

Face to Face/Faccia a Faccia

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Edited by

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P U B L I S H I N G

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Edited by Maria Cristina Cignatta

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For Libero and Elisa, who made it all possible.

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INTRODUCTION

The short story writers included in this anthology are representative of the various Italian geographical regions, ranging from the north of Italy: Piedmont (Ginzburg, Pavese and Soldati) and the Emilia-Romagna region (Colombi Guidotti and Guareschi), to central Italy: Tuscany (Tozzi), the Abruzzi region (D'Annunzio) and Lazio, including Rome (Moravia) and finally to the south and major islands: Sicily (Pirandello and Verga) and Sardinia (Deledda). Some of the stories even incorporate dialogue written in the local dialect, notably Verga's *La lupa* (Sicilian), D'Annunzio's *La fine di Candia* (dialect of Pescara), Deledda's *Fiaba* (Sardinian), and Soldati's *Una donna comprensiva*, where Liana's dialogues offer us a taste of Istrian dialect.

The stories themselves span almost a whole century, from 1880 (marking the publication of Verga's *La lupa*) to 1971 (publication of Soldati's *Una donna comprensiva*). They are presented in chronological order of publication, although they can be read in any order, given that each *racconto* is self-contained. The learner embarking on the study of Italian language and literature might find it more profitable to begin with more "approachable" authors such as Colombi Guidotti, Ginzburg, Guareschi and Moravia, then move on to Pavese and Soldati and finally tackle the more challenging and problematic writers such as D'Annunzio, Deledda, Pirandello, Tozzi and Verga.

The eleven writers chosen, although all established figures on the Italian literary scene, are by no means exhaustive. Many excellent writers such as Alvaro, Arpino, Bassani, Buzzati, Calvino, Comisso, Gadda, Morante, Ortese, Pratolini, Romano, Sciascia, Svevo and Vittorini have had to be excluded for deliberate reasons. To begin with, some of their stories are far too lengthy and intricate to be included in this brief overview of Italian short story writers. Secondly, some stories have been excluded *a priori*, on the grounds that they do not lend themselves to the *leitmotif* I have chosen for the anthology: that of a woman as the central character (D'Annunzio's *Candia*, the Princess in Deledda's fairy-tale, Pirandello's *Mommìna*, *gnà Pina* in Verga's story, etc.). Two of the writers, notably Grazia Deledda and Natalia Ginzburg, are themselves women writing about women: the former boasts the singular merit of being the only Italian woman writer to have been awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in the 20th century.

Curiously enough, women authors are quantitatively scarce in Italian literature but qualitatively superlative. Finally, in the narrowing down process, a certain amount of preference on my part has come into play. For this reason alone, I have chosen to include not one but two of Federigo Tozzi's *novelle*.

Each story is accompanied by brief biographical notes on the writer's life and literary achievements, as well as some information regarding the context in which the story was written and a few relevant features of theme and content.

The Italian texts are original and unabridged, with parallel English translations. The anthology has a dual target readership. First, it is destined for the reader with an interest in modern Italian literature but who does not necessarily possess a working knowledge of Italian. With this purpose in mind, although I have attempted to adhere as closely as possible to the Italian text in my translation, the emphasis has been placed on readability, so as to enable the reader with little or no familiarity with the Italian language to read the stories directly in English for their own intrinsic value. Secondly, the collection has also been tailored to suit the needs of the reader who already possesses some knowledge of the Italian language and is seeking to improve it through further reading. In this case, the English translation can be read side by side with the Italian text and frequent reference can be made to the latter. The South African poet Roy Campbell (1901-57) once commented, "*Translations (like wives) are seldom faithful if they are in the least attractive.*" I would like to think that the translation method I have adopted complies with a happy combination of both.

It is common knowledge that literature provides us with a vast source of materials which, if put to profitable use, can be an indispensable and, indeed, highly motivating resource for stimulating language learning. Approaching a literary text can be a challenging and sometimes daunting experience for the neophyte linguist, who finds him/herself faced with the hard task of interpreting a piece of writing alien to him/her from the linguistic and cultural point of view. For this reason, it is of paramount importance to choose appropriate literary texts to accompany the learner in the early stages. The short story lends itself admirably to this purpose; by virtue of its brevity and condensation, as well as allowing for a relatively rapid decoding process, it discourages boredom and ultimately rewards the reader with a great sense of achievement after having succeeded in "ploughing through a whole text". The indissoluble link between language and literature has been emphasized by Ezra Pound, who observed that

literature is “*simply language charged with meaning to the utmost possible degree.*”

Therefore, the anthology operates on two levels. The first aims to promote effective language acquisition by offering the learner as wide a spectrum as possible of language and styles. Alongside Tozzi’s classical Tuscan, the reader will have the opportunity to taste the simple picturesque urban language of Rome used so effectively by Moravia; parallel to the lyrical prose charged with symbolism of Deledda’s “fairy-tale with a difference”, we are faced with stark reality in Ginzburg’s simple, crisp, anti-rhetorical style. On another level, the stories also aim to provide learners of Italian with some insight into Italian life, customs and culture. The characters described in the stories not only come from different geographical areas and represent different moments in the history of Italy, but they reflect different cultural backgrounds and social strata. In this way, it is hoped that the reader will be encouraged to widen his/her outlook by being made to identify and respond to different situations.

