

DIALECT POETRY OF SOUTHERN ITALY

TEXTS AND CRITICISM
(A Trilingual Anthology)



Edited by Luigi Bonaffini



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Text and Critic

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Text and Criticism

Edited by

Luigi Bonaffini

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to
all dialect poets
everywhere

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ITALIAN LANGUAGE AND SOUTHERN DIALECTS

Giacinto Spagnoletti

Dialect: which literature? The question answers one of the many topics debated in the numerous symposia held on the subject in recent years. In general, the tendency was not to speak only of a few dialects, but of our whole patrimony conceived through the centuries for the relationship between the expression of the national language and that of local speech. In this specific case, taking into account, the interrogative, it would seem that dialect is offered not one, but several literary possibilities. In reality, one cannot help but note that the plurilinguistic line, so dear to Gianfranco Contini, has seen no interruption from the Middle Ages to the present day.

The problem that inescapably arises now, does not stem from the fact that there exists, as a counterpoint to poetry in Italian, a splendid poetry in dialect. The difficulty lies elsewhere, in the discrepancy between exceptional flowering and the unstoppable decline of the various local idioms in every region of Italy (it is common knowledge that the few pockets of resistance are the Veneto region and the area around Naples). This is the situation that had already worried Pasolini in the early Seventies, as he was getting ready to rewrite *La mejo gioventù*. In a few memorable essays he underscored the advance of the mass media, and above all the triumph of television, that speaks and imposes a single language in every corner of the country.

So: what destiny will attend the current success of poetry in dialect, after the

expressive choice made since the times of Di Giacomo, and then of Marin and Pierro? If then we approach the last few decades, the break becomes more evident still with respect to the distant 1903, when, dazzled by Di Giacomo's poetry, Benedetto Croce, in an essay that was to become famous, went so far as to say: "What does it mean to contest the rights of dialect poetry? How can one prevent someone from composing in dialect? Much of our soul is dialect, as much of it is made of Greek, Latin, German, French, or of ancient Italian language." And then, decisively: "When an artist feels in dialect, he must express himself with those sounds. And, according to the necessity of his vision, he will express himself in dialect, in dialect mixed with Italian, in an idiom of his own particular making." And of course he was alluding to the macaronic Latin of Teofilo

Folengo, remembering De Sanctis who had introduced him, as one of the few different poets of our literature.

Since the time of Croce's essay, reflected dialect literature, as the great philosopher defined it, distinguishing it from popular poetry, has never been a problem, has long has the various local idioms have resisted, as source of inspiration for the poets themselves (or even for writers such as Gadda). Idioms in every sense, to the extent that they make one think of a maternal tongue: the national language being the language of the father, of authority, of power. But then, as was said before, when the mass media have come to prevail, things have not stayed the same. Detachment has set in, and dialect has become for its devotees a form of experimentalism, of which Pasolini himself has provided

conspicuous examples with his collections. Every poet has felt the need, somewhat administered on the intellectual level, to compete with poets in Italian or, as is frequently the case, with the other side of themselves which thought in Italian. There has been, and this is what we are speaking of most of all, an avant-garde dialect poetry that was inconceivable before. The traditional viewpoint tended to reaffirm tradition, arousing great diffidence in critics who in the end, until Croce, have considered dialect poetry inferior to that in Italian. But the experimental tendency has definitively won, and not only in the North of Italy, but, what is more surprising, in the South as well, where there persists not a longing for times past as in remote times (those of Basile and Cortese), but a decided drive towards experimentation, which can be observed in

certain recent cases, from Pierro to Maffia, from Cirese to Buttitta, from Viviani to Gatti. No doubt the more interesting among the poets mentioned are those who, instead of repeating the Nineteenth-Century models, adapt with exceptional results to the most advanced methods. This is noticeable above all in Neapolitan poetry and the poetry from Lucania to Calabria, giving rise to curious motivations of a philological nature, but often of a more markedly sentimental introspection. As if, after abandoning one's real town, perhaps with some sadness, one were to choose an ideal place where even neologisms can coincide with surviving retentions. In any case, the singular aspect offered by the whole landscape of Southern poetry in dialect today has more to do with the author's individual experience than with rules common to all speakers. If in place of a

dialect poem, in order to characterize it, you were to put another type of utterance, you would be closer to the truth. Thus it happens that the many new collections could all together form a still undefined picture of the adventures of words in motion.

We should perhaps draw some conclusions from the little that has been said so far. In the first place, the marked decrease of feeling, which was synonymous with the longing for times past. In second place, and almost in contrast with certain belated movements of the national language, the clash with the new results in an expression which is no longer semantic, strictly speaking, but something explosive that will take future linguists to task.

A History in Two Parts

Luigi Reina

A critical definition of Twentieth-Century dialect poetry in southern and insular Italy entails dealing with problems not easily assimilated, even if in appearance not difficult to catalogue. Because they are related to, and often depend directly on, very heterogenous factors. Simultaneously, a priority appear to be those factors determined by the different anthropologies from which they stem or on which they tend to take root (at least in the very long first half of a history that substantially trails until the turning point clearly recognizable with very rare exceptions, even of great significance³ in the last quarter of the century, with the emergence of the neodialect line), and those more directly

related to the statutes of literariness, which involve the linguistic instrument most of all in its exemplary grammatical coding.

The regions under scrutiny have experienced (or were subjected to) century-old conditions that have profoundly affected the very mindsets of the populations, determining contrasting attitudes, conservative and aiming timidly at uniformity. The need to safeguard ethnic identity has often been expressed by remaining enclosed within the natural anthropological and territorial boundaries. This has also entailed a strong attitude to reclaim one's dignity, both in the spontaneous reiteration of ritual forms directly tied to oral transmission, and in the expression of a knowledge which is most often born from local experience rather than national. The latter, in reality, has always

appeared in some way challenged with an outlook not infrequently of actual exorcism (a widespread controversy against urban modernity). Thus, attitudes aiming to justify the privileged adoption of abstractly defining categories of a way of being or of a personal distinctive culture (Sicilian, Neapolitan, Molisan, Calabrian...) with respect to the nation seen for the most part as something far away and almost extraneous, have been able to grow easily and take on meaningful connotations. This, if on the one hand has contributed to safeguarding an inalienable anthropological patrimony, on the other it has led progressively to a sort of schematizing regression, which has certainly not promoted the elimination of the numerous obstacles in the way of a dialogic growth of dialect poetry in the contemporary world. So

that, instead of diminishing, certain inequalities with respect to Italian poetry have almost become more prominent.

It is not by chance that, right in the aftermath of the political unification of Italy, there was an increased interest in the ethnological research and a widespread proliferation of studies on folklore and popular culture, which required numerous transcriptions from the oral tradition. Just as it is not by chance that there was a concomitant general flowering of poetry in dialect which a long time, with a stance which was certainly different from the one dictated by Romantic practice. Everywhere, though, a few essential questions came forcefully to the fore. They were tied, nevertheless, to formulations not altogether new, especially when they touched on certain peculiar characteristics of textuality

organized into a system, all substantially referable to genetic factors or problems of destination.

As for the genesis, it is clear that the anthropological structures of the collective imagination (being at any rate a question of literature) played a priority role. Through them, regional and subregional differences were able to gain ground simultaneously with their own distinctive traits, as well as with their standardizing features. But the paths followed necessarily led, from time to time, to forcing the system sometimes downward (elective application in the management of local peculiarities), sometimes upward (tendency to record minimal data connoting the human condition globally). It was therefore natural for dialect poets to align themselves with the two veins that would on the whole

designate Twentieth-Century textuality.

The first, tied to popularity (often also taken in its more restrictive meaning), presupposed at times attitudes of almost automatic immersion in it (with more than a few concessions to folkloric and descriptive data, with the consequence that attention to “speech” produced typically vernacular results); at other times, the tendency toward the detachment typical of middle-class writers, who tended to elaborate somewhat moralistically, often giving voice to the people, the traces provided by reality, or to ideologize them, certainly not without risking obvious strains. The second line led to the preferential selection of consolidated literary canons in their age-old traditions, which seemed to guarantee a sort of dependable grammar, maybe with a watchful eye as well to behaviors defined by

the poetic experience in Italian.

On the one hand, then (to resume a general classification of Romantic origin which will for a long time retain some validity), the popular imagination was mined for material which could later be returned to that same imagination, exploiting the channels of verse communication; on the other hand, there was a tendency toward a manipulation "other" of the same material, aiming at communicating within higher, if not wider, circuits. As a consequence, even languages somehow tended to become differentiated: along the popular line there was the more explicit use of municipal "speech" (vernaculars); in the other cases, less differentiated grammatical results were reached (at times with a "philological" tendency to reconstruct the lexicon on the

same "idioms," revisited in their original forms, either by reclaiming the traditional textual tradition, or with some imaginative contamination that further allowed effects of antiliterary linguistic expressionism.).

Not an easy path to follow, then, which met with different applications over a rather fragmented territory, above all linguistically.⁴ And if the lessons arising from the culture of naturalistic realism seemed to prevail, there were also those of decadent origin which consented the recovery of a melancholy, sentimental Romanticism, elegiac and georgic, and the related expressions of the lyrical self with excursions into melody. So that one could go from pure mimesis to forms of more elaborate expression in search of the cantabile, if with a popular taste only rarely abandoned.

The practice of vernacular dialectality, then, when not instrumentally pursued for folkloric, sociological or broadly political use, tended to be connected more with “nature” than with “culture” in the popular vein. It frequently relied on the allegorical fable or parable, the invective, satire, the song of love or protest, sketches and news stories, descriptivism and gnomic sententiousness, the blasphemous wisecrack and the epigrammatic wordplay, almost always in keeping with a markedly ethnic and broadly conservative lore, which contributed to underline its differences with respect to elitist Italian literature.

On the more strictly middle-class side, instead, it carried out a sort of philological reconstruction of lexicon and grammar. And when it could count on a tradition in some ways already “illustrious” (Latium,

Campania, Sicily...), working on the “poetics,” it produced elitist results (Trilussa, Di Giacomo, Buttitta...) which could be somehow assimilated, through the levels achieved, to those attained more or less simultaneously by Italian poetry, albeit with more narrowly defined themes.

In this sense, the role played by certain exemplary lessons (from the more recent Belli, Trilussa, Di Giacomo, Russo, to the more distant Berneri, Basile, Cortese, Meli, Tempio) seemed very significant; and not only in the respective regions, but also in the broad context of poetic dialectality, for the grammatical canons it provided and the guarantee of a thematic tradition. Along with these, when interest turned simultaneously to poetry in Italian, at times particular insights were to be found, in a more diffuse manner, in “small things” and

in Pascoli's georgic poems, and more infrequently at other times even in a certain Parini, in Leopardi, in Carducci, in D'Annunzio (if not the classics!). That could even be a way to reclaim dialect as an instrument of poetry, were it not that what prevailed in most cases were forms of epigonic imitation (as generally happened for Di Giacomo's melodic line) which, when dealing with certain themes and their modalities of expression, had very little to do with lexicon. In general, the latter was regulated by forms of linguistic empiricism even when philological concerns were very strong, so that the various poetic experiences in dialect rarely achieved results of a level comparable to those achieved by contemporary Italian poetry. The persistent realistic (and therefore mimetic) component completed the picture, preventing the

necessary linguistic ferment to which poetry has always entrusted its very nature.

Only in the aftermath of W.W. II, and to a large degree thanks to the influence exerted by Pasolini's specific lesson (but perhaps, more indirectly, Gadda's as well), a different attitude in favor of dialects was beginning to emerge, even in the South. They were gradually being seen as flexible codes capable of being exploited for the sake of poetry, rather than as primary signifiers tied to the experience of reality. The first to sense this were poets who, abandoning common language, affected too deeply by the levelling contamination of consumerism (Pierro), but also very resistant to the artificial sophistication of neoavant-garde ideological operations on insignificance, turned to a sort of almost archetypical language, a mental language rather than

language of "speech," capable of bending to all subjective needs (gnoseological, psychological, lyrical...) and of favoring the necessary development of the senses by dilating the referential, timbric, rhythmic, phonic potentials which contribute to qualify poetic expression. Thus, dialects aimed at progressively freeing themselves of their onus of pure "speech" (little more than "languages of nature"), and began to transform themselves into true "languages of culture," while poets started to address the codes with a neostilnovistic attitude that would lead to neopetrarchan (but no longer univocal) linguistic results. Hierarchies and residual resistances fell; to the point that, especially in the last two decades, not a small number of poets, at times renouncing it completely, at times occasionally setting it aside, have substituted the common

language for dialect, convinced of the equal dignity of the various languages with respect to poetry.

Might this be a way of foreshadowing the cultures of the second millennium on the basis of a new awareness that, safeguarding identities, guarantees man in his essences of ratio and verbum against planetary deindividualization, which risks to deprive nationalities progressively of meaning, as they had deprived of meaning regional differences? It is difficult to say.

What the neodialect flowering of recent years seem to want to reclaim, with the strength of its suggestions and the insistence of its practice, is the right to encode semantic fields individually definable as cultural choices, apparently deprived of the measure of virginity they seem to postulate, but in reality aspiring to become charged with

emblematic meanings. All this within a context which takes for granted the progressive impoverishment, through its erosion and lowering, of the standard language (it too, after all, the product of an age-old evolution of a recognizable and easily definable dialect⁵ against which other dialects represented not the regressive and deviant variation, but only an alternative which, if it has not known certain "normalizing" paths, does not deserve, almost by definition, the indifference or self-serving ostracism with which the "different" has always been exorcised. On the contrary, it imposes a gnoseological and analytical openness).

It is not a question of giving in to a demonic temptation, maybe aimed at endorsing "maternal" tongues over the "paternal" one, but rather of feeling the

need to recognize and define the expressive potentials of the various languages⁶. In this line of thought, very significant sound the following verses of a Calabrian poet who for a while has been using, without distinction and with critical awareness, both standard language and dialect, achieving results that appear clearly homologous: "Giacinto, now / that I write / with my mother's language / I feel things more deeply, / words have substance / they're not dead consumed, / they belong to no one / it's as if they were / springing from a blaze of water."⁷

The real problem that needs to be resolved today, it seems, stems from the progressive loss of substance of local idioms under the levelling invasion of the media which nonetheless, as they progressively despoil dialect lexicons, also lower that of the standard language, again promoting the

dichotomy between people and élite, which adversely affects the daily use of language and its literary application: the former compelled to foster a depriving normalized use of slang, the latter driven to appear more and more aloof through the forced retreat into apparently neopurist spheres, which might allow it to resist the progressive loss of halo by reclaiming a norm that shields from risks and attests the possibility of elitist survival without obliging it to take refuge in austere Della-Cruscan areas. As a consequence, on the one hand there is the tendency toward a language that might be proper to an extended "countryside" and very large "guilds," on the other toward a sort of dynamic academic neopetrarchism developed through stilnovistic and experimental varieties that take into account the evolutionary processes of the language

in use as well as the responsibility of privileged users committed to the renobilitation of the standard language and of dialects, also in order to render the instrument of their signification dantesquely “illustrious” and “cardinal.”

It is easy to understand what remains of the old dichotomy between language “of culture” and language “of nature”, referred to the possible demarcation between national language and dialect. Because the common language found itself in the position of having to embody and express these two conditions at a time when it had to assume the responsibilities of mass media communications by creating a new grammar, capable of regulating the new linguistic conventions on the basis of the colorless pronunciation of the language of information and of the repetitive and

euphemistic language of show business, assembled on a bare lexicon, or of the often meaningless or highly technical language of politics and the esoteric and instrumental language of sport.

In such a context, is the practice of dialects justified in representing itself with new credentials? In our opinion, there does not seem to be any doubt. On the condition that the instrument rid itself of all traditional ballast: from that appropriated by the languages of the mass media, to that already disowned by the literature in the common language; and that it be accorded as well the expressive dignity of the languages of poetry, not forced by ideological prejudices toward determinate themes nor imprisoned within codified norms.

Southern neodialect poets, as do poets in Italian, tend today to regain the right to the

personal recreation of language for purely expressionistic purposes, instrumental only for the primacy of artistic expression. They address every theme by striving to render through essentiality what standard language should now achieve in extension or through artifice, and, in the effort toward semantic connotation or phonic realization, they often tend toward the reinvention of languages now frequently half-buried in the consciousness of the speakers under the constraints of levelling contaminations.

Southern dialects tend to become, as a consequence, true languages of art, shedding all of the dross of folklore and overcoming the obstacles of slanginess. It is almost a recovery of behaviors that, from the Sixteenth to the Eighteenth Century above all, had provided fodder for literature tout court (I am thinking, for instance, of the

original and deforming expressionism, often hyperbolic, of Sgruttendio da Scafati, or the one somehow differently “normalizing” of Giambattista Basile or Giulio Cesare Cortese...). Dialects, that is, become flexible again in the cultured use of poets who can mediate their aristocratic artistic needs with the more general ones of expressiveness (and of communication as well, even if privileged), bringing about a meeting between “speakers” (often merely hypothetical) and “non speakers,” in the name of a recovered language aiming at the absolute, the eternal: the classical, finally.

This language crosses the boundaries of dialect anthropology inasmuch as it presupposes, at any rate, a refined and supernational culture. For it is precisely the latter that has permitted an active use of it, capable of rendering dialects all the more

“cardinal” and “illustrious,” the less they are tied to the slangy forms of everyday communication.

In this way, an awareness of the undertaking becomes an essential vehicle of sublimation for a lexicon that can even be reduced to its archaic forms, as it can be legitimately reinvented, through an effort of responsible personalization capable of exploiting the natural ductility of poetic languages which have never been constrained by the standardized signification typical of the languages of communication.

Pasolini was substantially on the mark when he spoke, crowning a long reflection on dialect, of an “earlier, infinitely purer” language.⁸ A definition that, if it can appear today in some ways beholding to a certain romantic and decadent postulate, charged with the sense of added responsibility

imposed by its utilization with the overall demands of neodialect, reveals all the potential resources of an instrument which maybe has been definitely rediscovered.

The neodialect poetic challenge in the South, therefore, today seems at work simultaneously on two fronts: of language and content. With a process that variously affects, as it can be verified in the respective paths, all the regions or all the varieties of "idioms" (those already having a stratified literary marginality as well as those that have remained tied longer to a stage of virginity left untouched by enterprising agents). In either case, the risk of a narrowly mimetic recovery of slanginess seems to have been definitively set aside, in favor of an action capable of adapting the word made flexible to the diverse demands of poetic expression, signification included.

The widespread practice of linguistic creativity has shown that the poet's essential need to render his inner discourse through a language as much as possible "jealously private," "endophasic,"⁹ can now be met by dialectal languages, mature to the extent of overcoming the risks of folkloric and neonaturalistic relapses, as well as neodecadent and romantic reversions.

The fact that characterizes the more recent generations of poets in dialect springs directly from these sources and is emblemized in the search for an expression which is as much as possible original and makes it possible, at the same time, to deal with even extremely modern themes. Substantially, they have not allowed themselves to be affected by the progressive loss of "speakers" that has characterized the course of dialect during the levelling

onslaught of the media, because they have never looked to those speakers as their readers.

More and more the audience of poetry, in an era of planetary circulation of culture, tends to be defined, in fact, by new categories, not bound by regional or national specificities, to the extent that the thematics itself is affected, as it is increasingly forced to identify universal values in the particulars. Dialect becomes a “precious,” “refined” instrument because it is a purer refuge for the poetic word absolutely longing for essentiality.¹⁰

In such a way, the languages “of nature” offer themselves to arduous “philology,” developed on a textuality traditionally very alien to them, and represent themselves tendentially as rediscovered languages “of culture,” flexible enough to become the

instruments of a modern trobar.

NOTES

1 In the case of this volume, with a geographic extension of the area to include regions such as Latium and Abruzzo, for schematizing reasons related not just to editorial needs — as it addresses an international audience —, but referring directly to the Romantic partition of Sismondi, who was the first to propose a distinction between North and South, in which there is no room for the typically Italian geographic category of center.

2 But for Sardinia it is really difficult to speak of “dialects,” inasmuch as Sardinian has always been a true language, independently of the four subregional varieties in which it is represented (Campidanese, Logudorese, Gallurese, Sassarese).

3 I refer mainly to Albino Pierro, whose first collections in the dialect of Tursi date back from the Sixties.

4 It would be useful to remember, besides the local varieties of dialects, the various Greek and Albanian areas.

5 “...standard Italian is a dialect like any other form of Italian and... it makes no sense to suppose that any one dialect is in some way linguistically superior to any other” (J.K. Chambers-P. Trudgill, *La dialettologia*, Bologna 1987).

6 Cf. C. Segre, *Lingua, stile, società*, Milan 1974.

7 Dante Maffia, "Jacì," in *U Ddie puvirille*, Milan 1990.

8 Cf. *Passione e ideologia*, Milan 1960, p.137.

9 Of "endophasia" speak both Baldini with respect to Biagio Marin ("he disinters an almost extinct dialect... making it phonetically extravagant, but all the more resounding with personal accents in the direction of a private endophasia," "Osservazioni sull'ultima poesia dialettale," in *Ulisse*, XI, February 1972) and Mengaldo with respect to Pierro ("...one can grasp... the necessary paradox ... of a part of the current poetry in dialect, which from vehicle of socially open and communicative messages tends to become more and more a jealously individual language, almost endophasic," in *Poeti italiani del Novecento*, Milan 1978, p.960; but already Contini, reviewing Pasolini's *Poesie a Casarsa*, stigmatized the necessity of a progressively stratified reading of dialect poetry, as if refusing the medianic assistance of translation: "allow a certain time to digest this Friulan dialect, which is not everyday food; leave some margin to the wonder that a "spirit" "à la page" has taken refuge among those final s's, those palatals, those diphtongs" ("Il limite della poesia dialettale," in *Corriere del Ticino*, April 24, 1943).

10 Cf. *Via terra. Antologia di poesia neodialettale*, edited by A. Serrao with an introduction by Luigi Reina, Udine 1992.

ABRUZZO

If the birth of dialect literature is to be placed not beyond the Sixteenth century, that is, the period in which the Florentine and Tuscan vernacular in general imposes itself as a literary language on the national level, relegating all other regional vernaculars to the rank of "dialects," namely secondary idioms and local tongues, one can easily state that the first document of dialect poetry from Abruzzi is a caudate sonnet, written by the Tailor Mariano Moreiro (L'Aquila, ? — 1551) for the death of Serafino Aquilano.

From the first part of the Seventeenth Century is then a "Canzone in lingua rustica cicolana" by Giovanni Argoli (1606 — 1660), from Tagliacozzo, author of *Idilli* and of a long poem, *Endimione*, composed in

imitation of Marino's Adonis when he was about twenty. In the same century, but with a few reservations about the dialect adopted, one can remember the collection of Sonnets by Loreto Mattei from Rieti (1623 – 1705), belonging to the linguistic area around L'Aquila: published posthumously in 1827, they employ a strongly realistic language, which is free of the Baroque excesses prevailing at the time.

To the Eighteenth Century belongs a singular poem entitled "Zu matrimonio azz'uso" [Ready-Made Wedding], written by Romualdo Parente from Scanno (1735-1831), in collaboration with two fellow-townsmen who have remained unknown, and published in Naples in 1765. It is a work of considerable importance, divided into two parts: the first describes, in 57 stanzas, "The wedding between Mariella and Nanno from

the land of Scanno"; the second, shorter (it only has 16 stanzas), describes "La figlienza," Mariella's childbirth. The work is of great interest on the socio-linguistic level, with valid poetic results, because it trenchantly represents a whole environment and a community that takes part in an extraordinary event such as a wedding, from the preparations to the vows in church, to the procession, the banquet, the dance, the dowry, the gifts, the final farewell.

Between the end of the 18th Century and the beginning of the 19th we can situate a certain Mascetta, archpriest of Colledimacine, in the province of Chieti, to whom is attributed a short but heartbreaking text, "The Widow's Lament," anonymously set to music and inspired on the figure of a poor widow who, tormented by debts and abandoned by everybody, becomes

desperate because “if the ram is missing / the dog always barks.”

Also worthy of mention are the few verses left to us by Tito di Blasio, from Civitella Casanova (Pescara), who lived at the beginning of the 19th Century; and even more so is “The Peasant’s Toast,” by Giuseppe Paparella (1835–1895), from Tocco Casauria, that traces in a sharp and incisive manner the life of a poor farmer who takes part in a holiday in order to drink, among blows and curses, to everyone’s health, to his friends, to the town’s patron Saint. Everything is said in a plain language, taken from current popular speech.

With Fedele Romani (1855 -1910), from Colledara (Teramo), well-known teacher of Italian Literature at the University of Florence, dialect poetry from Abruzzi takes a significant step in the direction of a

conscious literary dignity, even if he refuses to adopt “high-class dialect” and employs instead the “pure and primitive speech of the farmers” of his native town (cf. *Li sunette de nu Colledarese*, 1883) or, at any rate, the popular dialect of the city of Teramo (cf. *Ddu huttave e ttre sunette*, 1884).

More substantial and demanding is the work of Luigi Brigiotti (1859-1933), from Teramo, who draws on his long experience as a tax accountant for a wealth of material that reflects a reality inherent in the supposed everyday banality, which he portrays at times with irony, at times with vaguely social themes: from *Nu recurde de l’Espusizione didattica* (1899) to *La gennasteca nova* (mono-logue, 1903), *Nachiacchiarate de gnore Paule* (1904), *La torre de lu Doome* [The Duomo’s Tower] (short

poem, 1906), *Nu v'icchie bandeste* (monologue, 1912) and *Lu panegìreche de Petrarca* (no date). Just before his death, he rearranges the best of his work in the volume *Strada facenne*, with the acquired certainty of a dialect aiming at overcoming the variance between the "coarse" speech of the lower classes and the "clean" speech of the cultured class.

On the same level of literary invention moves Gaetano Murolo (1858-1903), born in Vasto from a Neapolitan family. Although he was forced to leave Abruzzi when still young for reasons of work, he retains firm ties with his native city and adopts its speech in a considerable output of sonnets, collected with the title *Abruzzo* (1886) and *Ciamarèlle* [Bagpipes], 1898. The two collections, edited by Tito Spinelli, have been reprinted recently in a fine volume entitled *Sonetti*

dialettali [Dialect Sonnets], 1979, included in a series edited by Gianni Oliva for the publisher Cannarsa. Habits, customs, events, figures, but also personal sentiments in relation to changing occasions constitute the material that inspired Murolo.

Also from Vasto is Luigi Anelli (1860-1933), known mainly as a historian and playwright, author of a collection of forty sonnets, *Fujj'ammesche* [Mixed Leaves], 1892, in which he draws "small scenes," "slices of reality," fragments of town life, with the criteria typical of traditional sketches, nevertheless capable of showing glimpses of real drama.

Worthy of mention, among a few more names appearing between the end of the last century and the beginning of the present one, are Luigi Renzetti (1860— 1931), from Lanciano, with *Fiure de fratte* [Hedge

Flowers]; Ettore d’Orazio (1860-1931), from Villetta Barrea, author of a considerable output, from which only four sonnets have survived, with the explanatory title *La disgrazia di Paulantonie o puramente U carcerate ‘nnucente*; Giovanni de Paulis (1861-1959), from Paganica, well known as painter and sculptor, who, in a collection of forty-one sonnets, marked by a plain and incisive style, recounts the misadventures of a poor “emigrant” farmer who “returns from Argentina”; finally, Gabriele D’Annunzio (1863-1938), the “Immagi-nifico,” who did not disdain, all taken as he was by the cultivation of high style, to tackle a dozen dialect compositions, all tied to an occasion and playful in tone, among which we would mention the quatrains on the Pescara “parrozzo” [type of pastry] (“To Luigino D’Amiche”) and the “pork sonnet” (“To

Giacomino Acerbo").

Much richer and more varied is the Twentieth-Century landscape. The century opens with a small survey of Dialect Documents, prepared by Gennaro Finamore for the *Rivista Abruzzese* (Teramo, 1903); an important survey not only because the first of a series of antological surveys still to come until the present, but also because the well-known folklorist accompanies it with prejudicial observations that will be often discussed in the future, that is, that in "all our dialect compositions in verse it is not the poet, but the man of the people or the populace who is speaking; and for this reason one should not look to them for delicacy of sentiments or high flights of fancy." And he suggests, chancing a hasty comment, that the cause of the mediocrity of results depends on the common conviction

“that the Abruzzi vernacular, too humble, was not suited to poetry.”

Harking back to Finamore ten years later, Ermindo Campana, in the preface to his collection *Voci d'Abruzzo* (Vasto, 1914), containing selected pages by T. Bruni, F. Brigiotti, V. Ranalli, L. Anelli, A. Luciani and some of his own, notes that, with the exception of Luciani, we still have “the old prejudice” that dialect “cannot and should not go beyond certain limits,” and that it is due precisely to this conviction if the work of our dialect poets shows a lack of subjective lyrics and abounds instead in satire and local color.”

E. Campana is the first, in Abruzzo, to fight for this “false conviction,” with the awareness that language and dialect, for the authentic poet, are “the same thing” and that, if there are “limits” at the stylistic-

expressive level, they “vary naturally according to each poet, or rather they are but the limits of the artistic potential of the individual poet.”

The first confirmation of this truth, as Campana himself observes, comes from the experience of Alfredo Luciani (1889-1969), from Pescosansonesco (Pescara), who with *Stelle Lucenti* (1913, 2nd Ed. 1921), must be considered the initiator of what could be called an Abruzzi “Stilnovo”, marked by a vigorous tendency to lyric vocation, with the adoption of “a dialect that belongs to no one town and, collectively, to all the towns in Abruzzi,” as Luciani underlined. The way was thus opened to what was later called a real regional koiné, a sort of “ideal and instinctive synthesis of all the phonetic and intonational nuances,” into which converge in equal measure “a strong local flavor” and

“a certain intentional verbal aristocracy.” It is not by chance that Pasolini includes him in his anthology, along with De Titta and Clemente.

At the beginning of the Twentieth Century, a similar course is followed by Cesare De Titta (1862-1933), relying on his own devices. Born in Sant’Eusanio del Sangro (Chieti), humanist and philologist of great learning, he went through an extraordinary experience of poetry in Italian and Latin, and comes to dialect poetry in his later years, but just the same leaving the mark of an uncommon presence: from *Canzoni abruzzesi* [Songs of Abruzzi] (1919) to *Nuove canzoni abruzzesi* (1923), to *Gente d’Abruzzo* [People of Abruzzi] (1923), to *Terra d’ore* [Golden Land] (1925), within the span of barely five years De Titta crosses all the stages one normally crosses in a lifetime.

His masterpiece is undoubtedly *Terra d'ore*, considered by everyone "not only an artistic gem, but above all a jewel of expressive and phonetic precision," because the poet in tandem with the linguist have been able to penetrate deeply into the natural world of Abruzzi, portraying it with the inebriation of a panic adoration that vaguely recalls D'Annunzio's "carnal" effusion, but without falling into the snares of a troubled and arty sensuality of Decadent origin.

An analogous experience, even if in a rather discontinuous way, has Luigi Illuminati (1881-1962), from Atri, also a talented humanist and an expert in the art of versifying in Italian, Latin and dialect. In his style he is able of blending, in Luciani's footsteps, a local ingenuosness with an aristocratic taste for words, as attested by a few pages preserved and collected in the

volume *Ultima linea* (1959).

Much more meaningful and more assiduously long-lasting, on similar positions, is the experience of Vittorio Clemente (1895-1975), from Bugnara (L'Aquila). Though he had already received recognition for his youthful work, *Prime canzoni* (1924) and *La Madonna Addulerata* (1925), it's in the aftermath of W.W. II that he attains wide acceptance and authoritative endorsements that establish him as one of the most active and valid figures of dialect poetry at the national level. From *Sclocchitte* (1948) and *Acqua de magge* (1952) to *Tiempe de sole e fiure* (1955), *Canzune ad allegrie...* (1960), *Serenatelle abruzzesi* (1965), Clemente follows a very personal path, until he attains a style all his own, which takes up and continues the cultured model of "local

speech,” stripping it of the artificial frills accumulated in our literary tradition, meager as it might be.

A voice of great breadth would have certainly become Umberto Postiglione (1893-1924), from Raiano (l’Aquila), if death had not taken him away so soon from life and poetry. His output is rather scant, but it contains pages that to us seem unforgettable. Among the few poems that have survived, in our judgment stand out “A na rinnele” [To a Swallow], “Ne fije spierze” [A Lost son], “A nu ruscigneuje” [To a Nightingale], suffused with a melancholy pathos, restrained yet heartbreaking.

