

Travesty, Parody, Enchantment:

Translating Hanibal Lucić's *Vila*

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Hanibal Lucić (c.1485-1553) was a Dalmatian patrician from the Venetian-ruled Adriatic island of Hvar. As well as managing his estates and carrying out public administrative and legal duties, he had a long-established habit of writing poetry, building up a substantial body of work ranging from love songs and poetic epistles to one of the first secular verse dramas written in Croatian. He has received little attention in English, either through translation or critical commentary. This is surprising, not least because of his recognition as one of the most talented poets of the Croatian Renaissance, both in the eyes of his contemporaries and in modern times. He had plenty of competition for this status, given the astonishing efflorescence of humanist creativity in sixteenth-century Dalmatia. Though Lucić's poetry circulated only in manuscript in his lifetime, we know his work through two volumes published in Venice by his illegitimate son Antun in 1556: a selection of Italian sonnets (only recently discovered), and a substantial collection of poems in Croatian, *Skladanja izvrsnih pisan razlicih* (or 'Collections of Diverse Excellent Poems').¹

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¹ For an indispensable introduction to Lucić's works see Ivan Lupić, 'Italian Poetry in Early Modern Dalmatia: The Strange Case of Hanibal Lucić (1485-1553)', *Colloquia Maruliana*, 28 (2018), 5-41, announcing his discovery of Lucić's Italian sonnets, and also his 'Tiskani udes Hanibala Lucića', *Colloquia Maruliana*, 32 (2023), 175-205, setting Lucić's *Skladanja* in wider context. The text of Lucić's poem is taken from the new critical edition of his works: Hanibal Lucić, *Djela*, edited by Ivan Lupić, Vol. 155 in the series *Stoljeća hrvatske književnosti* (Zagreb, 2023), henceforward *Djela*. The 1556 text, digitized by the Nacionalna i sveučilišna knjižnica, is available at <<https://digitalna.nsk.hr/?pr=i&id=10523>> (accessed 1 March 2024).

His book of Croatian verses includes a sequence of twenty-two love poems that form a coherent whole, voicing the protagonist's love of a disdainful young woman and tracing his courtship from unrequited love to its fulfilment. Like other such Renaissance compilations, Lucić's songbook shows the influence of Petrarch's *Canzoniere*, from the choice of the vernacular as a vehicle for love lyrics, through a familiar lexicon of similes and paradoxes (often even by Lucić's time commonplaces: cheeks like roses; love as both flame and tears), to the celebration of love as the source of poetic inspiration. It's not possible to dismiss Lucić's poetry as imitation, however, even when he directly reworks verses by Petrarch or his successors. His lyrics are distinguished not just by their virtuosity and wit, but also by their inventive adaptation of influences from a range of sources.

The best known of these poems is usually entitled 'Jur nijedna na svit vila' or 'No other *vila* on the earth' – with the term 'vila' used in Lucić's verse as the equivalent of 'nymph' or simply 'mistress', although the word has its own specific connotations in the South Slav tradition. The poem announces that no other woman can receive any praise for her beauty, because the one that is bewitching the poet's heart has gathered it all to herself. The poet then goes on to describe her attributes from top to bottom: hair, forehead, eyebrows, eyes, cheeks, lips, teeth, throat, breasts, fingers, and bearing. He concludes by praying to God to make time stand still, to preserve such beauty from time's effects. Lucić's Croatian verse normally relies on dodecasyllabic lines with both an end rhyme and an internal one, so the form of this poem is unusual for his lyrics: eight syllables to a line, eight lines to each of the ten stanzas, with a rhyme scheme of ABABABBA. Each stanza closes by repeating the first two lines in reverse order, making each stanza a closed unit. The following translation of the first stanza preserves these features for the purpose of illustration:

Jur nijedna na svit vila

There is no nymph the world around

<i>Lipotom se već ne slavi,</i>	whose beauty poets can extol,
<i>Jer je hvale sve skupila</i>	for she has captured all renown –
<i>Vila ka mi srce travi,</i>	that nymph who doth bewitch my soul.
<i>Ni će biti, ni je bila</i>	There never was, nor will be found
<i>Njoj takmena ka se pravi.</i>	a rival equal to her role.
<i>Lipotom se već ne slavi</i>	For beauty, poets can extol
<i>Jur nijedna na svit vila.</i>	no other nymph the world around. ²

It's a much-loved poem, repeatedly anthologized, and even set to music in the 1970s by singer-songwriter Drago Mlinarec (you can listen to it on YouTube). The verses have been memorized by generations of schoolchildren, who as grown-ups need little encouragement to recite the bits they can still remember.

Such love lyrics are frustrating to translate into English. Part of the difficulty lies in the way communicative content and expressive form are so closely entwined: the poem's beauty lies in its musicality as well as its descriptive conceits. But a second problem, perhaps even greater, has to do with the effect of even a good translation on the contemporary reader. Lucić's Petrarchan idiom is exhausted in English, worn out by centuries on so many poets' lips. A lovelorn poet and his unattainable nymph – check. Hair like a golden crown and cheeks like roses – check. Lips of coral, teeth of pearls – check. Translating such devices with a straight face can give the effect of a conservative adherence to 'proper' love poetry, rather than conveying the verse's original freshness – or worse, it ends up sounding like a greeting card. One's eyes slide over the threadbare images. The problem is to get the reader to pay attention and to read with open-minded curiosity.

One way of dealing with this exhaustion might be to shock the reader into seeing these conventions of description anew through parody, or its more transgressive relative, travesty.