Finally, I hope that the collection will make readers aware of the rich variety of literary intents and styles offered by late 19th- and 20th-century Italian short story writers and stimulate further interest in Italian literature.

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LA LUPA:
THE SHE-WOLF
GIOVANNI VERGA



Era alta, magra, aveva soltanto un seno fermo e vigoroso da bruna - e pure non era più giovane - era pallida come se avesse sempre addosso la malaria, e su quel pallore due occhi grandi così, e delle labbra fresche e rosse, che vi mangiavano.

Al villaggio la chiamavano *la Lupa* perché non era sazia giammai - di nulla. Le donne si facevano la croce quando la vedevano passare, sola come una cagnaccia, con quell'andare randagio e sospettoso della lupa affamata; ella si spolpava i loro figliuoli e i loro mariti in un batter d'occhio, con le sue labbra rosse, e se li tirava dietro alla gonnella solamente a guardarli con quegli occhi da satanasso, fossero stati davanti all'altare di Santa Agrippina. Per fortuna *la Lupa* non veniva mai in chiesa, né a Pasqua, né a Natale, né per ascoltar messa, né per confessarsi. Padre Angiolino di Santa Maria di Gesù, un vero servo di Dio, aveva persa l'anima per lei.

Maricchia, poveretta, buona e brava ragazza, piangeva di nascosto, perché era la figlia della *Lupa*, e nessuno l'avrebbe tolta in moglie, sebbene ci avesse la sua bella roba nel cassettone, e la sua buona terra al sole, come ogni altra ragazza del villaggio.

Una volta *la Lupa* si innamorò di un bel giovane che era tornato da soldato, e mieteva il fieno con lei nelle chiuse del notaro; ma proprio quello che si dice innamorarsi, sentirsene ardere le carni sotto al fustagno del corpetto, e provare, fissandolo negli occhi, la sete che si ha nelle ore calde di giugno, in fondo alla pianura. Ma lui seguiva a mietere tranquillamente col naso sui manipoli, e le diceva: - O che avete, gnà Pina? - Nei campi immensi, dove scoppiettava soltanto il volo dei grilli, quando il sole batteva a piombo, *la Lupa* affastellava manipoli su manipoli, e covoni su covoni, senza stancarsi mai, senza rizzarsi un momento sulla vita, senza accostare le labbra al fiasco, pur di stare sempre alle calcagna di Nanni, che mieteva e mieteva, e le domandava di quando in quando:

- Che volete, gnà Pina?

Una sera ella glielo disse, mentre gli uomini sonnecchiavano nell'aia, stanchi della lunga giornata, ed i cani uggolavano per la vasta campagna nera: - Te voglio! Te che sei bello come il sole, e dolce come il miele. Voglio te!

- Ed io invece voglio vostra figlia, che è zitella - rispose Nanni ridendo.

La Lupa si cacciò le mani nei capelli, grattandosi le tempie senza dir parola, e se ne andò; né più comparve nell'aia. Ma in ottobre rivide Nanni, al tempo che cavavano l'olio, perché egli lavorava accanto alla sua casa, e lo scricchiolio del torchio non la faceva dormire tutta notte.

- Prendi il sacco delle olive, - disse alla figliuola - e vieni con me.

Nanni spingeva con la pala le olive sotto la macina, e gridava «Ohi!»

She was tall and lean and, although no longer in her prime, she had the firm, well-rounded breasts of a brunette. She was pale-it was as if she had malaria forever hanging over her-and on top of that pale skin were two huge round eyes and two fresh red lips that looked as if they would literally devour you.

In the village she was known by the name of "The She-Wolf", because nothing could satiate her appetites and desires. The women were in the habit of making the sign of the cross whenever they saw her coming, lone as a stray bitch, with the wandering, wary step of a ravenous she-wolf; she would snaffle their sons and husbands in next to no time with those red lips of hers, and she would have them trailing behind her skirts just by gazing at them with her devilish eyes - even if they had been standing in front of the altar in the Church of Santa Agrippina! Luckily the She-Wolf herself never set foot inside the church, either at Easter, or at Christmas, or at any other time to hear Mass or go to confession. Father Angiolino of the Church of Santa Maria di Gesù, a true servant of God, had lost his soul over her.

Maricchia, a kind, good-natured girl, used to shed tears in secret, because the poor girl was the She-Wolf's daughter and nobody would ever consider taking her for a wife, despite the fact that she had a fine trousseau laid out in her bottom drawer, as well as her nice patch of land in the sun, just like any other girl in the village.