Also worthy of being placed in the same line seems to us Cesare Fagiani (1901-1965), from Lanciano. Having made his debut with *Lu done* [The Gift], 1933, in collaboration with his father Alfonso, he gradually grows

in self-awareness with *Luna nove* [New Moon], 1949, *Stamme a senti* [Listen to Me], 1953, *Lu pijiatore de feste* [The Feast Organizer], 1965 and *Fenestre aperte* [Open Windows, 1966. Autobiographical confessions and ethical-social motivations combine in his inspiration, always running on the edge of popular inventiveness supported by a rather cultured style.

In the last thirty years many have continued the search for the word as inner exploration and lyric confession, essentially freed from traditional conditionings and therefore well established on avant-garde positions, so to speak, in keeping with the most advanced experiences taking place in all the regions of Italy. We regret, frankly, having to reserve only a brief mention for poets such as Walter Ciancusi (born in Cori,

but resident in Collelongo), receiver of the most prestigious regional awards (from the "Teramo" to the "Pescara," to the "Francavilla" and "Lanciano"), author of two collections to be numbered among the best works of the second half of the Twentieth Century (*L'ora delle cose* [The Hour of Things] e *Parlémene d'amore* [Talk to me of Love]), respectively from 1975 and 1978; Marco Notamurzi (Scanno), who in *Serena* (1967) succeeds in capturing the essence of feelings and things, in a solid, spare verse; Salvatore Mampieri (Introdacqua) who, in the anguished pages of *Na terre amara* [Bitter Land], 1975, privileges a choral lyric, lending a voice to the joys and sorrows of his people; Luigi Monaco (born in Rome from an Abruzzi family), who in *Val di contra* (1976) is capable of "giving a voice to the silences of

the soul," with a language totally free from bookish schemes; Tonino Merletti (Pineto), who in *Allegrine* (1986), even where he seems not to wander very far from local themes, is able to combine the freshness of spoken speech with the subtlety of the well-wrought text; Vittorio Monaco (Pettorano sul Gizio), who from *Castagne pazze* [Crazy Chestnuts], 1997 to *La vie e ju viene* [The Road and the Wind], 1988 and *Specie de vierne*, [Kind of Winter], 1989, with a language dense with evocative vibrations, is able to express man's disorientation before the erosion of our ancient values; Pietro Civitareale (Vittorito), who in a small collection, *Come nu suonne* [Like a Dream], 1984, displays a prodigious new voice, both strong and graceful, if devoid of "rhymes and even assonances"; Michele Ursini (Guastamerolli), who, from *Gente e cose de*

paese [People and Things of the Town], 1975 to Lu cunforte [Comfort], 1980, is able to demonstrate how one can write new poetry without resorting to “linguistic archeology”; finally, Vito Moretti (S. Vito Chietino), the youngest of all, who from N’andica degnetà de fiije [Ancient Filial Dignity], 1985 to La vuluntà e li jurne [Will and Days], 1986 and Déndre a na storie [Within a Story], 1988, follows a personal notion of “pure poetry,” with a very controlled style, not far removed from a certain return to Hermeticism in recent times.

The landscape of dialect poetry from Abruzzi in the Twentieth century would be seriously lacking if, along with the tendency for the search for pure poetry, we didn’t also point out other aspects and trends, minor perhaps, but not less interesting for the continuity of tradition. Throughout the

whole century, for instance, there is an enduring and widening satirical-playful tendency, which finds in Modesto Della Porta (1885-1938) its master and favorite model. Born in Guardiagrele (Chieti), known as the poet-tailor, highly regarded by everyone while living and admired even by Trilussa, he presently engenders conflicting views among critics, not all of whom are convinced that he wrote real poetry. We believe, on the other hand, that his *Ta-pù, lu trumbone d'accompagnamente* [Ta-pù, the Accompanying Trombone], 1933 is to be considered not only the most popular text of Abruzzi literature, but a small masterpiece of its genre as well. One should also add that the value and meaning of the book is not exhausted by its principal vein, no doubt grounded on local color, but it explores the most varied tonalities, ranging from the

farcical to the ironic and elegiac, and even the dramatic. Finally, if one takes into account some of the scattered poems, of ethic-civil inspiration, one can doubtless state that Della Porta has a much more complex personality than might at first appear, which assures him a significant position in mid-century literary history. Following Modesto Della Porta's example are a numerous host of poets and versifiers of the second half of the century. We will mention only a few among the best-known: Elio Finizi (Atri), Alfonso Sardella (Teramo), Lelio Porreca (Torricella Peligna), Attilio Micozzi (Filetto), Emanuele Talone (Roccascasale), Nicolò D'Eramo (Introdacqua), Vittorio Petrucci (Sulmona), Armando Gizzi (Cocullo), Nino Maurizi (Scoppitto), Evandro Ricci (Roccacasale), Dario e Cesidio Di Gravio (Cerchio).

Another widespread tendency is melic poetry, both monodic and choral. One should recall that, after sporadic attempts during the last century, it received a strong impetus from Evandro Marcolongo (1874-1959), from Atessa, and Luigi Dommarco (1876-1969), from Ortona, with the now famous *Maggiolate ortonesi*, successfully begun in 1920. Of the two, Dommarco had a more versatile personality and greater renown, in part due to the song *Vola vola vola*, that has traveled around the world. He is the author of numerous collections of poetry, some of which go well beyond the melodic line.

There have been really many who, throughout the century, have written for music and song, so that one can maintain that Abruzzi boasts of a *canzoniere* worthy of the Neapolitan one. Here are some of the

names: Giulio Sigismondi (Guardiagrele), Mario Cieri (Città S. Angelo), Eduardo Di Loreto (Castelfren-tano), Luigi Venturini (Tagliacozzo), Arturo Ursitti (Opi), Camillo Di Benedetto (Lanciano), Vincenzo De Luca (Ortona), Aniello Polsi (Mutignano); Giuseppe Antonelli (Nocciano), Giulio Marino (Pescara).

Another traditional vein running through the Twentieth Century is the ethic-religious, which in Abruzzi has strong and far-reaching roots, inasmuch as it dates back to the Laude that blossomed around L'Aquila in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth centuries. As an exponent of it in the last decades, we could mention P. Donatangelo Lupinetti (Castilenti), P. Antonio da Serramonacesca, don Mario Morelli (S. Gregorio), P. Natale Cavatassi (Tortoreto), Angelo Gallo (Tollo), Giuseppe Porto

(Tornimparte), Angelo Semeraro (Sulmona). Among all of them, a particular mention deserves Raffaele Fraticelli (Chieti), who more than anybody else has been able to raise the Christian message to intensely poetic tones, as witnessed by several works, paramount among which are *Parole de Vangele* [Gospel Words], 1975 and *Golgota* (1983).

Civil and social themes, aimed at denunciation, protest, moral revolt against the evils and injustices caused by a culture of medieval origin as well as by the malaise typical of a consumer-oriented industrial society, have also found wide acceptance. Numerous and noteworthy are the names to be mentioned, above all: Pasquale Ciancusi (Collelongo), Giuseppe Gualtieri (Aielli), but emigrated to Detroit), Romolo Liberale (S. Benedetto dei Marsi), Luigi Susi (Trasacco),

Pietro Assetta (Brecciarola), Antonino Di Donato (Chieti), Rino Panza (Introdacqua), Ercole Di Renzo (Celano).

Between civil commitment and lyric impetus are situated other poets with a significant output, who would require a lengthy treatment. A few of the most significant names: Ermando Magazzeni (Ornano Grande), with *Aria fresche* [Fresh Air], a really valuable work (1968, 1977); Giovanni Spitilli (Silvi Marina), with *Spine fiurite* [Blossoming Thorns], *Fiure spinuse* [Thorny Flowers] (1975, 1976), and *Crucistrate* (1985); Ugo Leandro Japadre (Lucolli), with *Ju brunzinu* [The Cow Bell], 1981, *La massaria* [The farm], 1984, and *Quanno te nn'ice core* [When the Heart Tells You], 1989; Camillo Coccione (Poggiofiorito), with *Vulije di cante* [Yearning to Sing], 1988;

Quirino Lucarelli (Trasacco), with *Ratiche de paese* [Town Roots], 1987; Romolo Liberale (S. Benedetto dei Marsi), with *Ce vo' ne munne gnove* [We Need a New World], 1953 and *Le stagioni* [Seasons], 1981; Aldo Aimola (Guardiagrele), with *Accante a lu fôche* [Next to the Fire], 1982; Renzo Paris (Celano), with *Vajjulitt'* [Little Boy], 1983.

Very common, finally, is also the confessional-elegiac tendency, grounded in the regret for a world irremediably lost, with habits and customs evoked with undescribable anxiety and tenderness, with a language that adheres to realistic details while venturing into the sphere of dream and imagination. Here too we can only provide a few names: Guido Giuliani, from Pennapiedimonte, with *Rozi* (1956), *L'addore de lu nide* [The Smell of the Nest],

1957, *La sagra dei talami* (1965, 1966), *Sapisce terra d'ore* [If You Knew Golden Land], 1977; Francesco Brasile, from Lanciano, with *Voce d'Abruzzo* [Voice of Abruzzi], 1955, *Maiella madre* [Mother Maiella], 1958, *Lu ramaiette* [Wild Flowers], 1960, *La mazze de lu campanile* [The Bell Clapper], 1967, *Lu cuncerte* [The Concert], 1970; Giovanni Chiola, from Loreto Aprutino, with *Gocce di guazza* [Dewdrops], 1961 and *Le feste arconosciute* [Recognized Holidays], 1965; Mario Dell'Agata, from Penne, with *Pecure e pastore* [Sheep and Shepherds], 1979; Valeria e Luigia Garzarelli, di Ortona, with *Nuvele e serene* (1968) and *L'anema siempre cante* [The Soul Always Sings], 1969; Alberto Cesarii, from Chieti, with *Le caveze rosce* [Red Socks], 1965; Lora Lanci Fusilli, from Guastameroli, with *Nû sême gne picciune* [We Are Like Pigeons], 1988; and then

Candida Di Santo (Lanciano), Gino Orsini and Anna Maria Maviglia (Chieti), Alfredo Postiglione (Raiano), Bice Solfaroli Camillocci (Montereale) and many others.

Beyond and above these groupings, whose objective is merely an introductory survey and not a historical overview, we must situate the five poets selected to represent the most rigorous and valuable experiences, both at the literary and more strictly poetic level, of the middle and second half of the century: Vittorio Clemente, Alessandro Dommarco, Ottaviano Giannangeli, Giuseppe Rosato and Cosimo Savastano. It is thanks to them if dialect poetry from Abruzzi, today, is not afraid of comparisons with that of other regions, as we believe the following pages will bear out.

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La poesia dialettale abruzzese dell'ultimo trentennio (1945-1975), edited by E. Giammarco, Pescara 1976.

Parnaso d'Abruzzo, edited by V. Esposito, Rome 1980.

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G. Pischedda, *Gli abruzzesi*, in *Il Belli*,
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E. Giammarco, *Storia della cultura e della
letteratura abruzzese*, Rome 1969.

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abruzzesi*, Lanciano 1969.

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anni", in *Cinque abruzzesi e alcuni paesi
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V. Esposito, *Note di letteratura abruzzese*, Rome 1982.

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VITTORIO CLEMENTE

Vittorio Clemente was born in Bugnara (L'Aquila) in 1885. After attending the Scuola Normale di Tivoli, he taught in the rural schools of Abruzzi, later becoming a principal and school inspector. He died in Rome in 1975. Besides dialect literature, he took interest in folklore, literary criticism, children's narrative and literature, dialect theater.

During World WAR I, he collaborated with Ardengo Soffici in *La Ghirba* and *Il Gazzettino del Soldato*. His sonnet, "Malingunie" [Melancholy], appeared in those years. Several works in dialect followed: *Prime canzône*, [First Songs], Rome, 1924; *La Madonna Addulurata*, [Our Lady of Sorrows]: Sulmona, Angeletti, 1925; *Sia*

benedetta Roma [Bless Rome], Rome, 1945; *Sclocchitte* [Poppy Flowers], Milan: Gastaldi, 1949; *Acqua de magge* [May Rain] (with a preface by P.P. Pasolini), Rome: Conchiglia, 1952; *Tiempe de sole e fiure* [Time of Sun and Flowers], Caltanissetta-Rome: Sciascia, 1955; *La Passione di N.S. Gesù Cristo, dai Canti abruzzesi* [The Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ, from the Songs of Abruzzi], Rome: Conchiglia, 1958; *Canzune ad allegrie...* [Happy Songs], Lanciano: *Quadrivio* 1960; *Serenatelle abruzzesi* [Abruzzi Serenades], Rome: La carovana, 1965; many of these works have been collected in the anthology *Canzune de tutte tiempe* [Songs of All Times], edited by Ottaviano Giannangeli, Lanciano: *Itinerari*, 1970.

Criticism: F. Fichera in *Convivio Letterario* (Milan, 1946); P. P. Pasolini in *Quaderno*

Romanzo, June 1947; L. Sciascia in *Galleria*, March-May 1953; G. Caproni in *Il Belli*, April 1955; G. Pischedda, Vittorio Clemente, Rome: Ed. Conchiglia, 1956; A. Spallicci in *La piè*, August 1962; G. Titta Rosa in *Almanacco Bompiani*, 1964; V. Esposito, *Parnaso d'Abruzzo*, Edizioni dell'Urbe 1980; U. Russo (ed.), *Abruzzo nel Novecento*, Pescara, 1984; O. Giannangeli, *Per Vittorio Clemente nel decennale della scomparsa*, Lanciano: Editrice Itinerari, 1985; V. Esposito, *Panorama della poesia dialettale abruzzese dalle origini ai giorni nostri*, Rome: Edizioni dell'Urbe, 1989.

Vittorio Clemente owes his first official consecration to that small gem "Acqua de magge," which earned him a place in Pasolini's and Dell'Arco's anthology. But his poetic journey begins much earlier, between the ages of twenty and thirty, with *Prime*

canzône [First Songs], 1924 and *La Madonna Addulurata* [Our Lady of Sorrows], 1925, in keeping with the best Arcadian-melodic and ethical-religious tradition. It is after the Second World War, with *Sclocchitte* [Poppy Flowers], 1948, that he forges his own path, which leads him to a progressive refinement of themes and style, following a course that we would define as all ascending: from *Acqua de magge* [May Rain], 1952 to *Tiempe de sole e fiure* [Time of Sun and Flowers], 1955, *Canzune ad allegrie...* [Happy Song], 1960, *Serenatelle abruzzesi* [Abruzzi Serenades, 1965.]

An ascending path, as we said, not traced on the surface but dug deeply, until he attains a very personal style, which takes up and continues the highest and most cultured model of literary Abruzzi dialect. Without

presuming to be doing philological work, he transposes the local idiom onto the grid of a rigorous morphological-syntactical patterning. One should also underline the exacting transcription criteria, according to a method that tends to reconcile phonetic and etymological principles.

As for the contents of his poetry, we can say that Vittorio Clemente's work on the whole has nothing outwardly artificial or gloomily pessimistic, because it centers, as Pasolini himself noted, on "the very poetic Abruzzi of his childhood," relived not with sudden flights of fancy, but with a sort of lucid "fade-out, a reasoned regression."

Hence the predominance of that "clear and serene and full vision of nature and time" that, in our view, is not only the dominant note in the poem "Acqua de magge," but in part of all of Clemente's

poetry. Even if, it must be added, there are moments of latent sadness, of disquiet and melancholy, as for instance in the beginning of the sonnet “‘Mattine d’autunne”: “Quanta malengunie/p’ ‘llu ciele bianchicce, senza cante!/I ‘lla campagne è triste ‘mmà nu piante,/comma ‘nu piante dôce senza fine.”

It is an Autumn sketch, which the poet draws with light touches, mentioning the withering of roses, the fading of colors, the muting of voices, to conclude that what is left of so much beauty are only thorns and, in the heart, “a shadow of sorrow.” Everything seems to turn into a invitation to weep, but a “sweet weeping.”

No doubt there are some echoes here of Petrarch’s *voluptas dolendi*, but the timber of the voice is his own: Vittorio Clemente.

La prima lune

Ecche la prima lune de l' Estate,
Amore amore mie, sò remenute
e te manne lu fiore de lu vote.
Ecche la prima lune de l' Estate!
Sperdute pe na via scampagnate
dienghe na voce, se ci sta chi ascote:
l'Amore mie nen m'ha recunusciute.
da *Canzune de tutte tiempe*, 1970

La prima luna — Ecco la prima luna dell'Estate, / Amore,
amore mio, son rivenuto / ed il fiore ti mando di quel voto. /
Ecco la prima luna dell'Estate! // Sperduto in una strada
desolata / do una voce, se c'è chi m'ha ascoltato: / l'Amore
mio non m'ha riconosciuto.

(Traduzione di Ottaviano Giannangeli)

The First Moon

Here is the first moon of Summer,
my love, and now that I've returned
I've come to make good on my vow of old:
Yours is the first moon of Summer!
Down a backwoods road, like a newcomer
I cry out, to anyone who would be told:
My love's denied me, left me spurned.
(Translated by Anthony Molino)

Chela notte d'estate

Chela notte d' estate, tutta stelle...

E nu quatrate spierse
appriesse appriesse a na luciaccapelle
che nen s'ô fà acchiappà.

E chela voce:

Vittò! Revì alla casa!

da *Canzune de tutte tiempe*, 1970

Quella notte d'estate – Quella notte d'estate, tutta stelle...

/ E un ragazzo sperduto / dietro dietro a una lucciola / che
ti fugge di mano. / E quella voce: / Vittorio! Torna a casa!

(Traduzione di Ottaviano Giannangeli)

That Summer Night

That summer night,
stars
everywhere...
The boy strays,
scrambling
after an elusive firefly.
And that voice:
Vittorio! Come home!
(Translated by Anthony Molino)

Autunne

A calate de sera
nu fueche a arde a na campagna stese
fine alla finitore de lu munne.
E quille grille, mpunte d'angunie,
a chiamà da nu funne
de liette pe sta vìe.
Nu file, appene, de fiate: cri, cri:
a quanne a quanne.
Ma chi l'ô sentì?
S'ha finate lu munne, a luna scite.
da *Canzune de tutte tiempe*, 1970

Autunno — Al calar della sera / un fuoco ad ardere in
una campagna / distesa fino alla fine del mondo. / E quei
grilli là, in punto di agonia, / a chiamare da un fondo / di
lelto a questa via. / Un filo, appena, di fiato: cri, cri; / a
quando a quando. / Ma chi vuole udirlo? / Il mondo s'è
finito, a luna uscita.

(Traduzione di Ottaviano Giannangeli)

Autumn

Nightfall.

Fields on fire,

blazing to the far ends of the world.

The agony of crickets

seeps

from the hollow, falls

on deaf ears:

when? when...

The moon is up, the world

has ended.

(Translated by Anthony Molino)

A tiempe de sorve

Nu gricele alla vite...Me retrove
ancora na cullane
de sorve mmane; e quile piuoppe ancora
remire abballe l'acque chela fronna
gialle che treme e lùcceche, ammassite
mpizze a nu rame nire; e revà ammonte
la voce, pe lu colle: "Quande è tiempe
de sorve, amore amore, già l'estate
ha pigliate la vè d'attraviezze..."
E pure mandemane, chela fronne
se raggruglie a nu fiate
de la muntagne. E dellà da nu vele
de nebbie, nfunne funne alla campagne,
chi ancora chiane? Chi redà na voce?
da *Canzune de tutte tiempe*, 1970

Al tempo delle sorbe — Un brivido per la vita...Mi ritrovo
/ ancora una collana / di sorbe in mano; e quel pioppo
ancora / rimira giù nel fiume quella foglia / gialla che trema
e luccica, immalinconita / in pizzo a un ramo nero; e ritorna
su / la voce per il colle: "Quando è tempo / delle sorbe,
amore amore, già l'estate / ha imboccato la via per di là..." /
E pure questa mattina quella foglia / si riaccartoccia a un

soffio / della montagna. E al di là di un velo / di nebbia, in
fondo in fondo ai campi, / chi ancora chiama? Chi ridà una
voce?

(Traduzione di Ottaviano Giannangeli)

When Sorbs are in Season

A chill comes over me... a necklace
of sorbs, even now, in my hands;
even now the poplar
sees in the river
the shimmer of a yellow leaf
dangling from the tip
of a blackened bough... and a voice
surges through the hills: "When sorbs,
my love, are in season, summer is already in flight..."
Later this morning the leaf
will shrivel, at a whish
of mountain wind. From across a veil
of fog, from far away across the fields,
who'll call out, even now? Whose voice
will ring?
(Translated by Anthony Molino)

Viatezze

Giorne d'estate d'ore, mbacce a sole,
mbacce allu mare, a gòdere cuntiente.
E addusulà e sta attente alle parole
che vè nzecrete a referì lu viente.
E spiccecarle; e ndènne a suole a suole
la voce de lu munne, e necchiù niente;
e a ìrsene lu core, lieghie, 'n vole,
chi lu sa dove, a quale appuntamiente.
Forse luntane, all'ùteme cunfine
dò laMadonne de gli marenare
sfronze le rose bianche, a matutine.
E sempre qua retruvarse, uocchie vive
e chiare de quatrale, e su na trine
de spume, vedè rose venì a rive.

Beatitudine - Giorni d'estate e d'oro, in faccia al sole, / in
faccia al mare, a godere contento. / Ed origliare e coglier le
parole / che vien segreto a riferire il vento. // E spiegarsele;
e udir da solo a solo / questa voce del mondo, e poi più
niente; / ed andarsene il cuor, leggero, in volo, / chi lo sa
dove, a quali appuntamenti. // Forse lontano, all'ultimo
confine, / dove sfoglia le rose la Madonna / dei marinari,
bianche, a mattutino. // E sempre qui ritrovarsi, occhi vivi /

e chiari di fanciullo, e su una trina / di spume, veder rose a
riva giungere.

(Traduzione di Ottaviano Giannangeli)

Bliss

Golden days of summer, facing the sun,
facing the sea, delighted, and content.
Days spent eavesdropping on the wind,
mindful of words whispered in secret.
Words I'd unravel; listening, alone,
for the voice of the world, the nothing beyond,
alone, while my nimble heart took flight
for untold trysts and destinations.
Perhaps for the very edge of the world,
where Our Lady of the Mariners
trims white roses in the morning.
And to find myself here, again, eyes
like a boy's, quick and bright, seeing, upon
the lace of waves, roses ride to shore...
(Translated by Anthony Molino)

L'ovalò

Resentì na matine, tra lu suonne,
sunà l'albe, elle abballe alla Madonne
e la voce: "Vittò, iesce lu sole".

E resagliere ammonte alla muntagne
e stà alle poste, all'"Acque de gli Cielle"
de l'ovalò, che ce revianghe a beve
dope cient'anne, come chela vote.

D'arie le piume e d'ore, l'ovalò
che nse trove, e che cante chi sa ddó.

L'uccello fantastico - Risentire, tra il sonno, una mattina /
suonare l'alba, laggiù alla Madonna / e la voce: "Vittorio,
spunta il sole". / E risalire in cima alla montagna / e
appostare, alla "Fonte degli uccelli", / l'ovalò, che ci torni
ancora a bere / dopo cent'anni, come quella volta. // D'aria
le piume e d'oro, l'ovalò / che non si trova, e canta chi sa
dove.

(Traduzione di Ottaviano Giannangeli)

The Ovalò

To stir again, one morning, at the ring
of dawn, down by the sanctuary of Our Lady,
and hear the voice: "Vittorio, the sun is up!"
And climb the mountain once again,
to lie in wait at the Birdbath,
for the return of the ovaló: for it to drink
once more, like that time a hundred years ago...
Of gold its feathers, and of air, nowhere
will the ovalò, or its song, be found.
(Translated by Anthony Molino)

ALESSANDRO DOMMARCO

Alessandro Dommarco was born in Ortona al Mare in 1912 and has been living in Rome since 1931. Having graduated from college with a degree in political science, he initially took up teaching, and later attained a high administrative position in the state bureaucracy. He was a member of the Editorial Board of *Marsia*, a review of literature and criticism, and has contributed to numerous periodicals and journals. His main interest has been French literature, and he has translated Mallarmé and Jean Cassou. His poems and translations have appeared in various cultural reviews and anthologies.

He has published: *Immagini e miti* [Images and Myths], 1951; *Frutti avari* [Meager Fruits], *Quaderni di Marsia*, 1959;

Tèmbe stórte [Crooked Time], Poems in the Abruzzi dialect, *Quaderni di Marsia*, 1970; *Damó ve diche addìje* [I'll Say Goodbye Now], Poems in the Abruzzi dialect, Rome: Bulzoni, 1980; *Colloqui con Isabella*, 14 poesie [Conversations with Isabella, 14 Poems], Rome 1989; *Lamento di Adamo* [Adam's Lament], short poem, Rome: ediz. T.E.R., 1989; *Passeggiate ortonesi* [Ortona Walks], Poems in dialect, Rome: T.E.R., 1991. He also edited an anthology of dialect poetry by his father, Luigi Dommarco, Rome, 1984.

Criticism: E. Giammarco, in *La poesia dialettale abruzzese dell'ultimo trentennio: 1945-1975*, Pescara 1976; A. Motta (ed.), in *Oltre Eboli: la Poesia*, Lacaia 1979; M. Dell'Arco (ed.) in *Primavera della poesia in dialetto*, Rome 1981; C. De Matteis, *Letteratura delle regioni d'Italia: Abruzzo*, Brescia 1986; V.

Esposito, *Panorama della poesia dialettale abruzzese*, Rome: Edizioni dell'Urbe, 1989; F. Brevini, *Le parole perdute*, Turin: Einaudi, 1990; V. Esposito, *Poesia, non-poesia, anti-poesia del '900 italiano*, Foggia: Bastogi, 1992.

Alessandro Dommarco is the greatest living poet of Abruzzi and one of the most representative figures of the dialect Parnassus of the late Twentieth Century. Like so many others, he made his debut in Italian, in the Fifties, earning critical recognition; but it is in dialect that he was to find his most congenial vocation, also due to the fact that he grew up in an environment that was favorable to it (his father, Luigi Dommarco, was a talented dialect poet).

His output is not abundant, but very exacting in its choice of themes and style. Already in the first collection, *Tembe storte*,

1970, his page aims at mirroring the anguished consciousness of his time, rather than indulging in autobiographical effusions. A sorrowful vision of man and his history persists in the second, more substantial collection, significantly titled *Da mo ve diche addije*, 1980, where one can perceive nevertheless a subterranean need of revenge against evil and the certainty of advancing nothingness, through the urgency — at times stated and at times hinted at — to forcefully reclaim the reasons of goodness and the pleasure of living.

As a consequence, a certain darkness of tone, already noted by De Mauro, far from sounding corrosive and depressing, seems rather, in Leopardi's wake, a source of unexpected comfort and, in its own way, even satisfying. A marvelous achievement of rare balance between beauty and truth,

notwithstanding the persistence of an essentially pessimistic atmosphere, can be found in the two poems recently combined into an art chapbook, *Passeggiate ortonesi*, 1992, dominated by the presence-absence of his life companion, Isabella, whose death placed a seal of love and death on the events of a lifetime.

As for style and expressiveness, Alessandro Dommarco's poetry offers one of the highest achievements of modern poetry for the extremely refined use of words, both at the phonetic and semantic level, the accurate morphological-syntactical structure, the transparency of images even through the complexity of analogical relationships, the density and, at the same time, the clarity of the symbolical-metaphorical allusions. One should add, finally, that the adoption of blank hendecasyllables, so rare in the

tradition of Abruzzi as in the rest of Italy, reveals a space which has not been well explored in its expressive potential by dialect poetry in general.

Gna 'rvòte lu vènde

Vuò sapé' che tte diche? Quand'è ll'ùteme
'sta vite còcche passe sòpr'a mmé
'ccuscì gna hè, 'na vòte 'nnammurète
'n'âtre 'ngifrète: gna 'rvòte lu vènde
che mmó stè ècche accòme 'na carézze
mó ze 'gnanisce e ffè 'nu scenuflègge.
Fére lu vènde quande e accòma vó'
de llà de cqua, e a lu judìzije nòstre
nen dè' nisciuna réhule, 'stu vènde
che ggna pòrte la vite e ggna le stucche
nen ze scumbònne e ppe' la ternetà
cundinue a ccòrre a ccòrre e le cummane
sòle 'na légge che n'-ze sè che hè
e ne' hè malamènde e mmanghe bbóne
ma a la fine lu cónde j'ardè siémbre.
da *Da mó ve diche addije*, 1980

Come volta il vento — Vuoi sapere che ti dico? Quando è
in ultimo / questa vita passi pure sopra di me / così com'è,
una volta innamorata, / un'altra inluciferata, a seconda che
volti il vento / che ora è qui come una carezza, / ora si
accanisce e fa uno sfragello. / Spira il vento quando e come
vuole / di là e di qua, ed al nostro giudizio / non ha

nessuna regola, questo vento / che allorché porta la vita e
quando la strappa / non si scompone e per l'eternità /
continua a correre a correre e lo comanda / unicamente una
legge che non si sa cosa sia / e non è cattiva e nemmeno
buona / ma alla fine il conto torna sempre.

(Traduzione dell'Autore)

As the Wind Blows

You know what? When all is said and done
just let this life of mine pass over me
plain as it is, at times so deep in love,
at times instead bedeviled: as the wind blows,
sometimes as soothing as a soft caress,
roaring at other times, and wreaking havoc.
The wind keeps storming here and there, striking
at its own whim, and it seems to us
to have no rule to follow, this wind
that doesn't brood, whether it's bearing life
or wrenching it, and for eternity
it runs on and on, observing only
a law that no one's able to understand,
neither evil nor good but in the end
its numbers always manage to add up.
(Translated by Luigi Bonaffini)

È da quande so' nète

È da quande so' nète che ti porte
déndre di mé, inzième a mé criscènne
juorne pe' juorne cchiù che carna vive,
arbattute 'nchiuvète a 'sti quattr'uosse
ji' e te sénza mullè, ma tu cchiù forte,
tu che cchiù mègne e cchiù ti té vulijje
strujjènne ogne penziére, ogne speranze,
e allóre che m'addorme cchiù sci svéjje
e t'aritrúove già padrone e sotté.
Ccusci ogne juorne, tutte le mumiénde,
senza ripose, senza turnè' arréte,
da quande che so' nète tra di nu
zi fè sta guèrre che nen pozze véngé':
pure se ji' m'affanne e nen m'arrènne
a frabbichè' senza nisciuna arscita,
fràciche di sidore e di pavure,
'ndò putérme arparè'. E tu stié rrite,
morta futtuta mé.

da *Da mó ve diche addije*, 1980

È fin dall'attimo del mio nascere — È fin dall'attimo del
mio nascere che ti porto / dentro di me, insieme a me
crescendo / ogni giorno più che carne viva, / ribaditi

inchiodati a queste quattro ossa / io e te senza cedere, tu più forte, / che più mangi e più ti cresce la voglia / struggendo ogni pensiero, ogni speranza, / e quando mi addormento più sei sveglia / e ti ritrovi già del tutto padrona. / Così ogni giorno, tutti gli istanti, / senza riposo, senza tornare indietro, / da quando sono nato tra di noi / si compie questa guerra che non posso vincere: / anche se mi affanno e non mi arrendo / a costruire senza nessuna speranza di riuscita, / fradicio di sudore e di paura, / luoghi dove poter trovare scampo. / E tu ridi / mia stramaledetta morte.

(Traduzione dell'Autore)

Since the Moment I Was Born

Since the moment of my birth I've borne you
inside me, growing with me more than living
flesh, day after day, together clinched
and nailed to these spare bones, you and I
never relenting, but you far stronger,
you who increase in hunger as you feed,
destroying every thought, every hope,
and when I fall asleep you're more awake
and find yourself the mistress of it all.
So every day, every passing minute,
without a rest, without turning back,
since the time I was born between the two of us
there's been a war that I can never win:
though breathlessly, never yielding, soaked
with sweat and fear and without hope, I try
to build a refuge. And you keep laughing
o my accursed death.

(Translated by Novella Bonaffini)

E ne' vò' pióve cchiù

Jjve la stète. E 'ndré' déndr'a la cambre,
gna tu 'ndrive, lu mère àleche e scuòjje:
e 'ndré' lu sóle: e 'ndréve tra le piéde
de live le cichèle e la cambagne
de la nòtte d'ahóste stelle 'n-giéle
e ttremóre de grille.

Luna rósce d'ahóste, luna tónne
jjve déndr'a la cambre: e mme currive
ridénne éndr'a le véne, éndr'a lu sanghe.

Tu jjve, amóre mé', la luce, l'arie,
lu 'ddóre de la tèrre, le culure,
le fiure de la stète.

