

You've Given My Name to a Tree?

You've given my name to a tree? No small gift,
though I'm not resigned to being shadow, or trunk,
abandoned in the suburb. I gave your name
to a river, a fire that wouldn't die, the rough-
and-tumble of my fate; to the more-than-human
assurance with which you spoke to the toad who hopped
from the sewer, without horror, pity
or joy; to the breathing of that gently
powerful lip of yours that, naming things,
creates them—toad, flower, grass, rock—
oak tree just unfolding over our heads,
when the rain scatters the pollen of the clover's
fleshing petals, and the flame leaps up.

Hai dato il mio nome a un albero?

Hai dato il mio nome a un albero? Non è poco;
pure non mi rassegnò a restar ombra, o tronco,
di un abbandono nel suburbio. Io il tuo
l'ho dato a un fiume, a un lungo incendio, al crudo
gioco della mia sorte, alla fiducia
sovrumana con cui parlasti al rospo
uscito dalla fogna, senza orrore o pietà
o tripudio, al respiro di quel forte
e morbido tuo labbro che riesce,
nominando, a creare; rospo fiore erba scoglio—
quercia pronta a spiegarsi su di noi
quando la pioggia spollina i carnosì
petali del trifoglio e il fuoco cresce.

Greve" is worth noting. "The regenerative power of love elicits divine hyperbole as prerogative of the beloved, whose magical kiss can animate a statue; she is omnipresent, and each rendez-vous, indoors and outdoors, brings light, releases heraldic birds: a swallow, a hawk. Again, an anti-motet of sorts, to celebrate presence and consummation." (Cambon, *ibid.*, p. 167)

You've Given My Name to a Tree? (1949)

Despite its apparent simplicity, an exceptionally concentrated poem. The focus is the shared intimacy of two poets preoccupied with the loving task of naming each other and thereby naming their world. In the finale, Cambon (*ibid.*, p. 169) observes, "The poem achieves itself, by developing to culmination the initial icon, the tree . . . and the feminine addressee . . . 'speaks' a sheltering oak into vivid presence. . . . If, on one existential level, she communicates with the adoring speaker in creative dialectic, on another level she communes with the elemental creature, the inarticulate toad who emerges from an underworld of slime and decay without thereby becoming either monstrous or disgusting. . . . The bliss of cosmic and personal harmony is attained—an utterly rare development in Montale!—thanks to the girl, who ends up as the center of the cosmos, whose elements she controls, air having become her creative breath and fire responding to her presence." Mutually, the two lovers name each other, thereby becoming the single flame enfolding them. (Cf. "Incantation")

If They've Likened You . . . (1949)

An ecstatic but beautifully controlled hymn, clearly religious in feeling, in celebration of the Vixen, first described as the world ("they") perceives her, and then as she manifests herself to the private eyes of her poet-lover, her one "true believer." Formally, the poem is an antiphonal pendant to "The Eel," M.'s dithyramb to Clizia. Each poem is thirty lines long; each consists of a single breathless musical period linked by intricate assonance and slant, or "buried" rhymes. "The Eel" asks a rhetorical question; "If They've Likened You . . ." is a conditional sentence whose protasis ("If . . .") conveys the splendor and range of the Vixen's animal vitality, and whose apodosis ("they did it because they were blind . . .") contains the poet's proclamation of her spiritual nature.

The protasis is a rhetorical fiction—nobody, I suppose, has actually slandered the Vixen—or hyperbolic device designed to express her many-sidedness and the sheer breathtaking beauty of her carnal nature. As in "For Album," she is not one animal but many, a composite of loping marelike grace, feral shyness, devouring passion, seductive animal cunning, and a strange predator, capable of astonishing gentleness combined with the power to deal a fatal shock. A "living oxymoron," Cambon