Once the She-Wolf fell in love with a handsome young fellow who had come back from the army; he found himself haymaking alongside her in the notary's lands. For her it was Love in the true sense of the word, her flesh ardently burning with desire under her coarse fustian bodice and, as she gazed right into his eyes, she was overwhelmed by the sort of thirst that comes over you in the fields on a hot midsummer afternoon. For his part, he simply went on scything away, his eyes glued to the sheaves, and asked her: "What's troubling you, Ma Pina?" Over the great expanse of fields, where nothing could be heard except for the chirping of the crickets as they flew through the air, with the sun's rays beating straight down, the She-Wolf would tie up sheaf upon sheaf, bundle upon bundle, showing no sign of fatigue, without ever straightening up even for a moment, without ever putting her lips to the flask, just so long as she could be at Nanni's heels; as for him, he just went on scything away, and every now and then he asked:

"What d'you want, Ma Pina?"

One evening she told him exactly what she wanted, while the men, exhausted after a hard day's work, were dozing off on the threshing-floor, and the dogs were howling across the vast, black countryside. "It's *you* I

alla mula perché non si arrestasse. - La vuoi mia figlia Maricchia? - gli domandò la gnà Pina. - Cosa gli date a vostra figlia Maricchia? - rispose Nanni. - Essa ha la roba di suo padre, e dippiù io le do la mia casa; a me mi basterà che mi lasciate un cantuccio nella cucina, per stendervi un po' di pagliericcio. - Se è così se ne può parlare a Natale - disse Nanni.

Nanni era tutto unto e sudicio dell'olio e delle olive messe a fermentare, e Maricchia non lo voleva a nessun patto; ma sua madre l'afferrò pe' capelli, davanti al focolare, e le disse co' denti stretti:

- Se non lo pigli, ti ammazzo!

La Lupa era quasi malata, e la gente andava dicendo che il diavolo quando invecchia si fa eremita. Non andava più di qua e di là; non si metteva più sull'uscio, con quegli occhi da spiritata. Suo genero, quando ella glieli piantava in faccia, quegli occhi, si metteva a ridere, e cavava fuori l'abitino della Madonna per segnarsi. Maricchia stava in casa ad allattare i figliuoli, e sua madre andava nei campi, a lavorare cogli uomini, proprio come un uomo, a sarchiare, a zappare, e a governare le bestie, a potare le viti, fosse stato greco e levante di gennaio, oppure scirocco di agosto, allorquando i muli lasciavano cader la testa penzoloni, e gli uomini dormivano bocconi a ridosso del muro a tramontana. *In quell'ora fra vespero e nona, in cui non ne va in volta femmina buona*, la gnà Pina era la sola anima viva che si vedesse errare per la campagna, sui sassi infuocati delle viottole, fra le stoppie riarse dei campi immensi, che si perdevano nell'afa, lontan lontan, verso l'Etna nebbioso, dove il cielo si aggravava sull'orizzonte.

- Svègliati! - disse *la Lupa* a Nanni che dormiva nel fosso, accanto alla siepe polverosa, col capo fra le braccia. - Svègliati, che ti ho portato il vino per rinfrescarti la gola.

Nanni spalancò gli occhi imbambolati, tra veglia e sonno, trovandosela dinanzi ritta, pallida, col petto prepotente, e gli occhi neri come il carbone, e stese brancolando le mani.

- No! non ne va in volta femmina buona nell'ora fra vespero e nona! - singhiozzava Nanni, ricacciando la faccia contro l'erba secca del fossato, in fondo in fondo, colle unghie nei capelli. - Andatevene! andatevene! non ci venite più nell'aia!

Ella se ne andava infatti, *la Lupa*, riannodando le trecce superbe, guardando fisso dinanzi ai suoi passi nelle stoppie calde, cogli occhi neri come il carbone.

Ma nell'aia ci tornò delle altre volte, e Nanni non le disse nulla. Quando tardava a venire anzi, nell'ora fra vespero e nona, egli andava ad

want! You're as handsome as the morning star and as sweet as honey. *You're the one I want!*"

"But it's your daughter I want. She's not married," Nanni laughed.

The She-Wolf buried her hands in her hair, rubbing her temples without uttering a word and off she went; and she never showed her face in the farmyard again. However, she set eyes on Nanni once more in October, in the olive-crushing season, because he was working next door to her house, and the creaking of the olive-press was keeping her awake all night.

"Pick up that sack of olives," she told her daughter, "and come with me."

Nanni was shovelling the olives under the press and shouting out "Giddap!" to the mule to keep it going. "So you want my daughter Maricchia, do you?" Ma Pina asked him. "What have you got to offer her?" replied Nanni. "Everything her father left her, and on top of that, she can have my house; as far as I'm concerned, I'll make do with a straw mattress in a corner of the kitchen." "If that's the case then, we can talk things over at Christmas," said Nanni.

Nanni was all greasy and filthy from the oil and fermenting olives and Maricchia wanted nothing to do with him. But her mother grabbed her by the hair in front of the fireplace and said, gritting her teeth:

"If you turn him down, I'll wring your neck!"