Jjve la stète. E gni na ficcra fatte
me te squajjve 'm-mócche, zuccre e amóre:
me te faci' svachè', vèche pe vvèche,
accóme 'na ricciàppele sucóse.

E ji' cóme 'nu céppe m'appiccéve:
e ardeve 'nnènd'a tté.

Mó de té ne' mm'ha 'rmaste che 'nu sònne
de la prim'albe che n'-ze sè che hè:
e stiénghe gni 'na frónn'ammuscelite
sópr'a la rème, 'nu teppóne arsécche

tutte 'ngòtte de sóle, tutte crépe.

E ne' vvò pióve cchiù.

da *Diverse Lingue*, n.4, 1988.

E non vuole piovere più — Eri l'estate. Ed entrava nella stanza, / come tu entravi, il mare alghe e scogli: / ed entrava il sole: ed entravano tra gli alberi / di ulivo le cicale, e la campagna / della notte d'agosto stelle in cielo e / tremore di grilli. // Luna rossa d'agosto, luna piena / eri nella stanza: e mi correvi / ridendo nelle vene, dentro il sangue. / Tu eri, amore mio, la luce, l'aria, / l'odore della terra, i colori, / i fiori dell'estate. // Eri l'estate. E come un fico maturo / mi ti scioglievi in bocca, zucchero e amore: / mi ti facevi piluccare acino dopo acino, / come un grappolo maturo. / Ed io come un sarmento mi accendevo: / e ardevo innanzi a te. // Ora di te non mi è rimasto che un sogno / della prima alba che non si sa che cosa sia: / e sto come una fronda appassita / sopra il ramo, una zolla risecca / tutta cotta al sole, tutta crepe. / E non vuol piovere più.

(Traduzione dell'Autore)

And It Won't Rain Anymore

Summer you were. As you came in the room
with you came in the sea, seaweeds and rocks:
and the sun came in and through the olive trees
came the cicadas, and the countryside
of an August night stars in the sky
and quivering of crickets.

Scarlet August moon, a full moon you were
inside the room: and you ran within me
laughing in my veins, deep within my blood.
You were, my love, the light, the air,
the scent of earth, the colors, the flowers
of the summer.

Summer you were. And like a mellowed fig
you melted in my mouth, sugar and love:
you let me nibble grape after grape on you
like on a juicy bunch.

And I lit up like a sarmentum:
and burned before your eyes.

All I have left of you now is a dream
of the first unfathomable dawn:
and I am hanging like a withered leaf
upon a bough, a patch of thirsty sod

scorched by the sun, cracked to the core.
And it won't rain anymore.
(Translated by Novella Bonaffini)

Pandanicchie a 'nn'ammòlle

Artnésse mahére mijche
de ciò che m'arrembiève la jurnète
— lu trimóre, la frève, rósce e ardènte
lu sanghe ch'arvulleve gni 'nu pazze —
e fusse ricche, fusse nu signore.
Pecché, allundanne, juórne e nòtte amore
me tené' cumbagnije: e jjé' la varche
che curreve curreve: e jjé' lu vènde
che vusséve la varche: e jjé' lu mère
che aperte z'arrapéve 'nnènd'a mmé.
Oh! Amóre, amóre: oh! juórne sénza abbènde
e ssénza pèce, juòrne tutte piine
de maravije ch'arvundé' lucènde
déndra lu sònne. Quand'è ttriste, amòre,
sendì 'gnilite e stracche pe' le véne
caminè' passe passe 'stu rebbèlle
che zz'ha 'ppusète, 'sta pezzendarije,
pandanicchie a 'nn'ammòlle, acqua che stè.
da *Diverse Lingue*, n.4, 1988.

Pantanicchio in mollo — Aversi magari una mollica / di
ciò che mi riempiva la giornata / — il tremore, la febbre,
rosso e ardente / il sangue che mi ribolliva come un pazzo —

/ e sarei ricco, sarei un signore. / Perché, allora, giorno e
notte amore / mi teneva compagnia: ed era la barca / che
correva correva: ed era il vento / che spingeva la barca: ed
era il mare / che aperto si apriva innanzi a me. / Oh!
amore, amore: oh! giorni senza posa / e senza pace, giorni
tutti pieni / di meraviglia che traboccava lucente / nel
sonno. Quanto è triste, amore, / sentire diaccio e stracco per
le vene / camminare passo passo questo ribelle / che si è
posato, questa pezzenteria, / pantanicchio in mollo, acqua
che sta.

(Traduzione dell'Autore)

Stagnating Pool

Had I a crumb of what once filled my day
the trembling, the fever, the red, the burning
blood that seethed and rushed madly through my veins —
I would be rich, I would live like a lord.

Because then, in those times, night and day love
was there with me: and it was the boat
that swiftly sailed, it was the wind
that pushed it onward, and the open sea
that stretched so vast before me.

Oh love, Oh love, Oh days without rest,
Oh days without peace, oh days filled with wonder
brightly overflowing in my sleep. How sad,
my love, it is to feel this rebel walking
so slowly through my veins and come to rest
so weary and cold, this shabby raggedness,
stagnating pool, water standing still.

(Translated by Novella Bonaffini)

OTTAVIANO GIANNANGELI

Ottaviano Giannangeli was born in Raiano (L'Aquila) in 1923 and lives in Pescara. For over forty years he taught in secondary schools, and later modern Italian literature at Gabriele D'Annunzio University.

He was founder and editor, from '57 to '74, of the review *Dimensioni*, which in a special issue published his novel *Sposare una* [To Marry Someone]. He is the author of numerous essays and monographic studies, mainly on Pascoli, Montale, D'Annunzio, and the dialect literature of Abruzzi.

His verse production is quite large. In Italian he has published: *Ritorni* [Returns] (1944); *Taccuino lirico* [Lyric Notebook], 1953; *Strage per la giostra dei dischi volanti*

[Massacre for The Carousel of Flying Saucers], 1955; *Gli isolani terrestri* [Terrestrial Islanders], 1958; *Biografia a San Venanzio* [Biography for San Venanzio], 1959; *Canzoni del tempo imperfetto* [Songs of the Imperfect Tense], 1961; *Un gettone di esistenza* [A Token of Existence], 1970; *Tra piet  e ironia ed epigrammi* [Between Pity and Irony and Epigrams], 1988.

His dialect poems up to 1979 have been collected in the volume *Lu libbre d'Ottavie* [Ottavio's Book], Sulmona: Di Cioccio, 1979; a new *Antologia poetica* [Poetic Anthology] in Italian and dialect appeared in Raiano (L'Aquila) in 1985. In 1989 a new short collection came out, *Arie de la vecchiaie* [Air of Old Age] (Pescara); and in 1994 *Litanie per Maria e altri versi in abruzzese*, Udine, Campanotto Editore.

He also published a critical edition of Vittorio Clemente's works.

Giannangeli, better known as a literary critic and poet in Italian, deserves an important place as a lover of dialect poetry as well, as witnessed by the intense work done since early youth, documented in the large volume *Lu libbre d'Ottavie* (1979). This is a book that marks an important moment in the history of poetry, not only in Abruzzi, for its actual stylistic achievements, for the variety of experiences that subtend it, and for the conspicuous quantity of theoretical reflections that accompanies it, as the attached *Appendice dei codici linguistici* amply demonstrates.

Il libro d'Ottavio presents a vast gamut of motivations, ranging from lyric urgency to elegiac testimony, to the ethical-civil imperative, and even to social concerns. The

informing material is divided into three parts (Il nascere a questo mondo, L'esistere e il resistere, Questo mondo e quell'altro), but with interconnections that make possible an organic reading. And this despite a certain diversity in formal structures, due to the fact that some poems are written in a strict Raiano dialect, while others in a micro-koiné of the Peligna Valley, others still in a regional koiné.

From this one can understand how and why Giannangeli's poetry is so unique: in fact, it is able to demonstrate, with accomplishments that go well beyond mere linguistic experimentation, that dialects lends themselves easily — no less than other expressive forms — to the most varied creations, without losing their essential connotations, which reflect primarily the immediacy and incisiveness of the spoken

word.

Ten years after the *Liber* that outlined his whole human and artistic iter, Ottaviano Giannangeli published a chapbook of short poems, *Arie de la vecchiaiaie*, in which his lyric talent reaches heights of considerable beauty. With a few, vaguely defined suggestions (the sound of an old song or cheerful stornelli, the peals of a bell, views of the town, poplar leaves and cut hay, mysterious echoes that accompany the voice of the Beyond), he grafts, in the memorial recovery of a world undone, the heart-rending melancholy of life passing.

The *Litanie per Maria*, published recently (while thre present work was in its advanced stages), is a splendid confirmation of the his past achievements.

Criticism: A. Narducci, "Canti della terra d'Abruzzo e Molise," in *Prospettive*

Meridionali, a. V, n.10 (October), 1959; W. Binni N. Sapegno, *Storia letteraria delle regioni d'Italia* Florence: Sansoni, 1968; V. Esposito, "Il libro di Ottavio," in *Oggi e Domani* a. VII, n.11 (1979), later in *Note di letteratura abruzzese*, Rome; Edizioni dell'Urbe, 1982; V. Monaco, "La Raiano delle stelle," introduction to *Antologia poetica in lingua e in dialetto*, Comune di Raiano, 1985; V. Esposito, *Panorama della poesia dialettale abruzzese*, Ed. dell'Urbe, 1969; F. Loi, "Cercando un crepitio di vita nei dolci bisbigli d'Abruzzo," in *Il Sole 24 Ore*, February 25, 1990; V. Esposito, introductory sketch for *Arie de la vecchiaie*, in *Abruzzo Letterario*, n.1, January-March Rome: Edizione dell'Urbe, 1990; later in *Nuove note di letteratura abruzzese*, *ibid*, 1991; V. Moretti, "Arie de la vecchiaie di O.G.," in *L'orto di Accademo*, Pescara:

D'Incecco Editore, 1990; F. Brevini, *Le parole perdute*, Turin: Einaudi, 1990; U. Vignuzzi, "Gli Abruzzi e il Molise," in *L'italiano nelle regioni*, ed. by F. Bruni, Turin: UTET, 1992.

Ere, chela canzone, certe vote,
 n'acorde mai sentite
 che te meneve a pazzià alla mente
 e tu lu racchiappive,
 'mpette, 'nsecrete,
 che 'n te l'avesse a 'mmedià la gente.

O ere, certe vote,
 na file appress'all'atre de sturnielle
 cantate a core a core
 come bella sementa spaliàte
 a vache de brillante 'mbacce a sole
 che frutteve tesure
 e rise pe' la vite.

Mo, chi te dà la forze
 de retruvà lu file,
 pote 'nzunnacchite!

da *Arie de la vecchiaie*, 1989

Era quella canzone, certe volte, / accordo mai sentito /
 che ti veniva a scherzare nella mente / e tu lo riprendevi /
 nel tuo petto in segreto, / non avesse a invidiartelo la gente.
 // O era, certe volte, / di stornelli una fila dietro l'altra /
 cantati a cuore a cuore / come bel seme seminato a spaglio /

in chicchi di brillante in faccia al sole / che fruttava tesori /
e risa per la vita. // Ora, chi ti dà forza / di ritrovare il filo,
/ assonnato poeta?

(Traduzione dell'Autore)

like an unknown melody
would play in your head,
for you to capture
and relish in your heart,
far from the envy of others.
Or at times it played
like a string of folk songs
sung from heart to heart
and scattered like seeds,
like diamond beads in the sun,
sprouts for a lifetime
of treasure and laughter.
But now, my sleepy poet,
who'll give you the strength
to recover those riches?
(Translated by Anthony Molino)

Ze' Pietre

La mane a scrive
e na recchie a senti, quasce appuntite,
da l'orte nu rentocche,
na canzone senz'arie, lenta lente,
sole nu muvamente
che me vé da luntane:
nu colpe appress'all'atre de bidente.
Ecche, è ze' Pietre,
lu patre de na nonne che s' muorte
che i' 'n teneve n'anne:
ma mo perché me chiamo?
Ha fenite na lesche,
e l'accorde se ferme
(s'acquète pure sta canzona mé),
s'assuche lu sudore,
e rabbasse la schine, e recumenze
(e pure sta canzone recamine),
e surride ca m'ha recunusciute...

Zio Pietro — La mano a scrivere / e un orecchio a sentir,
quasi appuntito, / un rintocco dall'orto, / senz'aria una
canzone, lenta lenta, / soltanto un movimnto / che mi
vien da lontano: / un colpo dietro all'altro di bidente. /

Ecco, è zio Pietro, / il padre di mia nonna che morì / ch'io
non avevo un anno: / ma perché ora mi chiama? // Ha
ultimato una fetta di terreno, / e l'accordo si ferma / (si
acquieta pure questa mia canzone), / si asciuga il sudore, /
e riabbassa la schiena, e ricomincia / (e anche questo mio
canto ricammina), / e sorride, ché mi ha riconosciuto...

Uncle Pietro

The hand is busy writing,
my ears, sharpened, hear
a jangle from the garden,
a slow song without a tune,
a movement from afar:
I listen, to clangs of a pitchfork.
It's Pietro,
my grandmother's father,
who died when I was one:
why is he calling me now?
When he's done with one patch,
the music stops
(my song is stilled);
then he wipes his sweat,
bends his back, starts again
(as my song resumes):
finally, he makes me out and smiles...

E í penze a nu seculè,
a mill' nne che ancore hanna' menì,
a nu nepote che me rechenosce,
none pe sangue e manche parlatore,
ma sole pe st' accorde che remane
quande s' hanne perdute le parole,
nu dumande luntane...

da *Diverse Lingue*, n.10, 1991.

// Ed io penso ad un secolo, / a mille anni che debbono
venire, / ad un nipote che mi riconosce, / non per sangue e
nemmeno parlatura, / ma solo per questo accordo che
rimane / quando si son perdute le parole, / un domani
lontano...

(Traduzione dell'Autore)

And I think of a century,
of a thousand years yet to come,
of a grandson who will recognize me
not in our tongue or bloodline,
but in a single song that endures
after the words have all been lost,
in some faraway tomorrow...
(Translated by Anthony Molino)

Chele che vu dicere

E sempre stu strafunne
tra chele che sci ditte
e chele che vù dicere, a stu munne.

E chele che vù dicere
o sci pensate 'n sonne
è sole polvra d'ore
che te se scie da 'mmane
come jesce lu sole.

da *Diverse Lingue*, n.10, 1991

Quello che vuoi dire — E sempre questo abisso / tra quello
che hai detto / e quello che vuoi dire, a questo mondo. // E
quello che vuoi dire / o hai pensato in sogno / è solo polvere
d'oro / che ti si scie da mano / non appena esce il sole.

(Traduzione dell'Autore)

What you mean to say

Always a chasm
between what you said
and mean to say, to the world.
But what you mean to say
or thought in your sleep
is only gold dust
that slips through your fingers
and at daybreak, comes undone.
(Translated by Anthony Molino)

'Mmernate senza neve

'Mmernate senza neve, e nn'ha piovute
pe niente a primavera.

Scarze l'annate,

cagnate le staggiune:

ce sta chi ha sementate

e che nen ha metute.

La spighe nen ha 'mpite

(vedive sta campagne

tutta quanta 'ngiallite).

E i' paggene e paggene haje scritte,

haj' raccute du' vierze solamente:

me je recape, me je tienghe stritte,

je lasse a n'atru tiempe pe' semente...

da *Diverse Lingue*, n. 10, 1991

Invernata senza neve — Invernata senza neve, non è piovuto / per niente a primavera. / Scarsa l'annata, / cambiate le stagioni: / ci sta chi ha seminato / e che non ha mietuto. / La spiga non ha empito / (vedevi questa campagna / tutta quanta ingiallita). // Pagine sopra pagine io ho scritto, / ho raccolto due versi solamente: / me li trascelgo, me li tengo stretti, / li lascio a un altro tempo per semente...

(Traduzione dell'Autore)

No Snow This Winter

No snow this winter,
no rain this spring.
The harvest is scarce,
sowers won't reap.
Wheatfields barren:
all you see,
straw yellow.

And I would write page after page
to salvage two verses of a poem:
choice verses to which I cling,
till there comes a time to sow them...
(Translated by Anthony Molino)

GIUSEPPE ROSATO

Giuseppe Rosato was born in Lanciano in 1932, where he has recently returned to live. He taught literature in secondary schools. He has published: *La cajola d'ore* [The Golden Cage], Lanciano: Cet, 1955); *L'acqua felice* [Happy Water] Milan: Schwarz, 1957); *Ars oratoria e altro* [Ars Oratoria and Other Things] Manduria: Lacaïta, 1974); *Autodidattica e altre moralità* [Self-teaching and Other Moralities] (ibid., 1980); *Prova di commiato* [Farewell Rehearsal], Milan: Edizioni Trentadue, 1982; *Esercizio di lettura* [Reading Exercise], Manduria: Lacaïta, 1984; *Lettere della quinta lontananza* [Letters of the Fifth Distance], Pescara: Questarte Libri, 1984; the novel *Un regno è un regno* [A Kingdom is a Kingdom], Milan: Edikon,

1969; a few books of prose and satirical and parodic verse: *Poesie in forma di cosa?* [Poetry in the Form of What?], Pescara: Emblema, 1967; *Un uomo sfinito* [An Exhausted Man], Lanciano: Itinerari, 1972; *Apologhi a Pietro* [Apologues to Peter], Foggia: Bastogi, 1983; *Ecche lu fridde* [Here Comes the Cold], Pescara 1986; *L'inverno alle porte* [Winter at the Gate], Venezia 1988. He has written and edited books of fiction for the schools. He is a contributor to RAI's cultural programs, literary reviews and the cultural sections of periodicals. Since 1977 he has been the editor of the review *Questarte*.

Giuseppe Rosato's dialect output is rather scant, but of a truly uncommon charm. It should be noted that, having made his debut in 1955 with *La cajole d'ore*, he is not heard of again until thirty years later,

with *Ecche lu fridde*, a collection of poems that are short in length, but have the appeal of certain fragments of Greek lyrics. Let's read, for instance, the first lines of the page that lends its title to the volume: "Here comes the cold again. Once more / December, and it's fifty-two. / Year after year to make summer pass / so much work, until the first / wind of August, suddenly, / brought you the smell of Autumn.

The return of the cold, which in the usual speech expresses nothing more than the natural change of seasons, here is charged with symbolic value, subtly alluding to the decline of life, under the onrush of time that cannot and will not wait. Apparently it is time that passes and carries us away, but in reality it is we that pass inexorably, year after year, finally sinking into nothingness. Events can repeat themselves, seasons renew

themselves, but feelings, emotions are irremediably lost; and if at times we have the illusion of recovering them through memory, all that is left is an incurable sadness in our baffled heart: "But what song, what litany / rising from a church or balcony / can make my heart / run wild again, that now is in a daze?"

That passes, then, vanishes forever. It can happen that, as if from an enchanted spell, one hears inside even his mother's voice along the twisting alleys of the old town, evoking her sweet presence in a sudden start, but all this is just a strange mixture of the past with the nothingness that remains. It is true, the voice can insist in calling out to the depths of memory, and so the cards of the days get more and more mixed up, since life wants to make fun of us, constantly changing them: "Because life likes to have

fun, /it changes the cards on the table and yes, it gives me a pair / of wings, but so I can stay inside a basket / with four children, hatching.”

It is rare for a poet to be able to express himself totally in a few pages. Giuseppe Rosato, in our judgment, has succeeded, often achieving authentic poetry in the process.

Criticism: Giacinto Spagnoletti, *Il Tempo*, 10/25/1986; Laura Saltarelli, *Nuovo Mezzogiorno*, Decemeber 1986; Francesco Desiderio, *Il Tempo*, 11/19/1986; Rino Boccaccini, *La pianura*; March '87; Ugo Maria Palanza, *Il Tempo*, 1/24/1987; Franco Loi, *Il Sole 24 Ore*, 2/23/1990; Pietro Gibellini, *Diverse lingue*, n. 4, 1988; Vittoriano Esposito, *Panorama della poesia dialettale abruzzese*, Rome: ed. dell'Urbe, 1989; Franco Brevini, *Le*

parole perdute, Turin: Einaudi, 1990; Giacinto Spagnoletti-Cesare Vivaldi, *Poesia dialettale dal Rinascimento ad oggi*, Milan: Garzanti, 1991; Achille Serrao, *Via terra*, Udine: Campanotto, 1992; Vittoriano Esposito, *Poesia, non poesia, anti poesia del '900 italiano*, Foggia: Bastogi, 1992

Dope tant'anne resenti' la voce,
 la voce che ti chiamo pe' le ruve...
 Dope tant'anne chela stessa voce,
 ma chi ti chiamo cirche e ne' le truve...
 Ci t'aresbije, a vvote, a chela voce,
 je vulisse aresponne' e non ci pruve;
 ti pare di sapé'da 'ddo la voce
 ti chiamo, fî pe' corre' e non ti smuve.
 Che ne' le sa 'ddò sti, mo chi ti chiamo?
 E tu, che ne' le sî 'ddova sta ésse?
 Tra chela voce e tte nu mare fonne
 di terre e di silenzie, nu strafonne
 che ti fa scí' di mente... E tu non lèsse
 di 'scutà, e chela voce chiama, chiamo?
 da *Ecche lu fredde*, 1986

Dopo tanti anni risentire la voce / la voce che ti chiama
 per i vicoli... / Dopo tanti anni quella stessa voce / ma chi ti
 chiama cerchi e non la trovi... / Ti ci risvegli, a volte, a
 quella voce, / le vorresti rispondere e non ci provi; / ti pare
 di sapere da dove la voce / ti chiami, fai per correre e non ti
 muovi. / Che forse non lo sa dove tu stai chi ti chiama? / E
 tu, che non lo sai dove sta lei? / Tra quella voce e te un mare

fondo / di terra e di silenzio, un abisso / che ti fa uscir di
senno... E tu non smetti / di stare in ascolto, e quella voce
chiama. chiama?

(Traduzione dell'Autore)

To hear, again, years later, a voice,
hailing you through back streets...
To hear again, years later, that voice,
to seek her out, but fail to meet...
Awakened by the sound of that voice,
tempted to answer, you hold your reply;
then, fancying you know from where the voice
hails, at first you stir, then idly stand by.
But the voice knows your whereabouts all too well;
Nor do you ignore where she hides.
Between you both is a sea
of earth and silence, an abyss
that rends the mind; still, you abide
to listen, as a voice calls out, and wails....
(Translated by Anthony Molino)

Non te ne i', fa finte ca te voje
 bbene come na vote, t'arecurde?,
 quando la sere nen m'avesse maie
 addurmite pe' 'n te landà e tu stive
 a cape de lu llette la matine
 a 'spettarme... E lu jorne se ne jiave
 gne nu selustre. 'n ci avanzave manche
 lu tempe di fermarse nu mumente
 a penzarce, a penzà' quanta puté
 durà... Com'à successe ca 'ddavere
 ha finite? Ccuscí, a la spruvviste,
 tu sî 'bbijate a írtene, vulije
 di campà: e i gna faccc a richiamarte
 se mi ci so' 'ncantate a guardà proprie
 a tte che te ne vi, a ppoche a ppoche...
 da *Ecche lu fredde*, 1986

Non te ne andare, fa finta che ti voglio / bene come una
 volta, ti ricordi?, / quando la sera non mi sarei mai /
 addormentato per non lasciarti e tu stavi / al mattino a capo
 del letto / ad aspettarmi... E la giornata se ne andava /
 come un lampo, non avanzava neanche / il tempo per
 fermarsi un momento / a pensarci, a pensare quanto

sarebbe potuto / durare... Com'è successo che davvero è
finito? / Così, all'improvviso, / tu hai cominciato ad
andartene, voglia / di vivere: e io come faccio a richiamarti
/ se mi ci sono incantato a guardare proprio / te che te ne
vai, a poco a poco...

(Traduzione dell'Autore)

Don't leave. Pretend, instead,
that I love you as before... Think back,
at nights I'd lie awake
not to leave you, mornings
you waited
at the foot of the bed, for me...
And the days would rush like lightning,
as we had no time to stop and think,
to think how long we'd last... How did we
end? Hungry for life, you began,
simply, to leave; now,
how can I call you back,
if the very sight of you
fading
enthalls me?

(Translated by Anthony Molino)

E s'apre' la nenguente

Lu ciele che di bbotte s'accupave,
le nuvole che scé da ugne late
e s'apré la nenguente, ne calave
tante ca a lu mumente avé 'ncasciate.

E a chelu silenzie di bbummasce
lu tembe si scurdave ch'à da corre',
si fermave nu ccone a rifiatà.

E ti sentive aremmuri' la vrasce
de le pinzire. Pe' la vie na morre
di bbardesce a fa' feste, a zambija'.

Da *Diverse lingue*, n.5, 1988

E s'apriva la nevicata — Il cielo che di colpo s'incupiva, /
le nuvole che sortivano da ogni lato / e s'apriva la nevicata,
ne veniva giù / tanta che all'istante era già tutto bianco. //
E a quel silenzio d'ovatta / il tempo dimenticava che deve
correre, / si fermava un poco a riprendere fiato. // E tu
sentivi spegnertisi la brace / dei pensieri. Per strada una
frotta / di ragazzini a far festa, a zampettare.

(Traduzione dell'Autore)

Snowfall

Suddenly, skies darkened
clouds swarmed
and a burst of snow
enwhitened the world.

Upon that cottony silence
time stopped to catch its breath,
and forgot to pass.

You could feel the embers of your thoughts
dying. Outside, a pack of children,
cut loose, rejoiced.

(Translated by Anthony Molino)

La neva furastere

Na neva furastere ha 'mpruvelate
le titte e le terrazze, ma n'ha 'vute
lu tembe d'attaccà a le vie, squajate
da cente e cente rote. E po' ha piuuvute.

La neva nostre arebbelé le ruve,
facé cagnà lu sone a le cambane,
purtave passaritte a lu balcone.

Sta neva furastere è na 'mbrujone:
ti fa crede' ch'arporte anne luntane,
facce, parole, rise...E 'n ce le truve.

Da *Diverse lingue*, n.5, 1988

La neve forestiera — Una neve forestiera ha impolverato /
i tetti e le terrazze, ma non ha avuto / tempo di legarsi alle
strade, disciolta / da cento e cento ruote. E poi è piovuto...
// La neve nostra ricolmava i vicoli, / faceva cambiare
suono alle campane, / portava passerotti sul balcone. //
Questa neve forestiera è un'imbrogliona: / ti fa credere che
riporta anni lontani, / volti, parole, risa...E non ce li trovi.

(Traduzione dell'Autore)

The Foreign Snow

A foreign snow dusted
the rooftops and terraces, but had no
time to stick to the ground, slushed
under hundreds of wheels. Then it rained.
Our own snow would carpet the alleys,
change the timbre of churchbells,
bring baby sparrows to our balconies.
Foreign snows'll trick you, assure
you they carry bygone years,
faces, words, laughter... But look again.
(Translated by Anthony Molino)

L'utema lune de settembre, gobbe
 a llavante, ugne sere se ne cale
 a lu sprufonne, ancore n'atru ccone
 e lu scure s'attònne. A la serene
 lu lume de le stelle a fa' cchiù fredde
 le nuttate, e ugne notte chela vele
 sempre cchiù se sbiadisce e se trafonne.
 Ma va 'ncontr'a a lu sole: quala morte
 è cuscì bbelle? Putèrece acchède'
 ca nu levante pure a nnu j'aspètte
 com'a st'utema lune de settembre,
 na matine de luce a n'atru monne
 che sta 'rrèt'a la notte...

A nnu lu scure ce s'ajòtte, e dope
 nen ci sta cchiù crescenze e nné mmancanze,
 nen ci sta gobbe de lune e stellijàte,
 nen ci sta cieles, 'n ci sta cchiù nijènte.
 Da *Ugn'a ddò*, 1991

L'ultima luna di settembre, gobba / a levante, ogni sera se
 ne scende / verso lo sprofondo, ancora un poco / e il buio
 s'arrotonda. A cielo sereno / il lume delle stelle a far più
 fredde / le notti, e ogni notte quella vela / sempre più

impallidisce e s'inabissa. / Ma va incontro al sole: quale
morte / è così bella? Poterlo credere / che un levante
attenda pure noi / come quest'ultima luna di settembre, /
un mattino di luce in un altro mondo / che sta dietro la
notte... / Noi il buio ci s'inghiotte, e dopo / non c'è più
crescenza e né mancanza, non c'è gobba di luna e distesa di
stelle, / non ci sta cielo, non c'è più niente.

(Traduzione dell'Autore)

Humpbacked, the last September
moon dips nightly
towards the chasm in the East; soon the dark
will be round. The sparkle of stars
chills the clear night, as the sail
fades, and dwindles
to meet the sun.

What other death is so grand?
If only we could believe
that the East awaits us as well,
as it does this last September moon...
or that a sunlit morning of a different creation
lies behind the night...
Instead, we are only swallowed by the dark,
and can look to no crescents, no new moons,
there is no sweep of stars,
no sky. Nothing,
anymore.

(Translated by Anthony Molino)

COSIMO SAVASTANO

Cosimo Savastano was born in Castel di Sangro in 1939. He studied literature in Naples, where he also attended the Academy of Fine Arts. After receiving a degree with a thesis on the painter from Abruzzi Teofilo Patini, he went on to teach literature and history in secondary schools.

He has received many awards, both regional and national. His works in dialect include: *Che sarrà* [What Will Be], Pescara 1965; *Amore amore e pàrleme d'amore* [Love Love and Speak to Me of Love], with a preface by Vittorio Clemente, Pescara 1966; *Dènte a na scionna* [Inside a Sling], Pescara 1967; *Nu parlà zettenne* [Speaking in Silence], with a preface by Ottaviano Giannangeli, Japadre, L'Aquila 1982.

His poems have appeared in reviews: *Dimensioni*, Pescara 1968; *Diverse Lingue*, Udine, April 1988; *Abruzzo Letterario*, IV, n.3, Rome, 1992; *Il Belli*, II, n.2, Rome, 1993.

Savastano has also been interested in painting and art criticism. Among his most important essays are: *Teofilo Patini e la sua gente* [Teofilo Patini and His People], L'Aquila, 1982; *Patini, momenti d'arte e di vita* [Patini, Moments of Art and Life], Teramo, 1991.

Other writings and brief essays have appeared in cultural periodicals. Recently he published the environmental study *Uomini e territorio fra l'Altosangro e l'Altopiano delle Cinquemiglia* [Men and Territory between the Altosangro and the Cinquemiglia Higland], Teramo: EGI, 1993.

Criticism: V. Esposito, *Parnaso d'Abruzzo*,

Edizioni dell'Urbe, 1980; *Note di letteratura abruzzese*, ibid., 1982; *Panorama della poesia dialettale abruzzese*, ibid., 1989; *Poesia, non poesia, anti poesia del '900 italiano*, Foggia: Bastogi, 1992; Anna Ventura, *Il sole e le carte*, L'Aquila: Ferri, 1981; G. Oliva - G. De Matteis, *Letteratura delle regioni di Italia: Abruzzo*, Brescia: Ed. La Scuola, 1986; Franco Brevini, *Le parole perdute*, Torino: Einaudi, 1990; G. Spagnoletti-C. Vivaldi, *Poesia dialettale dal Rinascimento ad oggi*, Milan: Garzanti, 1991; Ugo Perolino, "L'antico fascino del dialetto riscoperto nell'opera di Savastano," in *Il Centro* (1/8/1991), Pescara; Oliva Gualtieri Bernardi, "Nu parlà zettegne," in *Abruzzo Letterario*, a. IV, n. 3, 1992, Edizioni dell'Urbe; Franco Loi, "Di che stoffa sono i sogni della poesia?" in *Il Sole-24 ore* (2/7/1993), Milan.

Cosimo Savastano stands out among Italian and Abruzzi poets for his complete dedication to the use of dialect: in fact, he is not a bilingual poet, like almost everyone else now, unless one were to consider autonomous creations the Italian translations that usually accompany his texts.

Another of Savastano's distinctive traits is the fact that he was born, in a way, as an adult poet, in the sense that with his first experiences he is already capable of drawing a very personal itinerarium in poesin. No wonder then if, in 1968, upon conferring the National "Lanciano" Price, the Jury (chaired by Mario Sansoni), recognized his "considerable personality," capable of giving "of himself and his land that magical lyrical relationship that is the greatest charm of his compositions."

This flattering assessment was, in our judgment, totally confirmed after a few years in the collection that marks his full maturity: *Nu parlà zettene* (1982). Here Savastano takes up and amplifies his meditative themes, veined here and there by confessional effusions, in an aura alternately fabulous and essentially dramatic. One of the shortest examples: "The whole year is to weave the song, / but summer is closed muteness / an impassioned hush that doesn't quiet us / like the wave upon the sand of the sea. // The wave that comes and goes and doesn't rest, / the whole night long, grandma, it vents its woes / with its language that does not take hold of us..."