² SPH 6, pp. 209-12. All otherwise unattributed translations and verses are my own.

This term came into English by way of French, in turn borrowed from the Italian *tra-vestire* – ‘to cross dress’ or ‘to dress in disguise’. ‘To travesty’ became, in English, ‘to dress ridiculously’, eventually losing the dress while keeping the mockery, and thus ‘to pervert, to represent falsely or ludicrously’. This evolution perhaps tells us more about inflexible gender norms than about literary forms, but the *tra-* (*trans-*) prefix usefully highlights the sense of a move across boundaries that, ostensibly, ought to be maintained: between men and women (and their gender-appropriate dress) or between a straight rendition and a perverse one. It is no coincidence that when the term ‘travesty’ entered English in the mid-seventeenth century, it did so as the title of a translation, Charles Cotton’s *Scarronides; or, Virgile Travestie*, a burlesque version in English of two Books of the *Aeneid*, which imitated an equally disrespectful French translation by Paul Scarron, who himself was following a fashion for travestying Virgil set by the Italian Giambattista Lalli, whose *L’Eneide travestita* was first published in 1633. Lalli, at least, meant to be respectful; though he clad Virgil’s verse in ‘rags’, he claimed that the poem’s virtue would still ‘shine like gold’ despite this change of clothes.³ However, the mere fact that he felt compelled to say this suggests that he was anxious that his playful translation would hold Virgil’s epic up to ridicule. So to travesty a Petrarchan nymph is to dress her ridiculously and improperly, in inappropriate poetic language, inviting the reader to laugh at the way an incongruous and anachronistic make-over goes beyond the boundaries of taste or convention. But at the same time, just as the exaggeration of a drag act draws attention to the stereotypical character of gender roles, travesty’s transgressive masquerade asks us to recognize how stereotyped some familiar

³ Giambattista Lalli, *L’Eneide travestita* (Venice, 1635): ‘e pareo che quell’incomparabile autore già vestito di oro, di poveri e ruvidi panni travestir volesse’ (‘it might appear that the intention was to disguise that incomparable author, formerly dressed in gold, in poor and rough clothes’); nonetheless, his work would shine ‘come oro avvolto negli stracci’ (‘like gold wrapped in rags’), fols 5^v, 6^v. On the origin of travesty as a term and genre in French, see Gérard Genette, *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree* (Lincoln, NE, 1997), pp. 56-62.

images of female beauty are, and how very peculiar and arbitrary. For illustration, here's an experimental travesty of my own:

There is no nymph who can be found
as fair as this, the world around.
Her hair, a crown of golden wire,
fizzes with electric fire.
Eyebrows like two sleek black leeches
squirm above her other features.
Her cheeks are like a hybrid rose,
the sort that David Austin grows
(not only pink or red in hue,
but yellow, orange – even blue).
Her nostrils like umbrellas furled;
snot of rubies or of pearl.

My nymph has got a pretty throat,
as supple as a squirming stoat.
Her breasts, two milky jellies white –
a pity there's no spoon in sight.
Her fingers ten (or maybe nine)
are carved from tusks elephantine.
A shame that Time must take his fee
from beauty so exemplary.
Oh Lord above, make Time stand still –
these verses ought to pay his bill.

This is not a translation (obviously), but it makes a nod to Lucić's descriptive language and images and those used by similar poets, while taking them in new directions. What happens if you apply logic to some poetic clichés? Wires nowadays conduct electric current; roses come in more shades than pink or red; if a breast is compared to food, one can expect it to be consumed. There are other comparisons available than the usual ones, other images than the ones we expect. Lucić compares his nymph's fingers to elephant bones ('Od lefanće da su kosti') or, more prosaically, ivory, but why is that any less peculiar than suggesting similarities between a girl's neck and a stoat's, as Leonardo da Vinci did in his portrait of Cecilia Gallerani, the 'Lady with an Ermine'? (The parallel was not only visual, given the implied pun on her surname and the Greek word for stoat or weasel: 'γαλῆ'.) And not all my

choices here are arbitrary. South Slav folk poetry regularly compares a maiden's eyebrows to leeches ('obrvica morske pijavice'; though in this phrase they are 'sea leeches' or, even more disgustingly in English, sea slugs). Readers of della Casa's Renaissance etiquette book *Galateo* may recognize an echo of the advice not to inspect your handkerchief after blowing your nose as if you expect to discover precious jewels in it; not really much odder than expecting lumps of manna to drop out of a beloved's mouth when she speaks.⁴ Is it possible to read even greeting-card verse after this without thinking about the choices that went into the poet's expression? Travesty is thus not mere mockery, but also a form of critique that can help us to read attentively – though it also risks debasing a poetic idiom so thoroughly that it is impossible to recover its original character.

If travesty ridicules, transgressing boundaries to show the taken-for-granted in a different light, parody doesn't necessarily hold its object up to laughter, but it does aim at a certain distance from the text it echoes. Here again the etymology of the word is instructive. The Greek 'parōidia' was a song composed both 'against' but also 'alongside' another, in parallel with its source. Unlike travesty, parody doesn't cross the boundary between this and that, but respects the difference, with its alterations or additions establishing its relation to the original text. Just like travesty's transgressions, however, parody's distance has a critical edge, ironically highlighting aspects of the original text.⁵

Some of the devices of Lucić's love lyrics, and of other such poetry, positively invite parodic treatment. The 'blazon' formula that Lucić echoes is one such conceit. The *blason anatomique*, in which the (female) beloved's body parts are catalogued and praised one by one, received this name in the mid-sixteenth century, after a collection of poems edited by Clément Marot, but similar techniques were also used earlier. Where Lucić may have found

⁴ '[A]prire il moccichino, & guatarui entro, come se perle, o rubini ti douessero esser discesi dal cielabro' ('[O]pen the handkerchief and look inside, as if rubies or pearls might have dropped out of your brain'), Giovanni della Casa, *Galateo, o vero Trattato de' Costumi* (Florence, 1561), p. 35.

