

Davinia Hamilton

For Gallantry (1942)

self-translated from Maltese by the poet

from the field you'd have seen it / the plane nosing the clouds / flashing silver / a bright smile / shattering the torpor of the morning / the siren didn't sound / i read the reports later / it was an attack with no warning / it was an ordinary morning in ghajnsielem / ġuzeppi, my grandfather, aged 12, closed his eyes again, resisting the day / lulled by the music of breakfast / the kettle skirled / the teaspoon jangled / soon his mother would be backlit in the door frame, corpulent and loud, always smelling of flour with an apron stretched over the bowl of her belly, sucking her teeth / *sar il-hin* / already a pie cooling on the wire tray / for now, she buttered bread and sprinkled sugar into tea cups / the steel bird gave a languid purr / the missile whistled / his mother looked up / from the field you'd have seen it / quick / inside /

/ the moment exploded before the bomb did / the children momentarily / animal foreknowing / hairs stood on end / then came the blast / then came the fire / the world a blazing red / five of them dead / ġuzeppi displaced / alive in the ruins / everything changes / in the blink of an eye / before the milk can be stirred in / the family leaves the village / his father can no longer bear / the cedar trees / the smell of a fresh catch / moves them to the city / goes to bed early / the children pretend they cannot hear when he sobs late into the night / george / the king / gives us a cross bearing his name / *for gallantry* / ġuzeppi has to look up the word / *to the island fortress of malta* / the most bombed place on earth / *to bear witness* / there are children begging for scraps in the streets / *to a heroism and devotion* / fifteen thousand tonnes of death / *we will endure* / the governor says / pins the cross to the flag / in english.

Davinia Hamilton

For Gallantry (1942)

mill-ghalqa kont tarah / l-ajruplan ixammem l-ishab / ileqq, fiddi / jitbissem jitkerrah / itajjar in-nghas ta' filghodu / is-sirena m'ghamlitx hoss / qrajthom ir-rapporti / kienet ghodwa ordinarja l-ghajnsielem / ġuzeppi, nannuwi, ta' 12-il sena, jerga jaghlaq ghajnejh, jirrezisti l-ġurnata / imhannen mill-mużika tal-kolazzjon / il-kitla tkanta / il-kuċċarina ċċekċek / daqt ommu ha tidher fil-bieba, imlahhma u b'lehinha gholi, dejjem tinxtamm ta' dqi, bil-fardal mgebbbed mal-iskutella ta' żaqqa, issoff snienha / *sar il-hin* / u diġà hemm torta tiksah fit-tieqa / ghalissa, tidlek il-hobż bil-butir u tbexx iz-zokkor fil-kikkri / l-ghasfur tal-azzar iqarqar / issaffar il-missila / omm ġuzeppi thares 'il fuq / mill-ghalqa kont tarah / isa / gewwa /

/ il-mument jisplodi qabel ma tisplodi l-arma / it-tfal, ghal mument / il-ġisem qisu jaf / kollha xewk xewk / imbaghad in-nar / imbaghad il-vampa / id-dinja huġġieġa hamra / hamsa mejtin / ġuzeppi haj, mirdum / jinbidel kollox f'hakka t'ghajn / x'hela dik / jitolqu kollha mir-rahal / mis-sierhom ma jiflahx aktar / is-siġar taċ-ċedru / ir-riha ta' qabda hut / imorru l-belt / jorqdu kmieni / it-tfal taparsi ma jisimghuhx jibki tard fid-dlam / ġorg / ir-re / jaghtina salib b'ismu / *for gallantry* / ġuzeppi jfittixha l-kelma / *to the island fortress of malta* / il-ġzira saret sejjieħ / *to bear witness* / it-tfal *nix mangiare* jittalbu ghal kisra hobż fit-triq / *to a heroism and devotion* / hmistax-il elf tunnellata mewt / *we will endure* / jghid il-gvernatur / iwaħħal is-salib mal-bandiera / bl-ingliż.