In matters of language and style, Savastano has carried out a truly valuable salvage operation: spurred by the urgency of an imaginary conversation with his

grandmother, he reinvents the speech of a remote time identifiable with his own childhood, and this way everything goes back into its most natural place, where saying and communicating were the same thing, and conversing itself had the flavor of fables, without betraying the truth of popular wisdom, mixed with myths and legends.

The result is, as Spagnoletti has rightly noted, an “invincible charm,” not only in the most demanding pages, where his “cosmic and existential wonder” rise to the surface, but in our view also in the apparently more relaxed pages, in which the poet abandons himself to the *narratio*, happy yet painful, of a modern teller of fairy-tales.

Sciate e pretame

Tutta l'anne pe' tesse la canzona,
ma la staggiona n'ammupirce chiuse,
nu zetteià accurate che n' ci acquieta
come l'onna alla rena de ru mare.
L'onna che va e vè nen ci apposa
tutta la notta, no', sfoca le pene
ché ru language sia che n' ci afferra:
e ma la terra o no', parla la terra?
o faciaranne nu trascurse antiche
come parlame nu' sciate e pretame?

Da *Nu parlà zette*, 1982

Fiato e pietrame — Tutto l'anno per tesser la canzone, /
ma l'estate è un ammutolire, / un tacere accorato senza
pace, / come l'onda sulla rena del mare. / L'onda che va e
viene e non riposa / tutta la notte, nonna, sfoga le pene /
con il linguaggio suo che non si intende: / ma la terra,
nonna, parla la terra? / o faranno un dialogo antico / come
parliamo noi due, fiato e pietrame?

(Traduzione dell'Autore)

Breath and Stone

The year is ours to weave a song,
except for summer, season of silence,
wordless time, restless
as a wave against the shore.

A wave, grandma, that comes and goes
and never sleeps, but spills its pain
in a language all its own:
but tell me, grandma, does the earth speak?
or do they share an ancient tongue,
like you and I, breath and stone?
(Translated by Anthony Molino)

Lucecappella i' so' dénte alla notte,
 ca miele e pane i' so', ca so' cecuta,
 ca so' l'onna e le sale de ru mare,
 maniere sceme i' so' dell'acqua chiova,
 ca na caccamandonia so' d'amore,
 so' la sementa chiusa d'ogne fiore
 e come la sementa me sprufonne,
 ruscegnuole 'mbriache e cantatore,
 mazzamarielle e spica de dolore.

I' so' na ciammaruca che n'allega
 'n miezze alle scorze de re salecune.

I' so' na pescia d'acqua de cutine,
 scenna sperduta, pena della sera.

Me vuoje chiude dénte a ste penziere
 come nu ricce dénte alla sua spine,
 me vuoje sazià che l'oje e che le vine
 e stregnerme alla terra assi' la fine
 come na fronna secca de chiuppera.

Io sono — Lucciola io sono della notte, / e ancora miele e
 pane io sono, sono anche cicuta, / anche l'onda sono e il
 sale del mare, / mestolo sono di insipida acqua piovana, / e
 un papavero sono d'amore, / sono il chiuso seme d'ogni

fio­re / e co­me il se­me mi spro­fon­do, / usig­no­lo ubria­co e
can­ta­to­re, / far­fal­la ne­ra e d'oro e spi­ga di do­lo­re. // Io
so­no una lu­ma­ca so­li­ta­ria / in mez­zo alle cor­tec­ce dei sa­li­ci.
/ Io so­no una tro­ta che vi­ve nell'an­sa pro­fon­da / ala
sper­du­ta, pe­na della se­ra. // Mi vo­glio rin­chiu­de­re in que­sti
pen­sie­ri / co­me l'is­tri­ce den­tro i suoi acu­lei, / vo­glio
sa­zia­rmi con l'olio e con il vi­no / ed ag­grap­par­mi alla ter­ra
fi­no alla fi­ne / co­me una fo­glia se­cca di piop­pe­to. //

I Am

A firefly I am in the night
and more, I am honey and bread, I am hemlock,
I am the wave and salt of the sea I am
a ladle of insipid rainwater,
a poppy I am of love
the closed seed of every flower
and like every seed I plunge into the earth,
I am the drunken song of a warbler,
a black and gold butterfly, a grain of sorrow.
I am a snail that won't stick
to the barks of willows.
I am a river trout,
a lost wing, evening sadness.
In these thoughts I want to recoil
like a porcupine in its bristles,
I want to feast on oil and wine,
cling to the earth until the end
like a dry leaf to a poplar.

E pure lapa so', lapa allullita,
 lapa sperduta a na cascia de cupe,
 i' so' la cera e l'oje della lampa
 a strujerce a nu fueche de jurnate,
 nu sciume 'mbambalite,
 n'acqua de fonta
 scummerta e sulleiata.

I' so' na lota antica de pengiara
 che fu servuta p'ammassà ru munne.

Da *Nu parlà zette*, 1982

Eppure ape sono, ape sfinita, / ape sperduta in un
 alveare, / io sono la cera e l'olio della lampada / che si
 strugge al fuoco dei giorni, / un fiume imbambolato, /
 un'acqua di sorgente / sconvolta e soleggiata. / Io sono un
 antico fango adatto a fabbricare coppi / quello che servì per
 impastare il mondo.

(Traduzione dell'Autore)

And I am also a bee, a feeble bee,
a bee lost in the swarm of the hive,
I am the wax and oil of a lamp
outmatched by the fire of days,
a river, bewildered,
water from a spring,
turbulent, iridescent.
I am the ancient clay of potters
used to make the world.

(Translated by Anthony Molino)

Puterla arretuhà che na canzone

N'ha chiù chi canta e chi vularne 'n cieie
mia lennenella lùtema d'abbrile.
'Mbecciate nu cucù 'n miezze a ste vile
de neja, suol'isse orapuiele,
orapuielepe' sta parlatura
che ci allullisce e ce strascina a morte.
Cucù che le penne d'ore, orapuiele:
chessa canzone, ciùfele de scorza,
la puorte pe' la selva alle cumbina
andò n'è chiù nu lèmete de sulcre,
andò n'è chiù ru signe de sta genta,
spierte vaca sperdute e spaliare,
no' chiù sementa a sperchie de maiure
ma farra ammetecata a veccia e iuojje,
ammupita canaria,
attassate verdone,
che chiù nene sbrita 'ndricce de languagge,
chiamata laria alla campagna spasa,
felame senza fina attuorre a fuse.
Orapuiele, pe' sta parlatura,
pe' ste campagne scamurrate e stente:
funte d'antica vena le muntagne,

radeche senza chiù n'umà de stizze,
menne senza chiù latte ci ene fatte,
arruscenite vèmbre 'n bacci a sole.

Poterla ritrovare con una canzone Non c'è più chi canti e
voli nel cielo, / mia rondine ultima d'aprile. / Intricato un
cuculo in mezzo a questi veli / di nebbia, solamente lui
prega per lei, / prega per lei, per questa parlata / che si
svilisce e si trascina a morte. // Cuculo dalle piume d'oro
prega per lei: / la tua canzone, zufolo di scorza, / la porti
fino al limitare della selva / dove non c'è più un confine per
i solchi, / dove non c'è più un segno di questa gente, / acini
spersi, sperduti e sparpagliati, / non più semente quasi come
specchio di antenati, / ma farro mescolato alle impurità e al
loglio, / canarina ammutolita, / affranto verdone, / che più
non dipana intrichi di linguaggio: / chiamata larga alla
campagna distesa, / filo senza fine attorno al fuso. // Prega
per lei, per questa parlata, / per questa parlata, / per queste
campagne senza più frutti sulle spighe decapitate e scolorite:
/ sorgenti di antica vena le montagne, / radici senza più un
trasudare di gocce, / mammelle senza più latte sono
diventate, / arroventati vomeri contro il sole. //

Would that My Song Could Find Her

No longer do we sing or dare to fly,
oh, last of the April swallows.
Caught in these drapes
of fog, a cuckoo alone prays, prays
for this language
on the wane, dragging toward its death...
Pray for her, gold feathered cuckoo:
carry this song, the notes of this reed,
to the far edge of the woods,
where furrows no longer mark the land
and no trace of this people remains,
but for seeds no forbear would recognize,
pits scattered and lost
spelt mixed with dregs and chaff...
the canary is mute
the greenfinch, weary
of trying to untangle the tongues
that stretch across the countryside
like endless spools of thread.
Pray for her, for this language,
for these barren, sickly fields:
mountain veins once gushing with water

are now roots with no moisture
breasts with no milk
skulls exposed to the sun.

You, cuckoo, gold feathered pilgrim
sprinkle your song of crystal
over this hearth enfolded in silence:
over the flotsam that is our people,
whose processions now unfold without banners,
without monks, nor compassion.

Cucù de penne d'ore pellehrine,
 spanne la tua canzone de cristalle
 pe' le gente, pajiuche de sciumara,
 senza chiù stannarde 'n prucessione,
 senza peiure e senza cumbassione,
 sciummenera culcata alle zettenne.
 Tu curre, mia cucù, curre cantanne
 de na razza vestuta nera e chiena
 della canzona che mo c'è stuccata,
 de na cruva 'nchiummita a ru sua 'ndricce,
 telare spase e fuse ammatassate
 de quanta licce tutte aiommerate.
 N'ha chiù chi attorce d'acce e cannavella
 della chenocchia andica de candanne...
 Puterla arretruhà che na canzone,
 o mia cucù che le tua penne d'ore,
 chella canzona gialla de ru miere,
 sta razza spaliata pe' ru munne,
 strùmmele senza mana che r'ammena,
 cresteiane de dia senza stelle,
 stracche core de chiumme,
 scungertate destine,

raspa azzannata de na rama secca.

Da *Diverse lingue*, n.4, 1988

Cuculo dalle piume d'oro pellegrino, / diffondi il tuo
canto di cristallo / per le genti, pagliuzze di fiumara, / che
non hanno più stendardo nelle processioni, / senza più
priori e neppure compassione, / come focolare coricato nel
suo tacere. // Tu corri, mio cuculo, corri cantando / di una
razza vestita di nero e colma / del canto che ora si è
spezzato, / di una navetta pesante come piombo nel suo
intrico, / telaio dall'ordito preparato e fuso dal filo
scompigliato / di quanti licci, tutti malamente aggomitolati.
// Non vi è più chi attorca lini e canape / dalla conocchia
antica del cantare... // Poterla ritrovare con una canzone, /
o mio cuculo con le piume d'oro, / con la canzone gialla del
merlo, / questa razza sparpagliata per il mondo, / trottola
senza una mano che la lanci, / cristiani di Dio senza stelle, /
stanco cuore di piombo, / sconcertato destino, / rude
zannata di ramo secco.

(Traduzione dell'Autore)

Go, my cuckoo, go and sing
of a race dressed in black
whose song has come to silence;
of leaden fibers on the loom,
of a spindle ensnarled
and heddles entangled.

No longer does anyone spin flax and hemp
from yesterday's yarns of song...

Oh my gold feathered cuckoo,
if only a song, if only the yellow
song of the blackbird, could find her,
this race scattered across the earth,
spinning top that no hand flung,
chosen people with no stars to implore...
oh, this tired, leaden heart,
baffled destiny,
withered branch, bearing marks of fangs.
(Translated by Anthony Molino)

Ciuòcchere

'Ngoppa alla varda, amore,
'ncatenate dalla muntagna càlene nu ciuòcchere...
Chi mana vo' spanà nude de jàccure
a prima sera, a voria acquiatata.
Stuzzeneià iennotta re tezzune
e spalummà na fatta de vernisce.
Mane 'ncertate, amore arrescetate,
'ncantesemate amore, quanta suonne.
Mia ciòcchere 'ndrunate a capefuoche,
addore de Natale pe' la casa.

Da *Diverse lingue*, n.4, 1988

Ciocco Sul basto, amore, incatenato / dalla montagna
portano giù un ciocco. / Quale mano saprà dipanare i nodi
delle corde / sul far della sera, a borea acquietata. //
Stozzare stanotte le braci di tizzoni / e far volare una
quantità di scintille. // Mani intrecciate, amore ridestato, /
amore irretito dagli incantesimi, quanti sogni. // Mio ciocco
che troneggi nel camino, / profumo di Natale per la casa.

(Traduzione dell'Autore)

The Kindling

Tied to the packsaddle, my love,
is the firewood, brought down from the mountain.
What hands will loosen the ropes
at dusk, once the north wind settles?
Tonight, we'll stoke the cinders
watch the swirl of sparks.
Hands locked, love rekindled,
spellbound, we will dream.
From the hearth my kindling will lord
over the house, filled with the scent of Christmas.
(Translated by Anthony Molino)

A menà grànnera

E dope la calia a menà grànnera:
na risa de cumbiette a cieie vasse,
nu strucurà pe' tèttera e ramere.
E la specuccia stenta della lenza,
gialla lenderna spasa alla luntana,
nen purtarrà manuocchie pe' la chiana
ahuanne e chisà chiù se mai. Morte
ci êna arruzì, vattute a sullione,
camorre scamurrate, pena d'aneme
chiecate e 'nzuffunnate. E tuorre tuorre
chiù niente alla campagna stesa, chiusa
alla fatia, streppune e cembune
e ièrvene gramegne. Addia addia
core de ru mia core addupeiate,
manche na reja chiù pe' 'n miezze all'ara.
Da *Diverse lingue*, n.4, 1988

Scrosci di grandine E dopo la caligine scrosci di grandine:
/ una risata di confetti a cielo basso, / uno stropicciare per i
tetti e sulle lamiere. // Così le poche spighe stente del
piccolo campo, / unica luce gialla come di lanterna alla
lontana, / non basteranno a far covoni giù per la piana /
quest'anno e chissà se mai più. Morte / saranno destinate ad

ossidarsi, battute dal solleone, / spighe dalla testa spezzata,
pena di anime / piegate e distrutte. E tutt'intorno / più
nulla nell'estesa campagna / non più lavorata, ma
sterpaglie e radici monche / ed erbacce di gramigna. Addio
addio / cuore del mio cuore sognante, / neppure un covone
più per tutta l'aia.

(Traduzione dell'Autore)

Hailstorm

After the swelter, the pelting:
low skies broke out in laughter,
rattling shingles and rooftops.
Languid wheatstalks,
like far off yellow lanterns,
won't cover the plain with bales of hay,
not this year, nor, perhaps, again. Dead,
they will rust under a blazing sun
and snap, the toll of bent
and broken souls.

Of untilled fields nothing remains
except for brushwood, weeds,
quack grass. Goodbye,
heart of my failing heart, goodbye:
the threshing floor is bare.

(Translated by Anthony Molino)

LATIUM

For centuries, approximately since the Renaissance, everything written in dialect in the Latium region is related to Rome; generally the poets who have expressed themselves in the dialect of Rieti or Viterbo or of some small town like Bagnoregio Alatri have been imitators, more eager to pattern themselves after Peresio, Berneri or Belli than to develop their own style. Today things have changed or are changing, due in part to the frenzy of the dialect vogue, but also to the small towns' rediscovery of the historical, cultural and linguistic patrimony of their past. We are thus witnessing an apparently rather paradoxical phenomenon: the more restricted dialect speech becomes, the greater the blossoming of dialect poets, who are not only storehouses of philology or

folklore, but expressive worlds often of considerable quality.

Having to choose some texts for a small Twentieth -Century anthology of Latium, it is not possible to take into account (and it would be interesting to delve into the linguistic spirituality of idioms such as the one from Tolfa, almost totally feminine in gender) experiences outside of Rome.

Rome now has over four million inhabitants, the areas still tied to dialect remain Trastevere and Testaccio, but a new vernacular is being born based on the slangy “romanesco” of the suburbs and outskirts; this combines with the “generic” speech of immigrants who have become citizens of the capital and have acquired the cadence of the Roman dialect. It was fated to happen, because a metropolis like Rome, with the strength of its history, lures the out-of-

towner and lets him have a taste of its linguistic expressiveness, which mixes with the monuments, the works of art, tradition. One becomes a Roman with a certain ease, and the engagement takes place (or had taken place in the classroom when one reads a little Trilussa and Belli) naturally, also because in the bars, on the busses, in the lines at the post office, at the bank or municipal delegations, people are not reserved and quiet, but talk, complain, shout, tell stories. What is happening is somewhat similar to what used to happen at the time of the great conquests of the Roman Empire: then it was the slaves and the artists who came to Rome and when they spoke (Piero Bargellini in his History of Italian Literature compiles an amusing inventory of anecdotes related to this) they mangled sentences, thereby creating the premises for

the birth of the Italian language (Da mihi illum panem: da mi il pane).

The phenomenon this time concerns the other regional idioms that interact among themselves and with the Roman dialect, thus creating a new *romanesco*, just as effective, even though it's very different from the one used by Belli, for example. This has somewhat authorized the dialect of Mauro Marè, who lives on innovations and inventions as he looks for poetry through a language fashioned by him and capable of realizing the thing in the sound.

This premise was necessary because a dialect, spoken by millions of people and with a considerable written tradition behind it, does not have the same problems and significance of a dialect spoken by a few hundred people and without a written tradition in its past. Not to mention that

Rome is the Capital of Italy, the fate of the country and the spiritual fate of Christianity are decided there; it is the crossroads of the events (seat of both Parliament and Senate) which must necessarily reflect upon those who are interested in dialect poetry and above all its practitioners.

It is very well known that all poetry in Roman dialect in the second half of the Nineteenth Century developed under the direct influence of Gioacchino Belli; the great master, with his more than two thousand sonnets, is the legitimate, unquestioned predecessor, indispensable source not only for everything concerning language, but also everything concerning themes and even contents. Filippo Chiappini and Luigi Feretti, for example, move slavishly within Belli's poetry and not only do they not make a secret of their affiliation,

they go so far as to exhibit it, with that easy insistence that demands attention in the name of a tradition within which one is sure to find at least the legitimacy of being heard. Clearly, the latter show the keen preoccupation typical of the vaudevillians, of the variety artist who yearns for applause and doesn't care about the rest.

Gaetano Mariani has written that they "live in the shadow of Belli's words; they go into the streets,... they listen to the people, speak in their tongue, they see them move, love, suffer; but they listen to them and see them with Belli in their ears and in their soul, as a guide but also as a constant burden."

Different from the poetry of Ferretti and Chiappini or even opposed to it is that of Augusto Marini, who looks to political and economic news as fodder for his verses. So

simple sketches are replaced by satirical and polemical comments that strike at the government and its Ministers, the Cardinals, the officials. At times Marini's verses, who does not stray far from the usual trite and vapid themes, finds a genuine parodistic vein which, however, gets soon diluted in the ritual of images and in the standard repertory of scenes that never approach Belli's human and poetic sensibility. It is clear that the aforementioned poets lack the participation and adherence to the world they are representing and evoking, and they lack the conviction that poetry must be something other than descriptivity tout-court.

They don't even have that generic disenchantment (non-committal, for some critics) shown later by Trilussa as he crossed the broken doors of fairy-tales, which are

only able to impose an original and acceptable form when they become cutting and mocking.

To find some kind of poetic certainty again, not devoid of energy and quality, one has to wait for the first compositions by Gigi Zanazzo, who is directly connected to Belli's vein (perhaps without neglecting even Ferretti's and Chiappini's experiences) and from it he draws the inspiration to capture the small realities of everyday Roman world. Zanazzo understands the necessity of going beyond Belli while starting with him, and to explore the spaces left empty or unexpressed by his great predecessor. His expressive energy is thus enhanced by it, because it doesn't adjust easily to the meter of imitation and it must therefore follow a totally personal groove, making an effort to find poetic motifs applicable to the

suggestions. Zanazzo carefully avoids dwelling on whatever he feels to be extraneous and above all avoids attracting the reader's attention with recurrent exclamations: he tempers the subjects in a warm, goodnatureed mimicry of spoken speech until he touches the chords of recitative which, unlike the one exhibited and chosen by Pascarella and Trilussa, in Zanazzo is inherent to poetry, as an attitude that is beyond the scope of true recitation, but gives it substance with words and images.

At this point one should broach the particular question of the relationship existing among dialect poets of the same linguistic area and not between dialect poets and poets writing in Italian; maybe up to Marini, to limit ourselves to Rome, the affiliations had taken place almost

exclusively on the trunk of the Roman dialect, but he opens a fresh new chapter, with which he contributes to the development of Italian poetry. This is an era dominated by the teaching of Giosuè Carducci, a necessary point of reference. The seething spirit of the Risorgimento is still burning and vigilant, and everything extolling heroism, patriotic virtues and similar subjects is enthusiastically accepted. Dialect poets do not want to lag behind and feel oldfashioned with their discourses that bring to life town sketches, that endlessly portray the oleography of the village, so they adapt to the themes advanced by Italian poetry and of course look to the bard of the Terza Italia. In the first place Cesare Pascarella who, even though he remains in the atmosphere and spirit of Trastevere, is able nevertheless to break away from that

sticky crepuscular tone and reach high and lofty notes, bringing “into history Belli’s ahistorical world,” as Franco Brevini writes. This happens because the poet, while in a certain sense withdrawing into the type of anti-Risorgimento invectives with which Carducci had attacked false and deceitful trophies, does not let himself go, does not yield to anticlerical invectives or political parroting with trite formulas or worn-out archetypes. There is an interview with Ugo Ojetti that clarifies Pascarella’s poetic attitude and gives us the key to his writing: “The spoken language of the Roman people is not a dialect in the sense the popular languages of Milan, Venice or Naples are called dialects. It is the selfsame Italian language pronounced differently. And add to these purely phonetic differences the great superiority of our dialectal language

over Italian. It is more proper because it is more concrete, because it has not been used by sublime minds for many centuries for metaphysical speculations and every word gives immediately the idea of the thing it represents, without having other representations weaken that certainty." Pascarella speaks of "dialectal language...more proper and more concrete than Italian," that is, he insists on the possibility (certainty, in his case) that the Roman dialect can contain in the sounds the precise idea of the thing uttered by virtue also of the fact that it still has not been weakened, contaminated or rendered vague by tradition. The question here becomes interesting and lays the foundation for the ideas that Loi and Giacomini have been advancing for some years. Which means that Pascarella, whatever the achievements of his

poetry, had clear in his mind what was happening in that never really clarified relationship between dialect and language. These theoretical statements are even more striking because they were made by a poet in odor of high style and adopted by Carducci the critic. Should not the opposite have happened? Or was it enough for Carducci to simply look at the themes Pascarella dealt with?

Carducci had understood that for Pascarella dialect had not been a mere expedient and therefore he introduced him to readers with that fervor that at the time contributed to erasing so many of the misunderstandings and fears stemming from the Unification of Italy.

In order to show that Roman dialect (but also any other dialect) could attain results equal to if not better than those achieved in

Italian, Pascarella attempted the long poem with *Storia nostra* [Our History], which was intended to trace events beginning with the foundation of Rome. "If Belli had used that dialect solely to introduce the Roman people 'to speak of themselves in his naked, coarse and even bawdy tongue,' Pascarella needed it to sing the glory of a nation: antithetical attitudes that place the two poets on different paths, even if historically both are Romantic positions. But Pascarella's attempt is to be underscored even more if one considers that at the time in other regions the epic poem was only something to be translated, so they looked to the *Comedy*, the *Jerusalem*, the *Orlando*, the *Aeneid*, a chapter still to be studied both as a phenomenon and as the dialect's attitude with respect to the classics.

Totally ignoring history, Trilussa would

make one think of a type of poetry harking back to Belli; instead Spagnoletti explains very well its remote roots: "in the sentiments expressed by Trilussa everything appears clear and explicit, according to the tradition of Eighteenth Century poetry: love of honesty is almost always absent, a certain dose of programmatic cynicism, the refusal of all 'exaggerations,' including demagoguery and dictatorship, and the reduction of human values to a bourgeois scale." We have come down a step, we are outside a strictly plebeian reality, but also far removed from Pascarella's commoner. In Trilussa everything takes on the appearance of discoloration, of a remnant; it's as if we were at the Porta Portese market and rummaged through new and old or imitation old knick-knacks, as if objects and animals, people and things, sentiments and virtues underwent a

marrow removal and became, to give an example suited to the present, like Mac Donald's fast food. The poet does not have the conviction of what he says and relates, his supermarket is somewhat playful and impudent, somewhat moralistic and disrespectful, and has all the appearance of ending up in tavern chatter. Claudio Rendina writes: "the hedonistic society of late Nineteenth and early Twentieth Century exalted Trilussa, poet and character; he was the symbol of an era and of the middle class. And that's how he expressed himself up to *La gente* [The People] in 1927. But during the twenty years of Fascist rule he did not lose his popularity: he became instead the source of impetus for the banter going around the peninsula, in non-committal terms, and therefore tolerated by the regime. His voice became confirmed not

as of a school or party,' but the cicada capable of facing a 'chameleon / blacker than coal."

Steering dialect towards "an arrangement of dialect" Trilussa breaks that flow of tradition that, if with contradictions and rejections, was advancing with poetic intent.; he does not renew and does not betray, but has the idea of having animals speak in his apologues and in his fables, so that it became a veritable fashion after him, with dozens of versifiers imitating him, lacking nonetheless his composed and engaging inventiveness. He however falls back on "a type of satire that does not help us very much in understanding the man, but only a small slice of society."

After Pascarella, Zanazzo and Trilussa, Roman dialect poets are numberless, but almost always moving within worn-out

formulas not far removed from the usual sketches and from the vignettes to which theater has also contributed, above all Petrolini's. One can say at any rate that, contrary to other regions and other metropolis, there is no perceptible lag with respect to schools and trends or teachings of Italian poetry: the "Crepuscolari" immediately find a willing audience, as do the Futurists, the "Rondisti," the "Ermetici," the Neorealists.

It would be interesting to see where the reasons for such a direct correlative come from, and it would also be interesting to investigate why nearly the whole prolific output in Roman dialect (as in the Neapolitan as well, where the exceptions are few, such as Serrao, Sovente and Di Natale) almost completely lacks the note of a feeling or color which is not oleographic. The

hypotheses are perhaps referable to the use of language in Belli, that is intimidating and makes his disciples revolve around themselves (The case of Corazzini dialect poems are an exception).

It is probable that Mario dell'Arco, raised in the cult of all preceding and contemporary Roman dialect poetry (he was born in 1905, Pasarella died in 1940 and Trilussa in 1950), saw more than one motif lacking in the tradition (such as sentiment itself) and had the complete vision of a repetition of recurrent topos only apparently varied. The virginity of dialect, mentioned by the author of *Villa Glori*, capable of decanting the profound sense of history and to radically transcribe facts, has at least suffered a laceration: the capital's dialect mulls over stale reflections of a world fallen into disuse. The various poets are no longer

even the famous notaries of transformations of Balzachian memory, they come to terms with rhymes, wink at rhetoric, at coarseness. Dell'Arco feels the need, since *Taja ch'è rosso* [Cut that It's Red], of 1946, to purify the stale air being breathed. That is why he rejects the frequently baroque and plodding commentaries of the last decades and entrusts himself to the suggestions of the heart, yet never allowing them absolute freedom, dell'Arco language being vigilant and even rigorously calibrated. A scrupulous scholar, but with a manly and open crepuscular soul, he has in any case proved he can handle even more traditional subjects, such as *The Sack of Rome* and *The Rape of the Sabine Women*, realizing works that legitimately follow the line of Italian poetry, but correcting it with the mischievousness comparable to that of the

early Palazzeschi. The results, even though noteworthy, remain nevertheless in the confines of an effort that comes to terms with the near and not so near past.

The true novelty is ushered in by Mauro Marè who, after his 1977 debut with *Ossi di pèrsica* [Peach Stones], (with a preface by Giuseppe d'Arrigo), gradually finds a personal and original direction that utilizes Roman dialect in an experimental way, but without disavowing the patrimony of tradition. But the poet makes the patrimony's eyes spin, its hair stand on end, its teeth fall off. Already the poetic attitude found in *Cicci de sellero*, [Celery Heart] 1979, is different from that of a few years before; one can see that he is fascinated by spoken speech, but more for what it offers in the deformations of a stuttering ideal or of a schoolchild who bungles language than of a

man of the people who looks to the middle class when he speaks. The subsequent collection, *Er mantello e la rota* [The Cloak and the Cape], all centered on circumstances that look to Belli as he thoughtfully considers life and human destiny, introduces the poet's new hell whose center is Rome and whose outskirts are the other side of a Rome advancing from the remote shores of a universal desert. Marè writes in *Sillabe e stelle* [Syllables and Stars], "Streets of Rome, alleyways: / I often come to visit you. / My heart on my sleeve, / I look for hand-me-down myselfes." Mario Lunetta has observed that for Marè "it is not enough to relate, to represent with sorrowful wit the scenes of an *Arazzo Romano* [Roman Tapestry] that in any case remained a fiction to be subjected to words of praise or scorn:

from him it has become indispensable to look for contamination." This contamination takes place in Célinian fashion first in *Verso novunque* [Verse Nowhere] and then in *Controcore* [Counterheart] which take us inside a disorientating dimension of precariousness, even linguistic. But in this disorientation there is no estrangement, rather the opposite, with that lucid analysis of the world that crumbles and gets stranded on the neurotic possibilities of the inhuman disarray of a race toward nothingness. In this poetry there is all the muriatic acid of a civilization whose rhythm is constantly thrown off by the need of a relationship with life that Marè pursues in plenitude and enchantment and that puts him ill at ease primarily for the senses that appear and disappear, offer themselves and combine

with other senses. It's as if Marè were making a Dantean journey, no longer through the realms of good and evil, but through the dissonance of syllables, through the jungle of phonemes that crash with one another and get angry and expect to take the place of being. This state of inhumanity of words leads the poet to fuse with sounds and so he merges with his song and becomes its victim and executioner.

No more rituals to follow, sights to immortalize, characters of a memorable Rome, full or half-tone portraits of a reality to be defended by memory, now the poet needs to find himself and place us outside the circuit of what we could call traditional semantics, and for this reason he pursues the dark key to the mystery that will reveal to us the meaning of the symbols and perhaps will give us the opening onto the infinite.

Marè, with his neologisms, with his expressive richness, shows clearly, as if it were still necessary, that real poetry can be entrusted to any language, and often invents its own language to protect itself from contamination, maybe by an act of contamination.

We are now peering into the future of Roman dialect poetry which, had we taken into consideration the myriad poets that have blossomed recently, would have taken us too far from the analysis of its development and would have led us astray. It was our intent to follow the course of Belli's seed and see how it was transformed into something other than itself; the rest is academia, exercises, a few whims not to be considered, in order to prevent too many incrustations from covering the trail and the voice made flesh *ner nerbo e ner vverbo* (in

sinew and word), to paraphrase the poet.

NOTES

1 cf., to have an idea, *Frammenti di luce, poesie folkloristiche*, ed. Circolo Poetico-Culturale "Bartolomeo Battilocchio", Civitavecchia, s.d., and, by Ettore Pierrettori, *La Tòrfa dal Barsòlo — Poesia in dialetto tolfetano*, Turin: Gruppo Editoriale Forma, 1982.

2 Piero Bargellini, *Pian de' Giullari*, vol. I, Florence: Vallecchi, 1946.

3 Gaetano Mariani, "Pascarella nella letteratura Romantico-Verista", in *Ottocento Romantico e Verista*, Naples: Gianni Editore, 1972, p. 531.

4 Franco Brevini, in Introduction to Cesare Pascarella, *La scoperta dell'America e altri sonetti*, Milan: Mondadori, 1992.

5 Ugo Ojetti, in *Alla scoperta dei letterati*, new edition ed. by Pietro Pancrazi, Florence: Sansoni, 1946, p. 239.

6idem.

7 Gaetano Mariani writes in *Ottocento Romantico e Verista*, op. cit., p. 561: "I don't believe that to explain Carducci's enthusiastic opinion of Pascarella and the friendship between the two poets it is enough to insist on the epic of Villa Glori, on the type of poetry that Carducci dreamed of doing and did not do, on the undeniable liking the author of the Giambi always showed for whoever took an interest in

patriotic poetry and literature. At the root of Carducci's judgment lies the consciousness of a master who feels he has a firm disciple among the dialect poets of Rome, a man who saw life and history (history above all) as he himself saw it, as he himself interpreted it: a clash of passions against the flabbiness of Romantic sentimentalism".

8 Gaetano Mariani, *idem*, p. 540.

9 Giacinto Spagnoletti-Cesare Vivaldi, *Poesia dialettale dal Rinascimento a oggi*, vol. II, Milan: Garzanti, 1991, p. 698.

