to avoid demystifying the image. He took a step backward, ever cautious, & rummaged around on the table again. He extracted a pair of eyeglasses, which clearly didn't belong to him, and put them on.

Meant for a far-sighted person, they placed him at a significant distance from the reflection. Now he was crying even harder, given the distortion added to the forced steadiness of his vision. He'd think twice before uttering a syllable this time. He hadn't finished putting on his make-up yet. Make-up is meditation. In the end, save perhaps only once or twice, he'd never succeeded in going beyond the preambles in these rituals. He'd lose himself in the ritual, exhausted,

wounded, passed out, or drunk, and without grace. Passionate, oh yes! He had, however, chosen to attribute the collapses that precluded him each time from arriving at the final state of madness to his non-method and to his undeniable physical unpreparedness. And he wasn't wrong.

He'd had occasion, in the days that followed his first experiments, to define the prearranged objective madness as a "colorless sum." He'd appropriated the terms *Ursa Major* and *Ursa Minor* from astronomy and used them as basic attributes. In the first, he intended to group together those elements of the ritual that he considered at that point invariable, such as, for example, the geraniums, even if they were withered, the candles, the liquors, the pure alcohol, the ashtrays, the fortified wine, the mirror, thenceforth positioned above the empire shelf. On the other hand, he assigned to the second set of attributes, the so-called variable objects, those that were, in effect, more useful and practical than those from *Ursa Major*, which he destined to an almost perpetual renewal since they were functioning as variants between the officiating chemist and the fixed objects.

In the end, *Ursa Minor* was — he had to admit — one of his weaknesses, because it was a continuous object of distraction. Note that even a cigarette butt was a variant object. That is to say that if, on the one hand, these secondary objects were providing forks in the

path and therefore access corridors to the immutability of the fixed objects, by facilitating, for example, with novelty for novelty's sake, the absenteeism of the walls, doors, windows, lateral lights, then on the other hand, however, they were seriously compromising the value of the habit that categorized the *Ursa Majors* as such. Value equals crystallization, an inability to prompt, to communicate, to surprise, to remember, to impart. Ultimately compromising, like when the officiant would attempt to quiet distractions by rambling on, right at the point that the thread of the catalyzing argument had been lost. Not that the classification of the major objects was the result of a choice. It was, rather, something that he endured, such as a quotidian gratuitousness that had been determined by a gesture or a series of extraneous gestures.

In the end, the laboratory as a concept disturbed him, so much so that he'd decided to enter the house, skipping and shouting in falsetto: "Kids, time for dinner! Kids, time for dinner."

And once he'd entered, let's say the room next to the one he'd designated, — pretending to find himself in the latter, but because it hadn't been prepared at all, he wouldn't be able to walk around in there in the dark like he could in the other one; that is, without bumping into things one or two times out of ten, as wouldn't have been the case in the former, — he'd sit in an armchair and begin a conversation, mostly on

Hegel, with an imaginary interlocutor who contradicted him. The interlocutor was a dolt who was constantly misquoting Marx. Initially, he'd be outraged by him. Then, little by little, the guest would exasperate him to the point of making him swear, shout, insult, and rain curses on him until he finally threw him out.

As soon as he was alone, in the grips of fury and on the verge of tears, he'd find his way to the right room, all the while swearing and slamming doors. In other words, the banality of his predicament would spare him from criticism when he entered the room. Not that this manner of access was indispensable for him, but rather the fact of unleashing a rambling speech in the hall, which he'd sustain until he was drooling, reduced his chances of undertaking another one in his room. Which was a good thing. However, the bile — which was nevertheless equal in volume to authenticity — exhausted him more than a little. That was the disadvantage.