⁵ I draw here on Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody* (Champaign, IL, 2000), pp. 32-3.

the inspiration for his poetic catalogue is debated.⁶ What is clear, however, is that while Lucić, in Neoplatonic fashion, saw each aspect of his beloved's outward loveliness as a reflection of her inner virtue, for modern readers this formula can elicit very different reactions.

One way of approaching Lucić's poem, then, might be through a feminist critique of the blazon format, operating within a 'hermeneutics of suspicion' aimed at unveiling attitudes that lie behind the text, regardless of the author's intent.⁷ This perspective calls on the reader to notice that, in the typical blazon, the male poet's gaze, scrutinizing the woman's body with all the absorbed attention of an anatomist, reduces the woman not just to an object, but to a series of objects, conceived as *things* (a crown, a meadow, roses, coral, pearls, ivory).⁸ To the contemporary reader this can be rather off-putting. It suggests that a woman can be represented as nothing more than her body parts, which can be disarticulated, itemized, evaluated, and displayed to public view as if they belonged not to her but to the poet. And they *do* belong to the poet – or rather, the poem is his own idealized reinvention of a woman out of her components. Thus, even when towards the end of Lucić's poem he shows us his lady whole, in graceful motion, her noble carriage and gait still exist as something to be displayed and commented upon.

Such a feminist critique lends itself to a parodic reading that both distils and comments. I offer an illustration of my own:

On reading 'Jur nijedna na svit vila'

"There is no nymph who can be found
as fair as mine, the world around.
And now, this fact to emphasize,
each separate bit I'll itemize."

⁶ See Tomislav Bogdan, 'Jur nijedna na svit vila – novo čitanje', *Dani Hvarškoga kazališta*, 40 (2014), 125-51.

⁷ Rita Felski, *The Limits of Critique* (Chicago, 2015), on Ricoeur's 'hermeneutics of suspicion' in feminist critique, pp. 30-5, 107-13.

⁸ A summary, and critique, of the literature in Catherine Bates, *Masculinity, Gender and Identity in the English Renaissance Lyric* (Cambridge, 2007), pp. 91-5.

The lawyer then compiles his list,
ensuring that no part is missed.

So “*Item*: hair, a crown of gold,
proclaims her virtues manifold.
Her cheeks are like the blushing rose,
that in her face’s garden grows.
A pair of nostrils sweetly curled,
then lips like coral, teeth like pearls.

And *item*: neck, all smooth and white,
a joy to him who hugs it tight.
Her trembling breasts like snow or milk,
with veins of ink and skin of silk.
Her fingers, pointed, long, and pale,
rounded, slender, waxen, frail;
nimble fingers, made to please,
like ivory of piano keys.”

(He keeps it up but, ugh, enough –
I cannot bear to voice this stuff.)

Our poet sighs; he sees her dead,
with all that tallied beauty fled.
Oh foolish man! Why do you sigh
that she might some day have to die?
You’ve made her dead while still alive;
sliced up like this she can’t survive –
just like a rabbit neatly jointed,
each part with oily praise anointed.

The moral here is blunt and terse
(although expressed in ludic verse):
a living girl should never be
reduced to just anatomy.

When such a poet laments that such beauty must fade and die, it reads as though he is really lamenting the transient beauty of his own verses, since he’s already squashed his nymph dead, as a series of static images, between the pages of his lawyer’s ledger. Ultimately his celebration of his beloved is as much a celebration of his own art as of her beauty.⁹

⁹ Argued of Lucić’s poem in slightly different terms by Dunja Fališevac, ‘Poetika Lucićeva kanconijera’, *Dani hvarskog kazališta*, 13 (1987), 181-203 (p. 197).

The above parody is also far from being a translation, though it aligns with elements of Lucić's verse. It might best be described as a creative appropriation of the same form that Lucić's poem follows, reacting to the way it appears when read from a specific critical position, within a different cultural context. This sort of parody has something in common with the 'anti-blazon', which appeared simultaneously with the popularization of the anatomical blazon in the sixteenth century. The anti- or counter-blazon could criticize and undermine the form in various ways, whether as in Shakespeare's Sonnet 130, rejecting the blazon's unrealistic rhetoric of description ('My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun; | coral is far more red than her lips' red'), or Louise Labé's Sonnet 21, which poses a list of questions about which attributes should be selected to praise a man, in the process highlighting the lack of blazon-spectacles to focus the female gaze: 'Quelle grandeur rend l'homme vénérable? | Quelle grosseur? Quell poil? Quelle couleur?' ('What height places a man beyond compare? | What size? What shade of hair? What colour of skin?').¹⁰ Anti-blazon is particularly effective when the formula is subjected to translation from one context to another: figurative to literal, female to male, past to present. The Croatian poet Luko Paljetak transfers Lucić's nymph to a contemporary context, in which the Petrarchan vision of inner and outer beauty has been replaced by a commodification of outward appearance:

Jur ni jedna na svit vila
lipotom se već ne slavi,
ljepota je nekad bila
ures vila, sjaj u travi,
danas treba imat stila
druge vrste, onaj pravi;
lipotom se već ne slavi
jur ni jedna na svit vila.