The She-Wolf was looking sickly and people went round saying that "the Devil goes into hiding in his old age". She stopped wandering around the village; she never stood on her doorstep any more, flashing those devilish eyes of hers. As for her son-in-law, whenever she fixed those eyes of hers upon him, he would burst out laughing in her face and take out the Virgin Mary's scapular to bless himself with. Maricchia would stay indoors breastfeeding her children, while her mother went off to work with the men in the fields. She would do everything a man did - weeding, hoeing, seeing to the animals, pruning the vines - whether there was a north-east wind or east wind blowing in January or a sultry south-east wind in August, and she would still be working long after the mules had let their heads droop with exhaustion, and after the men had fallen asleep face downwards against the north-wall. *At that hour, twixt vespers and nones, when no God-fearing woman should go roaming alone*, Ma Pina was the only living soul to be seen wandering through the countryside on the sunbaked stones along the footpaths or amid the scorched stubble in the boundless fields, which became hazier and hazier in the sultry heat, far, far away, towards Mount Etna shrouded in mist, where the sky was weighing down on the horizon.

aspettarla in cima alla viottola bianca e deserta, col sudore sulla fronte; e dopo si cacciava le mani nei capelli, e le ripeteva ogni volta!

- Andatevene! andatevene! Non ci tornate più nell'aia!

Maricchia piangeva notte e giorno, e alla madre le piantava in faccia gli occhi ardenti di lagrime e di gelosia, come una lupacchiotta anch'essa, allorché la vedeva tornare da' campi pallida e muta ogni volta.

- Scellerata! - le diceva. - Mamma scellerata!

- Taci!

- Ladra! ladra!

- Taci!

- Andrò dal brigadiere, andrò!

- Vacci!

E ci andò davvero, coi figli in collo, senza temere di nulla, e senza versare una lagrima, come una pazza, perché adesso amava anche lei quel marito che le avevano dato per forza, unto e sudicio delle olive messe a fermentare.

Il brigadiere fece chiamare Nanni; lo minacciò sin della galera e della forca. Nanni si diede a singhiozzare ed a strapparsi i capelli; non negò nulla, non tentò di scolarsi.

- E' la tentazione! - diceva - è la tentazione dell'inferno!

Si buttò ai piedi del brigadiere supplicandolo di mandarlo in galera.

- Per carità, signor brigadiere, levatemi da questo inferno! fatemi ammazzare, mandatemi in prigione; non me la lasciate veder più, mai! mai!

- No! - rispose invece *la Lupa* al brigadiere - Io mi son riserbato un cantuccio della cucina per dormirvi, quando gli ho dato la mia casa in dote. La casa è mia. Non voglio andarmene.

Poco dopo, Nanni s'ebbe nel petto un calcio dal mulo, e fu per morire; ma il parroco ricusò di portargli il Signore se *la Lupa* non usciva di casa. *La Lupa* se ne andò, e suo genero allora si poté preparare ad andarsene anche lui da buon cristiano; si confessò e comunicò con tali segni di pentimento e di contrizione che tutti i vicini e i curiosi piangevano davanti al letto del moribondo. E meglio sarebbe stato per lui che fosse morto in quel giorno; prima che il diavolo tornasse a tentarlo e a ficcarglisi nell'anima e nel corpo quando fu guarito.

- Lasciatemi stare! - diceva alla *Lupa* - per carità, lasciatemi in pace! Io ho visto la morte cogli occhi! La povera Maricchia non fa che disperarsi. Ora tutto il paese lo sa! Quando non vi vedo è meglio per voi e per me...

Ed avrebbe voluto strapparsi gli occhi per non vedere quelli della *Lupa*, che quando gli si ficcavano ne' suoi gli facevano perdere l'anima ed il corpo. Non sapeva più che fare per svincolarsi dall'incantesimo. Pagò delle messe alle anime del Purgatorio, e andò a chiedere aiuto al parroco e

“Wake up!” cried the She-Wolf to Nanni, who was lying asleep, with his head resting between his arms, in the ditch alongside the dusty hedgerow. “Wake up, I’ve brought some wine to quench your thirst.”

Nanni, who was still half asleep, opened his eyes wide with astonishment to find her standing there in front of him, with that pale skin, those overbearing breasts and those eyes as black as coal, and he stretched out his hands gropingly.

“No! No God-fearing woman goes roaming alone between the hours of vespers and nones!” Nanni sobbed and, clutching at his hair with his nails, he thrust his face against the dry grass at the very bottom of the ditch. “Go away! Go away! Don’t show your face in the farmyard ever again!”

And indeed the She-Wolf did go away, twisting her proud tresses around her head again, staring ahead at her footsteps in the hot stubble, with those eyes as black as coal.

Yet she did return to the farmyard, and more than once, and Nanni made no objection. On the contrary, whenever she was a long time coming, in the hours between vespers and nones, he would go and wait for her at the top of the white, deserted footpath, his forehead dripping with sweat; then he would bury his hands in his hair and repeat every time:

“Away with you! Away with you! Don’t show your face in the farmyard ever again!”

Maricchia wept day and night and glared at her mother, her eyes blazing with tears and jealousy, just like a wolf-cub herself, every time she saw her returning, pale and silent, from the fields.

