

Self- Shadowing Prey

GHÉRASIM LUCA

Translation &
Introduction by
Mary Ann Caws



ENCOMIUMS

“Ghérasim Luca is a great poet among the greatest: he invented a prodigious stammering, his own.” —Deleuze

“Mary Ann Caws’ passionate translations render deft, delightful facets of the formidable Ghérasim Luca: virile servings of refreshment and tumult, liberating language from the yoke of Duty. This collection pairs and contrasts well with the churning self-surgery we had the pleasure of smuggling from Romanian. *Self-Shadowing Prey* calls for vertiginous reading, in exhilarating reflection of the sonorous scintillations of Luca’s own reading performances.” —Julian and Laura Semilian, translators of Ghérasim Luca’s *The Inventor of Love & Other Works*

Luca’s writings are “gems brilliant with incisions, sudden fulgurations, critical incantations, lucent despairs, and a lucidity tempered by sex whose white heat protects a definitive cold perception of duplicities with incendiary ruthless concision.” —Allan Graubard

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André Breton, *Mad Love*

*S*elf-Shadowing
*P*rey

Ghérasim Luca

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Introduction

WHOSE PREY? Ghérasim Luca s'ombre ...

The tale of Ghérasim Luca is passing strange. I first heard of him as yet another Surrealist suicide, another brilliant poet undoing himself for eternity. As the tale went, he mailed off his last manuscript and threw himself into the Seine. Those of us haunted by all the writerly suicides, from the Dada and surrealist worlds of Jacques Rigaut and Duprey to the Bloomsbury worlds of Carrington and Virginia Woolf are bound to or at least likely to pay special attention to legends and truth, and their interaction. This time, it concerns Ghérasim Luca, a writer who had left, on different occasions, five suicide notes, all of which are reproduced in his *Inventor of Love & Other Writings* (2009), translated by Julian and Laura Semilian.

In the introduction to this book a host of information about Luca's life can be found, and here I want simply to talk about the text of this highly peculiar work, *La Proie s'ombre*.

One word about the surrealist flavor of the text, beyond the play of the word play and of the concept play relating to it. Such references as the "Beau comme" – the "lovely as" – in juxtaposition with the theatre of operation and the sewing machine are instantly grasped as part of the heritage of Comte de Lautréamont, whose expression: "lovely as the chance meeting on a dissecting table of a sewing machine and an umbrella!" has come down as an essential description of, even definition of surrealism.

What fascinated me in the suggestion by Rainer J. Hanshe that I undertake a translation of the poet Luca was the obvious impossibility of the task. There are, among Luca's writings, some that are not so clearly constructed around the sought complications of language as this one, and I could have chosen among them. For, immediately in the title: *La Proie s'ombre*, you see what you cannot do. "The Prey," fine, but *s'ombre*? Is it a question of a somber

something, or then something shadowing itself, in a kind of neologistic stupor of a noun gone verb-like? By a few other of his titles you already see the issue: *L'Inventeur de l'amour*, suivi de *La Mort morte* or then *Un Loup à travers une loupe*, and so on. Such impossible readerly, writerly, and translaterly situations will either set your teeth on edge or put your translator's mind to work.

When I was savoring Luca's writings with the multiple word plays, early to late, it appeared to me that his delectation in adjusting and repeating – and enlarging – such “games” took the play to an entirely different level. Just look at his *Paralipomènes* (1976), with their dizzying spin on reading and bedding, on drink and the unreal:

... lit-vie
tirant sur le noir, lit-vide

lit legal contraire à la loi
lit moral contraire à la morale

... lit réel n'est pas réel lit réalisable n'est pas réalisable
...

LIT IVRE

Which gives something like

... (livid) bed-life
drawing on the dark, void bed
Ilegal (legal bed) contrary to the law
moral bed (illegal) contrary to morals

the real bed (the unreal) isn't real
the unrealizable (the realizable bed) isn't realizable

...

BED DRUNK (BOOK)

And I am irrationally delighted by part of this book called "A LA SANTÉ du 'MORT'" – the play on the letter "o" here predicting the play in our text on the italicized letters of such words as BRANCH and TIMBRES ... In this text, we see the real inventiveness of Luca, making nouns and adjectives into verbs: ...