There is no nymph the world around
whose beauty still the poets sing.
With beauty once our nymphs were crowned,
splendour in t'grass, a rose in spring.
Today it's style that must astound,
a different sort, the real thing.
Their beauty now no poets sing,
those nymphs who charmed the world around.¹¹

¹⁰ Louise Labé, *Love Sonnets and Elegies*, translated by Richard Sieburth (New York, 2014), pp. 52-3.

¹¹ Luko Paljetak, 'Jur ni jedna' in *Pjesni na dubrovačku* (Dubrovnik, 1997), pp. 147-9. My thanks to Dr Paljetak for his permission to reproduce and translate his verses (given in full below, pp. 000-00).

In his recasting, Paljetak's nymph brings her conquests to their knees by making use of the whole armoury of modern cosmetics – hair dye, contact lenses, green lipstick, face lifts, silicone implants, acrylic nails – and takes the pill to ensure that there will be no unwanted consequences. It is make-up and money that defy the effects of age in his poem, not the poet's skill.

Paljetak's verse is simultaneously parody (in its reference to Lucić's text), satire (in its reference to contemporary social reality), and 'trans-contextualization' (in its move from one context to another, here past to present). But his poem has a very different weight in Croatian, where it is an impudent travesty of a canonical text, and in English, where it is merely social satire, one in a long line of texts decrying artificial aids to female beauty. In translation it doesn't require any prior acquaintance with Lucić's *vila* (nor can it exploit her non-existent cultural capital). Similarly, my travesty and parodic misappropriation of Lucić's poem as given above can stand alone, since it is the clichés of love poetry and the blazon formula that are the objects of critique, rather than Lucić's lyric *per se*. If parody is repetition that measures a critical distance, as Linda Hutcheon tells us, then all these verses fit the bill, but the objects of their criticism vary according to the context.¹²

What do these comments on travesty and parody have to do with translation from language to language? In pessimistic mood, some critics sigh that all translation is travesty, and *especially* translations of poetry.¹³ Traduttore, traditore: 'translator, traitor' as the Italian pun has it, with more implications of crossing the boundaries of the permissible (a treacherous 'traditore' was originally someone who 'hands over' a victim). The implication is that trying

¹² Hutcheon (n. 5), p. 6, and, on 'trans-contextualization', p. 37.

¹³ One such is Vladimir Nabokov, in 'The Art of Translation', *New Republic*, 105 (1941), 160-2. Or, more pithily:

What is translation? On a platter
A poet's pale and glaring head,
A parrot's screech, a monkey's chatter,
And profanation of the dead

Nabokov, 'On Translating "Eugene Onegin"', *New Yorker*, 8 January 1955.

to transfer meaning between languages can only produce a dishonourable betrayal, not a true correspondence – or, to return to travesty’s original metaphor, only a masquerade in incongruous clothes, not a reincarnation of the text in new flesh. Thinking of translation in terms of travesty, insisting on the discrepancies and losses in any act of translation, works to keep in place the boundaries between languages, and between difference. Why struggle to translate if the result is at best a betrayal, at worst a parasitic relationship that distorts the source text? But parody and translation have a different, perhaps slightly more sympathetic relationship. Indeed, parody is a form of translation, or at least both are parallel processes. Both the translator and the parodist must be Janus-faced: both de-coder and re-coder, concerned equally with source and target. Both depend on an original text or referent: parody and translation are both, if not parasitic on, then at least in symbiosis with, their originals, since neither translation nor parody actively causes harm to their hosts, though they do exploit them. Each requires an intimate engagement aimed at generating something new through a creative act: a ‘singing alongside’. They do this by ‘trans-contextualizing’ their originals, giving them a new frame of reference, whether by a shift in associations or a change of language. Most importantly, both translation and parody are *interpretive* processes, and both interpret in a critical mode, through their distance from their originals. Parody prompts the reader to look at the original work more carefully, since its effect depends on constantly identifying the degree and kind of distance from its source. A translation can elicit this precise sort of attention only from someone who reads both source and target languages (and the potential benefit is whether the juxtaposition of the two versions inspires insights – something beyond the remit of this essay). But even without that flickering back and forth between languages, reading a translation can prompt questions about the relationship between source and target contexts. Ultimately, both parody and translation can expand the reader’s critical capacity.

All that said, let us try out these sharpened critical senses. Turn to the end of this article and read Lucić's poem in full – deliberately not yet quoted at length – together with my attempt at a poetically adequate translation.



The acts of travesty and parody that have introduced this poem ask us to consider whether Lucić's nymph exists on her own terms, or only as a list of conventional attributes, assessed through the eyes of male observers. Or, when the poet laments beauty's transience and asks for time to stand still, whether this trades the *vila*'s capacity to change, and hence her life, for his poem's immortality. But even if these insights are accurate and fair, would this be a *sufficient* reading of Lucić's poem? If the reader's reaction is to admit that the preceding exercises have a point but do not adequately encompass the poem's possibilities, then they will have done what they were meant to do: elicit an attentive and curious reading that does not merely register a too-familiar poetic lexicon or condemn a problematic gender regime. Such resistance is also a consequence of the critical distance that parody can grant us.