“You wicked, evil mother!” she repeated, “Evil slut of a mother!”

“Shut up!”

“Husband snatcher!”

“Shut up!”

“I’ll go and have a talk to the Sergeant, see if I won’t!”

“Go ahead!”

And so she did, with her babies in her arms, fearing nothing and without shedding a single tear, like a woman possessed, because she, too, now loved that husband that had been forced upon her, all greasy and filthy from the fermenting olives.

The Sergeant sent for Nanni; he even threatened him with imprisonment and the gallows. Nanni took to sobbing and tearing his hair; he denied nothing, nor did he make any attempt to prove his innocence.

“She’s a temptress,” he cried, “she’s been sent by the Devil!”

He threw himself at the Sergeant’s feet, pleading with him to send him to prison.

“For Heaven’s sake, Sergeant, save me from this Hell! Have me

al brigadiere. A Pasqua andò a confessarsi, e fece pubblicamente sei palmi di lingua a strasciconi sui ciottoli del sacrato innanzi alla chiesa, in penitenza - e poi, come *la Lupa* tornava a tentarlo:

- Sentite! - le disse - non ci venite più nell'aia, perché se tornate a cercarmi, com'è vero Iddio, vi ammazzo!

- Ammazzami, - rispose *la Lupa* - ché non me ne importa; ma senza di te non voglio starci.

Ei come la scorre da lontano, in mezzo a' seminati verdi, lasciò di zappare la vigna, e andò a staccare la scure dall'olmo. *La Lupa* lo vide venire, pallido e stralunato, colla scure che luccicava al sole, e non si arretrò di un sol passo, non chinò gli occhi, seguì ad andargli incontro, con le mani piene di manipoli di papaveri rossi, e mangiandoselo con gli occhi neri. - Ah! malanno all'anima vostra! - balbettò Nanni.

hanged, have me locked up, but never let me see her face ever again! Ever!"

"No," was the She-Wolf's reply to the Sergeant, "I made my bed in a corner of the kitchen when I gave them my house as a dowry. The house is mine. I've no intention of leaving it."

Not long after, Nanni got kicked in the chest by the mule and was on his deathbed, but the priest agreed to bring him Holy Communion only on the condition that the She-Wolf left the house. The She-Wolf went out and so her son-in-law was able to make the necessary preparations to take his leave of the world as a good Christian; he made his confession and received Holy Communion with such a genuine show of repentance and contrition that all the neighbours and curious onlookers were in tears at the foot of the dying man's bed. And, indeed, he would have been better off if he had died that very day - before the Devil could return to tempt him and take possession of both his body and soul the minute he was feeling better.

"Leave me in peace!" he said to the She-Wolf, "For Heaven's sake, leave me in peace! I've come face to face with death! Poor Maricchia does nothing but cry her eyes out. It's the talk of the village! When I don't see you, I'm better off and so are you ..."

He would sooner have plucked his eyes out than see those of the She-Wolf, which made him surrender body and soul when they glared at him. He had lost all his willpower to free himself from her spell. He had Masses said for the souls in Purgatory and sought help from the priest and Sergeant. At Easter he went to confession and did penance in public by dragging his tongue over the cobblestones on the church doorstep. Then, as the She-Wolf returned to torment him:

"Listen to me!" he said. "Keep clear of the farmyard, because if you come looking for me again, as true as there's a God in Heaven, I'll kill you!"

"Kill me then," answered the She-Wolf, "I couldn't care less. I can't live without you."

And, as he spotted her from a distance, amid the green fields, he stopped digging around the vines and went to remove the axe from the elm-tree. The She-Wolf watched him as he approached her, pale-faced and in a frenzy, his axe glittering in the sun, and she did not retreat one single step, nor did she lower her gaze, but continued walking towards him, clutching bunches of red poppies in her hands and devouring him all the while with her coal-black eyes. "Ah!" stammered Nanni, "A curse on your soul!"

Giovanni Verga (Catania 1840-Catania 1922)

Italian novelist, short story writer and playwright. He was born in Catania (Sicily) in 1840 into a landowning family. He abandoned his literature studies at Catania University and, after a few unsuccessful attempts at journalism and the poor reception of his early patriotic novels (*Amore e patria*, written between 1856 and 1857 but never published; *I carbonari della montagna*, published between 1861 and 1862 and *Sulle lagune*, which appeared in the Florentine magazine *La Nuova Europa* in 1863), he moved to Florence in 1865, where in 1871 he published his *Storia di una capinera*, a slender volume of pathos in epistolary form. This work was highly successful and was subsequently hailed as a symbol of the “condizione femminile”.

His novels can be classified according to two distinct periods. The *prima maniera*, or early period, (1866-1875) marks the publication of a series of fashionable romances such as *Una peccatrice*; *Eva*; *Tigre reale* and *Eros*. The second period coincides with Verga's mature works, in which he deliberately moves away from the themes of artificial elegance, frivolity and adultery in the cities in favour of the description of a hitherto unexplored world populated by the underprivileged Sicilian peasants and their day-to-day struggle for existence. Verga's novella *Nedda - bozzetto siciliano*, published in 1874, seems to coincide with his “conversion” and marks a fundamental stepping-stone towards his artistic maturity. This new thematic “change of heart” will be further illustrated in the collection of short stories entitled *Vita dei campi* (1880), from which the short story *La lupa* has been taken, and in the very famous *Novelle rusticane* (1882), translated by D.H. Lawrence in 1952 with the title *Little Novels of Sicily*.