Another dangerous disturbance for the grand finale was constituted by a sacrilegious near insult that nevertheless would succeed in catching up with him in the concluding phases, and even confounding him in cracking the combination of his most elaborate and nearly accomplished stupidity. Deconsecration was perhaps the most dangerous agent in the entire exercise, and it could overtake him from all sides, menacing either the propitiatory phase, or the peak

of his improvisation, the more unpredictable, the more uncontrollable. Like a tic. The mirror would crack and all would be lost. It was impossible to continue at this point. In moments such as these, which occurred frequently, he'd cover the mirror with an opaque rag, mess up the table, like the altars on Good Friday, and swallow a sleeping pill. This phenomenon would provoke another one that he nevertheless identified with the solution to the first one. He knew he was in the same situation as those suffering from heart ailments, and he felt conditioned above all in the transitions from one decisive moment to the next. He remembered the first Christian rituals, when they would gather in the catacombs, or in the boardroom at the Bank of Italy in the heart of the night. He thought again about the non-official status of his ritual, getting himself worked up with apprehension, so that he instinctively entered into it, without recalling even one of his mental reserves that would preserve this protective measure. The second phenomenon was precisely this state of apprehension which he, nevertheless, ended up preferring to the nightmare of the first one.

It didn't always work, because the tic would sometimes truly surprise him in the nightmare of this precautionary zeal. After all, I'll say it again, he was only successful once or twice in getting within a breath of idiocy.

He sometimes even succeeded in damming up these breaches, for example in the case of this very same improvisation: inscribed in the bloody contours, the crown of thorns encircling his head, controlling his breath so that he wouldn't fog up the mirror's surface, almost in the flames of exaltation, he wanted to overdo it by humiliating himself until it sounded like he was pronouncing the word "province." He stopped at the letter "p," which he kept repeating like a fish. He was trying to mechanize it as to wear out, by practicing his lip movements, the detrimental obduracy of that thought, overindulging in making spit bubbles, ever freer, and then at least one perfect moment. Four seconds at his best: this was his personal record. Not thinking about the word saint four times & not even feeling as though he'd been canonized, was equivalent to being a saint for four seconds. The only thing left to do was to gasp for air, while avoiding monosyllables and waiting for the prospect of his divine state, not like for a train or a sailboat, but like for an infernal device capable of obliterating itself in a single burst of flames. The cruelest moment that would've struck him at this point would've consisted in re-making him, creator of himself, the creator of another movement, reduced to an object, even an instrument; in other words, like in nature.

He was also an expert in "communication." But in reality, he felt like he was moving away from his

object, which was moving away in its turn and subjectifying itself while changing its role. The state of grace shattered, like a glass just filled, and being no longer perfect, nothing was left to him except opting for that dissolve. Recognizing himself, that is, as an object of his own gesture, at this point autonomous, or proclaiming himself a subject of that autonomy, as in a *memento* and other threats of that kind.

It's true that he almost always resolved to insult a missed opportunity with grimaces — this time by transforming bubbles into spittle — always aimed at the obstinacy that permitted certain of his reflexes to direct themselves and, in any event, to the incalculable detriment of the ardent idiocy which he'd have liked to establish. He'd never boast of his paternity among the insults directed at his failures — he knew the game all too well — rather, he would simply grow sad & seek refuge in self-criticism.

Sometimes, he'd even laugh at his experiments. His despondency was mostly physical. He'd feel as though he was being used, like a patient under the knife of a good doctor, and would only complain by changing the subject.

In fact, he was exceedingly courteous during the day, like someone who'd conceived of a great plan. The only thing his nirvana had in common with the times was the Calvary, and most of the time it was only the Calvary.

As it was, in his first attempts at meditation, he'd attributed the failure of his experiments to one or more forms of his complex. For this reason, he'd burdened himself with a disjointed preparatory study that employed phrases like: "For the love of country, let's not talk about social problems," or "I'm a 70-year-old widow," or "Oh, the flower of youth!" and mostly dragging himself on his hands and knees around the balcony. A similar expedient allowed him a state of apprehension equivalent to the one adopted against the danger of the deconsecration. Being no longer troubled by it, he went so far as feeling like a victim persecuted by his complex, a heroic victim, a challenger, who would hide behind invectives like: "I'm not talking to you anymore!" or "It's none of my business!" and other such sayings, up to the point of ending in exuberance & enthusiasm. Not even an elixir, no drug in the world could have decentered him to the point of concealing his limits from him. If he'd been looking for something, it would've been easy to find a surrogate, to replace volume for the idea of volume. He knew that the dialectical method was an arrangement far from the concept of "utility," in the name of which the exposition begins, there where we stop looking for it. We renounce and we amplify ourselves. He'd renounced showing and even expressing himself. He'd renounced renouncing. For this reason, he still mistook his own exuberance as controversy.