A resistant reader might well go on to ask: if it is stereotyped in its language and problematic in its gender regime, why is the original poem in Croatian still so powerful and beloved? Is it something about the source context that is obscured in translation? I've already noted that some of the beauty of the piece lies in its simple musicality, which is difficult to reproduce. In my translation, I've attempted to capture that simplicity by shortening the line (with the unintended effect of echoing Lucić's more usual doubly-rhymed dodecasyllabic verse). But even a good translation into English casts a veil over some of the other ways in which the poem works in Croatian. For instance, the character of Lucić's language contributes a great deal to its effect. Archaic in its vocabulary and idiosyncratic in its mix of dialect forms, it is nonetheless accessible to the contemporary reader. But more than that, it's possible to hear in Lucić's poem the sound of linguistic history, as the vernacular found a new literary

voice in the sixteenth century. In other circumstances, modern Croatian might have developed in quite different directions, guided by Lucić as well as other such Renaissance innovators.¹⁴ In the nineteenth century, Lucić's verse was promoted as a model that could help shape a literary language that was being reconceived by a newly patriotic generation. When the journal *Danica ilirska* rediscovered and published this poem in 1836, the title given to the article, which translates as 'the epitome of beauty', could be read as a comment on Lucić's language as much as on the depiction of his *vila*. The commentary noted that 'our Illyrian dialect' had reached a high level of perfection in the sixteenth century but went on to lament that 'our literature subsequently regressed much more than it advanced'.¹⁵ Lucić's editor, along with other linguistic reformers of the 1830s, proposed a hybrid solution to the problem of a standardized literary language, one that would consciously draw on dialectical variants and the historical models offered by earlier writers like Lucić – although ultimately it would be the neoštokavian dialect that set the norm. Lucić's lyric thus epitomizes both the flowering of a Renaissance idiom and, at the same time, a dead end in the development of modern Croatian. But thinking only in terms of linguistic history makes the poem a museum piece, rather than a living text. Is there something else that translation loses?

The verses are evocative in Croatian in a way that is difficult to replicate in English because of their echoes of South Slav oral poetry. Lucić's eight-syllable line, although unusual for his poems, is not unusual for folk verse; but his eight-line stanzas, with their inverted repetition of the first two lines, are an innovative adaptation of the more usual four- or six-line stanzas of folksong.¹⁶ Lucić's descriptive phrases also employ the fixed epithets of folk literature, in which foreheads are always serene, eyes and eyebrows are black, a throat is

¹⁴ See Marin Franičević, *Povijest hrvatske renesansne književnosti* (Zagreb, 1983), pp. 369-70.

¹⁵ 'Uzor lepote', *Danica ilirska*, 2.33 (1836), 130.

¹⁶ Josip Vončina, 'Jedan od mogućih analiza Lucićeve Vile', *Analize starih hrvatskih pisaca* (Split, 1977), 75-87.

white, and the sun is bright (vedro čelo, črne oči, bilo grlo, žarko sunce).¹⁷ And Lucić's adaptation of the blazon technique recalls folk formulas depicting female beauty through a list of attributes, as in this verse published in 1846 by the Serbian collector and codifier Vuk

Karadžić:

... oči su joj dva draga kamena,	... two precious jewels are her eyes,
a obrve morske pijavice,	sea leeches are her eyebrows black;
trepavice krila lastavice,	her lashes are like swallow's wings,
rusa kosa kita ibrišima;	her red-gold hair a skein of silk,
usta su joj kutija šećera,	her mouth a box of sugar sweet,
b'jeli zubi dva niza bisera;	her white teeth form two rows of pearls;
ruke su joj krila labudova,	her arms are like the wings of swans,
b'jele dojke dva siva goluba ...	her two white breasts like turtle doves ... ¹⁸

Does this mean that Lucić lifted this device from the decasyllabic oral lyrics of the hinterland štokavian tradition? It's unlikely. More elaborate formulations of the same technique, devoting a complete stanza to each aspect of the singer's beloved, were also to be found in the popular songs of the coastal towns and islands.¹⁹ In turn, these urban ballads sometimes reveal literary influences in their references to golden crowns, angelic loveliness, or cheeks of rose and white; the 'box of sugar' and 'strings of pearls' in Karadžić's song suggest similar processes in that folk tradition. Such formulas were part of a widely shared poetic vocabulary, absorbed and reworked by poets such as Lucić, alongside the devices of troubadour poetry or the Petrarchan lyric. These echoes may strike a familiar note in Croatian but are inaudible in English translation.

The term 'vila' is another potential key to the poem's effects. 'Nymph' would be the conventional equivalent in early modern English verse, and *vila* is used in the same way, as a

¹⁷ See Miroslav Pantić, 'Jugoslovenska književnost i usmena (narodna) književnost od XV do XVIII veka', *Prilozi za književnost, jezik, istoriju i folklor*, 29 (1963), 17-44.

¹⁸ 'Udaja sestre Ljubovića', in Vuk Stefanović Karadžić, *Pjesme junačke srednjih vremena*, Sabrana dela Vuka Karadžića, 3 (Belgrade, 1988), 383-5.

¹⁹ See Petar Kasandrić, '“Pisni ljuvene” Hanibala Lucića', *Glasnik Matice dalmatinske*, 2.3 (1902), 267-88; 2.4 (1903), 380-402 (pp. 390-3).

poetic term for any fair young woman, both by Lucić and by other similar poets. Still, relying on the term ‘nymph’ in translation erases some of the specificities of the South Slav *vila*. *Vilas* are similar to the nymphs of classical mythology in being associated with specific natural environments, mountains and forest groves in particular, where they sing and dance in their white robes. More closely associated with magic and the supernatural than the nymph, the *vila* is largely benevolent to mortals, guiding those she favours to the magical herbs she gathers, although she is also known to beguile inadvertent observers and drive them out of their wits.²⁰ Yet while the term ‘vila’ evokes magical connotations for readers with an acquaintance with Slavic mythology,²¹ it is a poetic commonplace in sixteenth-century verse. Similarly, when the poem’s narrator writes of the ‘*vila* who bewitches my heart’, he uses a verb that has at its root the word ‘trava’ (‘herb’), as though he has been given a love potion. Yet this too is a poetic cliché, as we can see by looking at other verses, for instance one by the Ragusan Šiško Menčetić, who complains about the *vila* who is unnaturally bewitching (*zatravi*) his mind so that he yearns after her, but then splices this image with the familiar Petrarchan paradox of love as ice and flame.²² Neither poet means the language of beguilement to be taken literally: it’s a taken-for-granted metaphor for the effects of love.