10 Claudio Rendina, *Introduzione a Trilussa, Poesie*, Rome: Newton Compton, 1992, p. 13.

11 Giacinto Spagnoletti-Cesare Vivaldi, *op. cit.*, p.698.

12 Mario Lunetta, *Introduzione a Sillabe e stelle*, di Mauro Marè, Rome 1986.

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CESARE PASCARELLA

Cesare Pascarella was born in Roma in 1858. From his early childhood he manifested a character intolerant of rules and institutions, to such a degree that he ran away from the seminary of Frascati and devoted himself to politics and to the social events that followed the Breach of Porta Pia. In any case he finished his studies at the Apollinaire and immediately after registered at the Fine Arts Institute, which he attended irregularly, but showing considerable progress.

He became a fashionable painter and took part in the group of XXIV of the Roman Countryside, whose intention it was to offer a realistic picture of landscape and animals. Pascarella devoted himself to this activity with great enthusiasm and benefited from it,

making acquaintances that gave him the possibility, at only twenty-two, to publish his first sonnets in Roman dialect in Cronaca Bizantina and Capitan Fracassa.

His collaboration with the two reviews allowed him to strike up a friendship with Gabriele D'Annunzio and Edoardo Scarfoglio. The three made a trip to Sardinia with a spirit of adventure and with the intention to discover a civilization that they considered different from that of other Italian regions, and for this reason interesting both from a social and a more strictly anthropological point of view.

In 1883 he began to write for *Fanfulla della Domenica*, which allowed him to publish the long poem *La serenata* [The Serenade] and aroused the critics' welcome, if somewhat belated, interest, even for the recent work published the year before, in

1882.

Pascarella's life was later a succession of trips (to Japan, North America, Africa, Egypt, South America, India) of which there are traces in the Taccuini [Notebooks], Milan: Accademia dei Lincei, 1961, witty and often very effective pages, that show the poet's caustic power of observation and his pictorial, as well as human, eye. But there are also the journeys through Italy, some of them on foot, like the one through the Ciociaria. Thus his contributions include reports, short essays, descriptions of places, of types, of areas, and he tackles even certain humorous topics, as in the case of *Il manichino* [The Mannequin], 1885. Incidentally, a careful study reveals that Luigi Pirandello had an earnest interest in Pascarella's volume.

Between trips he publishes his work,

recites in theaters (not only in Rome, and Giuseppe Verdi was in the audience in Milan), and falls prey to a restlessness that turns him into a wanderer and a stubborn walker.

Pascarella's poetry is born on the threshold of Belli's experience, which fades away or takes on new connotations with the rise of post-Unification nationalism and the patriotic enthusiasm of the Risorgimento. The model being followed was Carducci, who will take a favorable interest in Pascarella's poetry, thereby generating an almost disproportionate general endorsement on the part of men of letters and readers. So Pascarella, from *Er morto de campagna* [A Dead man in the Country], 1882, goes on to *Villa Glori* (1886), tempted by what Giorgio Barberi Squarotti has called

“the dialect epic.” *Villa Glori* is nevertheless less “fanciful and lively” than *La scoperta dell’America* [The Discovery of America].

In 1941 *Storia nostra* [Our History] comes out posthumously, which however gives too much play to linguistic wordplay and historical ambiguities, told amidst puns and “comical anachronisms,” as has been noted. In part the “distraction” of the journeys, in part the overly programmatic poetics in keeping with the official standard of the regime, weaken this work by Pascarella who however, perhaps thanks to his tolerant attitude, became Academic of Italy in 1930. Thus, there is truth in what Cecchi wrote, as Brevini notes, that “Pascarella was the epic poet that Carducci could not be for linguistic reasons.”

Cesare Pascarella died in Rome in 1940.

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Ma che dichi? Ma leva mano, leva!
 Ma prima assai che lui l'avesse trovo,
 Ma sai da quanto tempo lo sapeva,
 Che ar monno c'era pure er monno novo!
 E siccome la gente ce rideva,
 Lui sai che fece un giorno? Prese un ovo
 E li in presenza a chi nun ce credeva,
 Je fece, dice: — Adesso ve lo provo. —
 E li, davanti a tutti, zitto zitto,
 Prese quell'ovo e, senza compriméti,
 Pàffete! je lo fece regge' dritto. —
 Eh, ner vedé' quell'ovo dritto in piede,
 Pure li più contrarî più scontenti,
 Eh, sammarco! ce cominciorno a crede'.

da *La scoperta dell'America ed altri sonetti*, 1989

I — Ma che dici? Ma togliti, togliti! / Ma prima assai che
 lui l'avesse trovato / Ma sai da quanto tempo lo sapeva, /
 Che al mondo c'era pure il mondo nuovo! // E siccome la
 gente ci rideva / lui sa che fece un giorno? Prese un uovo /
 E li in presenza di chi non ci credeva, / Fece, dice: — adesso
 ve lo provo. — // E li, davanti a tutti, zitto zitto, / prese
 quell'uovo e, senza complimenti, / Pàffete! lo fece reggere

dritto. — // Eh, al vedere queel'ovo dritto in piedi, / Pure i più contrari più scontenti, / Eh, sanmarco! ci cominciarono a credere.

(Traduzione di Luigi Bonaffini)

But what are you talking about! Don't interrupt —
How long do you think before the moment when it
Finally got discovered, did he come up
With the idea the world had the New World in it!
No luck at first. At first he couldn't beg,
Finagle, argue people to the truth.
They just laughed. He takes a hardboiled egg:
"All right, you unbelievers, look. Here's proof!"
Then and there, right before their noses
He rolls his sleeves up, gingerly, gingerly poises
The egg — Then pop. Ta dah! It stands erect!
And when they see it standing on its toes
Even the most recalcitrant stiff necked
Unbeliever hears, believes, and knows.
(Translated by John Du Val)

Ché méttetelo in testa, che er pretaccio
 È stato sempre lui, sempre lo stesso.
 Er prete? è stato sempre quell'omaccio
 Nimico de la patria e der progresso.
 E in quelli tempi lì, si un poveraccio
 Se fosse, Dio ne scampi, compromesso,
 Lo schiaffavano sotto catenaccio,
 E quer ch'era successo era successo.
 E si poi j'inventavi un'invenzione,
 Te daveno per forza la tortura
 Ner tribunale de l'Inquisizione.
 E na vorta lì dentro, sarv'ognuno,
 La potevi tené' più che sicura
 De fa' la fine de Giordano Bruno.

da *La scoperta dell'America ed altri sonetti*, 1989

IX – Perché mettetevelo in testa, che il pretaccio / È stato
 sempre lui, sempre lo stesso. / Il prete? È stato sempre
 quell'omaccio / Nemico della patria e del progresso. // Ed a
 quei tempi lì, se un poveraccio / Si fosse, Dio ne scampi,
 compromesso, / Lo schiaffavano sotto catenaccio, / e quello
 che era successo era successo. // E se poi gl'inventavi
 un'invenzione, / Ti davano per forza la tortura / Nel

tribunale dell'Inquisizione. // E una volta lì dentro, si salvi
ognuno, / Potevi essere più che sicuro / Di fare la fine di
Giordano Bruno.

(Traduzione di Luigi Bonaffini)

IX

Your priest has stayed the same since the first day.
You always can depend upon a priest:
Whenever someone tries to take the least
Step toward progress, a priest blocks the way.
What happened when an ordinary person
Like you or me got in some kind of jam!
Back then priests threw you into jail, then slam!
However bad things were, next day they'd worsen.
If you invented something great and new,
They'd put you on a rack, tighten a screw,
And quiz you at their clerical tribunal.
Once you were in their grips, God help you, friend:
The only future left you was to end
On the same spot they put Giordano Bruno.
(Translated by John Du Val)

— E quelli? Quelli? Je successe questa:
 Che mentre, li, frammezzo ar villutello
 Così arto, p'entrà' ne la foresta
 Rompeveno li rami cor cortello,
 Veddero un fregno buffo co' la testa
 Dipinta come fosse un giocarello,
 Vestito mezzo ignudo, co' 'na cresta
 Tutta formata de penne d'ucello.
 Se fermorno. Se fecero coraggio:
 Ah quell'omo! — je fecero, — chi sête?
 — Eh, — fece, — chi ho da esse'? So' un servaggio.
 E voi antri quaggiù chi ve ce manna? —
 — Ah, — je dissero, — voi lo saperete
 Quando vedremo er re che ve commanna. —
 da *La scoperta dell'America ed altri sonetti*, 1989

XXIX — E quelli? — Gli successe questa: / Che mentre, li,
 in mezzo al muschio / così alto, per entrare nella foresta /
 Rompevano i rami con il coltello, // Vidro un fregno buffo
 con la testa / Dipinta come fosse un giocattolo, / Vestito
 mezzo nudo, con una cresta / Tutta formata di piume
 d'uccello. // Si fermarono. Si fecero coraggio: / Ah
 quell'uomo! — gli fecero, — chi siete? /

— Eh, — fece, — chi devo essere? Sono un selvaggio. // E voi altri quaggiù chi vi ci manda? — / Ah, — gli dissero, — voi lo saprete / Quando vedremo il re che vi comanda.

(Traduzione di Luigi Bonaffini)

But what about them! — Huh! Them! Oh, yeah, as they
Were wading through deep moss with knives to hack
The tangled weeds and vines that held them back
From making even slow and hard headway,
Suddenly they stumbled on a face
Painted all colors like a spinning top.
Its head was covered with a feather mop.
It had no clothes in any other place.
They halted, trembling, tried to shed their fear:
“Hey you, who are you! Tell us,” they began,
“Hey, who should I be! I’m a wild man.
But you guys! Who are you! Who sent you here!”
“You’ll find out soon,” they answered, “by St. Peter.
But first you have to take us to your leader.”
(Translated by John Du Val)

Ma come? Dopo tanto e tanto bene,
 M'avressi da bacià' dove cammino,
 E invece me fai mette' le catene?
 Me tratti come fossi un assassino?
 E tu sei Gasperone... Spadolino...
 E che sangue ci avrai drento a le vene?
 Er sangue de le tigre? De le jene?
 E che ci avrai ner core? Er travertino?
 Ma come? Dopo tutto guer ch'ho fatto,
 Che t'ho scoperto un monno e te l'ho dato,
 Mo me voi fa' passa' pure pe' matto?
 Ma sarai matto tu, brutt'impostore,
 Vassallo, porco, vile, scellerato;
 Viè' de fora, ché me te magno er core.

da *La scoperta dell'America ed altri sonetti*, 1989

XLIII – Ma come? Dopo tanto e tanto bene, / Dovresti
 baciare dove cammino, / E invece mi fai mettere le catene? /
 Mi tratti come fossi un assassino? // E tu sei Gasperone...
 Spadolino... / E che sangue ci avrai dentro le vene? / Il
 sangue delle tigri? Delle iene? / E che ci avrai nel cuore? Il
 travertino? // Ma come? Dopo tutto quello che ho fatto, /
 Che t'ho scoperto un mondo e te l'ho dato, / Adesso mi vuoi

fare passare pure per matto? // Ma sarai matto tu, brutto
impostore, / Vassallo, porco, vile, scellerato; / Vieni fuori,
che mi ti mangio il cuore.

(Traduzione di Luigi Bonaffini)

XLIII

What's this! After all the good I did for Spain,
You ought to kiss my footprints. No — instead,
You lock me like a criminal to a chain.
You treat me like I'd knocked someone in the head.
You're not a king, you're a hangman — hey, I mean a
King should have blood of tigers in his veins.
You! Blood of a tiger! Blood of a hyena!
Do you even have a heart! Do you have brains!!
After everything I've done for you,
Discovered a world and gave it to you, too,
You say, "Look at that poor lunatic."
But you're the lunatic, you know. You're sick!
Fraud! Pig! Coward! Son of a bitch!
Come out, I'll beat the bullshit out of you!
(Translated by John Du Val)

XLVIII

E l'italiano è stato sempre quello!
E si viè' 'n forestiere da lontano,
Sibbé' ch'ha visto tutto er monno sano,
Si arriva qui s'ha da cavà' er cappello.
Qui Tasso, Metastasio, Raffaello,
Fontan de Trevi, er Pincio, er Laterano,
La Rotonna, San Pietro in Vaticano,
Michelangelo, er Dante, Machiavello...
Ma poi nun serve mo che t'incomincio
A dilli tutti: tu, si te l'aggusti
Tutti 'st'òmini qui, vattene ar Pincio.
E lì, mica hai da fa' tanti misteri:
Ché quelli busti, prima d'esse' busti,
So' stati tutti quanti òmini veri.

da *La scoperta dell'America ed altri sonetti*, 1989

XLVIII — E l'italiano è sempre stato quello! / E se viene un forestiero da lontano, / Anche se ha visto tutto il mondo intero, / Se ariva qui deve togliersi il cappello. // Qui Tasso, Metastasio, Raffaello, / Fontana di trevi, il Pincio, il Laterano, / La Rotonda, San Pietro in Vaticano, / Michelangelo, il Dante, Machiavelli... // Ma poi non serve ora che t'incomincio / a dirli tutti: tu, se ti interessano / tutti

questi uomini vattene al Pincio. // E lì, mica devi fare tanti misteri: / Chè quei busti, prima d'essere busti / sono stati tutti quanti uomini veri.

(Traduzione di Luigi Bonaffini)

XLVIII

An Italian's Italian, and that's that.
And any time a foreigner comes to Italy,
Even if he's toured the world completely,
When he gets here, he's got to tip his hat.
Here we have Da Vinci, Pincio Museum,
Trevi Fountains, St. John Lateran,
Rotunda, St. Peters in the Vatican,
Tasso, Metastasio, Raphael, Colosseum,
Michaelangelo, Machiavelli, Dante, Boccaccio...
Look, if you're interested, I don't plan
To recite the whole long list. Why not go find
Them all at the Pincio. But keep in mind:
Each of the statues, before it was a statue,
Was a living, breathing, real Italian man.
(Translated by John Du Val)

Cusì Colombo. Lui còr suo volere,
 Seppe convince' l'ignoranza altrui.
 E come ce 'rivò? Cor suo pensiere.
 Ecchela si com'è. Dunque, per cui
 Risémo sempre lì. Famme er piacere:
 Lui perché la scopri? Perché era lui.
 Si invece fosse stato un forestiere,
 Che ce scopriva? Li mortacci sui!
 Quello invece t'inventa l'incredibile:
 Che si poi quello avesse avuto appoggi,
 Ma quello avrebbe fatto l'impossibile.
 Si ci aveva l'ordegni de marina
 Che se troveno adesso ar giorno d'oggi,
 Ma quello ne scopriva 'na ventina!

da *La scoperta dell'America ed altri sonetti*, 1989

L — Così Colombo. Con il suo volere, / seppe convincere
 l'ignoranza altrui. / E come ci arrivò? Col suo pensiero. /
 Ecco com'è. Dunque, per cui, // Siamo sempre lì. Fammi il
 piacere: / Lui perchè la scopri? Perché era lui. / Se invece
 fosse stato un forestiero, / Che ci scopriva? I suoi mortacci!
 / Quello invece t'inventa l'incredibile: / Che se poi quello
 avesse avuto appoggi, / Ma quello avrebbe fatto

l'impossibile. // Se avesse avuto gli attrezzi di marina / che
si trovano oggi, / Ma quello ne scopriva na ventina!

(Traduzione di Luigi Bonaffini)

L

That's how Columbus was. Against his will
And his smart thoughts and his power to convince,
Everybody else's ignorance
Couldn't stand a chance; which brings us still
Around to that same old question: why
Did he discover it? Because he was him!
Some foreigner sailing on the ocean's rim —
What could he discover? How to die!
But he did things nobody thought he'd do,
And if he'd had some help along the way,
Would have sailed on to accomplish miracles.
What's more, if he had only had a few
Of the fancy gadgets sailors use today,
He'd have discovered twenty-five Americas.
(Translated by John Du Val)

GIGI ZANAZZO

Zanazzo was born in Rome in 1860. He became interested very early in the folklore of his city and poetry in Roman dialect, reading with great intentness Peresio, Berneri and Belli. He took a job as deputy director of the Vittorio Emanuele Library, but later became director of the Biblioteca della Pubblica Istruzione. He had an open and affable nature which led him to live among the people, from whom he drew many of the qualities of his poetry. It was he who founded the periodicals that best succeeded in interpreting the spirit of the people of Rome: *Rugantino* and *Cassandrino*. It is a shame that his studies and critical essays are not always orthodox from a philological point of view, but his work never lacks motivation and is never the product of bizarre whim. In fact his sketches, his characters, his vignettes, while essentially harking back to Belli, depend too much on the parodic element and make use, as has been noted, "of brilliant wordplay" to obtain results that are perhaps too often garish and exhibited for their mastery of composition. Belli's common people live again in Zanazzo's pages, but in a minor key with respect to the master; nevertheless the habits, the customs, the beliefs, the fears,

the faith, in brief the life, in the change of seasons and sentiments, are illustrated with a sort of rigorous precision and meticulousness, so that one can even cull from Zanazzo's verses valid evidence for the reconstruction of more than a few moments of the atmosphere of Trastevere and the Ghetto.

The Author was not only a journalist and poet, but in addition to his studies he also pursued the theater, as witnessed by *Novelle, favole e leggende* [Stories, Fairy Tales and Legends], 1907; *Usi, costumi e pregiudizi del popolo di Roma* [Habits, Customs and Prejudices of the Roman People], 1908; *Canti popolari romani* [Roman Folksongs], 1910; the theatrical works *É re Gobetto* [Gobetto Is King], 1885; *Li fanatici p'er gioco der lotto* [The Lottery Fanatics], same year; *Li Manganzesi a Roma* [The Maganzesi in Rome], 1887; *L'amore in Trastevere* [Love in Trastevere], 1888; *Me vorresivo?* [Do You Want me?], 1890.

Critics have rightly noted that the poet, unlike his predecessors, has used not only hendecasyllables in the sonnet, but varied and at times complex metrical forms, probably because he wanted to escape the confines of an obligation he considered very limited, and also to better come to terms with the language spoken by the people, which has broken rhythms, or can be even more musical

and singable than the hendecasyllable. In any case he confronts and in a sense takes part in the changes taking place in Italian poetry.

All of Zanazzo's poetry is imbued with common sense and attention to life in its most delicate and subtle nuances, and this vein, that at times reveals a core of deep sadness, never neglects that choral, muffled voice that lies behind all things and seems to organize the world in its flux and haste.

Proverbi romaneschi [Proverbs in the Roman Dialect] came out posthumously, in 1960. Zanazzo died in Rome in 1911, at the age of fifty-one.

Essential bibliography: *Poesie romanesche*, 3 volumes, ed. G. Orioli, Rome, 1968.

Criticism: G. Mariani, "Gigi Zanazzo," in *Dizionario critico della letteratura italiana*, Turin 1973.

A la ppiù bbella de Roma

Ciai quell'occhi che ppàreno du' stelle;
u' nnassino che ppare pitturato:
du' trecce de capelli, accusì bbelli,
che ppàreno, a vvardalli, oro filato.
Care 'ste ganassucce grassottelle!
Spizzico quer grugnetto sminchionato !
Sugóse 'ste risate scrocchiarelle,
sugóse! com'e vvero er pan grattato.
Io, si ppotessi, bbell'Ersilia mia,
pe' sttatt' a rimirà' 'gni sempre a tte,
me vorebbe levà' la fantasia.
d'annà' a staccà' 'na stella co' 'ste mano
a mméttetela in fronte. E ssaai perché?
Pe' vvedette la notte da lontano.

30 gennaio 1883

da *Poesie romanesche*, 1968

Alla più bella di Roma — Ci hai quegli occhi che sembrano due stelle; / un nasino che pare dipinto: / due trecce di capelli, così belli / che sembrano, a guardarli, oro filato. // Dolci queste gote rassottelle! / Mi spilucco (o pilucco) quel too musetto che sbeffeggia! / Sugose (saporite) queste risate sonore, sugose! com' vero il pan grattato. // Io,

se potessi, bell'Ersilia mia / per poterti mirare sempre, / mi
vorrei levare la fantasia / d'andare a staccare una stella con
queste mani / e mettertela in fronte. / E sai perché? Per
vederti la notte da lontano.

(Traduzione di Dante Maffia)

To the Most Beautiful Woman in Rome

Those eyes of yours look like two shining stars
your little nose seems to be painted on:
how lovely these curls and tresses, they are
like threads of gold, ever so finely spun.
These chubby little cheeks are sweet as sugar!
I nibble at that little mocking mouth!
How plump and juicy your resounding laughter,
how juicy! as sure as I live and breathe.
My beautiful Erminia, if I could,
to be able to always look at you, I
would yield to my secret fancy, and would
with these two hands of mine go pick a star
and place it on your brow. Do you know why?
To see you in the darkness from afar.
(Translated by Luigi Bonaffini)

Estri matti

Quanno me vie' quell'estro de pazzia,
de scrive in povesìa,
me ne vad'in Trestevere debbotto;
e llì, ccom'un merlotto,
m'incanto a ssentì' questi e quelli llà,
che stanno a raggionà'.

Una dice a ssu fia, da la finestra,
ch'è ccotta la minestra:

“A Nenaccia, te possin'ammazzatte,
nun vienghi su a strozzatte?

Due stanno su la porta a ffa' l'amore
sentiteli discore:

“Io — dice lui — secca la lingua mia.
sì' pparlo co' Mmaria.”

E lei: — “Ve cianno v'isto sor vassallo;
Vorèssivo negallo?”

Lui: “Oh! ssapete che mme so' stufato”? ..

E llei: “Môri scannato!” ‘

E io? Godo. E ssapetc che ffarebbe?

Mentre stanno a pparlà', l'abbraccerebbe!

6 aprile 1883

da *Poesie romanesche*, 1968

Estri matti — Quando mi viene quell'estro di pazzia, / di scrivere in poesia, / me ne vado a Trastevere all'improvviso; / e lì, come un piccolo merlo, / m'incanto ad ascoltare questi e quelli / che stanno ragionando. / Uno dice a sua figlia dalla finestra, / che è cotta la minestra: / "Nenaccia, ti possano ammazzare, / non vieni su a strozzarti?" / Due sostano sulla porta a far l'amore / ascoltateli discorrere: / "Io dice lui mi si possa seccare la lingua, / se parlo con Maria". / E lei: "Vi ci hanno visto paravento; / vorreste negarlo?" / Lui "Oh, sapete che mi sono stufato?" / E lei: "Possa tu morire scannato!" E io? Godo. E sapete che farei? / Mentre parlano, li abbraccerei!

(Traduzione di Dante Maffia)

Crazy Whim

When I fall prey to that whim of folly,
that bids me write some poetry,
I go to Trastevere at once;
and like a little dunce,
I listen in a spell to people there,
the chatter you can hear just anywhere.
A woman tells her daughter from the window
the soup is on the table
“Nenaccia, you wretched nitwit,
aren't you coming up to choke on it?”
A couple is smooching in the doorway;
listen to what they say:
“He says — may my tongue drop to the ground
if I and Maria ever fool around.”
And she: They saw you, you big hypocrite;
are you going to deny it?”
He: “You know, I'm getting sick and tired.”
And she: “Then why don't you drop dead?”
And me? I enjoy it all. The way I am,
while they talk, I'd throw my arms around them.
(Translated by Luigi Bonaffini)

Addio pe' ssèmpe pôra finestrèlla,
 'ndove védévo la ciumàca mia.
 Io ppiù tte guardo, e ppiù... nun sò cche ssia,
 Ma ttu, ffinestra mia, non sei ppiù quèlla.
 Sarà... cche tt'ho dda di'? ... la fantasia;
 Ma pprima me parevi assai più bbella:
 ogni vetruccio tuo m'era 'na stella,
 che mme faceva lume pe' sta via.
 Che nun ce sbatte come pprima er sole?
 Che nun ce tinghi ppiù cquer ber vasètto
 ch'imbarsimava l'aria de viòle?
 C'è ttutto...sì! Ma Llei però indov'èlla?
 Appòsta da principio té l'ho ddètto;
 "Tu, ffinestruccia mia, nun 'sei ppiù quèlla."
 da *Poesie romanesche*, 1968

XIV — Addio per sempe povera finestrella, / da dove
 vedevo la ragazza mia. / Io più ti guardo, e più.. non so che
 cosa sia, / Ma tu, finestra mia, non sei più quella. // Sarà...
 che ho da dirti? ... la fantasia; / Ma prima mi sembravi
 molto più bella: / ogni tuo vetro mi diventava una stella, /
 che mi faceva lume per questa via. // Non ci sbatte come
 prima il sole? / Non ci tieni più quel bel vasetto / che

imbalsamava l'aria di viole? // C'è tutto... sì! Ma lei però
dov'è lei? / Di proposito all'inizio te l'ho detto: / "Tu,
finestrella mia, non sei più quella".

(Traduzione di Dante Maffia)

XIV

Goodbye forever, my poor little window,
I used to see my girl within your frame.
The more I look at you,... I just don't know,
But, little window, you are not the same.
Maybe... it's my imagination ...what can I say;
before you looked to me prettier by far
every little pane of yours was like a star
that cast its light for me along this way.
Isn't the sun as brilliant as it used to be?
Don't you still have that charming flowerpot
from which that heady scent of violets came?
Everything's still there... But She, where is she?
That's why I told you from the very start:
"You, little window, you are not the same."
(Translated by Luigi Bonaffini)

A Rosina

Occhioni fatti s mmàndola, celesti,
sérèni com'er cielo, come er mare,
ve lo dich'io ch'un paro com'e questi
je' l'ho vvisti a una santa su l'artare!
E quéle tréccie bionne accusì ccare,
in der mòdo dé come te l'assèsti,
nun c'è cchi nu' le védi e nun arèsti,
e' nun dichì tra sse: cche ccose rare!
'Sta testina mé pare un canéstrello
dé spighe che sbrilluccìcheno ar sole...
E ttu intanto me bburli! Io povérèllo,
dévo sentimme di': cche omo lècio!
da' 'sta bbocca ch'odòra de viðe,
da 'sta bboccuccia ché mmé pare un cécio!
8 novembre 1897

da *Poesie romanesche*, 1968

A Rosina — Occhioni a mandorla, celesti, / sereni come il
cielo, come il mare, / ve lo dico io che un paio (d'occhi)
come questi / glieli ho visti a una santa sull'altare! // E
quelle trecce bionde così care, / nel modo in cui te le
acconci, / non c'è chi non le guardi e non s'arresti, / e non
dica tra ssé: che cose rare! // Questa piccolo testa mi sembra

un canestro / di spighe che brillano al sole... / E tu intanto ti
prendi gioco di me! Io poveretto, // mi sento dire: che uomo
fiacco! / da questa bocca che odora di viole, / da questa
boccuccia che mi sembra un cece!

(Traduzione di Dante Maffia)

To Rosina

Almond-shaped, the biggest bluest eyes
clear as the sky, as the sea is clear,
I'm telling you a pair of eyes like these
I saw once on a saint upon the altar!
And those blond tresses that I find so rare,
that you arrange in many lovely rings
no one can look at them and then not stare,
no one who doesn't think: what precious things.
This little head seems like a tiny basket
of ears of wheat that glitter in the sun...
In the meantime you mock me! I hate it
when I hear: how broken-down can a man be!
from these lips that have the scent of violets,
from this mouth so small it seems a chickpea.
(Translated by Luigi Bonaffini)

TRILUSSA

It's the pseudonym of Carlo Alberto Salustri, born in Rome in 1871. His mother was from Bologna and his father, a waiter, from Albano Laziale. His childhood was filled with mourning and sadness, but he was perhaps too small to feel the full brunt of it. He lost his younger sister Elisabetta at the age of two and his father at the age of three. His mother was a seamstress and somewhat stern with the child, who was a poor and listless student. At sixteen he dropped out of school, but had already written his first verses.

In 1887 one of his poems came out in *Il Rugantino*, edited by Gigi Zanazzo, along with a prose piece signed with the pseudonym Marco Pepe. He became soon popular for a series of portraits of Roman

girls he published in 1889 under the title *Stelle de Roma* [Roman Stars]. Immediately a dispute broke out with the Roman dialect poet Filippo Chiappini, who accused Trilussa of not knowing the dialect, taking the position of the “vernacular purist,” as Claudio Rendina calls him.

The poet’s popularity was almost immediate, his contributions to *Il Messaggero* were followed and discussed; even his drawings were well received by the mass of readers. He worked on the editorial staff of *Don Chisciotte*, providing images, sketches, fables, skits, vignettes and poems with that easy vein that would become a distinctive trait of his life and work.

He too, like Pascarella, traveled extensively, but through the Italian cities, which welcomed him not only as a reporter,

but as a fine reciter of his own verses as well. In 1901 he even formed a trio with the poets Berto Barbarani from Verona and Alfredo Testoni from Bologna, making the rounds of the theaters of Genoa, Padua, Milan, Reggio Emilia etc.. The invitations became more and more frequent and Trilussa was constantly touring all of Italy, with evening engagements worthy of a star of the theater. People liked his poetry and they liked his recitation even more, done in a dialect everyone could understand yet possessing all the ingredients of cleverness, of wit, of irony and sarcasm.

He even went to Egypt, but perhaps in order to follow a girl he was in love with, the actress Leda Gys.

Upon his return, he began living in Maria Adelaide Street amidst a myriad souvenirs collected all over, with the same

casual and haphazard spirit with which D'Annunzio had organized the Vittoriale's rooms. He was still active in evening performances and the well-to-do Roman world welcomed him and invited him. But his literary friendships were few (not counting the affectionate period spent with the author of *La figlia di Jorio* [Jorio's Daughter]; he saw Civinini, Bontempelli and D'Ambra and went around the cafés and the taverns dressed in eccentric garb.

During the Fascist years he wrote texts for Petrolini and for Fregoli, Mondadori published one of his books, the regime did not react to his quips, which were blunted spears and could even be useful in giving the sensation that there was full freedom of expression and the possibility of protest.

Late in life his economic conditions were very modest, and in addition he was struck

by asthma and had difficulty going out for a stroll or to the taverns for his usual glass.

He died just before Christmas of 1950.

“Trilussa is an epicurean moralist,” said Barberi Squarotti. And Sciascia: “Trilussa’s characters really do not come out of Gogol’s “Overcoat.” In fact the poet does not know how to thrust deeply, he plays lightly with the foil and never takes sides clearly. “What holds him back is the lack of true indignation” against man’s behavior, against his vices and his violence.

His poetry is almost always easy and flat, and skims the surface even when a sentimental, somewhat crepuscular vein filters in, only to disappear at once.

Essential bibliography: *Tutte le poesie di Trilussa*, ed. P. Pancrazi, with notes by L. Huetter, Milan: Mondadori, 1954; *Poesie*, ed.

Claudio Rendina, Rome: Newton, 1992.

Criticism: G. A. Borgese, *La vita e il libro*, I, Bologna 1927; P. Pancrazi, introduction to *Tutte le poesie*, Milan 1951; M. Dell'Arco, *Lunga vita di Trilussa*, Rome 1951; G. Mariani, *Trilussa. Storia di un poeta*, Rome 1974; G. Spagnoletti, "Trilussa," in *Scrittori di un secolo*, I, Milan 1974; *Studi trilussiani*, edited by L. Felici, Rome 1977.

Er ventriloco

Se credi a questo, sei 'no scemo, scusa.

Pô sta' che un omo parli co' la gente
come se ne la panza internamente
ciavesse quarche machina arinchiusa?

Nun credo che in un'epoca che s'usa
d'apri la bocca senza di' mai gnente
esista sto fenomeno vivente

che dice tante cose a bocca chiusa!

Parla còr ventre! Oh questa si ch'è bella!

Sortanto er poveraccio che nun magna
se sente fa' glu glu ne le budella.

Io stesso, speciariamente a fin de mese,
me sento che lo stomaco se lagna . . .

Ma sai ched'è? La voce der Paese!

1919

da *I sonetti*, 1922

Il ventriloquista — Se credi a questo, sei uno scemo, scusa.
/ Può essere che un uomo parli con la gente / come se nella
pancia internamente / avesse qualche macchina rinchiusa?
// Non credo che in un'epoca in cui s'usa / aprire la bocca
senza dire mai niente / esista questo fenomeno vivente / che
dice tante cose a bocca chiusa! // Parla col ventre! Oh

questa sì ch'è bella! / Soltanto il poveraccio che non mangia
/ si sente fare glu-glu nelle budella. // Io stesso,
specialmente a fin di mese, / mi sento che lo stomaco si
lagna... / Ma sai cos'è? La voce del Paese!