Nedda is also important because it represents one of Verga's first exercises in *Verismo* (the Italian Realist movement), theorized by Luigi Capuana, a close friend of Verga's and a critic of his works. His concept of realism is connected with that of Flaubert and Zola in that his primary interest lies in a rigorously objective psychological analysis of the individual in strict relation to the social context in which he or she lives. Verga's language tends towards the “unliterary”, far removed from the typical Italian rhetoric and eloquence on which he had been nurtured in his youth. He considers the real language spoken by the inhabitants of his microcosm as a fundamental means of making actions and feelings speak for themselves. Descriptions are kept to a bare minimum and effect is created through devices such as rhythm and dramatic dialogue. He remains detached from the narration of the events, limiting himself to creating a stylistically homogeneous artistic whole. It has been said of Verga that he

would have been a “*Verista*” even without any precise knowledge of the movement; in other words, this was a type of style that came naturally to him and was virtually independent of any school of thought or literary movement.

The decade 1880-1890 marked the climax of Verga’s fame as a writer; these were years of prolific literary creation but also years fraught with financial difficulties and family problems.

Certain themes in the *Vita dei campi* were later to be expanded in a complete cycle of novels entitled *I vinti* (a sort of Sicilian *Comédie Humaine*), of which only the first two were actually completed. The first, *I Malavoglia* (1881), translated by E. Mosbacher as *The House by the Medlar Tree* (1950), the story of poor fisherfolk living near the Sicilian seacoast, has generally been acclaimed as the greatest Italian novel, second only to Manzoni’s *I promessi sposi*. The second novel of the series, *Mastro-don Gesualdo* (translated by D.H. Lawrence in 1928) was published in 1889. It recounts the defeat of an ambitious and wealthy peasant who, like Mazzarò in *La roba* (*Novelle rusticane*), becomes estranged from his friends, neighbours and family as a result of his relentless search for material wealth. Thus the *Novelle rusticane* also herald certain themes, characters and situations that are later to recur in *Mastro-don Gesualdo*. On the strength of these two novels alone, Giovanni Verga is regarded as the greatest Italian writer of fiction, with the sole exception of Manzoni. The third novel in the series, *La duchessa di Leyra*, continues the account of the miserable life of don Gesualdo’s daughter. This novel, however, was never completed.

Verga’s dramatic and starkly realistic depiction of the life and customs of the Sicilian peasantry strongly influenced the realist approach of post-World War II writers and film-makers. *I malavoglia* is the source of Luchino Visconti’s film *La terra trema* (1948).

It is significant that Verga gained fame as a dramatist for his stage version of *Cavalleria rusticana* (1883), adapted as the libretto for Mascagni’s opera and translated by D.H. Lawrence in 1928, and *La lupa*. The female protagonist of *La lupa* is well known to the Italian public, thanks to the film of the same name directed by Gabriele Lavia (1996), starring Monica Gueritore as Pina and Raoul Bova as Nanni.

In 1893, Verga returned to Catania, where he spent the rest of his life. He was nominated Senator in 1920 at the age of eighty. He died two years later in his native city.

LA FINE DI CANDIA:
CANDIA MEETS HER END

GABRIELE D'ANNUNZIO



I

Donna Cristina Lamonica, tre giorni dopo il convito pasquale che in casa Lamonica soleva essere grande per tradizione e magnifico e frequente di convitati, numerava la biancheria e l'argenteria delle mense e con perfetto ordine riponeva ogni cosa nei canterani e nei forzieri pei conviti futuri.

Erano presenti, per solito, alla bisogna, e porgevano aiuto, la cameriera Maria Bisaccia e la lavandaia Candida Marcanda detta popolarmente Candia. Le vaste canestre ricolme di tele fini giacevano in fila sul pavimento. I vasellami di argento e gli altri strumenti da tavola rilucevano sopra una spasa; ed erano massicci, lavorati un po' rudemente da argentarii rustici, di forme quasi liturgiche, come sono tutti i vasellami che si trasmettono di generazione in generazione nelle ricche famiglie provinciali. Una fresca fragranza di bucato spandevasi nella stanza.