But pursuing the magical associations behind these metaphors is productive. In Lucić’s poem the bewitching *vila* has more agency than is usual in blazon verses, and while the narrator loves her to bits, so to speak, he does not possess her – she is never described as ‘mine’. The first stanza is the only one in which the narrator appears, though indirectly. Instead, the succeeding verses show the effect of his beloved’s charms on other observers, who are also enchanted, turn by turn, stanza by incantatory stanza. Anyone who sees her hair will savour untold bliss; her black eyes will replace a man’s sadness with joy; a youth who

²⁰ Stipe Botica, ‘Vile u hrvatskoj mitologiji’, *Radovi Zavoda za slavensku filologiju*, 25 (1990), 29-40.

²¹ Now including fans of J. K. Rowling’s Harry Potter series, which features ‘veelas’ with the same attributes as in folk tradition.

²² *Pjesme Šiška Menčetića Vlahovića i Gjore Držića*, edited by Vatroslav Jagić, SPH 2 (Zagreb, 1870), p. 53.

chases after her will be driven crazy; whoever embraces her will experience delight; he who sees her breasts will be cured of all woes. The stanzas don't just enumerate her attributes but, both in their insistent, formulaic repetition and in the effects they describe, are reminiscent of spells.

Perhaps not by chance. The formulas of traditional South Slav love-charms offer suggestive parallels to Lucić's verses, particularly in the way they inventory parts of the body and conjure their power or susceptibility:

Gdje je ova vila | sve do sada bila? | Gdje je ova mama | sve do sada mamila? | Obraz
mi je obraz beg! | Oči su mi vile, | obrvice strile! | Koga očima prostrilim, | obrvama
premamim? | Ja uzmami i premami | i putnika i namernika, | i najviše svoga suđenika.

(Where has this *vila* been until now, where has this lure allured until now? My face is
a noble face! My eyes are *vilas*, my eyebrows arrows! Whom do I pierce with my
eyes, whom do I enthrall with my brows? I beguile and I enthrall the passer-by and the
chance observer, and most of all my own intended.)

Or this:

Što god oči ima, | u men' nek pogledne, | što god ruke ima, | men' da zagrli, | što god
noge ima, | za mnom da pođe.

(Who has eyes, let him look at me; who has arms, let him embrace me; who has feet, let him follow me.)²³

The enumeration of face, eyes, and brows in the first example has a very different effect from the dismemberment performed by blazon verses. Seeing Lucić's stanzas in term of love-charms makes us wonder whether the *vila* might be putting her anatomy to use for her own purposes.

But are the spells in Lucić's poem really cast by the *vila*? This is a far too literal and ethnological approach to the poem. As he does with the descriptive devices of oral poetry, Lucić borrows and adapts the grammar of traditional magic and spells, without presenting his beloved as a folkloric fairy. Instead, it is the poet himself who transmits the magic of her beauty through his incantations. And we, as readers, allow ourselves to be enchanted by the beauty of his language.

This surrender to enchantment produces precisely the opposite effect to that produced by the ironic, critically distancing methods of parody or the brash and bumptious border-crashing of travesty. But can we only get to the heart of things through suspicion, demystification, and disenchantment? Or, more generally, does the truth lie only in the sphere of the rational, self-interested, utility-maximizing, and in the will to power and domination, or hidden behind false consciousness, bad faith, delusion? The emotional power of poetry can show us some of the limits of critique.²⁴ This doesn't mean the surrender of all critical capacity, however. A reader's pleasure in being enchanted can include appreciating the artifice that brings this about.

²³ For these and similar spells, see Ljubinko Radenković, *Narodne basme i bajanja* (Niš, 1982), pp. 352, 361. Unlike other spells which depend on the inspiration of the spell-caster, traditional love charms have set forms which must be repeated accurately to take effect. Although recorded in the twentieth century, they probably preserve older phrasing.

²⁴ See, along these lines, Rita Felski's *The Uses of Literature* (Oxford, 2008).

Linguistic history, the echoes of folk song, the nature of the *vila*, and the affinities with traditional love charms – all the specifically Croatian features of this poem – are exceptionally difficult to conjure up within an English translation. However, all these aspects need to be recognized if we are to do justice to Hanibal LuciĆ as a gifted poet working with the poetic, cultural, and linguistic riches of his own time and place, while also transforming them in his verse. Readers in English, as well as in Croatian, receive this poem through their own filters and frames – of language, of poetic tradition, of cultural value, of history and experience. These may not be congruent with those of LuciĆ’s time or with each other’s. I’ve tried to use travesty and parody to dismantle some of the barriers to engaging with this poem in English and in the twenty-first century – impatience with descriptive conceits that now seem threadbare, or suspicion of a gender regime that can so lightly dismember and objectify a woman – but this can only take the reader so far. Trying to make the poem’s effects more transparent has also led me to explore some aspects that are obscured in translation. But can this sort of explication entirely replicate the potency of the poem?