(Traduzione di Luigi Bonaffini)

Ventriloquist

Ventriloquist means stomach speaker. It's Latin.
If you believe in him, by God, you're gullible —
as if the stomach were a place to chat in
or speech could come from swallowing a syllable.
I can't believe that in an age like ours
when everybody's mouth is open, but — but —
when nothing is said, anyone's got the power
of saying anything with his mouth shut.
His stomach talk! What is he trying to tell me?
Only a poor beggar who hasn't once
eaten today hears "glub glub" in his belly.
Matter of fact, especially when the month's
almost out, my guts grumble and grate
Know whose voice it is? The voice of the State!
1919
(Translated by John Du Val)

Er porco e er somaro

Una matina un povero Somaro,
ner vede un Porco amico annà ar macello,
sbottò in un pianto e disse. — Addio, frate:
nun ce vedremo più, nun c'è riparo!
— Bisogna esse filosofo, bisogna.
— je disse er Porco — via, nun fa' lo scemo
ché forse un giorno se ritroveremo
in quarche mortadella de Bologna!
da *Le favole*, 1922

Il porco e il somaro — Una mattina un povero Somaro, /
vedendo un Porco amico andare al macello, / sbottò in un
pianto e disse. — Addio, fratello: / non ci vedremo più, non
c'è rimedio! // — Bisogna essere filosofo, bisogna. / — gli
disse il Porco — via, non fare lo scemo / ché forse un giorno
ci ritroveremo / in qualche mortadella di Bologna!

(Traduzione di Luigi Bonaffini)

The Pig and the Donkey

A poor, lean donkey stood and watched his friend,
the pig, hauled to the slaughterhouse. "Dear brother!"
the donkey brayed, "farewell, farewell It's over.
We'll never meet again. This is the end!"
The pig replied, "Now, don't act like an ass
Be philosophical: life is a passage.
For all we know it may yet come to pass
we'll meet again in some bologna sausage."
(Translated by John Du Val)

Er gatto e er cane

Un Gatto soriano
diceva a un Barbone.
— Nun porto rispetto
nemmanco ar padrone,
perché a l'occasione
je sgraffto la mano;
ma tu che lo lecchi
te becchi le botte.
Te mena, te sfotte,
te mette in catena
cor muso rinchiuso
e un cerchio cor bollo
sull'osso der collo.
Seconno la moda
te taja li ricci,
te spunta la coda . . .
Che belli capricci!
lo, guarda. so' un Gatto,
so' un ladro, lo dico.
Ma a me nun s'azzarda
de famme ste cose.
Er Cane rispose.

— Ma io... je so' amico!

da *Le favole*, 1922

Il gatto e il cane — Un Gatto soriano / diceva a un
Barbone. / — Non porto rispetto / nemmeno al padrone, /
perché all'occasione / gli graffio la mano; / ma tu che lo
lecchi / ti becchi le botte. / Ti picchia, ti sfolte, / ti mette in
catena / col muso rinchiuso / e un cerchio col bollo /
sull'osso del collo. / Secondo la moda / ti taglia i riccioli, / ti
spunta la coda... / Che bei capricci! / Io, guarda, sono un
Gatto, / sono un ladro, lo dico. / Ma a me non s'azzarda /
a farmi queste cose. / Il cane rispose. / — Ma io... gli sono
amico!

(Traduzione di Luigi Bonaffini)

The Cat and the Dog

The cat said to the dog,
“Look at it this way.
you’ll never see me pay
any respect to the man
In fact, if I’m in the mood,
I scratch him on the hand.
But you, you fetch his slippers,
lick his boots and slobber.
What does it get you? A kick!
He chains you to a stick
and chokes you with a collar,
or keeps you in a kennel,
then crimps your ears and tags you,
bobs your tail and clips you,
because it’s the latest fad,
and, brother, you’ve been had!
Look at me. I’m a cat!
I’ve stolen again and again,
but the man’s never tried
to keep me muzzled or penned”
The dog replied,
“But I’m his friend.”

(Translated by John Du Val)

La maschera

Vent'anni fa m'ammascherai pur'io!
E ancora tengo er grugno de cartone
che servì p'anniskonne quello mio.
Sta da vent'anni sopra un credenzone
quela Maschera buffa, che'è restata
sempre co' la medesima espressione,
sempre co' la medesima risata.
Una vorta je chiesi — E come fai
a conservà lo stesso bon umore
puro ne li momenti der dolore,
puro quanno me trovo fra li guai!
Felice te, che nun te cambi mai!
Felice te, che vivi senza core! —
La Maschera rispose. — E tu che piagni
che ce guadagni? Gnente! Ce guadagni
che la gente dirà. Povero diavolo,
te compatisco ... me dispiace assai...
Ma, in fonno, credi, nun j'importa un cavolo!
Fa' invece come me, ch'ho sempre riso.
E se te pija la malinconia
coprete er viso co' la faccia mia
così la gente nun se scoccherà... —

D'allora in poi nascónno li dolori
de dietro a un'allegria de cartapista
e passo per un celebre egoista
che se ne frega de l'umanità!
da *Le favole*, 1992

La maschera — Vent'anni fa mi mascherai pure io! / Ed
ancora ho il grugno di cartone / che servì per nascondere
quello mio / Sta da vent'anni sopra un credenzone / quella
Maschera buffa, ch'è restata / sempre con la medesima
espressione, / sempre con la medesima risata. / Una volta le
chiesi — E come fai / a conservare lo stesso buon umore /
anche nei momenti di dolore, / anche quando mi trovo in
mezzo ai guai! / Felice te, che non cambi mai! / Felice te,
che vivi senza cuore! — / La Maschera rispose — E tu che
piangi / che ci guadagni? Niente! Ci guadagni / che la
gente dirà. povero diavolo, / ti compatisco... mi dispiace
assai... / Ma in fondo, credi, non gliene importa un cavolo! /
Fa' invece come me, che ho sempre riso. / E se ti prende la
malinconia / copriti il viso con la faccia mia / così la gente
non si scoccherà... — / D'allora in poi nascondo i dolori /
dietro un'allegria di cartapesta / e passo per un celebre
egoista / che se ne frega dell'umanità!

(Traduzione di Luigi Bonaffini)

The mask

Twenty years back I went to a masquerade,
and ever since, the mask has had its place
there on the dresser, a cardboard funny face
I used to hide my own. For a long while
it stared at me with the same buffoonish smile.
One day I asked my mask point blank, "Now how
have you managed to keep your spirits high
even when I'm feeling low down,
when sit and cry is all I want to do.

You never change. You get by
without a heart. Lucky, lucky you."

But then the mask answered, "Man, what does
complaining do for you? Nothing or it gets people to
saying,

Oh, I'm so sorry! Really I am.

Poor guy! Listen, I wish there was something...'

But deep down, they don't give a damn

Why don't you be like me? You can laugh.

When gladness goes and grief takes its place,

— nobody will guess —

hide your unhappiness behind my face."

So ever since that time I hide my grieving

behind a cardboard happiness
and pass for someone who couldn't care less
about the human race.

(Translated by John Du Val)

All'ombra

Mentre me leggo er solito giornale
spaparacchiato all'ombra d'un pajaro,
vedo un porco e je dico. — Addio, majale! —
vedo un ciuccio e je dico. — Addio, somaro! —
Forse ste bestie nun me caperanno,
ma provo armeno la soddisfazione
de potè di' le cose come stanno
senza paura de fini in priggione.
da *Giove e le bestie*, 1932

All'ombra — Mentre mi leggo il solito giornale / disteso
all'ombra di un pagliaio, / vedo un porco e gli dico. —
Addio, maiale! — / vedo un asino e gli dico. — Addio,
somaro! — // Forse queste bestie non mi capiranno, / ma
provo almeno la soddisfazione / di poter dire le cose come
stanno / senza paura di finire in priggione.

(Traduzione di Luigi Bonaffini)

In the Shade of a Hay Rick

I read my paper, back propped against the hay
Here comes a hog, so I look up and say,
“Goodbye, Pig!” And then across the grass
here comes a donkey; I say, “Goodbye, ass!”
No way of telling if they’ve understood.
Whether they have or not, it does me good
to call things what they are without the dread
of having to go to jail for what I’ve said.
(Translated by John Du Val)

MARIO DELL'ARCO

Mario dell'Arco is the pseudonym of Mario Fagiolo. He was born in Rome in 1905 and has been living in Genzano for several years.

He worked as architect and publisher, without ever neglecting his activity as a poet and as a determined and tireless advocate of the defense of dialect in general, not only Roman dialect. He founded and edited the reviews *Il Belli*, *Il nuovo Belli* and *Il nuovo Cracas*. He became known to readers in 1952 for having collaborated with Pier Paolo Pasolini at the historic anthology *Poesia dialettale del Novecento* [Dialect Poetry of the Twentieth Century] published by Guanda.

His work as an essayist has also been prolific: *Lunga vita di Trilussa* [The Long Life

of Trilussa], 1951; *Pasquino e le pasquinade* [Pasquino and the Pasquinades], 1957; *Giuseppe Gioacchino Belli. Ritratto mancato* [Giuseppe Gioacchino Belli. Incomplete Portrait], 1970; and so has his work as a prose writer: *Il cavallino d'Argante* [Argante's Pony], 1965; *Il nuovo cuore* [The New Heart], same year; *L'osteria cucinante* [The Cooking Tavern], 1965 and *Roma capricciosa* [Whimsical Rome], 1966.

He is the first Roman dialect poet who is open to the Hermetic experiences, to the new demands of contemporary poetry without disdaining dialect poetry. A poet of deep inner life and strong sensibility, he has expressed forcefully the modulations of his somewhat crepuscular spirit, which has given rise to his best work. Even the slight smile that ripples through many of his

compositions comes from the lesson of the early Palazzeschi and the early Govoni, as Spagnoletti remind us, but dell'Arco's bitterness contains something more sorrowful, as if he were the advocate of an ancient sadness that awakens things all around and shakes them to remind them that they have a function and are an integral part of life. His brush strokes complete this sensation, betray a foreboding and instill uneasiness. After all some of his collections have ranged from Oriental gracefulness to firm Greek lyricism, with sudden effusions, at time overflowing and at times filled with shivers, that pass like shadows over the earth and seem to bless it, notwithstanding the bitterness that slips in and nestles as in Leopardi. That first timid metrical experiment attempted by Zanazzo achieves notable results with dell'Arco, reaching the

full range of the octave. What is more, the poet conveys the full awareness of someone who has not resorted to dialect as a game or as the usual expedient, but because in dialect he has found a deeper and more elegant means of poetic expression.

One can therefore understand why the best part of his vast output is not to be found in his yielding to the nostalgia that takes him back into the world of the Roman people, but elsewhere, where he frees himself from the weight of the Roman dialect models, in the first place Belli, but Trilussa as well.

This is a poet who heeds his feelings and makes good use of them, even when the notes become tender and idyllic.

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Bodoni corpo dodici

Sempre a l'istessa moda:

la "è" co la ciafrella
e l'"effe" co la coda.

Una grassa, una secca, una barzotta,
l'"emme" tre zampe,
er "pi" co la stampella
perché soffre de gotta.

Sola, ingrugnata ner cassetto voto
l'ippisilonne — e l'unica speranza
uno sbajo der proto.

da *Poesie romanesche*, 1987

Bodoni corpo dodici — Sempre alla stessa moda: / la "è"
con la pantofola / e la "effe" con la coda. / Una grassa, una
magra, una bassotta, / la "emme" tre zampe, / la "pi" con
la stampella / perché soffre di gotta. / Sola, offesa nel
cassetto vuoto / la "Y" — e l'unica speranza (è) un errore del
proto.

(Traduzione di Dante Maffia)

Bodoni Twelve Points

Always the same way:

the “è” wearing a slipper

and “f” with a tail.

One fat, one lean, one short,

“m” with three paws,

“p” leaning on a crutch

because of gout.

Alone, in the empty drawer with a pout

is “y” — and the only hope

a printer’s error.

(Translated by Luigi Bonaffini)

La lodola

Una botta de schioppo
e un brivido d'argento addosso ar pioppo.

Una lodola: c'era
ner becco er celo — adesso c'è la terra.

Ma sospeso per aria ancora resta
fino a che dura er giorno er trillo a festa.

da Poesie romanesche, 1987

L'allodola — Un colpo di fucile // e un brivido d'argento
sopra il pioppo. / Un' allodola: aveva / nel becco il cielo —
adesso ha la terra. / Ma sospeso nell'aria ancora resta / fino
a che dura il giorno un trillo a festa.

(Traduzione di Dante Maffia)

The Skylark

A gunshot rings
and on the poplar
flashes of silver quivering.

A skylark: in its beak
it held the sky — now there is a dusty streak.
But suspended in the air there's hanging still
until the end of day the festive trill.

(Translated by Luigi Bonaffini)

Tormarancio

Corre er filo spinato
intorno a Tormarancio. Co la lagna
de la cicala e er fiato
dell'erba, la campagna
batte ar filo spinato.
Gnente rame de pioppo
lustre de verde doppo er temporale;
nun cresce un gersomino
addosso ar muro; sopra ar davanzale
è secco er rosmarino.
Indove sta er facocchio
che cava for da un rocchio
de robbinia o da un masso de sarcione
mozzo e razzi e cerchione
e la rota trabballa ar primo passo!
Indove sta er bottaro
che gira e chiama l'ombre de la notte
co le bòtte de mazza su la botte!
Indove sta er cordaro
che sposta pe la strada più niscosta
uguale ar grancio, ar sole o ner pantano
e la corda je nasce da le mano

lunga come la strada?

Tormarancio – Corre il filo spinato / intorno a
Tormarancio. Con la lagna / della cicala e il fiato /
dell'erba, la campagna / batte al filo spinato. // Niente rami
di pioppo / lustrate di verde dopo il temporale; / non cresce
un gelsomino / sul muro; al davanzale / è secco il
rosmarino. // Dove sta il carraio / che tira fuori da un
mazzo / di robinia o da un grosso salice / per fare mozzo e
raggi e cerchione / e la ruota traballa al primo giro? / Dove
sta il bottaio / che gira e invoca le ombre della notte / con
colpi di mazza sulla botte? / Dove sta il cordaro / che
sposta per la strada più in disparte / come un granchio,
sotto il sole o nel pantano / e la corda gli scaturisce dalla
mano / lunga come la strada?

Tormarancio

The barbed wire runs
around Tormarancio.
With the cicada's wail
and the sigh of grass, the countryside
pushes against the wire.
No poplar branches
glistening green
after the storm; no jasmine
grows against the wall; on the windowsill
the rosemary stands withered still.
Where is the wheelwright, can you see him
pulling out of a bundle
of robinia or a big willow tree
hub and spokes and rim,
at the first turn the wheel begins to wobble!
Where is the cooper
who turns and calls to the night shadows
striking the barrel with his mallet blows!
Where is the ropemaker
who moves along the most secluded byway
like a crab, in the sun or in the marshlands
and the rope is born out of his hands

the length of the whole road?

Tormarancio (cont.d)

Regazzini mischiati
co li cani affamati, a quattro zampe
a fonno a la catasta
de la monnezza, stampeno
trentadu' denti in una mela guasta.
'Na donna fa un rinnaccio
a un lenzolo strappato
o stenne quarche straccio
sopra a la cordicella — e un pupo in braccio
moscio, giallo, allupato.

A sede a lo scalino
co le mano incollate a li ginocchi
e una nuvola ferma drento all'occhi,
o a lo scuro che arza lo storino
e manna via la traccia
der sonno da la faccia,
o co le spalle ar muro
e la bocca serrata
su una cica smorzata:
un omo a fianco a un omo
e un deserto per omo.

// Ragazzini insieme / ai cani affamati, a quattro zampe

in fondo al cumulo // dell'immondizia, stampano /
trentadue denti in una mela guasta. // Una donna rattoppa
/ un lenzuolo strappato / o stende qualche straccio / sulla
cordicella — e (tiene) un bambino in braccio, / flaccido,
giallo, affamato. // Seduto su uno scalino / con le mani
incollate alle ginocchia / e una nuvola ferma dentro gli
occhi, / al buio che va via all'alzarsi dello stuoino / e scaccia
i residui / del sonno dal viso, / o con le spalle al muro / e la
bocca serrata / su una cicca spenta: / un uomo accanto a
un uomo / e un deserto per uomo. /

Tormarancio (cont.d)

Kids mixed
with hungry dogs, on all fours
at the bottom of the garbage heap
stamp thirty-two teeth
onto a rotten apple core.
A woman darns
a ragged bedsheet
or hangs a few tatters on a clothesline —
a baby in her arms
flabby, yellow, famished.
Sitting on the step
with his hands glued to his knees
and a cloud unmoving in his eyes,
in the darkness that fades as the blind rises
and banishes any trace
of sleep upon the face,
or leaning with his back against the wall
and his mouth shut
over a spent butt:
a man next to a man
and a desert for man.

Tormarancio (cont.d)

Mejo che la campagna
spezzi er filo spinato — e senza fiato
arrivi co le foje
a mette le carcagna su le soje
de le case. S'agguanta
coll'èllera a le mura,
allarga la fessura,
sconocchia er tetto, spacca la cimasa
e la casa se schianta.
Sopra, la cappa vota
der celo ⁂ e un farco i'empie co la rota.
da Poesie romanesche, 1987

Meglio che la campagna / interrompa il filo spinato — e
senza fiato / arrivi con le foglie / a mettere i piedi sulle
soglie / delle case. S'avvinghia / con l'edera ai muri, allarga
la fessura, / rivolta il tetto, rompe la cimasa / e la casa si
schianta. // Sopra, la cappa vuota / del cielo — e un falco la
riempie con la rota.

(Traduzione di Dante Maffia)

Tormarancio (cont.d)

Better for the countryside
to break through the barbed wire - and arrive
breathless with its leaves
under the eaves
of all the houses. With its ivy
it latches onto the walls,
splits open the crack,
topples the roof, shatters the top
and the house crashes.
Overhead, the empty vault of the sky
and a hawk that fills it with its cry.
(Translated by Luigi Bonaffini)

Un volo in celo

Esco da casa solo.

Una strada — e cammino
e lui tìppete e tàppete vicino.

Me pija pe la mano: vola — e volo
e m'empio le saccocce de turchino.

da Poesie romanesche, 1987

Un volo in cielo — Esco di casa solo. / Una strada — e cammino / e lui tìppete (passi leggeri) e tàppete / mi prende per la mano: vola — e volo / mi riempio le tasche di turchino.

(Traduzione di Dante Maffia)

A Flight in the Sky

I go out alone.

A street — and I walk
and he, tip-tap, close by.

He takes me by the hand — and I fly
and fill my pockets with blue sky.

(Translated by Luigi Bonaffini)

Un prato

C'era: un prato sospeso sopra a un fosso
e er fiore, l'erba, er pettirosso teso
verso l'acqua: passava ogni gricciore
dell'acqua ar pettirosso,
passava all'erba, ar fiore.

Perduto, un giorno. Adesso
rinato dentro a me,
un filo d'erba appresso
a un filo d'erba — e a galla —
una ditata bianca, rossa, gialla.

Rinato dentro a me
un prato. Ar soffio de l'inverno ecco
er ramo, er fiore, l'erba: tutto secco.
Unico resta, eterno
co la vampa viola de lo sguardo
tra le pennazze de le spine un cardo.

da *Poesie romanesche*, 1987

Un prato — C'era un prato sospeso sopra un fosso / e il
fiore, l'erba, il pettirosso teso / verso l'acqua: passava ogni
brivido / dell'acqua al pettirosso, / passava all'erba, al fiore.
// Perduto, un giorno. Adesso / rinato dentro me, / un filo
d'erba dietro / un filo d'erba — e a galla / una ditata,

bianca, rossa, gialla. // Rinato dentro me / un prato. Al
soffio dell'inverno ecco / il ramo, il fiore, l'erba: tutto
avvizzito. // Unico resta, eterno / con la vampa viola dello
sguardo / tra le ciglia delle spine un cardo.

(Traduzione di Dante Maffia)

A meadow

There was a meadow over a ravine
and the flower, the grass, the robin
leaning on the water: the water's every shiver
went through the robin,
went through the grass, the flower.
Lost, one day. Now
born again inside me,
a blade of grass after
blade of grass — and adrift
a white, red, yellow fingermark.
A meadow reborn
within me. At the breath of winter
here is the branch, flower, grass: everything withered.
The only thing left, eternal
with the violet glimmer of its gaze,
among the lashes of the thorns, a thistle.
(Translated by Luigi Bonaffini)

Un'arpa verde

Slunga l'orecchia er noce
e s'arisveja l'ormo.

Una fila de canne in pizzo ar fosso
è un'arpa.

L'arba je strofina addosso
le dita rosa — e sùbbito, a la voce
de Mozart, se fa giorno.

da *Poesie romanesche*, 1987

Un'arpa verde — Allunga l'orecchia il noce / e si risveglia
l'olmo. / Una fila di canne sull'orlo del fosso / è un'arpa. /
L'alba già strofina addosso / le dita rosa — e subito, alla voce
/ di Mozart, si fa giorno.

(Traduzione di Dante Maffia)

A Green Harp

The walnut tree pricks up its ears
and the elm tree stirs.

A row of reeds over the ditch's rim
becomes a harp.

Dawn rubs it with its rosy fingers —
and in a trice,

at Mozart's voice, the day begins to rise.

(Translated by Luigi Bonaffini)

Io gatto

Una crosta de roгна
e uno stormo de purce in mezzo ar pelo:
nessuno me s'accosta.
Sia a galla all'erba, sia
sdraiato sur serciato
m'imbriaco de sole.
A tempo perso dormo
e in sogno, verso a verso,
sgnàvolo una poesia.
da *Poesie romanesche*, 1987

Io-gatto — Una crosta di roгна / e uno stormo di pulci in
mezzo al pelo: / nessuno mi s'avvicina. / A cavalcioni
sull'erba / o sdraiato sul selciato / mi ubriaco di sole. / A
tempo perso dormo / e nel sogno, verso a verso, / miagolo
una poesia.

(Traduzione di Dante Maffia)

I-Cat

A crust of scab
and fleas swarming in my coat:
no one comes near me.
Stradling the grass
or stretched on the pavement
I get high on the sun.
I sleep in my spare time
and in my dreams, line by line,
I mew out a poem.
(Translated by Luigi Bonaffini)

Er gatto bianco

D'una notte de luna
è rimasto un brandello
su un capitello.

S'anima — e je sboccia
co li stami d'argento la capoccia,
Come un pampano un parmo
de coda allaccia er marmo.

Un gatto bianco: una
vita d'un giorno. Poi l'istessa luna
a l'istess'ora gira l'occhio intorno
e er gatto affoga ner chiaro de luna.

da *Poesie romanesche*, 1987

Il gatto bianco — Di una notte di luna / è rimasto un
brandello / sopra un capitello. / S'anima — e gli sboccia /
con gli stami d'argento la testa, / come un pampino, un
palmo / di coda s'abbarbica al marmo. // Un gatto bianco:
una / vita d'un giorno. Poi la stessa luna / alla stessa ora
gira l'occhio intorno / e il gatto affoga nel chiaro di luna.

(Traduzione di Dante Maffia)

The White Cat

A moonlit night
has left a jot
upon a capital.
It stirs - and spreads
a silver-stamened head,
like a vine, a sable
tail clinging to marble.
A white cat: a life lasting a day.
Then the same moon
at the same hour of night
turns her gaze
and the cat drowns
in the flood of moonlight.
(Translated by Luigi Bonaffini)

MAURO MARÈ

Mauro Marè was born in Rome in 1935 and is a practicing notary public. He has always lived in strict contact with the cultural and artistic circles of the capital, frequently becoming a friend of the most important critics and poets. His last books of poetry can be considered a revelation, the real novelty of Roman dialect poetry, and I would add one of the novelties in Italian poetry to follow closely.

Having started out rather modestly, as shown in any case by his sonnet, from the best-known experiences of Belli and Trilussa, he has later taken a different route in search of his own style, which makes a clean break with convention and is characterized by sparkling linguistic inventions. It should be stressed, however, that these inventions are

not a mere intellectual project, but a deep need, a necessity of poetry and therefore natural experimentation, the kind that should always be inherent in any work of art.

Marè first two volumes moved almost guardedly, under the weight of a past that claimed its rightful share; then, as Brevini noted, he “comes out of his own poetic prehistory.”

Sillabe e stelle [Syllables and Stars] — it is perhaps not by chance that the preface to the book is by Mario Lunetta — already offers in the meter a Marè who displays full mastery of his expressive tools. The verses become dense, syncopated, only rarely do they come to rest on a hendecasyllable, and immediately come undone in a sort of running sprint that finds him ready to react and to entrust to them even those nuances

and those subtle glosses of the spirit that live outside the sheet of paper and often become the very essence of the composition.

When Marè was utilizing Belli's and Trilussa's traditional poetic or sarcastic realism, he remained bound to subjects that did not disdain the social element and therefore the descriptive and, in the final analysis, sententious commentary, maybe at the margins; now his poetry is prompted by a need to look inside himself and an almost hermeneutical need to comprehend what is happening to words and hence to poetry.

Giacinto Spagnoletti has discerned in *Verso novunque*, 1988, the harrowing anguish of a human and poetic condition that makes of Marè an author who has rejected the facile exultation of poetry in order to put back into it a density of life which would otherwise have been lost. This entails a

constant attention on the part of the poet toward all that combines and uncombines in the flow of time: therefore Marè's gaze becomes unfocused, everything gets deformed for him inside and out, everything takes on the appearance of what in figurative art has been called the poetics of ugliness. In this ugliness, in this fluctuating monstrosity of things that has the weight of butterflies and the sticky consistency of rust, there slips in the glimmer of a fire that invokes salvation with a "desperate optimism," at least the salvation in the unity of all things. "We are", wrote Giorgio Patrizi, "before a text that bears witness to the existence in contemporary poetry, outside of fashions and advertising hubbub, of a serious and rigorous experimentation, capable of coming to terms with contemporary reality and with tradition, with the mind's as well

as the heart's reasons, with the problems of experience and knowledge." It seems clear to me that now the famous wide road is open for Marè, primarily because he knows how to interpret his time by becoming even a paradox, as Giovanni Tesio reminds us, of Kraus or maybe, as I would say, of Thomas Bernhard?

Mauro Marè died in 1993.

He has published: *Ossi di pèrsica*, Rome: IEPI, 1977; *Cicci de Sèllero*, Rome: Edizioni Cias, 1979; *Er mantello e la rota*, Rome: Palombi, 1982; *Sillabe e stelle*, Rome: Ellemme, 1986; *Verso novunque*, Rome: Edizione Grafica dei Greci, 1988; *Controcore*, Udine: Campanotto, 1992.

Criticism: M. Lunetta, introduction to *Sillabe e stelle*, Rome 1986; G. Spagnoletti, "Nota alle poesie inedite di Mauro Marè," in

Diverse Lingue, IV, 6, 1989; M. Lunetta,
"Mauro Marè," in *L'Informatore librario*, 3,
March 1990.

Concerto

Io e tte pparenti de parole
attorno quattro muri de bbambacia
forivia er monno sgnavola
come la crosta su la grattacacia.
L'istesso voto in petto e in celo: ommini!
un paro d'ale appese a ogni cantone.
Un certo ggiorno nuvolo un concerto
una gran festa de carciofolari
sfrizzoli d'alegria l'aritornelli
co quei calascioni tanti cari
du' sordi de ricordi davenì.
da *Verso novunque*, 1988

Concerto — Io e te parenti di parole / e attorno quattro
muri di bambagia; / di fuori il mondo miagola / come la
crosta sulla grattaformaggio. / Lo stesso vuoto in petto e in
cielo: uomini! / un paio d'ali appese a ogni cantone. / Un
certo giorno nuvolo un concerto / una gran festa di
musicanti, / briciole d'allegria i ritornelli / con quei
calascioni tanto cari, / un nonnulla
di ricordi da venire.

(Traduzione di Dante Maffia)

Concert

You and I word kin
hemmed by four padded walls
as out there the world mewls —
rind against the grater. ..
The same void in ribcage and sky: men!
A pair of wings strung at each crossroads.
Cloudy day, concert,
gala of thrummers,
crumbs of the merry, refrains
of moldy zithers (so dear) —
trifles of memories to come...
(Translated by Justin Vitiello)

Smemoria

Tutt'er più bbello ar monno fa ssueggiù
fà e nun fà llassà e stregne trucci trucci
turullullù ttrenini cavallucci
mo ssì mmo nno ddà e ppijja zzipitè
picchio scacchiato a vvolò caccia e mmette
nizza monta a la luna garaghè
fasse una gran notata dentro ar letto
sdindonà dde campane
su un silenzio de neve sfravolacelo
sto verso istesso la cantasilena
silabbe a carci in culo in canofiena
la rima un'onna che sbatte la rena
un tutto pesa tale e qquale a un gnente
nun vive e nnun morì
tempo der nun succede
ggnente se sente
ggnente se vede...

da *Verso novunque*, 1988

Smemoria — Tutto il più bello al mondo fa sueggiù: / fare
e non fare, lasciare e stringere, / trucci trucci / pupazzi a
molla trenini, cavallucci, / adesso sì adesso no, dai e prendi,
zipitè, / picchio messo fuori giro a volo, leva e metti, / lippa

monta a la luna, garaghè, / farsi una gran nuotata dentro il
letto / dindon di campane / su un silenzio di neve da cielo
sbriciolato, / questo stesso verso la cantilena, / sillabe a calci
in culo in altalena / la rima un'onda che sbatte la rena, / un
tutto pesa tale e quale a un niente / non vivere e non morire:
/ tempo del non succedere / niente si sente, niente si vede.

(Traduzione di Dante Maffia)

Dismemory

All the world's beauty heaves and dips:
do or not to do, press, off course
jack in the box, toy trains and seahorse
now yes then no, give take zap
woodpecker pecked, careening zoom
boom bah jumps over the moon — yippee!
take a big dip in bed
ding donging across
snow silence of crumbling sky
this very verse sting song
syllables kicking butt on a screesaw
the rhyme a wave battering sands
one counterweight of nil
neither to live nor to die
time of no happenstance
nothing sentient
nothing perceived...

(Translated by Justin Vitiello)

Dubbiquità

Facce stampate su li sampietrini
culi mosci ar giardino a sfusajjà
l'amore a ddoppia schina
tutte l'ale attaccate all'omo morto
fori de porta
e ddentro un fugge fugge
pe scappà vvìa dar gnente
se distrugge la ggente
vita frommicolata sur Bellicolo
dubbiqua niunquità
bellezze verminose in vaso d'oro
sbarzato d'arubbeschi
lupa madre snatura
perché ttamanto scanni li fijji tua?
da *Controcore*, 1992

Dubbiquità — Facce stampate sopra i sampietrini. / Culi mosci al giardino a mangiare / e sputare lupini. L'amore a doppia schiena. / Tutte le ali appese all'attacapani / fuori di porta / e dentro un fuggi-fuggi: / per scappar via dal niente / si distrugge la gente. / Vita formicolata sull'Ombelico (del mondo). / Dappertutto la dubbiezza dell'essere nessuno. / Lordure verminose in vaso d'oro /

sbanato d'arabescate ruberie. / Lupa madre snatura, /
perché fino a tal punto scanni i figli tuoi?

(Traduzione di Dante Maffia)

Doubiquity

Imprinted visages above cobblestones
butts in the garden, drooping to gulp
double hump backed love —
all the wings hung from the rack
outside the door
and, within, total panic
to exodus from nothingness
people are genociding
ant life swarming over the umbilicus mundi
doubiquitous the nec minus ultra
vermin scum in gold bed pans
teeter twittering in arabesques
she wolf — mother — un nature:
how come ly thou flayest thy children?
(Translated by Justin Vitiello)

Controcore

Ggente che ccampa pe ssentito di
senza nerbo né vverbo
controcore ...
la tragedia è nner gioco
la verità è nner mezzo
nissuno scopre la carta vincente
ce sarva er filo tra nnoijartri ggnente
tu ffilio mio purissimo
m'apparijji ner gioco a ddispari.
da Controcore, 1992

Controcore — Gente che campa per sentito dire, / senza
nerbo né verbo / controcuore ... / la tragedia è nel gioco / la
verità è nel mezzo / ma nessuno mai scopre / la carta
vincente. Ci salva solo il filo che lega noialtri / fatti di niente.
/ Tu filo purissimo, / mi affianchi in questo gioco e dispari.
(Traduzione di Dante Maffia)

Counter heart

People who to “survive”

sans nerve or verbum

counter heart...

The tragedy is in the game

the truth in the deck, yet

no one has the ace in the hole...

The only salve, thread twixt us, nothing

you, my finest web,

play me against all odds. ..