But if everything added up, or didn't add up, he'd finally become an idiot. Like a national holiday. Or an authentic idiot. He'd do his utmost to accomplish this with an enthusiasm that only a bank would be able to translate for you.

At times, he'd stop the rehearsal, like an actor — still wearing the crown of thorns — and think of all the idiots in the world. All of them would've willingly traded their own idiocy for the lakes of his failure. It would've undoubtedly been enough to make them into geniuses. Dignitaries of Lilliput & nothing more. So, he'd open his mouth wide in a voiceless scream, &, back in front of the mirror, stretch his lips. Then he'd sing softly, and, as if he didn't want to wake the neighbors, he'd go to the bathroom for the sole purpose of brushing his teeth.

It wasn't that he was particularly concerned about oral hygiene, but rather because he did think it a good thing to take a habit to the point of manic obsession, which he considered the rhythmic gymnastics of deficiency. Then he'd return to the mirror.

At times, he couldn't hold back from congratulating himself. During the breaks — not while resting — for example, which is why he'd give encores at the expense of the rhythm. Keep in mind, it was always a matter of fractions of seconds. All of his blanks were imperceptible in the end. Another theatergoer, whoever that may be, wouldn't have had time to even

applaud him. The exceedingly emotional approval — when that was the case — of a fervent spectator would always reach him a moment later, when, with the sequence already compromised, he'd think that he was distracted by something else. At that point, he'd stop abruptly, attributing the interruption to the excitement of that uncontrolled participation. This gave him the impression of being dishonest, like saying "I know my audience!" By going on a tangent in this manner, he'd get excited and threaten to pack his suitcases.

During these interruptions, he'd allow himself a little break, which was almost always filled with drinking whiskey and speaking loudly, but politely, as you would at a party. The sorts of phrases that he most often used smacked of things like, "I disagree!" or "Let's get out of here!" or other polite expressions lacking in good manners of that kind.

All of a sudden, he'd go back on stage. That evening he rummaged around everywhere. He extracted a cross pendant *✝*, approaching the mirror, looked at himself in it as if looking around the room. The framing didn't permit him to see beyond his throat. He was holding the cross in his left hand. He tried to put it in his right hand. Then he put it in his pocket. He felt a shudder, *✝*, in the space of a second, opened the door to the balcony. He closed it gently, and leaned against it obliquely like a blind man, trying very hard to convince himself that there was someone on the other side who wanted to force it open.

He returned home late that night. It was well after the clock had struck midnight. In order to conquer his determination, he slipped inside, as usual, by quickly ridding himself of his nonexistent companions. He mumbled courtesies, such as: "I owe you one!" or "Where did the time go? It's getting late!" or even "I really need to go to bed!" He turned on the light in the hall, and then feigned a start, as if he'd suddenly found himself facing an unexpected individual, an accomplice, and said a little too tersely, "You, here?" He lit a cigarette. "All right. I'll be ready in exactly one hour, just the time it'll take to pack my suitcase. In the meantime, you're welcome to take a nap on the couch!"

He went to his room, closing the door behind him nonchalantly. Here, out of sight, he turned the lock in such a baroque manner that the accomplice, even the most *real* one, wouldn't ever have suspected. He lit a candle, one in the corner. Using electricity would've startled him. He walked toward the window. It was closed. He closed the shutters as well. He pretended to look at the street. He was also gesturing with his arms, perhaps signaling, but he stopped as soon as it seemed they'd been understood. He poured himself a cognac and knocked it back.