Je te transparente
tu me pénombre

tu me translucide
...
Je t'équinoxe
je te poète
tu me danse
je te particulier
tu me perpendiculaire
...
Je te fragile
Je t'ardente
Je te phonétiquement
tu me hiéroglyphe

This provides an interchange of personalities as well as parts of grammar:

I transparent you
you twilight me
you translucid me
...
I equinox you
I poet you
you dance me

V

SELF-SHADOWING PREY

I particular you
you perpendicular me

...

I fragile you
I ardent you
I phonetically you
you hieroglyph me

Now this kind of work – in writing and reading and thinking – would lead any reader of surrealist texts to think of one of their first plays, on *Lis-tes-ratures*, or “read your scrapings” for literature, also a play on the dictionary *Littré*, and so on. Of course, André Breton’s statement, which had illuminated so many of my writings on and musings about surrealism was superoperative here: “Words are no longer playing, they are making love.”

Clearly, the extent to which Luca dwelt on each syllable of the words he cared about is again reminiscent of Lautréamont’s famous operation on a dissecting table. Take, for example, his play with the word Attention ...

Art Tension

A – Tension
Faites attention
Fete a-tension
Art Temps
Si on ...

Such an instantly comprehensible concentration upon the construction and deconstruction of one word marks an obsession with language, drawing attention to its self-play, perfectly befitting the title *La Proie s'ombre*.

It also seems to me, now that I am considering the sweep of his work, insofar as I can see it at the moment, that his remarks about the explosion of the self enter – with a kind of brilliant equivalence – into his taking apart of various words, causing them to explode, as it were, from inside.

Bearing all this in mind, then, I knew the inside of a work entitled *La Proie s'ombre* would offer the translator more than enough room for an explosive meditation on the

possibilities of surrealist translation in the broadest sense of the word.

Take, for instance, the conclusion of ZERO COUP DE FEU:

ta bouche glisse sans chaussure gauche
 ni chaussure droite
 ma langue passé
 m'a-langue passé
 t'a-chaussure glisse
 m'a-langue passé

Look how the poet worked over the presentation of this more-than-complicated *jeu-de-scène* in the original thinking of the slippery shoe and tongue play:

sous le palais de ta bouche, sous le palais sans bouche
 ta bouche glisse ~~sans chaussure gauche~~
~~ni chaussure droite~~, ma langue passé
 ta chaussure glisse, ~~apostrophe, accent grave~~
 trait d'union, m'a langue passé, t'a-chaussure glisse

Every detail of the printing enters into his mind: there is page after page of linear layout: here, three lines, then four, then two, just as here there is the insistence on the punctuation and the accents . . . In this text, the delight of the word play concerns both right and left, as well as the tongue of the mouth and the shoe and the shoelaces, sliding as they do into each other. For those acquainted with Jacques Derrida's complication of Martin Heidegger's and Meyer Schapiro's meditation on the shoes of Vincent van Gogh, with his droll questioning of the idea of the pair, and the play of the shoelaces, the shoe is on still another foot.

Right, but what about the translation in its own play?
Here is how I took the game to the next step:

your mouth slips without left shoe
or right shoe
my tongue passes
m'y-tongue passes
you'r-shoes slip
m'y-tongue passes

And then the near-impossibility of the next page, where
the General Strike, the

gREVE
GENERALe

without end or beginning would have to give

GENERAL
sTRIKE

thus losing the dream of the REVE in the gREVE, or then
losing the strike altogether, and thinking of a play be-
tween, say, I dream, with a small letter for the personal “I”
and larger for the DREAM, which had become GENER-
ALIZED. I first tried it this way, and then repented, choos-
ing the general strike over the personalized dream ...

But, as with all language losses, I miss the dream.

On the other hand – as I was tempted to say, again,
“foot,” but was refusing the too easy temptation – there
were some unexpected and near-to-accidental findings.

That the sole of a shoe and the sole of a foot should both be seized by “la plante”: how nice! For the many, many word plays, some have had such happy circumstantial finds, like the play on sound: “de temps en temps / un trou dans la tempe,” for a suicide, occasioning a shot in the forehead or – of course – the temple. Balancing some losses, like the funny footnote about the act of pushing the wrong “bouton,” as in both button and bud, there emerged some recoveries ...