Candia prendeva dalle canestre i mantili, le tovaglie, le salviette; faceva esaminare alla signora la tela intatta; e porgeva via via ciascun capo a Maria che riempiva i tiratoi, mentre la signora spargeva negli interstizii un aroma e segnava nel libro la cifra. Candia era una femmina alta, ossuta, segaligna, di cinquant'anni; aveva la schiena un po' curvata dall'abitudine abituale del suo mestiere, le braccia molto lunghe, una testa d'uccello rapace sopra un collo di testuggine. Maria Bisaccia era un'ortonese, un po' pingue, di carnagione latteia, d'occhi chiarissimi; aveva la parlatura molle, e i gesti lenti e delicati come colei ch'era usa a esercitar le mani quasi sempre tra la pasta dolce, tra gli sciroppi, tra le conserve e tra le confetture. Donna Cristina, anche nativa di Ortona, educata nel monastero benedettino, era piccola di statura, con il busto un po' abbandonato sul davanti; aveva i capelli tendenti al rosso, la faccia sparsa di lentiggini, il naso lungo e grosso, i denti cattivi, gli occhi bellissimi e pudichi, somigliando un cherico vestito d'abiti muliebri.

Le tre donne attendevano all'opera con molta cura; e spendevano così gran parte del pomeriggio.

Ora, una volta, come Candia usciva con le canestre vuote, Donna Cristina numerando le posate trovò che mancava un cucchiaino.

- Maria! Maria! – ella gridò, con una specie di spavento.

- Conta! Manca 'na cucchiara... Conta tu!

- Ma come? Non può essere, signó – rispose Maria. – Mo' vediamo.

E si mise a riscontrare le posate, dicendo il numero ad alta voce. Donna Cristina guardava, scotendo il capo. L'argento tintinnava chiaramente.

- E' vero! – esclamò alla fine Maria, con un atto di disperazione. – E mo' che facciamo?

I

Three days after the Easter banquet in the Lamonica household—a traditionally lavish, extravagant feast with a large number of guests—Donna Cristina Lamonica was numbering the items of table linen and silverware and meticulously putting them away, piece by piece, in the chests of drawers and coffers to be stored for future occasions.

As usual, she was assisted in this task by Maria Bisaccia, the maid, and Candida Marcanda (known as Candia), the washer-woman. The huge baskets piled up with fine linen were lined up in a row on the floor. The silverware and other tableware were glittering on a tray; they were solid objects of coarse craftsmanship, the work of rustic silversmiths. They had almost liturgical forms, like all the pieces of silver plate handed down from one generation to the next in the well-to-do provincial families. The scent of freshly-laundered linen was wafting through the room.

Candia would take the tablecloths, napkins and serviettes out of the baskets and hand them over to the lady of the house for inspection; then she would pass them on, one by one, to Maria, who would fill the drawers, while the lady scattered fragrant herbs among the items of linen and entered the number in her notebook. Candia was a tall, skinny, wiry woman of fifty; her back was slightly curved due to all the bending involved in her job, she had very long arms, a head similar to that of a bird of prey and a neck like a tortoise's. Maria Bisaccia was a native of Ortona, plumpish, with a milky complexion and very light eyes; she had the soft manner of speech and the slow, delicate hand movements of a woman solely accustomed to handling pastry, fruit syrups, sauces and jams. Donna Cristina, who was also born in Ortona and educated in the Benedictine monastery, was of short stature, with rounded breasts, reddish hair, freckles all over her face, a big, long nose, bad teeth and very beautiful modest eyes; she was rather like an altar-boy clad in women's clothes.

The three women were scrupulously attending to their duties, which virtually took up the whole afternoon.

Now, on one of the occasions when Candia was leaving the room with the empty baskets, Donna Cristina happened to notice that there was a spoon missing, while she was numbering the cutlery.

"Maria! Maria!" she shrieked, almost terror-stricken.

"Count them! There's a spoon missing ... Count them yourself!"

"What do you mean? That's impossible, Ma'am," replied Maria. "Let's check."

So she set about checking each piece of cutlery, calling out each number in a loud voice. Donna Cristina was shaking her head as she watched. The silver made a soft tinkling noise.

Ella era sicura da ogni sospetto. Aveva dato prove di fedeltà e di onestà per quindici anni, in quella famiglia. Era venuta da Ortona insieme con Donna Cristina, all'epoca delle nozze, quasi facendo parte dell'appannaggio matrimoniale; ed oramai nella casa aveva acquistata una certa autorità, sotto la protezione della signora. Ella era piena di superstizioni religiose, devota al suo santo e al suo campanile, astutissima. Con la signora aveva stretto una specie di alleanza ostile contro tutte le cose di Pescara, e specialmente contro il santo dei Pescara. Ad ogni occasione nominava il paese natale, le bellezze e le ricchezze del paese natale, gli splendori della sua basilica, i tesori di San Tommaso, la magnificenza delle cerimonie ecclesiastiche, in confronto alle miserie di San Cetto che possedeva un solo piccolo braccio d'argento.

Donna Cristina disse:

- Guarda bene di là.

Maria uscì dalla stanza per andare a cercare. Rovistò tutti gli angoli della cucina e della loggia inutilmente. Tornò a mani vuote.

- Non c'è! Non c'è!

Allora ambedue si misero a pensare, a cumular congetture, a investigar nella loro memoria. Uscirono su la loggia che dava nel cortile, su la loggia del lavatoio, per fare l'ultima ricerca. Come parlavano a voce alta, alle finestre delle case in torno si affacciarono le comari.

