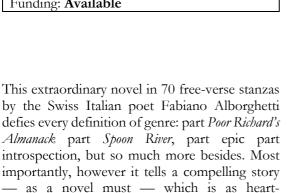
Author: Fabiano Alborghetti
Title in Italian: Maiser
Working Title: Maiser the Corn Man
Publisher: Marcos y Marcos
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makes you hold your breath right to the very end. It is the story of "An ordinary man, Bruno, like others perhaps/handsome, too. His beginning is here and/now: the collective history of an ordinary man/in post-war years of famine/and fatigue."

wrenching and life-affirming as nature itself, and

With a poet's sleight of hand, one man's story is transformed into a social history of the thankless toil of immigrant Italian sharecroppers, who moved to Canton Ticino after the war and met with harsher conditions than they had left behind, exacerbated by social isolation and stigma, expressed in the insult "Corn Man."

At the same time, however, the novel in free verse is a glorious celebration of humanity against all odds, of the generosity of the land even when there are too many mouths to feed, of the colors and chiaroscuros of the passing seasons, of everyday implements and their almost miraculous applications, of the sounds and smells of the countryside and of the blood, sweat and tears poured there for generations.

It is no chance that the novel has been dramatized for Italian Swiss Radio (RSI, Rete Due). The pace of the poetry and the driving force of the story



transports us to another dimension in time, space, and literary intensity.

Numerous reviews in the Swiss and Italian press, including *Corriere della Sera* and *Avvenire*, in Italy and Corriere del Ticino and *Il Giornale del Popolo* in Switzerland, have acclaimed the book as a literary monument to Italian emigrants.

Maiser won Pro Helvetia Literary Funding and on publication was awarded the most prestigious literary prize in the entire Confederation: the 2018 Swiss Literature Prize. Alborghetti was the recipient of the UBS Culture 2020 Foundation Prize and the Landis & Gyr 2020 Foundation Grant

Maiser was among the "Six Unmissable Swiss Books" to be translated for Pro Helvetia (the Swiss Ministry of Culture) and was included in the "CH Series" of the CH Foundation for Confederal Collaboration, which promotes the translation of selected Swiss works into the other languages of the Confederation. Maiser has been translated into German (Limmat Verlag, Zurich, tr. Maja Pflug, October 2020); the French translation is underway (Editions d'en bas, Lausanne, tr. Christophe Mileschi).

**Fabiano Alborghetti** is a leading intellectual in Italian Switzerland and one of its foremost poets. He is President of the *Casa della Letteratura per la Svizzera italiana*. (www.fabianoalborghetti.ch)

**Clarissa Botsford** is a literary translator (www.clarissabotsford.com)

Pro Helvetia has undertaken to fully fund the English translation of this remarkable work.

## Sample Translation of Maiser the Corn Man Part One, Stanza I, 1948-1952

An ordinary man, Bruno, like others perhaps, handsome, too. His beginning is here and now: the collective history of an ordinary man in post-war years of famine

and fatigue.

A numerous family like others at the time Bruno the middle boy of eight First Teresa Fedele Aurelio and Vittoria then Nerio Nerina and baby Urbano. Margherita his mother a name like a trodden field daisy His father, Zefferino, a breeze of a name for a tyrant. Born before the century turned just in time to fight the Great War holed up on a karst outcrop or so they said when he returned in one piece

a man you need permission to speak to whom you only address with respect

Frugal figures

forged from back breaking and blisters living hand to mouth off the land sharecropping wheat vines animals the sky weighing the land giving thick skin nails fingers the day's sweat rinsed off in a chipped tub a glimmer of light on the mystery that is a body, donning the same clothes again, the next day and the next for months. A reminder of the struggle stench and sweat of skin branded by fire the rough hue of exposed pigment now burnt now bled dry or cracked

and those hands

massacred by tools, by callouses and toil by the landowner's demands or the season's, the many seasons, mean, incessant and always severe. Lashing limbs advancing step by step scythe in hand harvesting the vibrantly ripe grain that has grown into gold, a scratchy scorching patchwork lovingly stitched each year

hollering from bushel to bushel on hearing the church bell strike midday, remembering the hunger.

Then

in the shade of a meal no talking, mouths full eyes down digging into the mess tin cornmeal chestnuts and wedges of cheese dry bread soaked in wine best with a hard crust to keep your teeth strong. Sitting quietly in the shade relieved your punishment is paid a nap to while away the hottest hours the relentless rays sapping your strength until you are spent.

You sleep

snagged in the grass, hours serenaded by the screeching of cicadas.

Born again

but it's back to work
as long as there's light until the light changes
stipples stretches and sets
a pink-red shimmering aslant
casting soft shadows returning from the fields
tools on shoulders the dogs running ahead
animal pleasure sniffing and zigzagging
over the crest, picking up
dry sticks in the ditches
to store as kindling for the fire.
The village a silhouette, like blackened rock
a levigated sky with no sign of rain.

Mezzopicchio is right there

The same old house: for generations its bowels bathed in sunlight warming the walls, olive trees, yard animals measuring in steps the spans of the chicken coop. Then it's time for dinner,
In the last of the light with no lamps on to scrimp and save, at best there's a flicker from the fireplace in the kitchen, the pot hanging indolently from a chain an economy of gestures a glowing rosary of sparks and embers.

The family gathers

crowded together
hale and hearty the pack of them, looking alike
despite the extremes, despite their
extreme tiredness.
In the air the smell of boiled bone broth
cornmeal reheated in yesterday's grease.
Our Father thank you for the food on our table

with Amen heralding the breaking of bread Later as they smoke narrow strips of tobacco the air becomes thick the densest clouds dissolve in the dying embers. Then everything goes quiet.