Oh, Margherita! He remembered her in a flash, as if a loved one in danger. He should've made it up to her. He'd caused her sorrow and was about to do it again. He had to make it up to her. Also, because it wouldn't kill her. All he needed was an impertinence. He flew to the garden where the lights were off. He avoided the flowerbeds with the geraniums & raced to the rosebush that ran along the perimeter wall. He ripped up all the roses. Little white roses. He covered himself in cuts. He began biting himself and sucking on his fingers. He could tell his fingertips were bathed in blood. He hesitated for a moment, but then returned to the roses, this time gathering them more carefully, all the while repeating annoyedly, "I got it; it's all right!" He counted them. 23. At least in the dark. He tiptoed back up the stairs. When passing through the hall, he remembered to remember his guest, the accomplice sleeping on the couch. He decided that the guest was, indeed, sleeping & went to his room. He also remembered that he was bleeding. He switched on the light. It was worth it. He placed the flowers on the table and examined his hands. In fact, there were red drops on the extremities of two or three of his fingers. He looked at himself in the mirror and closed his eyes. Then he ran bloody fingers at random all over his face. He succeeded in smearing blood on his forehead, his nose, and his chin. He didn't hear anyone knocking, and this made him think of the

lily lashes on the windowpanes, there on the balcony, when the weather was bad. He would've liked to write something that started with: "Oh, if then!..." And what was it that he was intending to do with those roses?

Then he'd slowly don a surgical gown. Dressed in this manner, he'd unmake and remake the bed, tucking in everything, even the top sheet. After that, turning anxiously to no one in particular, he'd say: "I'm sorry!" He'd free himself from the surgical gown, after pausing for a moment, and go to the mirror. He'd mess up his hair mumbling in a distressed state: "Why! Why?" answering himself hesitantly, as if he were being interviewed, in French. He wanted to appear on the balcony, as if a crowd were clamoring for him, to thank them, but the latch was rusted. It wouldn't slide without making noise, so he gave up.

He had the impression that it was daytime. He looked at the clock in the drawer. It was one o'clock in the morning. He imagined that it must have been ten o'clock outside, and he heard the band playing.

Goodbye Margherita! We say exaltation, don't we? Or is it like when we swim in the sea while it's raining, or not?

Now the band's music was much louder, as if right outside his windows. One day, the idea of her would kill him. The band's racket saved him from having to say "Who's calling me?" or "Come in!" if they knocked,

or drowned out the ringing of the non-existent telephone, and if it were to ring that would be worse.

He was annihilating himself extremely close to the mirror's surface. He was washing his face with alcohol, without drying it off & terrifying himself by threatening to caress the flickering candles' flames sparked by the drops falling from his face. Now the band's racket was deafening, as if they were playing in his room, and his heart contended by strumming. The threats were minor threats.

In a spasm, he decided to raise that soundtrack's volume, yet again, and superimposed applause on it. This was the easiest sound he could conjure up, because it was always there, this crowd lurking in the shells of his ears. He deserved a standing ovation that night. He took advantage of it immediately in this way: the sound of the slaps dominated; oh, if only it were a definitive punishment! If only she were to take offence & leave for good! "So, take that, whore! It's over!" To avoid a scandal to boot. At that very moment, Saint Margherita appeared to him. His own terror gained level after level, when the image of the Saint, the sweetest saint, was moving around the room as if being pulled along on ball bearings, mistreated by the fervor of the faithful, all of them miraculously healed, and to him she repeated like a broken record, in a perfidious celestial articulation: "I forgive you; I forgive you!"

This was when the scandal began. He gathered all the money in the house and threw every bit of it out the window. And the band was playing "Amado mio!" It played for him, who by then had nothing left except an attempt at indecency. He undressed & completely naked, gave in to a fit of rage, including insults.

At this point, the Saint was no longer standing; she was in bed, curled up under the sheets, all the way up to her neck, where she was smoking and leafing through a women's magazine.

