

The Day of the Verb

a story by

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(English translation by Wendy Piemonte)

It happened all of a sudden. In a small town in the Veneto countryside, Toni walked into the pub in front of the church: “Hey, Bepi, gimme a drop of red (wine)”, he said to his friend behind the counter.

This is what his brain had told him to say. What actually happened was that the words came out of his mouth back to front. So what the owner heard was: “yeH, ipeB emmig a pord fo der”.

Bepi, who of course knew what his friend was like, soon realised that Toni was already a little tipsy, even though it was only seven in the morning, and served him the usual wine.

Things went differently in church where the old priest started the sermon with two categorical statements:

“Dear brothers and sisters, the devil is among us. Religion has come to an end.” He was contradicting himself here, because if there was no religion, there could be no evil spirit either.

But what the faithful heard was:

“raeD srehtorb dna sretsis, eht lived si gnoma su. noigileR sah emoc ot na dne”.

Although they knew their priest well, those present obviously couldn't understand anything and suspected that he had poured grappa into the chalice instead of wine.

In that same moment, in a small town in the deep South, young Gennariello was saying to his beloved Concettina:

“I love you very much and would like to kiss you”.

This is how the passionate declaration of love reached the ears of the astonished girl:

“I evol uoy yrev hcum dna dluow ekil ot ssik uoy ”.

Concettina was a kind and patient girl, but could not stand the idea of marrying an inconsiderate person who couldn't even get the word *did* right. She turned her back on him and walked off indignantly, leaving her poor boyfriend totally discouraged.

Similar events were occurring everywhere. In the best of cases, people were flabbergasted. In the worst, riots broke out that even the police could not control, because they couldn't make themselves understood by the bullies, but neither could the police understand each other. So, even the police soon started punching each other.

The problem was simply that people were thinking right, but talking wrong.

At that time, the world was already split in two, the believers on one side and the atheists on the other. The believers were such believers that they would have said that God existed even if they had a proven demonstration that he didn't. Likewise, the atheists were such atheists that they would have denied the existence of God even if he had openly revealed himself in all his immense, radiant and terrifying might.

There were no compromises, nor were they allowed. The only thing the two opposing factions agreed upon was that there could be no third ways.

The sole and undisputed leader of the believers, their beacon and their absolute certainty, was St. Peraindio¹. He had been unanimously elected Supreme Dictator at a general meeting of the Congregation of the Faithful. He had defeated high-calibre adversaries, theologians who could demonstrate how God could even square the circle, Jesuits who could certify the existence of Jesus with mathematical equations, Dominican friars who had written a Gospel that was truer than those of John, Luke, Matthew and Mark, thaumaturges who performed miracles that were more miraculous than those of the Saviour. He had simply won with a speech that had become the Verb of the believers: “Vote for me, because God needs me. If he needs me, then he exists because I exist. If God needs me, he doesn’t need others. If the others want to step forward to replace me, this means they want to defy God’s will and deserve the stake for this”.

Simply put, when he spoke about Savonarola, St. Peraindio called him a “school girl”.

Yet the events that we referred to at the beginning managed to undermine his unshakeable certainties. He had called a special meeting in order to talk about the confusion being generated on Earth. Nobody could understand anything or anybody any longer. It was certainly the devil’s doing. It couldn’t be God’s doing. God is order and creates order. Satan is the creator of disorder. It was a matter of trying to find out how to put an end to chaos, otherwise the adversaries on the other side of the world would have rolled over in laughter.

“My dear brethren” he began. And what the onlookers understood was: “yM raed nerhterb”. They immediately became restless. Meaningless words poured out of the mouth of the Sole and Supreme Guide. The devil had definitely taken the place of God. A murmuring came from the audience. As St. Peraindio continued his dissertation, the murmuring became loud

¹ Translator’s note: English “St. Peraindio” = Italian “Sperandio” (hope in

grumbling, verbal protests became clearer but were incomprehensible for the already-noted reason, gestures became rather vulgar. From the back of the room came the worst of insults for a believer: Atheist!, which, of course, reached the ears of St. Peraindio under the form of: tsiehtA!

St. Peraindio growing more and more fervent before these people who didn't want to listen to him anymore, could only ask himself: "What is this disorder? It certainly can't be the work of the devil because God would not let his faithful fall victims to this. Ever since the world has existed, the devil has found fertile ground where the atheists stand. But this cannot be God's will either, because God is order and generates order. So, this means I have to admit that God doesn't exist, because of the disorder".

And this is what he said to the audience who was no longer listening to the voice of a God who didn't exist.

The other half of the world wasn't any better off. Here, the people were governed by a President. Until a few years before, the reins of command had been held by an illuminated person MsBeliever² (he was called this way because he had kept his English mother's surname), who, however, had been dishonourably removed following the election of A. Teo³.

A voter had asked the candidate who was hoping to take over from MsBeliever: "But do you believe in something?".

And the reply was: "No, I don't believe in anything. I don't even believe that I don't believe".

Well, he didn't even believe his atheism. That was it. He was unanimously elected. He was even voted by his adversary, who was immediately exiled to the no man's land that divided the two worlds.

God).

² Translator's note: English "MsBeliever" = Italian "Miss Credente" (non-believer)

³ Translator's note: English "A.Teo" = Italian "Ateo" (atheist)

A. Teo called a general meeting of his fellow citizens. The hour of victory had finally come. Where was the God of the believers if disorder had been sown in their field? He obviously didn't exist. If he had really existed, the disorder that he himself had permitted would have been the most crystal clear demonstration of his non existence. However, the reason that had governed atheist thought since the mists of time led him to deduct, by means of indisputable scientific demonstrations, that order, originating from primordial chaos, had then constantly reproduced itself, albeit haphazardly. Then, how could one explain the sudden burst of disorder in the atheist field as well? It could only be the hand of that irrational being called God who had his supporters in the other half of the world. And he enunciated these thoughts to his followers who, upon receiving the messages back to front, couldn't understand anything at all. At the start, they got a little nervous, then reacted more blatantly. Cushions flew into the air, shoes and other heavier dangerous objects hit the stage. At the end, from the back of the room came the worst of insults for an atheist: Believer!, which naturally resounded in the ears of A. Teo in the form of reveileB!

At this point, with people reasoning upside down just like they were talking, each side passed over to the other side. So everything went back to how it was before, because with the situation reversing, the words straightened themselves out.