(Translated by Justin Vitiello)

Er pensiero

Femmine bbelle insino a le bbudelle
a cchi jje tocca ricca carne e ssanguine
a cchi jj'avanza er siere der pensiero
quanno perso pe pperso
tutt'er monno s'inciufola in un verso
io n'ho vviste n'ho vviste (ah dd'una luce!)
ch'averebbero a un dì spuntate aurore
femmine da fa ffa ssogni d'incroci
mignottamente smulinà li fianchi
sbarzi tra ccosce chiappe zzinne e cchiome
vojja de spazzià in libro in ogni fibbra!
ce sò ppiù ffregne tra la terra e er celo
che er cazzo s'infilosofa
troppe ne vò che nnulla fregna stregne
e er pensiero er pensiero. .
da Controcure, 1992

Il pensiero — Femmine belle fino alle budella: / a chi tocca
in sorte ricca carne e sangue / e a chi gli resta il siero del
pensiero, / quando, perso per perso, / tutto il mondo si
chiude nell'armonia di un verso, / io ne ho viste, ne ho viste
(ah, d'una luce!)/ che avrebbero, m'azzardo a dire, fatto
spuntare aurore, / femmine tali da far fare sogni d'incroci, /

smignottamente mulinare i fianchi, / sbalzi tra cosce,
chiappe, seni e chiome. / Voglia di spaziare in vn libro in
ogni fibra! / Ci sono più vulve tra la terra e il cielo / che
l'uccello si si infilosofia. / Troppe ne vuole che nessuna ne
stringe e il pensiero, il pensiero...

(Traduzione di Dante Maffia)

Thought full ness

Lovely women in the entrails
they happen to you, flesh and blood
in the serified philtres of thought
when de pressed and dis persed
the globe recurls in a verse. ..
I've seen them, seen their light
(they could've made the day break)
women to make you dream the via crucis
grinding flanks for your assumption
thighs, buttocks, nipples, tresses
cellular itch to master one survey their gospel —
there are more pussies in heaven and earth
than the pecker dreams in all its philosophies!
It covets them all so none doth rivet!
Ah... but the thought full ness...
(Translated by Justin Vitiello)

Er forno

Mortaccia zzoza ammazzi ammazzi l'ommini
e intigni a ammzzacralli
pe avélli ne l'avelli!
Indove nasce un fiore d'alegranza?
Celo e nnotte cuciti all'aco d'oro
l'arba caparbia capo a ppunto d'ombra
ner callaro dell'esse
novo seme s'inzolla
spreme la spuma e la spiga riesce
all'omo cresce el pane che la donna cosce
ne l'abbrucio bbujoso de le vojje
ggiusto er ssanguine bbolle infornicà
'na cunnola sueggiù tra ppelo e ccelo
caccemmette un'innustria ummida in grotta
spropositasse insino all'urtranotte
arrazza arrazza a seguità una razza
scompagna ar monno ar celo a le staggione
da cima a ssenza fonno.
da Controcore, 1992

Il forno — Mortaccia sozza, ammazzi a mazzi gli uomini
/ e insisti ad ammazzacrarli / per averli negli avelli! / Dove
nasce un fiore d'allegranza? / Cielo e notte uniti da una

cucitura invisibile, / l'alba caparbia capo a punto d'ombra,
/ nel calderone dell'essere, / nuovo seme s'inserra, / sprema
la speme all'uomo cresce il pane che la donna cuoce / col
tepore del grembo nel fuoco buio delle voglie: / appena il
sangue bolle, infornicare. / Una culla altalenante tra pelo e
cielo / nel mettere a levare un'industria umida in grotta, /
spropositarsi sino all'ultranotte, / arrazza arrazza a seguità
una razza / incongrua rispetto al mondo al cielo e alle
stagioni / da cima a senza fondo.

(Traduzione di Dante Maffia)

The Oven

Lurid butcher, you massacre in bunches
and bludgeon on, massacrating
to crate sepulchres. ..
Where can a flower bloom and glow?
Sky and night seamed with aureate thread
stubborn dawn purled in shade
in the cauldron of being
new seed enclodded
expectation expressed and spike narded
to man is born bread woman kneads
in the dark warmth of desire
and when blood simmers, infornicates
rocking cradle twixt hair and heavens
thrust in the dank cavern industry
heedless till ultra night
razing crazinq do pursue a race
regardless of world sky season
from peak to depthlessness...
(Translated by Justin Vitiello)

MOLISE

The chapter of Molisan literature in dialect (wholly contained in this century) displays elements so peculiar with respect to the national context, that it requires some indispensable historical and cultural premises to the aesthetic and critical exegesis of the texts, which encompass a period of time ranging from 1910 (*Sciure de fratta*, by Eugenio Cirese) to 1992 (*Moliseide*, by Giose Rimanelli). A very brief tradition, as can be inferred, without deep roots, mostly unknown to scholars of regional literatures and dialectology, as witnessed by the more or less recent anthologies of dialect poetry [M. Chiesa-G. Tesio (edited by), *Le parole di legno. Poesia in dialetto del '900*. 2 vols, Milan, 1984; Franco Brevini ed., *Poeti dialettali del*

Novecento, Turin, 1987; *Letteratura Italiana. Storia e geografia. Età Contemporanea*, 3 vols, (ed. Alberto Asor Rosa), Turin, 1989; Franco Brevini, *Le parole perdute*, Turin, 1990; Giacinto Spagnoletti-Cesare Vivaldi eds., *Poesia dialettale dal Rinascimento ad oggi*, 2 vols, Milan 1991], whether due to insufficient research, to calculated editorial strategies, or also, unfortunately, to the inadequate efforts of local cultural policies to recognize, organize and distribute nationwide a body of works that, although relatively young, possesses a depth of motivations, styles, formal structures, and is not at all lacking in aesthetic achievements.

We spoke of “peculiarity” of the Molisan poetic tradition in dialect, inasmuch as this tradition is intimately bound to the very history of the Molisan province, self-

absorbed in a troubled search for a ethnic-cultural identity and political and administrative autonomy (with respect to the neighboring regions of Abruzzi and the Benevento area of Samnium) beginning with the start of the century, whereby the objective, historical conditions of isolation of the Campobasso province (fifth of the Abruzzi region since 1860) combined with decided autarchic tendencies, aiming at configuring, distinguishing and delineating the borders of a geographic and anthropological entity clearly defined or definable, and therefore to be legitimated first and foremost on the linguistic and literary level.

This need (felt by the most engaged intellectuals between the end of the Nineteenth Century and the beginning of the next, (cf. above all Alfonso Perrella and

Giambattista Masciotta), then supported more and more by the economic, social, political forces and by a wide margin of public opinion (suffice it to note that the general political elections of 1921 in Molise were based on this issue, that transformed into a unified "bloc" the 7/8 of the existing parties), conferred to the budding literature in dialect, and not just in dialect, an autochthonous conservative impulse, that more than ever aimed to find, with the mimetic instruments offered by the vernacular (more precisely by the vernaculars) the authentic, true, profound spirit of a Molise which had to be discovered in its "essence," in its unmistakable human dimension, historically intact and pure, in its "rurality," as it was proudly remarked later on, at the height of the Fascist era.

This focus on an existing "molisanness,"

still to be “recognized” in every sense, would eventually confine local culture in the net of a unidirectional process, substantially monolithic, even in the diversity of experiences, of private struggles and elaborations, of the styles and inspirations of the poets of the first dialect season (1920-35) who, with the exception of Eugenio Cirese, the most committed of all, and Luigi Antonio Trofa, an “irregular” who was responsive to the stimulus of a “modernism” still to be tested, can certainly be placed within the confines of a mimetic verismo, functionally adherent to a singular historical moment of the Molisan province, characterized, as noted earlier, by the expansion of a centripetal energy that excluded any sort of opening toward external literary models, urban and cosmopolitan, though such models were

fairly present and active in the cultural milieu of the province in the Twenties and Thirties.

It is not by chance that the diacronic line of Twentieth-Century Molisan literature is marked by two strong curves determined by the linguistic option of dialect, and both coinciding with the most intense phases of the development of a regionalistic consciousness: the first, beginning with the immediate aftermath of W.W.I, crosses the Twenties and Thirties; the second, beginning with the late Fifties, spans the decades of the Sixties and Seventies, and both go through lively periods of research and study of the popular culture and traditions of a Molise that, still in the early Sixties, awaited to be recognized as an autonomous region.

From the first decade of the Twentieth Century there is evidence of active and

concrete interests in history, popular and high culture, the dialects of the province and ever stronger demands for separatism and administrative autonomy. The fruitful preparatory phase of the positivistic studies of the late Nineteenth Century, especially in the fields of folklore and history proper (cf. Alberto Mario Cirese's essay *Intellettuale e mondo popolare nel Molise* [Intellectuals and Popular World in Molise], Isernia, 1983, 3d reprint) lays the groundwork for the significant studies by B. Galileo Amorosa (*Riccia nella storia e nel folk-lore*, 1903), Eugenio Cirese (*Canti popolari del Molise*, 1910), Oreste Conti (*Letteratura popolare capracottese*, 1911) Giovanni Ziccardi (*Il dialetto di Agnone*, 1910), for the academic research of Francesco D'Ovidio, whose philological teachings were extremely important for the methodological and

technical orientation of the dialect poets of the first generation (it must be remembered that D'Ovidio already in 1876 had published *La fonetica del dialetto di Campobasso*); for the vast historiographic activity of Alfonso Perrella and Giambattista Masciotta (the latter published in 1915 and 1915 the first two volumes of the monumental work *Il Molise dalle origini ai nostri giorni*). Masciotta was a convinced and strenuous advocate of the administrative autonomy of Molise (this commitment is attested in the local press in the first quarter century, cf. Ermanno Catalano, *Uno storico molisano*. Giambattista Masciotta, Campobasso, 1983), and to attain it (which only happened in 1963) it took the general mobilization of the ruling classes, the intellectuals, and above all the businessmen of the province, who took the initiative away from the political parties

[cf. The Acts of the Provincial Council of May 1920 and the 1st Regional Molisan Congress of May 20-22 1922; the periodical of the epoch, especially *L'Avvenire del Sannio* (1919-1922), the official organ of the Popular Party of Molise].

As the real prospect of acquiring autonomy for the province became unfeasible in a strongly centralized Fascist state, the idea of a Molisan "homeland" was kept alive instead on the cultural level in the framework of Gentile's education reforms (1923), which accepted historiographic concepts (Benedetto Croce) and anticentralizing linguistic philosophies (G. I. Ascoli), and above all the "decentralizing" pedagogical recommendations of G. Lombardo Radice for the elementary schools, which were to assume once again the task of educating the "people."

Elementary school teachers became the unquestioned leaders in this effort, as preservers, interpreters and mediators of the most authentic reality and the most authentic popular "wisdom", or even the "bards" of this reality (it is not by coincidence that Eugenio Cirese, Michele Cima, Giovanni Cerri, dialect poets of the first generation, were elementary school teachers, but more on the role of the teachers further on in this prologue).

So that paradoxically, within the very monocentric state organization established by Fascism, there was room for testing and solidifying those designs of "regionalization" that had already surfaced between the end of the Nineteenth Century and the beginning of the Twentieth, maybe even with the strains and distortions of the basic principles of the school reform that,

misunderstood, gave rise to and heightened municipalistic tendencies, of which we have substantial evidence.

At any rate, the Twenties and Thirties were the most productive period of Molisan poetry in dialect, [and of dialect literature in general, if we consider the substantial chapter of dialect Theater of Isernia, entirely in the years 1920-1940, (cf. Giambattista Faralli, *Il teatro dialettale di Isernia (1920-1940)* [The Dialect Theater of Isernia (1920-1940)], Isernia: Marinelli, 1992), in a context that involved not only the school as an institutional structure with well-planned programs [it should be remembered that the texts adopted in Molisan elementary schools, approved by the Ministry of Public Education, were written by G. Berengario Amorosa (Molise, 1926) and by Eugenio Cirese (*Gente buona*, 1925), but intellectuals

as well [the writer Lina Pietravalle made a specific contribution with the volume *Molise* (1924) and then with *Sannio mistico* (1931), in addition to making Molise the privileged background of her narrative, in keeping with the canons of a belated romantic verismo). Also involved were the press, that was focusing as never before on discovering and publicizing a well-defined and “illustrious” “molisanness” [*Molise* (1924), *La rivista di Molise* (1926), *Luci molisane* (1931), which later became *Luci sannite* (1937), to underline the “heroic” character of the Molisan people, local publications that became the basic forum for Molisan poets in dialect], associations and folkloristic groups, and composers and ethnomusicologists [cf. the musical study by Vittorio De Rubertis on the *Maggio della Defènsa*, (1920)]. All this was

happening in Molise, while instead in the other Italian regions, especially central and northern regions, with really century-old traditions, in those same years dialect poetry was substantially in decline: see, for example, Piedmont, with only M. Costa and G. Pacotto; Lombardy, with only Delio Tessa (cf. *L'è di mort, alechter!*, 1932); Veneto, with the few collections of G. Piva (cf. *Cante d'Àldese*, 1930; *Bi-ba-ri-bo*, 1934) and V. Giotti (cf. *Caprizzi*, 1928 and *Colori*, 1941); Liguria with E. Firpo (cf. *O grillo cantadò*, 1931 and *Fiore in to gotto*, 1935) and A. Acquarone (cf. *Discorsi e confidenze*, 1928 and *A scoperta dell'America*, 1932); Emilia Romagna, where only A. Spallicci is notably active; Marche, Umbria, Rome, Abruzzi, where the production in dialect is extremely limited. But even southern regions reveal the same

gap in that period, with the exception of the always fertile Naples, where with Luca Postiglione, Ernesto Murolo, Rocco Galdieri, Libero Bovio and, above all, Raffaele Viviani literary activity in dialect does not seem to experience any decline. The exception is, therefore, Molise, as confirmation of that “peculiarity” of its budding dialect tradition we proposed as premise to this introductory essay.

The other curve, which took place in a completely different historical climate, is fundamentally based on analogous motivations: the resumption of studies on popular traditions and of the debate on the relationship between “national” and “regional” cultures in the Sixties (cf. the fundamental text by Carlo Dionisotti, *Geografia e storia della letteratura italiana*, 1967), anticipated in exemplary fashion in

the Fifties by Eugenio and Alberto Mario Cirese, who published the two volumes of *Canti popolari del Molise* (Rieti, 1953) (in 1953, meanwhile, came out *Lucecabelle*, by E. Cirese and in 1955, posthumously, *Poesie molisane*) and founded the review of popular history and literature *La Lapa* (1953-55), which heralded future times much more responsive to the messages set down in its pages by Ernesto De Martino, Paolo Toschi, Pier Paolo Pasolini, Diego Carpitella, Giuseppe Petronio and other important experts in the field; this climate would be felt in the province also, which arranged for the publication (1952) of the III and IV volumes of Masciotta's *Molise*, once again called upon to act as the historiographic basis for the region's autonomistic design, which was realized a few years later (1963),

after decades of parliamentary battles, thus legitimizing the presence, cultural as well, of Molise in the national context. It also spurred not only research into the past, critical and historical "classifications," rediscoveries, but also the arousal of the pressing expressive needs of a human world, historically and ethically self-defined, that precisely in the Sixties and Seventies was undergoing for the first time the unforeseen, unplanned drama of widespread industrial and technological progress and of the advent of the mass media.

In this framework should be seen initiatives such as the reprint of the published and unpublished poems by Giuseppe Altobello, dialect poet of the first generation (*Sonetti molisani*, 1966) and the publication of the *Prima antologia dei poeti*

dialettali molisani (1967), edited by Emilio Ambrogio Paterno, but above all the activity of the new dialect poets who, already from the second half of the Fifties (Nina Guerrizio, *Sciure de Carde*, 1956); Emilio Spensieri, *Come fusse allora*, 1957-1970), reopen a discourse destined to become, in time, the most interesting and aesthetically reliable component of the regional literary production in general.

In the Sixties and Seventies the dialect line displays a progression directly proportional to the massive invasion of the language of the mass media and imported technological models. In mostly lyrical-elegiac tones, the new dialect poets generally opt for escapes into memory, the restoration of values dimmed by time or about to die out, the search for the inner self, the capture of what is native and natural,

and engage in operations of linguistic archeology in which melancholy and mournful moods combine with the idyllic and evocative tones of E. Spensieri (cf. op. cit.); the vertical, strongly interiorized tensions, translated into neo-hermetic stylistic patterns by N. Guerrizio (cf. op. cit.; *Viente de vòria*, 1963; *Pagliare 'e fantasie*, 1969); the corrosive, ironic, polemical voice of Turillo Tucci (cf. *Cenza che ze sfoche. Monologhi*, I, 1967; *Cenza che ze sfoche. Dialoghi*, II, 1968); the contemplative, "social" vein of Camillo Carlomagno (cf. *Gente nustrana*, 1969; *Voce de mundagna*, 1969; *Voglie candà*, 1980 [posthumous]); the backward glances into memory, the moralistic tension, the existential concerns of Gianni Barrea (cf. *Viarelle de fore*, 1972; *Vurie de state*, 1980). Alongside the authors just

mentioned, there are many more who, in different measure, have contributed to the enrichment of the rather substantial landscape of dialect poetry.

The consolidation of a literary consciousness that has adopted dialect as a highly connotative and fully legitimated instrument in the contemporary Babel of artistic languages is paralleled by the revival of a neo-positivistic culture more and more aggressive and open to the multiple spheres of knowledge, and actively at work in institutional centers of learning, at the local and national level: evidence of this are critical editions of the significant works of the poets of the historical tradition (Giuseppe Altobello, Domenico Sassi, Michele Cima), of authors like Berengario Amorosa, of La Lapa, the review of Cirese father and son; the studies by Luigi Biscardi

on poetry in dialect (cf. *La letteratura dialettale molisana*, Isernia, 1983); the exploration of little-known areas of dialect literature such as the theater (cf. Faralli, *op.cit.*); the critical work on the *opera omnia* of E. Cirese by A. M. Cirese and on the unpublished poems of G. Cerri by S. Martelli; the recent volume *Poesia dialettale del Molise. Testi e critica* (edited by Luigi Bonaffini, Giambattista Faralli, Sebastiano Martelli, Isernia, 1993); the critical anthology, also recent, by Mario Gramegna (*Letteratura dialettale molisana. Antologia e saggi estetici*, vol. I, Campobasso, 1993).

At the forefront of Molisan poetry in dialect we find Giuseppe Jovine (*Lu Pavone*, 1970 and 1983) and Giose Rimaneli (*Moliseide*, 1992), writers with a background that is rather broad and rich with linguistic

and literary, as well critical and historiographic experiences. They have come to dialect with a self-awareness that goes far beyond the usual “restoration” or idyllic dream in the depths of memory; in these two very “new” writers, not of course in a generational sense, dialect represents a field to be explored for a poetic quest with vast connotative possibilities, even though their search takes them in very different directions. With these last two authors Molise, beyond the conditioning inherent in its political and cultural history, strongly felt until the Sixties, is bound to the rhythms and breath, the signs and essence of contemporary poetry, beyond any provincial boundary: Jovine’s and Rimanelli’s dialect poetry leads local tradition, with its conservative specificity, its “backwardness,” its lags (with the exception of Cirese), to the

mainstream of the literary evolution of the nation and of that “global village” we call the world.

The recent “discovery” of the work of Raffaele Capriglione, a poet already mentioned, although briefly, by E. Ambrogio Paterno in his anthology (op. cit.), does not significantly alter the picture of Molisan poetry in dialect that we have presented. His opera omnia, both prose and poetry, has been published by the Town of Santa croce di Magliano, which approved a project of several years aimed at publishing everything written by the poet from Santa Croce. The first two volumes of this project have been issued: Raffaele Capriglione, *‘U l’uteme sabbete d’abbrile ed altre feste popolari a Santa Croce di Magliano* (poesie dialettali) [The Last Saturday in April and Other Popular

Holidays at Santa Croce di Magliano], prefaced by Francesco D'Episcopo, Project Dorrafajele, Edizioni Enne, Campobasso 1995; Sergio Bucci, Giambattista Faralli, Sebastiano Martelli, Raffaele Capriglione. *Un "caso" letterario tra Ottocento e Novecento* [Raffaele Capriglione. A Literary case between the 19th and 20th Century], id. Some of the partial and little-known publications of a few of Capriglione's poems are: *Poesie dialettali di Dorraffaele* [Dialect Poetry of Dorraffaele], Editrice Universitaria Felici, Pisa 1972 e *Antologia poetica di Raffaele Capriglione* [Poetic Anthology of Dorraffaele] (edited by Michele Castelli with drawings by Pietro Mastrangelo), Editore THR, Caracas, Giugno 1992.

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Canti della terra d'Abruzzo e Molise, preface by O. Giannangeli, Milan 1958.

Prima antologia di poeti dialettali molisani, edited by E. A. Paterno, Pescara 1967.

Vocabolario dei vari dialetti del Sannio, edited by S. Nittoli, Naples 1873 (reprint, Bologna 1984.)

Le concordanze dei dialetti del Molise, edited by P. Piemontese, Bari 1985.

Isernia e il suo dialetto, 2 vols., edited by Carlo Santilli, Isernia 1988.

Letteratura dialettale molisana (Antologia e saggi estetici), a cura di M. Gramegna, Vol. I and II, Campobasso 1993-195.

Vocabolario ragionato del dialetto di Casacalenda, edited by A. Vincelli, Campobasso 1991.

Il teatro dialettale di Isernia (1920-1940), edited by G. Faralli, Isernia 1992.

Poesia dialettale del Molise. Testi e critica / Dialect Poetry from Molise. Texts and criticism, trilingual edition, edited by L. Bonaffini, G. Faralli, S. Martelli, Isernia 1993.

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G. Jovine, *Benedetti molisani*, Campobasso 1979.

L. Biscardi, *La letteratura dialettale molisana tra restauro e invenzione*, Isernia 1983.

S. Martelli - G. Faralli, *Molise*, Brescia 1994.

GIUSEPPE ALTABELLO

Giuseppe Altobello was born in Campobasso in 1869, where he died in 1931; doctor, musician, scientist, linguist, poet, he was a versatile figure with a multifaceted culture, as shown by his studies and research on the fauna: *Saggio di ornitologia italiana* [Essay on Italian Ornithology] has been recently reissued with a preface by Corradino Guacci (Isernia, 1990). Altobello's entire poetic works have been collected in the volume *Sonetti molisani* [Molisan Sonnets], Campobasso 1966, 2nd ed. 1982, edited by Nina Guerrizio, containing both the published collections, *Da lu fronte* [From the Front], Campobasso 1918; *Poesie dialettali* [Dialect Poems] Campobasso 1926 and those unpublished: *Trascurrenne de le feste* [Talking

of Feasts], *Minghe e Peppe* [Minghe and Peppe].

Criticism: L. Biscardi, *La letteratura dialettale molisana fra restauro e invenzione*, Isernia 1983; G. Faralli, in *Poesia dialettale del Molise. Testi e Critica*, Isernia 1993.

Elegy and irony, memorial projection and ludic intention, regret and playful “divertissement” constitute the score of the poetic world of Giuseppe Altobello, doctor, epigone of that aristocratic southern “gentlemanliness,” conservative and paternalistic, bound to traditions, to the ethical order, to a “human” measure of living, that was able to reconcile his professional and scientific role (which was significant: Altobello was an ornithologist with a solid national reputation) with the emotions and the simple, spontaneous,

archaic, but also “pithy” manifestations of popular life, or rather rural life, since the sources of inspiration for his creativity were the community, work, the seasons, the customs of Molisan farmers in the first decades of this century.

It is on this twofold track that moves the poetic invention of the author from Campobasso, who conferred nothing authentically new and original to “rustic” literary tradition, which had been grounded for centuries on the classic, ambivalent relationship between city and country, urban and rural, civil and instinctive, which entailed the adoption of this double representation of the naturalistic, rustic element (the country as the privileged place of natural harmony, peacefulness and oblivion, bucolic alternative to the chaos and noise of the city, to turmoil and anxiety, but

also seedbed of coarseness and awkwardness, over which the knowing auctores of witty, ironic sketches have laughed and made others laugh for centuries). This operation was still possible in the primitive rural world of Molise, which Altobello had observed and “transcribed” with a profuse sense of humanity and empathy, which nevertheless did not exclude the ironic smile, even if it was gentle, benevolent and in good measure complicitous. And from this multitude of feeling towards a reality in the wane – and in essence bound to that other reality, of life itself, preserved intact and pure in memory – emerges the figure of “Minghe Cunzulette,” that lends the title to the collection *Minghe e Peppa*. Altobello himself explains its origin, with a clear consciousness of his role as sensitive witness of changing

times: “Minghe Cunzulette is not a character I made up, but was instead an old dear sharecropper of my family who died about twenty years ago, well known in the county and the city, a primitive farmer, with ancient ways, cheerful and respectful, completely untouched by urbanization; born and raised between the farm and the small house, eating cabbage, onions and corncakes, tied to all the old customs, the good traditions, tied to the soil, like an elm tree in the boundary hedge, always busily at work in the small farm...” (Cf. Altobello, *Due parole*, introductory comments to *Poesie dialettali di Campobasso*, 1926, p.109 of the volume edited by Nina Guerrizio, *Sonetti molisani*, 1966-1982). In fact, times had changed: “urbanization” had undermined traditional ways of life, values, language, style, human relationships. Altobello’s memory explores

this lost dimension, aiming at “reproducing” it, between melancholy and irony, through the “restoration” (Biscardi) of a language salvaged from the contaminating landslide of modernity.

The poet’s memorial tension leads him to a meticulous and guarded linguistic selection aimed at capturing the most archaic and “pure” vernacular, not yet corrupted, with a strongly-felt urgency to bring back to light the true identity of the Campobasso dialect, immune from patched-up modernizations. This operation, which often risks a certain predictable coldness, is carried out with a conscious and studied philologism, precise and sober, neither folkloristic nor academic, balanced between a scrupulous visual/memorial investigation, meticulously transcribed, and the sudden impulse of the most authentic emotion, if

rare and controlled.

This is characteristic of Altobello's poetry, poised between the intention to remain very close to the cadences and syntactic rhythms of the popular characters, to the communal intimacy (of both men and nature) of that dying world, and a strictly erudite need to elevate native speech, the "dirty talk," to the literary dignity of Italian lyric tradition. To this end he turns, with considerable risk, to one of the most ancient and rigorous compositions: the sonnet. In essence this "workshop" operation of fine linguistic craftsmanship is Altobello's poetic challenge; and it is not superfluous to underline that, aside from a few rare, inevitable misses, inherent in the difference of expressive levels (the popular and the cultured), the Author is able to achieve a natural symbiosis, all the more precious for

this reason, between the spontaneous, instinctive cadences of vernacular usage and the rigorous metric codification of the sonnet. Nor should it surprise us, on the other hand, that he chose a “classic” expressive structure like the sonnet, in a period rife with Twentieth-Century experimentation that reached the province as well, as witnessed by the abundance of articles in the Molisan press in the aftermath of W.W.I, since this choice is in keeping with his conservative ideas and the Eighteenth-Century origin (in imitation of Carducci’s classical style) of his intellectual development.

La festa de le muorte

I.

Ngopp'a ogni ramo d'arbere ingiallito
na lacrima la nebbia ci ha posata
e a pianger pe la gente seppellita
lu cielo è fatto scuro sta giornata.

Na vranca 'e passarielle intristite
pe dente a nu frattone z'è menata
e n'hanno cchiù cantate, hanno finito
quann'hanno visto questa matinata.
Senza esse da lu vento manche smosse
ogni cepriese fute che z'è nfuse
cala nu chianto amaro pe le fosse:
e lu cepriese fute cumme fusse
de chesta terra nu spessorie grosse
la benedice senza che lu usse.
da *Sonetti molisani*, Rist. 1982

La festa dei morti I. — Sopra ogni ramo d'albero ingiallito
/ la nebbia una lacrima ha posata, / e a pianger per la gente
seppellita / il cielo si è fatto scuro sta giornata. / Uno
stormo di passeri intristiti / dentro una grossa fratta s'è
buttato / e non ha più cantato, hanno finito / quando
hanno visto questa matinata. / Senza essere dal vento

manco mosso / ogni cipresso folto ch'è bagnato / manda
giù un pianto amaro per le fosse: / ed il cipresso folto, come
fosse / di questa terra un grosso asper \bar{t} sorio, / la benedice
senza che lo scuoti.

(Traduzione di Nina Guerrizio)

All Souls' Day

I.

On every branch of every yellow tree
the fog has left a single tear behind
the sky's so dark today it's hard to see,
it wants to weep for all those in the ground.
A band of melancholy little sparrows
flew inside a heavy thicket all together
and did not sing again, they suddenly stopped
as soon as they had seen the morning weather.
Without being even jiggled by the wind
every thick cypress tree that felt the rain
trickles with bitter tears down in the ditches
and the thick cypress tree, as if it were
a giant aspergillum for this earth,
blesses it without needing to be shaken.
(Translated by Luigi Bonaffini)

Primavera

III

Eme accuscì passate Marze e Abbrile
ciacianijanne assieme, tra cumpagne,
tenenne sempe mmane lu fucile,
menanne sempe l' uocchie a ste campagne
quann'ecche Magge e da le cannarile
de le cannune, senza ma' sparagne,
esce ogni botta quante nu varile
a scapuccià le cime 'e ste muntagne.
Senz'allentà migliara 'e battarije
arresbegliate leste qua pe' ffore
fanne lu vere nferne, ira de Ddije,
cumme quanne, cuntinue, pe' ore e ore,
tu te trivasce sempe nferruvie
strascenate pe' dent'a le trafore.
da Sonetti molisani, Rist. 1982

Primavera - III. ~- Abbiàm così passato Marzo e Aprile /
chiacchierando tra noi, tra compagni, / tenendo sempre in
mano il fucile, / volgendo sempre gli occhi alla campagna, /
quand'ecco arriva Maggio e dalle gole / dei cannoni, senza
tregua/ esce ogni botta come un barile / a frantumare le cime
delle montagne. / Senza allentar, migliaia di batterie /

risvegliate ben presto di qua fuori / fanno un inferno vero,
ira di Dio, / come se di continuo, ore ed ore, / tu ti trovassi
sempre in ferrovia / via trascinato per le gallerie.

(Traduzione di Nina Guerrizio)

Spring III.

And so we passed the time both March and April
yammering together, among friends,
always with our hands holding the rifle
always turning to look toward the fields
when May suddenly arrives, and from the mouth
of the cannons, without ever a rest,
big as a barrel every shell shoots out
and blows to pieces the near mountain crest.
Without a let up, a thousand batteries
that are awakened soon enough out here
strike up the wrath of God, a dreadful hell,
as if for hours on end you found yourself
always on railroad tracks, and if you were
endlessly being dragged inside the tunnels.
(Translated by Luigi Bonaffini)

L'acqua de la Fota
VIII.

Ventima cara e doce de l'Abrile
fatta tupella da lu prime sole,
tu manne abbasce pe le cannarile
l'addore de le toppe de vijole;
tu cante ent'a le chiuppe misse nfile
canzone ch'hanne doce le parole,
tu va pe le caute e sbiglie arile,
mitte a le cielle scenna p'ogne vuole.
Tutte le chiante stanne a farte nchine,
te mannene salute de sfujta
appena che tu passe o t'avvecine;
ogne terra pe te diventa zita
ch'aspetta a vraccia aperte che le mine
le sciure d'ogne fratta ch'è sciurita.
da *Sonetti molisani*, 1982

L'acqua della Fota - VIII. — Zefiro caro e dolce dell'aprile
/ intiepidito dal primo sole, / se spiri mandi giù per la gola
/ il profumo dei ciuffi di viole; / tu canti dentro i pioppi
messi in fila / canzoni che hanno dolci le parole, / vai per le
buche a risvegliare i ghiri, / metti agli uccelli l'ala p'ogni
volo. / Tutte le piante stanno a farti inchini, / ti mandano

saluti di sfuggita / appena che tu passi o t'avvicini; / ogni
terra per te diventa sposa / che aspetta a braccia aperte che
le getti / i fiori d'ogni fratta ch'è fiorita.

(Traduzione di Nina Guerrizio)

The Water of the Fota
VIII.