He was on all fours, on the floor, under the bed, flailing around while imitating a pig's oink. He came back to himself when he heard the gramophone's needle skipping beyond the grooves. He was ashamed of himself and wanted to punish himself further when he heard the neighbors complaining. He threw on some clothes. Now it was truly daytime. He ran down to the street and, with thanks, he had the astounded street sweepers return as much of the money as they'd been able to recover with their hands.

He went back up to his room, poured himself a Pernod, and started to write: "And the band was playing 'Amado mio!' It played for him, who by then had nothing left except an attempt at indecency. The Saint was no longer standing; she was in bed, curled up under the sheets, all the way up to her neck, where she was smoking & leafing through a women's magazine."

He chose not to sleep. He was a little worn out. This would be favorable for his state of absurdity. It would've been more prudent to anticipate a collapse. He thought about his stimulants.

He opened the closet and resolutely pulled out a flag, the Italian one: white, red, and green. Just looking at it raised his hackles. It was decidedly the combination of colors that did it. Not that he was allergic — he wasn't allergic to anything — on the contrary, he'd chosen carefully, once and for all, the objects that provoked him, predominately adopting precisely those that left him entirely indifferent. In this case, he was fairly far from a national polemic. It was the opposite; what infuriated him about that object was its extreme indifference. Then he was full of envy, so much so that he shed tears for it. That morning he cried more than ever.

All his extravagance was merely a detox treatment. The starting point of his nightly routines and that of his therapy were only a single moment. The alcohol abuse didn't harm him.

He'd stopped crying a while before. He drank a cup of tea and slept. Recently, he was able to rest. He'd also started a detoxifying treatment for his liver, Laevocistein, that was administered to him intravenously every other day. Not that it helped all that much, but it did of course weaken him. That's how he was able to rest.

He'd sleep. When he was tired, he'd sleep with his mouth open. Like an idiot. It would've made him happy to know that. He would've passed his nights by watching himself sleep. After all, life is essentially being present at either a calamity or a party, but only being present, involved up to a certain point; at best, we are witnesses & nothing more. The weight is religion, ethics, and oftentimes aesthetics, lead roses and heavy clouds, blankets of snow. You need only create a vacuum, stop relying on your muscles, stop walking because you have legs. Fly. Be present. Be present with your whole soul, look with your whole soul. Become impassioned as if for someone else's circumstances. Be ashamed of your own problems. Indulge yourself. Be nice to yourself. Where you find a prison, free a butterfly. Kill one instead of leaving. Fly. Sleep. Fly while asleep, to love without being loved, or even love reciprocated. Above all, decide when it doesn't depend on us, and, if it does depend on us, obey. In any event, sleep. Or simply fake it.

Certain afternoons he'd leave the house and the town and head toward the sea, but steering clear of the small roads. He'd cross the fields of thatch and thorns, weak or irrational, we don't know to what extent. He'd go into raptures over snails. The breeze would pass close to him, like a young woman with uncombed hair in those dead hours, unhopd-for, a memory in foliage from plane & chestnut trees, carob

and wild honey, milk, a daughter of the morning, and a daughter of the evening, wonderful and joyful, an aria in the musical sense, as colorless as a blessed life, which is lived only because we talk about it or because we talked about it, impossible. She passed close to him as if by chance, involuntarily blowing on the wings of dead butterflies, as invisible as gold & the heat within the emerald sea.

And him, bewitched as if turned to clay, scantily dressed, painted who knows when, with his hot blood still coursing through it, like in a disregarded miracle, perhaps yet another amphora of wine, abandoned in the shrubbery by ancient Athenian peasants on a feast day, where there were plane trees, chestnut trees, and arbors of purple and of shade, and there wasn't yet shrubbery. Today, felicity of fatigue, far thornier than the amnesia of his own fatigue of felicity.

And suddenly he returned, human up to the point of enslavement to his afternoon, a water carrier, like any other, carrying hot water all the way to the shore, the end of the adventure and of the fairy tale, exhausted from the wild clumps of earth and not the waves. Face down against the froth of the azure sea, like an overturned amphora, renouncing its contents for the integrity of the receptacle.