Ultimately the point of a spell, and especially a love charm, is not to communicate a meaning but to produce an emotional effect. The magic of this poem lies in the way it leads the reader to apprehend beauty – the beauty of a woman, the beauty of the poet’s words – and to be wonderstruck, shaken by loveliness out of a default emotional disposition (impatience, suspicion, detachment, cynicism ...). But the efficacy of a charm depends on repeating its words precisely and accurately. What happens when LuciĆ’s spell passes not just across some five centuries, but also across the boundaries of language? That remains to be tested by the reader.

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Hanibal Lucić

Translated by Wendy Bracewell

Jur nijedna na svit vila

Lipotom se već ne slavi

Jer je hvale sve skupila

Vila ka mi srce travi,

Ni će biti ni je bila

Njoj takmena ka se pravi.

Lipotom se već ne slavi

Jur nijedna na svit vila.

No nymph the world around

for beauty is extolled,

since she's claimed all renown –

that nymph who charms my soul.

None was, nor will be found,

her peer in part or whole.

For beauty is extolled

no other nymph around.

Vrhu njeje vedra čela

Vridna ti se kruna vidi

Od kosice ku je splela,

Kojom zlatu ne zavidi,

Svakomu je radost vela

Kad ju dobro razuvidi.

Vridna ti se kruna vidi

Vrhu njeje vedra čela.

Above her brow so fair,

a precious crown you see

of plaited strands of hair

which naught to gold. concedes.

Whoever sees it there

will ever joyous be.

A precious crown you see

above her brow so fair.

Obrve su tanke i črne

Nad črnima nad očima,

Črne oči kada svrne,

Človik tugu premda ima,

Tuga mu se sva odvrne

Za veselje koje prima.

Nad črnima nad očima

Obrve su tanke i črne.

Her brows are black and fine,

above her black, black eyes.

When on him those eyes shine,

though he in sorrow lies,

his woes will all resign

to joys that in him rise.

Above her black, black eyes

her brows are black and fine.

Kako polje premaliti

A sword in spring her face,

Ličca joj se ružom diče,	her cheeks a blushing rose;
Ruža nigdar pri na sviti	there is no other place
Toli lipa ne izniče,	where such a blossom blows.
Mladost će se pomamiti,	The youth who gives her chase
Kojano se za njom stiče.	is caught in frenzy's throes.
Ličca joj se ružom diče	Her cheek's a blushing rose:
Kako polje premaliti.	a springtime sward her face.

Pri rumenih njeje usti	No coral could compete,
Ostao bi kuralj zada,	beside her lips of red.
Zubići su drobni, gusti,	Her teeth are even, neat,
Kako biser ki se sklada,	like pearls strung on a thread.
Slatku ričcu kad izusti,	You'd think her words so sweet,
Bi reć mana s neba pada.	were manna heaven-shed.
Ostao bi kuralj zada	Beside her lips of red,
Pri rumenih njeje usti.	no coral could compete.

Blažen tko joj bude grlit	He's blessed who will embrace
Grlo i vrat bil i gladak,	her neck so smooth and white.
Srića ga će prem zagrlit,	Fate grants to him this grace –
Živiti će život sladak,	to live in sweet delight.
Žarko sunce neće hrlit	The sun won't speed its pace
Da mu pojde na zapadak.	to hurry him to night.
Grlo i vrat bil i gladak	Her neck so smooth and white;
Blažen tko joj bude grlit.	he's blessed who'll it embrace.

Lipo ti joj ustrepeću	Her prett'ly trembling breasts
Prsi bilji sniga i mlika	more white than milk or snow;
Tere oči na nje meću	whose gaze upon them rests
Ki žalosti išću lika,	finds cures for all his woes.

Jer ne mogu slatkost veću
 Umisliti do vik vika.
 Prsi bilji sniga i mlika
 Lipo ti joj ustrepeću.

No sweeter sights will bless
 his eyes while still time flows.
 More white than milk or snow,
 her prett'ly trembling breasts.

Prsti joj su tanci, bili,
 Obli, duzi, pravni, prosti,
 Gdi bi zelen venčac vili
 Ali krunu od vridnosti,
 Koga ne bi prihinili
 Od lefanće da su kosti?
 Prsti joj su pravni, prosti,
 Obli, duzi, tanci, bili.

Her fingers white and fine,
 are shapely, even, straight.
 When they a green wreath twine
 or coronet create,
 who'd not their form so fine
 for ivory mistake?
 So shapely, even, straight:
 her fingers white and fine.

Od svih gospoj ke su godi
 Gospodščina njoj se prosi,
 Meu njimi jer kad hodi
 Toli lipo kip uznosi
 Bi reć tančac da izvodi,
 Tim se ona ne ponosi.
 Gospodščina njoj se prosi
 Od svih gospoj ke su godi.

She is, of ladies all,
 most crowned with nobleness.
 When walking midst them all,
 so well she holds herself,
 you'd say she danced withal,
 yet no pride manifests.
 She's crowned with nobleness,
 more than the ladies all.

Grihota bi da se stara
 Ova lipost uzorita.
 Bože, ki si svim odzgara,
 Čin' da bude stanovita,
 Ne daj vrime da ju shara
 Do skončanja sega svita.

'Twere sin should age lay waste
 that beauty so sublime.
 Oh Lord, above all placed,
 let it endure through time.
 Let not it be effaced
 till earth's last hour shall chime.

Ova lipost uzorita
Grihota bi da se stara.