As for the obsessive repetitions, about the order of which the poet worked extensively, as he did about the presentation (so many lines, take the column to here on the page, align this with that, and so on, in his instructions to the printer), I have simply and – in my turn obsessively – translated them just as they are repeated. The overall feeling of translating such a linguistically-joyous text, with its delicious homophonic ending, over and over, is a rare experience with which anyone would be, and I was, fortunate to be involved.

Mary Ann Caws
New York, January 2012

Self-Shadowing Prey

2

at the edge of a forest
whose trees are slender ideas
and each leaf a thought at bay
the vegetal reveals to us
the damned depths of an animal sect
or more precisely
an old insect anguish
waking up as man
the only way
the only basic weapon
to animate a mental state
that I hurry to write mantil
like a mantis
if only to mark

3

SELF-SHADOWING PREY

with a dry warning laugh
the devouring word
Entity and antithesis of the bush
a sort of wild and organic brush
grows in the head of that man
ravaged
by the heresy of parks and greenhouses
like the orgasm of a key
a lovely door

So the legendary passivity
the famous and ample passivity of plants
changes here to idle hate
to mad rage

to sex brawl and dare
luring by sap blood lava . . .
as rapid as the passage of woman
to beast
she empties us of a foul ancestral
wound
which in a spurt relieves us
of these fixed complaints
and these false death rattles plumbing us
our calm gestures of the interred

Now only terror
is still able to insert

5

SELF-SHADOWING PREY

in the tropism of body and of guilty

spirit

this prism as doubled echo

where brains and senses capture

the violent innocence

of a flora and a fauna

whose marriage is a long seizure

and a rape as slow as gold

in the implacable lead

And it's around the mental equator

in the space delimited by the tropics

of a head

at the angle of the eye and what surrounds it
that the myth of a kind of utopian
jungle surges into the world

As virgin as the unknowable
or the other “face” of the moon
and never in the reach of a gun

or an axe

its prey is the snow

sand ball hip if not the trap

that the diffuse breath of a dream
lights up

7

SELF-SHADOWING PREY

For tangled
soldered to massive corkscrew keys
the vines

the branches stoves and rituals

fuse

around the forms placed
as if by miracle
at the crossroads of dryads
of druids and of man

So many points to aim at
all these yes and nos that
outside outside of time

of space and weight
select a sort of coupled oasis
and hamlet
to descend in these gods
from before the ages
the gods-place-beast-island-ash-fire
come forth as from the coupling of bird
and branch
and those exiled from the center
and from the shade of a golden foliage
will adore one day
between the walls of their somber cities
.....

IO

The Resting Whirlwind

II

SELF-SHADOWING PREY

What passes as perfectly immobile
pushes what seems strangely mobile
to pretend it's fixed and unmoving

So what appears to stop despite everything
passes as flitting crazily around

What moves or not in a dark corner
of the room or rather what slips
between the steps of what moves
or rests just in the middle of a whirlwind
and especially the mobile which appears

to come down in little immobile leaps
above
pretends to be perfectly
what appears to be
strangely moving
and with what pretends to pass
for what pretends to be
fixed if not unmoving
pushes what is perfectly immobile
to pretend to pass for
what pushes it to pretend
to pass for strangely moving
to pass from the perfectly immobile

to what perfectly appears to be
what passes
or rather what pushes
which appears to be what passes
to pass perfectly by what passes
to pass even what passes by what passes
and even while pretending to be
strangely passed by what passes
to push everything
everything that passes or not
to appear to be perfectly passed by
to be nothing but passed by
to be born fixed and passed by in a corner

Not
what pretends to be born
strangely passed by
but each being that moves in a corner
each corner that moves in a being
not what pretends
to move in the room

but each candle in each
each corner that moves in each
pretends to slip between the steps
passes for slipping between the steps
of each one