He imagined that someone passing by on the path in the distance greeted him, and he returned the greeting with a wave. See you tonight. But like that,

without saying when exactly. And, once evening came, he decided that it didn't matter.

"I cannot," he thought, "renounce losing you, just as I cannot lose you, Margherita!"

At this point, he'd call out his name loudly and immediately obey, as if there were no time to lose. The sooner he ate dinner the better. He'd make his happy way toward home, imagining himself to be famished.

Before going in, he'd check his mailbox. There was never anything there. Nobody knew his address, but he'd always find a letter there nonetheless. That night, what's more, the news was disconcerting. Complete craziness. And he went in. He decided against preparing himself a Martini. He crossed the hall mocking himself and repeating: "I don't have time for this!"

As soon as he was in his room, he looked out over the balcony on the shrubbery and the violet sea. And there were so many stars. He leaned against the parapet and wished that the first street lights would come on, & for his mother to be calling for him. He amused himself by not responding. Then he sighed, promising himself that he would go, without fail, to the city the following day on family business.

Back inside, he decisively attacked a bottle of laxative, Eparema, which was empty, forcing himself to suck the impossible. He sat down and started to write: "My dear," when he heard someone calling from the courtyard. Nobody. Any pretext to cross the hall in a hurry.

As abruptly as usual, he'd shatter the fiction and flop down on a chair, like an unnailed crucifix. This humiliation of discouragement was, in the end, the most benevolent and compassionate aspect of his failure, which cut off one of his wings and not the other. One wing for his ecstasy, like when we limp while flying, and the other, the active one, only the wing of perseverance. But oh, the unbelievable epiphanies, saints who saw their own wonders reflected within the panes of the most crowded mosaics, documented because alive, to come, Madonnas for whom they had laid down their dreams of woman truly dreamed, to whom, once awoken, the saints had considered and never promised: "I want to live with you forever!" Bronze roses, perfumed with incense, without the escape of a reference, indescribable like life made into ritual, like the party when it was joyous, asleep while praying for sleep, dreaming the very dream that they were praying for. Monks who during the day were busy in a pigsty, and who would fly at night, as clear as faith, because believing only their own eyes, without eyelids, ecstasies. Idiots for more than a moment, capable of resuscitating a dead man but not capable of hurting a fly, eternally incapable of spreading rumors, thoroughly prepared for miracles as long as they don't give you any details.

God God! God's name is made from two names! For saints it's different: their names are made from two attributes. He thought about his first and last name. That's definitely not enough to become a saint, but it is sufficient to make you an idiot.

COLOPHON



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CARMELO BENE (1937–2002) was a notorious Italian actor, writer, and director who inaugurated his theater in 1959 with Camus' *Caligula* then exploded onto the artistic scene with his outré Christ '63. Later, he collaborated with Pasolini, Glauber Rocha, Bussotti and others as well as philosophers, like Gilles Deleuze.

His novel *Our Lady of the Turks* (1964) recounts the bizarre, eccentric rituals of a young actor on a knightly quest, in the manner of the Crusaders, to hone his art so that he may ultimately become an idiot, if not a saint.

C.B. describes *Our Lady of the Turks* as the *jeu de cartes* of a perverse novel on the idiolect. It is an amusing and merciless parody of "interior life," risibly entrusted to the third-person narrative form: a monody peopled by a thousand and one voices.

A setting and a vision of a south of the south of the saints (the "homegrown" baroque, the Moorish kitsch of a palace, the cathedral-ossuary of the Otranto martyrs, etc.), "crusts" summoned to feed an ethnic fire... The music is elsewhere.

The only novel in C.B.'s prodigious oeuvre, *Our Lady of the Turks* was (re)elaborated on stage (1966; 1973) and in images in an eponymous film, which Bene calls "a 1968 film, or better yet, the 'anti-1968 film' par excellence [that was] misunderstood to the bitter end."

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