A beauty so sublime:
a sin if it should age.

Luko Paljetak

Translated by Wendy Bracewell

Jur ni jedna

There's now no

Jur ni jedna na svit vila
lipotom se već ne slavi,
ljepota je nekad bila
ures vila, sjaj u travi,
danas treba imat stila
druge vrste, onaj pravi;
lipotom se već ne slavi
jur ni jedna na svit vila.

There's now no nymph the world around
whose beauty still the poets sing.
With beauty once our nymphs were crowned,
splendour in t'grass, a rose in spring.
Today it's style that must astound,
a different sort, the real thing.
Their beauty now no poets sing,
those nymphs who charmed the world around.

Vrhu njeje vedra čela
svaki dan su drugi vlasi,
priroda bi zlobno htjela
da je jedna boja krasi,
ali boja hrpa cijela
tu je da joj izgled spasi;
svaki dan su druge vlasi
vrhu njeje vedra čela.

Above her brow, serene and wise,
new-coloured locks each day are spread.
Cruel Mother Nature authorized
the one tint only for her head,
but with a bunch of tints and dyes
her salon helps to save her cred.
New-coloured locks each day are spread
Above her brow, serene and wise.

Obrve ta sebi čupa,
na očima nosi leće
raznobojne, nije glupa,
zbog toga gdje god se kreće
svima za njom srce lupa

Each eyebrow she doth pluck and tweeze,
she's contact lenses on her eyes,
all different colours – she's a tease.
Wherever she might socialize,
she sends us all weak at the knees;

pa i tebi – kako neće! –
 na očima nosi leće,
 obrve ta sebi čupa.

you too, so do not criticize.
 She's contact lenses on her eyes,
 each eyebrow she doth pluck and tweeze.

Lice joj je uvijek glatko;
 vila danas bora nema,
 mladost traje vrlo kratko,
 ali tu je lifting, krema
 za noć, za dan, to zna svatko,
 suha, masna – čemu trema;
 vila danas bora nema,
 lice joj je uvijek glatko.

Her face is always smooth and fair;
 a nymph today won't get crow's feet.
 Sure, youth is short and life's unfair –
 but then we've Botox, moisture sheets,
 Korean snail slime, night repair,
 or peels and fillers – quite discreet.
 A nymph today won't get crow's feet:
 her face is always smooth and fair.

Na usnama njoj je šminka
 i zelena ako treba,
 ona joj je samo krinka,
 misliš da je došla s neba
 da pokaže čudo klinka,
 čudo što na svakog vreba;
 i zelena ako treba
 na usnama njoj je šminka.

Her lips with gloss she'll emphasize –
 green lipstick if that ups her pace.
 For her it's just a cool disguise;
 you'd think she came from outer space,
 her wondrousness to advertise –
 though she's a wonder that gives chase.
 Green lipstick if that ups her pace,
 her lips with gloss she'll emphasize.

Blažen tko joj ljubiti smije
 grlo i vrat, a i niže,
 jer tablete ona pije
 razne, tako u raj stiže
 u kojem se pako krije,
 dublji što mu priđeš bliže;
 grlo i vrat, a i niže,
 blažen tko joj ljubiti smije.

Full blest is he who dares to kiss
 her throat and neck, and down below.
 She takes some pills, she's no dumb miss.
 When into heaven he doth go,
 it's one that hides hell's foul abyss,
 as closer, deeper still you go.
 Her throat and neck, and down below –
 full blest is he who dares her kiss.

Ako su joj male prsi,
stavi ona silicone
koji služe svojoj svrsi,
odatle joj grudi one
bujne, da te prođu srsi:
ravnih cura svi se klone;
stavi ona silicone
ako su joj male prsi.

Prsti su joj tanci, bili,
nokti su joj oštri, dugi,
od plastike, kakvi vili
i pristaju jer bi drugi
slomili se u čas tili,
kad te grebe plešeš bugi;
nokti su joj oštri, dugi,
prsti su joj tanci, bili.

Kakva god je, u kafiću
takve nema, nit će biti,
zbog nje će se odat piću
svaki drugi, pa čak i ti,
takvu, priznaj, u svom žiću
nisi sreo, nemoj kriti:
takve nema, nit će biti,
kakva god je, u kafiću.

Grihota bi da se stara!
Toj ljepoti venut ne daj,

If modest breasts her bra won't fill
some silicone will do the trick,
to help her private goals fulfil.
Boobs suit her body politics –
they're big enough to give you chills –
for no one wants a scrawny chick.
Some silicone will do the trick,
if modest breasts her bra won't fill.

Her fingers each are slim and white,
her fingernails are sharp and long,
and of acrylic, as is right:
a nymph needs nails sharp-filed and strong
to give a love scratch late at night:
to have them break would be quite wrong.
Her fingernails are sharp and long,
her fingers each are slim and white.

At cafés, bars, or barbecues,
there's none like her, nor will there be.
Yes, she's the sort drives men to booze,
at least the ones like you and me.
Admit it, do not act bemused:
you've never met one such as she.
There's none like her, nor will there be,
in cafés, bars, or barbecues.

For her to age would be a shame:
no, do not let such beauty fade!

kozmetika čuda stvara,
u ruke je dobre predaj,
nemoj za to žalit para,
onda stani pa je gledaj,
toj ljepoti venut ne daj,
grihota bi da se stara.

Skilled makeup will lost youth reclaim,
so find our nymph some expert aid –
don't spare the cash and lose the game.
Then gaze at her and be afraid.
No, do not let such beauty fade,
for her to age would be a shame.