I5

SELF-SHADOWING PREY

not to slip into each one
but what is perfectly immobile
pretends to make strangely
in the room
a dark step into each corner
– each step perfectly immobile
in each –
seems to be the whirlwind
that slips
in each corner of the room

a candle that each pretends
to fix

So what appears dark in a corner
pretends to slip madly in each one
the whirlwind that rests
just in the middle of the despite everything
which in its turn fixes if not unmoving
in each one
or rather strangely moving
in a corner
moves in the room which appears to stop
despite everything

or pretends to flit about
perfectly unmoving in a corner

I7

SELF-SHADOWING PREY

then
in little leaps
slips a candle around a mobile
which appears to pass
as what rests
in the just middle of a well
or of its whirlwind perfectly dark
which pretends to stop
in each being that moves
what passes as being perfectly
dark despite everything

not at all strangely fixed

and rather madly around
what moves between the steps
but which above all rests
what flits madly the above all
above all the above-all-not of the mobile
which in the just middle of a perfect rest
in a whirlwind
drives in the room
and passes as moving perfectly around
what each one slips into each one

in the just middle of what stops despite everything
above

I9

SELF-SHADOWING PREY

Between your shoe and the between-my-legs
 between your absent foot and the shoe
between the shoe and the between-my-legs
 your absent foot

Between your absent foot and the shoe
between the shoe and the between-my-legs
 the shoe between my legs

20

In your shoes without mistake
the sole of the feet without roots or feet

Under your shoes without sole
the high heels the roots without earth

21

SELF-SHADOWING PREY

The roots are buried under your high heels
the sole of the feet takes root

In your shoes with high heels
the sole of the feet without roots

Only takes root on high heels
the sole of the feet without heels

The high heels without roots

The roots are buried
in your shoes without feet

The sole without feet or roots

24

Your absent foot enters
the present shoe
the shoe between the legs
the absent foot in the shoe

Between my legs enters your absent foot

Between my legs and your shoe
the absent foot
between your absent foot and my legs
the shoe

Heel needle skin of face sole
“of wind”

25

Towards the Non-Mental

Earthworm under a high heel
the thought turns
around itself
with a static frenzy
comparable to an earthworm
under a high heel
comparable in its turn to the thought
which while turning around itself
returns upon itself
with a static frenzy
comparable

In turning
not like a table
or at least not yet
the thought turns upon itself
with a static frenzy

comparable to the earthworm
under a high heel
and not to the glass of water
upon a revolving table

It turns around
an earthworm
that turns
around a body
which returns to the earthworm
and to the earth that turns
So not yet like
a table
Thought is then not yet
comparable to the shadow
that turns around a table
revolving
Nor to the revolving table of a head
Nor to the shadow
of a head
around the revolving table
of a shadow

It is then not comparable
to the shadow
Nor to the glass of water
On the turntable of a head
Nor to the tempest of shadow
in a head
Nor to the turning frenzy
of a glass of water
on the head
It denies the turning truth
of the earth

Its frenzy of shadow
The glass of shadow on the shadow of a
table that turns around the shadow
of a head
It is then not comparable
to the tempest

Nor to the tempest
in a glass of water
nor to the glass of water in the tempest

But rather to the static frenzy
of the shadow of a doubt

which still turns in his head
and which turns badly
like everything that turns
around the good and the bad
with a headache comparable
to the static frenzy of a thought
comparable to the incomparable



COLOPHON

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Self-Shadowing Prey, one of the final texts by the Romanian poet Ghérasim Luca (1913–1994), is clearly constructed around the sought complications of language. Embodying the surrealist operation of play with considerable exactitude and rigor, *Self-Shadowing Prey* is rich with neologistic stupors, nouns made verbs, and compelling repetitions and linguistic expansions. Language is not merely put into play but made to participate in an erotic act, and words become the locus of an exploding self.

This linguistically joyous text reveals the arresting syntactic creation and creative stammering which Deleuze and Guattari both saw in Luca and what led Deleuze to call him a great poet among the greatest. “If Ghérasim Luca’s speech is eminently poetic,” Deleuze pronounced, “it is because he makes stuttering an affect of language and not an affectation of speech. The entire language spins and varies in order to disengage a final block of sound, a single breath at the limit of the cry, JE T’AIME PASSIONNÉMENT.”

Transformed for the first time into English by distinguished translator Mary Ann Caws, this bilingual edition of *Self-Shadowing Prey* gives us yet one more important text by a key figure of the Romanian branch of Surrealism.



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