- Che v'è successo, Donna Cristi? Dite! Dite!

Donna Cristina e Maria raccontarono il fatto, con molte parole, con molti gesti.

- Gesù! Gesù! Dunque ci stanno i ladri?

In un momento il rumore del furto si sparse pel vicinato, per tutta Pescara. Uomini e donne si misero a discutere, a immaginare chi potesse essere il ladro. La novella, giungendo alle ultime case di Sant'Agostino, s'ingrandì: non si trattava più di un semplice cucchiaino, ma di tutta l'argenteria di casa Lamonica.

Ora, come il tempo era bello e su la loggia le rose cominciavano a fiorire e due lucherini in gabbia cantavano, le comari si trattennero alle finestre per il piacere di ciarlare al bel tempo, con quel dolce calore. Le teste femminili apparivano tra i vasi di basilico e il ciaramellio pareva dilettere i gatti in su le gronde.

Donna Cristina disse, congiungendo le mani:

- Chi sarà stato?

Donna Isabella Sertale, detta la Faina, che aveva i movimenti lesti e furtivi di un animaletto predatore, chiese con la voce stridula:

- Chi ci stava con voi, Donna Cristi? Mi pare che ho visto ripassare Candia...

"You're right!" Maria finally exclaimed, with a gesture of desperation. "So what's to be done now?"

She was above and beyond all suspicion. She had given proof of her loyalty and honesty in fifteen years' service. She had come from Ortona with Donna Cristina on the occasion of her marriage; she was virtually part and parcel of the wedding dowry and, by this time, she had acquired a certain amount of authority in the household, under her mistress' protection. Her head was whirling with religious superstitions, she was devoted to her patron saint and native parish-church, and very shrewd. She and her mistress had made a sort of vow of hostility towards everything in Pescara, and in particular towards the patron saint of Pescara. She never missed an opportunity to talk about her native town, about the beauties and riches of her native town, the magnificence of its Basilica, the treasures of San Tommaso, the pomp and splendour of the church ceremonies, as opposed to the wretched poverty of San Cetto, who could boast of nothing but a small arm made of silver.

Donna Cristina said:

"Take a good look over there."

Maria left the room to undertake her search. She went rummaging in all four corners of the kitchen and loggia - but without success. She came back empty-handed.

"It's gone! It's gone!"

So they both started racking their brains and making one conjecture after another, probing in the recesses of their memories. They went out onto the loggia leading out to the courtyard, then onto the loggia where the wash-house was, to have a last look. As they were speaking in a loud voice, all the neighbours appeared at the windows of the surrounding houses.

"What's happened, Donna Cristina? Tell us all about it! Tell us!"

Donna Cristina and Maria told them the whole story, in great detail and with a wealth of gestures.

"Oh, Lord! So you've had burglars then?"

In a twinkling the rumour of the stolen spoon spread throughout the neighbourhood, and then throughout the city of Pescara. Men and women started talking amongst themselves, trying to figure out who the thief might be. By the time the story had reached the last houses in Sant'Agostino, it had snowballed: the spoon had now become the entire collection of silver-plate belonging to the Lamonica family.

Now, as the weather was fine and the roses were beginning to flower on the loggia and there were two goldfinches singing in a cage, the neighbours lingered at their windows for the sheer pleasure of chatting in

- Aaaah! – esclamò Donna Felicetta Margasanta, detta la Pica per la sua continua garrulità.

- Ah! – ripeterono le altre comari.

- E non ci pensavate?

- E non ve n'accorgevate?

- E non sapete chi è Candia?

- Ve lo diciamo noi chi è Candia!

- Sicuro!

- Ve lo diciamo noi!

- I panni li lava bene, non c'è che dire. E' la meglio lavandaia che sta a Pescara, non c'è che dire. Ma tiene lu difetto delle cinque dita... Non lo sapevate, commà?

- A me 'na volta mi mancò due mantili.

- A me 'na tovaglia.

- A me 'na camicia.

- A me tre paia di calzette.

- A me due fédere.

- A me 'na sottana nuova.

- Io non ho potuto riavere niente.

- Io manco.

- Io manco.

- Io non l'ho cacciata; perché chi prendo? Silvestra?

- Ah! Ah!

- Angelantonio? Babascetta?

- Una peggio dell'altra!

- Bisogna ave' pazienza.

- Ma 'na cucchiara, mo'!

- E' troppo, mo'!

- Non vi state zitta, Donna Cristì; non vi state zitta!

- Che zitta e non zitta! – proruppe Maria Bisaccia che, quantunque avesse l'aspetto placido e benigno, non si lasciava sfuggire nessuna occasione per opprimere o per mettere in mala vista gli altri serventi della casa. – Ci penseremo noi, Donn'Isabbè, ci penseremo!

E le ciarle dalla loggia alle finestre seguitavano. E l'accusa di bocca in bocca si propalò per tutto il paese.

II

La mattina vegnente, mentre Candia Marcanda teneva le braccia nella lisciva, comparve su la soglia la guardia comunale Biagio Pesce soprannominato il Caporaletto.