Gentle and caressing April breeze
already warmed by early morning sunlight,
you send us, trickling down our throat, the sweet
fragrance of a myriad tufts of violets;
you sing amid long rows of poplar trees
songs that fill the air with soothing words
you go among the ditches and wake dormice
for every flight you put a wing on birds.
All the plants and trees bow down to you
and send you greetings with a fleeting nod
as soon as you go by them or approach;
every land for you becomes a bride
waiting with open arms for you to drop
the flowers stolen from each blooming bush.
(Translated by Luigi Bonaffini)

Che tiempe, ch'allegrija, e che canzune
 sentive a Sant'Antuone o pe la Fota
 quanne cuntiente fatijave ognune
 cu la paccija mmocca a bota a bbota!
 Chi steva a sciuppà lacce a une a une,
 chi sradecava tante na carota,
 chi pigliava le torte, chi le fune,
 chi rresciacquave fronne da la lota.
 E doppe vintun'ore ognune sciva
 pe z'assucà le piede a la chianura
 e p'acchiappà lu ciucce che fuiiva...
 E sottè a na muntagna de verdura,
 rraglianne pe' l'addore che sentiva
 spedetijava alegre la vettura.

da *Sonetti molisani*, 1982

XVIII. — Che tempi, che allegria, e che canzoni / sentivi
 A Sant'Antonio o per la Fota / quando contento faticava
 ognuno / con la battuta in bocca a volta a volta! / Chi
 sedani strappava ad uno ad uno / chi tanto sradicava una
 carota / chi pigliava ritorte, chi le funi / chi dal loto le foglie
 risciacquava. / E dopo ventun'ora ognuno usciva / per
 asciugarsi i piedi alla pianura / ed acchiappare il ciuco che

fuggiva... / E sotto a una montagna di verdura, / tagliando
per l'odore che sentiva, / allegra trombettava la vettura.

(Traduzione di Nina Guerrizio)

XVIII.

What times, what fun, and what happy songs
you heard around the Fota or at St. Anthony
when all worked in good cheer the whole day long
always with a wisecrack or a story!
Some people tore off celery one by one,
some people pulled a carrot from its roots,
some people picked up ropes, some gathered withes,
some people washed the mud around the leaves.
And after twilight everyone went out
down in the darkened plain to dry their feet
and try to catch the donkey running off...
And underneath a huge mountain of greens,
braying for the strong smell in the air
the carriage went on blaring happily away.
(Translated by Luigi Bonaffini)

Minghe a Peppa II.

A la sulagna stea na funtanella
che deva la cchiù fresca acqua suttila,
nu sperchie d'acqua fatte a scatulella
cu quatte lisce all'erta a capefila.

L'acqua scurreva pe na fussatella
cumme a na capesciola che ze sfila
facenne cresce la mentuccia bella
e la chiantima d'erva cchiù gentila.

Pe nnu era nu spasse la matina
a j a struscià llà dente le peducce
e i te vede ancora llà vecina,
e addurente te sente de mentucce
cu lu nasille lustre, mbusse, china
a veve ent'a na fronna de cappucce.

da *Sonetti molisani*, 1982

Minghe a Peppa II. - A solatìo stava una fontanella / che
dava la più fresca acqua sottile, / d'acqua uno specchio a
scatoletta fatto / con quattro pietre lisce dritte a incastro. /
L'acqua scorreva per un fossatello / come trina di lana che
si sfila / facendo crescer la mentuccia bella / e la piantina
d'erba più gentile. / Per noi era uno spasso la mattina /

andar su e giù là dentro coi piedini / ed io ti vedo ancora là vicino / e odorosa ti sento di mentuccia, / lustro il nasetto, gocciolante, china / a bere in una foglia di cappuccio.

(Traduzione di Nina Guerrizio)

Minghe to Peppa II.

There was a little fountain in the sunlight
that gave the freshest and most limpid water,
a pool of water looking like a crate
with its four smoothed stones wedged in upright.
The water flowed down through a narrow ditch
like a slowly unraveled woolen lace
nourishing the lovely plants of mint
and the small tufts of the most tender grass.
For us it was great fun early in the morning
to go and wade in it with our bare feet
and I still see you there as you stood near
and I can smell the fragrant mint on you
as you bent over, your nose shiny and wet,
to take a sip from a cupped cabbage leaf.
(Translated by Luigi Bonaffini)

Minghe a Peppa
XX.

La massaria, z'arrecanosce, è chella
ch'appare a la sulagna ghianchijata,
che te' ent'a l'uocchie de la rumanella
na cocchia de pecciune apparegliata.
Na preulata d'uva sangenella
scorre ngoppa lu puzze maretata
a nu cièuze ghianche e a na prunella
ddò vanne cielle tutta la jurnata.
Na specanarda a mure nfaccia a sole,
chiena de mille spiche a primavera
sta llà pe fa addurente le lenzole,
e ngoppa a la funestra vide dritte
le megliè chiante roppie de vijole
nate e cresciute dent'a ddu marmitte.
da *Sonetti molisani*, 1982

Minghe a Peppa XX. — La masseria, si riconosce, è quella
/ che appare a solatìo, lì, biancheggiata, / e tiene entro
quell'occhio sottotetto / di colombi una coppia
ap-parigliata. / Una pergola d'uva sanginella / scorre
disopra al pozzo maritata / a un gelso bianco ed un pruno
selvatico / dove per tutto il giorno vanno uccelli. / Una

pianta di nardo in faccia al sole, / piena di mille spighe a
primavera / sta lì per profumare le lenzuola, / e sopra la
finestra vedi dritte / le meglio piante di viole a ciocca / nate
e cresciute dentro due marmitte.

(Traduzione di Nina Guerrizio)

Minghe to Peppa
XX.

The farmhouse, you can tell, is the one there
that appears brightly whitened in the sun
and holds within that eye under the ledge
two coupled doves that make a happy pair.
A pergola of Sanginella grapes
now runs over the well, wedded to a white
mulberry tree and to a blackthorn hedge
where birds go in and stay the whole day long.
A spikenard on the wall against the sunlight
full of a thousand blooming spikes in spring
is there to lend its fragrance to the sheets
and on the window sill you see upright
the finest plants of violets grown in clusters
all born and raised inside two earthen pots.
(Translated by Luigi Bonaffini)

LUIGI ANTONIO TROFA

Luigi Antonio Trofa was born in Ferrazzano (Campobasso) in 1879 and died in 1936. Having begun his career in the cavalry, he abandoned it because of his intolerance of military discipline, later becoming an employee in Campobasso's Financial Administration. He carried on an intense activity as a journalist, collaborating with regional journals such as *Il Gufo*, *Sci-ta-bum*, *Il Foglietto*, etc., transferring into some even the verve of his Futurist experiences and at any rate making a deep mark with his presence on the Molisan periodical publications from 1911 to the early Thirties. In the thick volume *Rime allegre* [Happy Verses], Campobasso, 1928, Trofa gathers his vast and uneven writings in Italian, while

with his songs and dialect poems he becomes a very original voice in Molisan dialect poetry. His works in dialect have been collected posthumously in the volume *Pampuglie* [Woodchips], Campobasso, 1973, edited by Mario Trofa. He also wrote a short novel, *Vita paesana...com'era una volta* [Town Life...How It Used to Be], Campobasso, 1935) that offers a lively portrait of Molisan life and customs in the early Twentieth Century.

Luigi Antonio Trofa (1879-1936), an unorthodox, eclectic, irreverent poet, capable however of intimate, absorbed and moving self-withdrawal, takes up dialect as the instrument of poetic expression after the most varied experiences, both as an active journalist, within the limits allowed by a province such as Campobasso's (Cf. the satirical reviews *Il Gufo*, *Il Foglietto*, *Sci-Ta-*

Bum, in the years between W.W.I and the advent of fascism, in which he completed his modernist training, of markedly Futurist origin), and as a poet and writer in Italian (Cf. *Rime allegre*, [Happy Verses], 1928; *Vita paesana...com'era una volta* [Country Life...How It Used to Be], 1935).

Trofa's inspiration, consolidated by a vast cultural background, nourished by the most vital lymphs of Twentieth Century poetics (D'Annunzio, Pascoli, the *Crepuscolari*, the Futurists), follows two different paths: an ironic, desecrating, mocking consideration of certain aspects and figures of reality, and a troubled, painful, at time dejected existential vicissitude, modernly perceived and modernly rendered, in a language absolutely new, free of rhetorical frills, and intent above all on capturing and rendering the

natural complexity of an authentic dialectal “consciousness,” as it emerges from the collection *Pampuglie* [Woodchips], published posthumously (1973) and edited by Mario Trofa.

It is indeed from this dimension of the self that Trofa extracts the most significant moments and insights of his dialect writing, cultivated with extreme reserve and solitary discretion, but also with a scrupulous and refined labor *limae*, which has yielded in the end truly exceptional aesthetic results, such as those in the compositions “Sole d’autunne” [Autumn Sun], “La voce dell’òrghene” [The Voice of the Organ], in which the “twilight tonality” noted by Ettore Paratore in the preface to *Pampuglie*, is an excellent example of Trofa’s evocative skills — based on hermetic allusions and light imagery —, as he expresses the most

subterranean and quivering traces, the most secret ties in the relationship of the authorial self with the entire reality of his land.

Luigi Fontanella is therefore on the right track in identifying the deep traces of Trofa's absolutely "modern" inventiveness in his "skillful musical mix, whose ideal 'fathers' are Pascoli and D'Annunzio for the density of onomatopoeias, homophonies, iterative epanalepses, bold alliterations: the whole thing often amalgamated in a phonosymbolic process which nonetheless remains rooted in Trofa's earthy spirit. In him this work is the result of a constant and careful polishing [...] Only thus will we have the complete portrait of a poet who wrote a small epic of his land in his ancestral language, a brief symphony of subtle elegance and genteel irony that speaks of a Past-Present still open [...] even to the

Future.”

To summarize, Luigi A. Trofa is a singular exponent of the history of Molisan poetry in dialect, a precious link between old and new, tradition and innovation, and fundamentally with a very particular and noteworthy awareness of the possibilities of language: in this sense Trofa is closer, beyond chronological divisions, to today's experimental writers — such as Rimanelli, for instance — than he is to his contemporaries, fixed upon a conservative position, in every sense (intellectual and psychological, as well as linguistic), perhaps with the exclusion of Cirese only, who was also, however, very far from conceiving and realizing certain “daring” constructs. Enlightening, in this regard, are once again the words of L. Fontanella, who in his introductory essay to Trofa's poetry cites a few reflections by

Giuseppe Rosato: “[...] It is important to note, on the level of composition, how Trofa experimented in dialect with free verse, which in Italian had appeared only in Futurist poetry; but it is also significant that the experience of free verse precedes chronologically the adoption of the endecasyllable, which will become exclusive in his later work. And it is an unusual process of evolution, or involution, if it is true that generally a dialect poet has the desire to find metrical freedom after a start usually made in the rigorous observance of traditional forms. Thus for Trofa one could speak of innovation within tradition, in order to stress precisely the fact that the poet, while respecting the linguistic-cultural heritage that precedes him, subjects the latter to a refined process of innovation [...]”.

Criticism: E. Paratore, introduction to L. A. Trofa, in *Pampùglie*, Campobasso 1973; L. Biscardi, *La letteratura dialettale molisana*, Isernia 1983; L. Fontanella in *La poesia dialettale del Molise. Testi e critica*, Isernia 1993;

1. Cf. Luigi Fontanella, "Luigi Antonio Trofa", in *Poesia Dialettale del Molise*, cit., p.88.

2. Cf. L. Fontanella, cit., p.84 and bibliographical appendix, p.90.

'Na zénghera nera

Stèva a ru sole, comm'a 'na luscèrta
o 'nu pezzente stracche e stengenàte,
e 'na zénghera néra — 'nciuffellàta —
m'afferràtte 'na mane e 'ncumenzàtte:
"Uócchie de cacciatore, tié... 'na rosa,
'na rosa róscia, ségne de l'amore...
ma spìne de maluócchie a mmille a mmille
tremèntene la vita e la fertuna..."

La zénghera decéva... i' tamentéva
'n'albere stiénte, 'mbacce a 'nu murille
ruscecàte de bùche e de verdìca,
'n'albere pàzze pe' ggulie de luce.
Ru fùme azzurre de ri saramiènte
'sciva addurùse da le ciummenère.
A ru sole de Màrze — dentr'a ll'aria —
pareva che cantasse la cecàla.
E la zénghera, vócca de curàlle,
cìrchie d'òre a le 'récchie, z'affannava
a 'nduvenà la vita e la ventura...
I' me sunnàva 'na scalélla lèggia,
tutta file de paglia lucechènte,
che me purtàva drìtte 'mbaravise.

da Pampùglie, 1973

Una zingara nera — Ristavo al sole, come una lucerta / o
un mendicante stracco, con i suoi cenci, / e una zingara
nera — tutta trine — una mano mi prese e cominciò: /
“Occhi di caccia-tore, c’è una rosa, / la rosa rossa, segno
dell’amore... / ma spine di malocchio a mille a mille /
tormentano la vita e la fortuna...” / La zingara diceva... ed
io miravo / l’albero sten-to, accosto ad un muretto /
rosicchiato dai buchi e dall’ortica, / un alberello pazzo [per
voglia] di luce. / Un fumo azzurro, il fumo dei sarmenti /
usciva pieno d’aromi dai camini. / A quel sole di marzo —
dentro l’aria — / sembrava che cantasse la ci-cala. / E la
zingara, bocca di corallo, / cerchi d’oro alle orecchie,
s’affannava / a indovinar la vita e la ventura... Ma io
sognavo una scaletta lieve, / tutta fili di paglia rilucente, /
che mi portava dritto in paradiso.

(Traduzione di Mario Trofa)

A Dark Gypsy Woman

I was standing in the sun, like a lizard
or a tired beggar wrapped in his old rags,
and a dark gypsy woman — dressed in lace —
grabbed one of my hands and so began:
“Here, hunter’s eyes... here is a rose for you,
a red red rose, that is the sign of love...
but by the thousands, thorns of evil eye
will pierce with endless pangs your life and fortune...”
The gypsy went on talking... I kept my eyes
fixed on a stunted tree close to a wall
eaten through and through by cracks and nettles,
a small tree driven mad from yearning light.
A bluish smoke, the smoke from shoots and twigs,
rose heavy with fragrance from the smokestacks.
Under that sun in March — all through the air —
countless cicadas seemed to trill their song.
And the gypsy woman, lips of coral,
golden rings in her ears, breathlessly
went on trying to tell my life and future...
But I was dreaming of a weightless ladder
all made of light and shiny blades of straw
that took me straight on high to paradise.

(Translated by Luigi Bonaffini)

Ciérte notte affàtate

E ccàla, suonne, càla
'ncòppe a 'stu còre stràcche
che 'nz'addorme...
Ciérte notte affatàte,
ru remòre
j' sènte de le stelle
che ggirene menùte pe' 'mmenùte;
'nu respìre
de 'na rosa stranìta pe' l'acquàra.
'Nu sfricceche de rille,
'nu mallàrde
che ze ne vola e trétteca la fratta,
me fa zumbà tremànne da ru liette...
Ma quànn'è mmatutìne,
ru cuscìne
ze fa doce, de giglie:
l'ombra de mamma
me passa affiànche, senza fa' parola,
e che le mane d'aria,
zitte zitte,
m'accarezza la fronte e ri capille.
Me ze chiüdene l'ucchie,

e pe' la stanza

z'arrespàgne la pace e la frescùra.

da Pampùglie, 1973

Certe notti fatate — E scendi, sonno, scendi / su questo cuore stanco / che non s'addorme... / Certe notti fatate, / il rumore / io sento delle stelle / che girano minuto per minuto; / il respiro / d'una rosa stordita di rugiada. / Lo sfreccicare d'un grillo, / oppure un tordo / che vola frusciando tra la siepe, / mi fa saltare, tremando, giù dal letto. / Ma quando è mattutino / il cuscino / si fa dolce, di giglio: / l'ombra di mamma / mi passa affianco, senza far parola, e con le mani d'aria, / zitta zitta, m'accarezza la fronte ed i capelli. / Mi si chiudono gli occhi / e, per la stanza, si rispande la pace e la frescura.

(Traduzione di Mario Trofa)

Certain Enchanted Nights

Descend, sleep, descend
upon this weary heart
that cannot rest...
Certain enchanted nights,
I hear
the echo of the stars
as they turn minute by minute;
the sigh
of a rose made giddy by the dew.
the rustle of a cricket,
a thrush
that's taking flight and stirs the foliage
makes me jump up trembling on the bed....
But in the morning,
the pillow
becomes sweet, a lily:
my mother's shadow
brushes by me, speechless,
and with hands of air,
caresses my forehead and my hair.
I close my eyes,
and through the room

coolness and peace spread slowly once again.
(Translated by Luigi Bonaffini)

Sole d'autunno

Sole d'autunno,
tu c'appicce ri vrite de le case
mo che ru vèspre ze fà rùsce 'ncièle,
tu che rrìre a le loggie 'ngherlandàte
de mazzille lucente de randìnie,
jè vera chésta voce de campane,
ze sènte... o me la sònne a uocchie apiérte?
Jè nu 'ntrille affatàte che me chiama
e me fa perde forza e sentemiènte;
'na nuvela de 'nciènze mo m'abbòglie,
retornene ri tiémpe de 'na vòta:
la pella ze fa liscia e ri capille
ze 'ncréspe cchiù nnire de la pece!
Quanta perzòne care attuórne a mmé!
...Ma da 'ndó viénne, comme so' mmenùte?
Puccàte ca se sule le tamiènte
'nu pòche cchiù pezzùte o ca le mane
alluònghe chiàne chiàne p'attentàrle...
resta sule la spèra de ru vèspre...
trema, e ru cièle, priéste, ze fà scure!
Sole d'autunno,
l'angele è passate:

jè vera chesta voce de campane,
ze sente... o me la sònne a uòcchie apièrte?
da *Pampùglie*, 1973

Sole d'autunno — Sole d'autunno, / tu che fiammeggi ai
vetri delle case / ora che il vespro si fa rosso in cielo, / tu
che ridi alle logge inghirlandate / di pannocchie lucenti di
granturco, / è vera questa voce di campane, / si sente... o
me la sogno ad occhi aperti? / É una squilla fatata che mi
chiama / e mi toglie la forza e i sentimenti; / m'avvolge, ora,
una nuvola d'incenso / e ritornano i tempi di una volta: /
la pelle si fa liscia ed i capelli / s'increspano più neri della
pece. / Quante persone care intorno a me! / ...Di dove
vengono, come sono venute? / Peccato che se solo tu le
guardi / con maggiore attenzione, o che le mani / allunghi
piano piano per toccarle / ...rimane solo la spera del
vespro... / trema, ed il cielo, presto, si fa scuro! / Sole
d'autunno, / l'angelo è passato: / è vera questa voce di
campane, / si sente... o me la sogno ad occhi aperti?

(Traduzione di Mario Trofa)

Autumn Sun

You Autumn sun,
that set on fire the glasspanes of the houses
as the evening spreads red across the sky,
you that smile at the balconies all wreathed
with small bouquets of shining ears of corn,
does this voice of bells exist for real,
do you hear it... or is this sound a daydream?
It's an enchanted trill that calls my name
and makes me lose my strength and senses;
a cloud of incense now envelops me,
the times of long ago are here again:
my skin is smooth once more, and my hair
is curly as once was and black as pitch!
So many loved ones standing all around me!
...Where do they come from, how did they get here?
A pity that if you only look at them
a little closer, or slowly stretch your hands
and try to touch them...
only the evening light is left behind...
it quivers, and soon the sky turns into darkness!
Autumn sun,
the angel has gone by:

does this voice of bells exist for real,
do you hear it... or is this sound a daydream?
(Translated by Luigi Bonaffini)

Maritime m'ha scritte

Carissema Tresàngela,
sòng'arrivato bbène;
madonna e quanta trène
ce stàne a 'sta cità!
Le càsere so' àvete
comm'a ru campanàre,
la ggiòbba¹ ru cumpàre
me l'à truàta ggià...
Ma chélla ch'è terribbéla
Tresàngela, è la lénga!
Qua, ùne che scéllenga
ze dice ca: nò stén²...
So' uomméne³ le fémmene,
ri màschere so' mèn⁴,
e yes, a Brucchelì
segnífeca: pe'scì!
Diécche pe' ru devìvere
ze passa bunariélla,
però ru zanzaniélla
e assütte comm'a ché...
Qua la bevanda 'còlica
nesciùne la pò vénne...

Ce cride tù?... Vatténne,
so' chiacchiere, Tresé.

Mi ha scritto mio marito – Carissima Tresangela, / son
arrivato bene; / madonna quanti treni / stanno in questa
città! / Le case sono alte / come ad un campanile, / la
giobba il mio compare / me l'ha trovata già... / Ma quella
che è terribile, / Tresangela, / è la lingua! / Se uno qua
s'imbroglia, / gli dicono no stèn... / Sono "uommene" le
femmine, / i maschi sono "men", / e "yes" a Brucchelì /
vuol dire appena: sì!

1 giobba: dall'inglese job, lavoro.

2 nò stén: da I don't understand, non capisco.

3 uomméne: da women, donne

4 men: uomini

My Husband Wrote to Me

My dearest Tresangela,
I have arrived just fine;
Madonna! you wouldn't believe
the trains this city has!
All the houses here
are as tall as belfries,
our friend already did
find a job for me.
But what's terrible and strange,
Tresangela, is their language!
When you get mixed up
here they say: "no stén..."¹
"Uommene"² here are women,
and the males are "men,"
and "yes" in "Bruccheli"³
stands for our "sci"⁴!
As far as living goes,
here things are pretty good,
but my thirsty gullet
gets drier every day...
Nobody here can sell
alcoholic beverages...

Can you believe it?

Tresé, they must be joking.

1. Nò stén: corruption of I don't understand.

2 uommene: it sounds like women, but in dialect it means men.

3 Brucchelì: corruption of Brooklyn.

4 scì: in dialect it means yes.

Ma chélla ch'è terribbéla,
 Tresàngela, è la lénga!
 Se truòve a chi t'anzénga
 cumiénz'a ggastemà.
 T'ammàtte che 'na ggióvena,
 sciacchènza⁵ siente fa...
 natinga, a Bufalò
 signifeca: pe'nno!
 Tresà, qua la sciammèreca
 z'aùsa p'ògne gghiuorne,
 nen g'è bbrevògna o scuòrne
 pe' chi ze la vò fa.
 Pe' chésse spisse càpeta
 ca scàgne pe' nnutàre
 ru prime sapunàre
 che trovez'a passà!
 Ma chélla ch'è terribbéla,
 Tresàngela, è la lénga!
 Tu tié chéssa zerlénga...
 ma se mmenisce qua,
 o pòvera Tresàngela,
 che bbularrisce fa?

Ru accìse⁶, sa ched'è?

Ru càsce, sòre sé!

da Pampùglie, 1973

Ora qui, riguardo ai viveri, / si campa per benino, / però
'sto gargarozzo / è asciutto sempre più... / Qua la bevanda
alcolica / nessuno la può vendere... / Ci credi tu?... Ma
scherzi! / sono chiac-chiere, Tresé. / Ma quella che è
terribile, / Tresangela, è la lingua! / Se trovi chi t'insegna, /
cominci a bestemmiare... / T'imbatti in una giovane, /
"sciacchenza" senti dire... / "natinga", a Bufalò, / vuol dire
solo: no! / Tresà, qua il battichia-pppe / si adopera ogni
giorno, / non c'è vergogna o scorno / per chi se lo vuol fare.
/ Per questo, spesso capita / che scambi per notaro / il
primo saponaro / che si trovi a passare! / Ma quella ch'è
terribile, / Tresàngela, è la lingua! / Tu ce l'hai tanto
lunga... / ma se venissi qua, / o povera Tresangela, / cosa
vorresti fare? / l'"accise", sai cos'è? / il cacio, cara mia!

(Traduzione di Mario Trofa)

5 sciacchenza: da to shake hands, stringere la mano.

6 accise: da cheese, formaggio.

But what's terrible and strange,
Tresangela, is their language!
If you find someone to teach you
you start to curse and swear.
If you meet a young woman,
you hear her say "sciacchenza"*...
"natinga"* in Buffalo,
stands for our: "pe'nno"!*
Tresé dear, here people
use tail-coats everyday,
nothing to be ashamed
if you should have one made.
That's why it often happens
that you take for a notary
the very first soap-dealer
that happens to go by.
But what's terrible and strange,
Tresangela, is their language!
You who're always talking,
if you were to come here,
Tresangela my dear,
what would you ever do?

Do you know what “accise”* means?

It's really cheese, my love.

(Translated by Luigi Fontanella)

5 sciacchena: corruption of shake hands.

6 natinga: corruption of nothing.

7 accise: corruption of cheese.

La vita

La vita?... 'n'affacciàta de fenèstra,
'na porta che ze ràpe e ze rrechiùde;
ri culùre de sèmpe vànne e viénne:
la premavèra jére.. e mo jè viérne.
Ru viénte de ru vèspre, malandrìne,
camìna che le scarpe de vellùte,
e quànne te z'accòsta, chiàne chiàne,
già siénte letanìe de campane.
Quànne, pure pe' mmé, sarrà mmenùte,
me vòglie curecà 'mmiéze a ru ràne;
a la bbèlla staggióne, da ru còre,
'na rosa róscia spuntsrrà 'mbruvvìsa.
Già véde 'na quatràra 'nammuràta
che ze la còglie e ze la mette 'mbiétte.

Novembre 1935

da Pampùglie, 1973

La vita — La vita?... un'affacciata alla finestra, / una
porta che s'apre e si richiude; / i colori s'alternano veloci: /
la primavera ieri... oggi l'inverno. / Ed il vento del vespro,
malandrino, / cammina con le scarpe di velluto; / mentre
ancora ti s'accosta, piano piano, / già senti litanie di
campane. / Quando, pure per me, sarà venuto, / mi voglio

coricare in mezzo al grano; / alla stagione bella, dal mio
cuore, / una rosa rossa spunterà improvvisa. / Già vedo
una ragazza innamorata / che se la coglie e se al porta al
seno.

(Traduzione di Mario Trofa)

Life

Life?... a look outside the window
a door that opens and closes;
eternal colors coming and going:
yesterday spring... and now it's wintertime.
The evening's roguish wind
walks with its velvet shoes,
and when he slowly approaches you
you already hear the litany of bells.
When that moment arrives for me as well
I want to lie down amid a field of wheat.
in the springtime, from my heart
a red rose suddenly will bloom.
I already see a girl in love go by
and pick it, and place it on her breast.
(Translated by Luigi Fontanella)

EUGENIO CIRESE

Eugenio Cirese was born in Fossalto (Campobasso) in 1884 and died in Rieti in 1953, after having gone through all the levels of elementary teaching; teacher, didactic director and supervisor first in Molise, then in Abruzzo, and finally in Rieti. His early work is concerned mainly with the collection and study of Molisan folk songs, as shown by his first collection, *Canti popolari e sonetti in dialetto molisano* [Folk Songs and Sonnets in the Molisan dialect], 1910; at the end of his existential and poetic itinerary we find, emblematically, the massive and fundamental collection of *Canti popolari del Molise* (Rieti, 1953). His poetry is contained in the following works: *Sciure de fratta* [Hedge Flowers], Campobasso, 1910; *La*

guerra: discurzi di cafuni [The War: Peasants' Talk], Campobasso, 1912; *Ru cantone della fata* [The Fairy's Rock], Pescara, 1916; *Suspire e risatelle* [Sighs and Laughter], Campobasso, 1918); *Canzone d'atre tiempe* [Song of Times Past], Pesaro, 1926); *Rugiade* [Dew], Avezzano, 1938; *Lucecabelle* [Fireflies], Rome, 1951; *Poesie molisane* [Molisan Poems], posthumous, Caltanissetta, 1955. Also worthy of mention is *Gente buona* [Good People], Lanciano, 1925, a regional school primer — in keeping with the new directives of Gentile's reforms and of the pedagogical ideas of Lombardo Radice — that confirms his mastery of the cultural anthropological patrimony of the region, repository of his dialect poetic world.

Criticism: P. P. Pasolini, "Un poeta in molisano," in *Passione e ideologia*, Milan 1960;

E. Giammarco, *Storia della cultura e della letteratura abruzzese*, Rome 1969; G. Jovine, "La poesia dialettale molisana," in *Benedetti molisani*, Campobasso 1979; L. Biscardi, *La poesia dialettale molisana*, Isernia 1983; F. Brevini, *Le parole perdute*, Turin 1990; L. Bonaffini, "Eugenio Cirese," in *Twentieth-Century Italian Poets, First Series, Dictionary of Literary Biography*, Detroit-London 1991; L. Biscardi, in *La poesia dialettale del Molise. Testi e critica*, Isernia 1993.

In keeping with the critical perspective, presently considered canonical, of the Molisan poetic tradition in dialect — unfortunately we still do not have the original manuscripts, nor the chronological data or a philologically adequate edition of the poetry of Raffaele Capriglione (1874-1921) —, we reconfirm, for now, the premise

postulated on several occasions, according to which the literary activity of Eugenio Cirese constitutes the most coherent, complete and consciously “experienced” poetic testimonial in dialect ever put forth by the not very long or substantial history of the province of Molise, an autonomous region for little over twenty years.

Eugenio Cirese’s work, beginning in 1910 — *Canti popolari e sonetti in dialetto molisano* [Folk Songs and Sonnets in Molisan Dialect], followed by *La Guerra. Discursi di cafuni* [The War...Peasants’ Talk], 1910 — unfolds on a double register — mimetic/realistic and lyrical/subjective —, which finally, after a progressive and more personal development (*Suspire e risatelle*) [Sighs and Laughter], 1918 ; *Rugiade* [Dew], 1932, finds absolutely original modalities,

grounded on an experimentally hermetic neo-Romanticism (*Lucecabelle*) [Fireflies], 1951; and, posthumously, *Poesie molisane* [Molisan Poems], 1955.

There are, however, certain observations to be made, based on a less widely accepted, less academic and even less stereotyped review of the poetic world of this author, undoubtedly regarded as the founder of Molisan poetry in dialect.

In truth, on the mimetic/objective side of his creativity, Cirese still wanders, with a romantically “aristocratic” vocation, on the surface of the reality he is portraying, perceived and assumed in tones that tend more towards an “idealization” of bourgeois origin, “urban,” of the rural and pastoral universe, than an authentically and impulsively suffered empathy: Cirese stops at the gates of Hell, on the threshold of the

true picture of the life and "toil" of the rural world, despite the fact that it is the recurrent theme of his poetic inspiration. Shepherds, peasants, farmers, field work, sheep trails, hovels, a harsh, barren land, animals, seasons and chores, hunger and rage are rather projected onto a sentimental imagination, often too soft, sugarcoated, at times even finely ironic, more often still preoccupied with the "transcendental" moments of religious meditation.

Can we accept the hypothesis of a Cirese determined to "purge" his inspiration and writings of the less sportive experiences of his life (his work as a journalist — cf. the periodical *Battaglie di Lavoro* (1912-1914); — of political activist; of promoter and organizer in the schools)? Meanwhile, we find no echo in his melos of the historical, civil, political storms raging in the province

of Molise, and in all of Italy (but for Molise, intent upon the achievement of administrative autonomy, the situation was even more complex), in the years between the period preceding W.W.I. and the advent of Fascism.

In any case, in the twenty-year interval of the Fascist regime, Cirese plays a leading role in the context of Gentile's school reforms, and in full adherence to the programs outlined and promoted by Lombardo Radice, so that he is wholly taken with the representation of his "extremely rural" Molise, always with an "idyllic," gratified, very satisfied and satisfying vision of the "strapaese" typology (Gente Buona) [Good People], 1925 – an elementary school primer; *La 'lettricità* [The Electricity], 1926, a poem in a good-naturedly ironic key.

But apart from the political cultural

climate of the time, there still remains his commitment with regards to the project of autonomy for the region, at least two decades old (cf. the general Introduction), an autonomy to be based first of all on a homogenous, compact and identifiable linguistic-cultural tradition. This legitimizes Cirese's work during these years, independently of purely aesthetic and historiographic values, including the collection *Rugiade* (1932). L. Biscardi rightly notes that: "With respect to *Suspire e risatelle*, the essential novelty of *Rugiade* is marked by the rejection of most of the "passionate songs," which in the first corpus expressed the extreme tension of melic abandon, replaced by didactic, fable-centered, gnomic compositions, on the whole "ideological." The lines placed as premise to this last section of the collection

(Don't be conceited: / read and think, / that even a peasant / can teach you something) represent its explicit interpretive key, in absolute consonance with Lombardo Radice's speech to the teachers of Florence. The "culture" of the "illiterate" people, rediscovered by the teacher, can accept and assimilate in its unchanging mindset even the novelties brought by time.

The overall sense of Cirese's cultural position in those years is clearly defined in the premise to *Rugiade*, where the vindication of the contribution of his research on folksongs and dialect poetry to the reconstruction of the cultural, and consequently geographical and historical, identity of Molise, (also to be remembered is his attempt at dialect prose — *Tempo d'allora: figure, storie e proverbi* [Time of long ago: figures, tales and proverbs], 1939 — in the

tradition of the regional sketch) is inserted intentionally in the political and cultural context of the time [...]”

The third and final phase of Eugenio Cirese’s poetic pursuit, also related to the climate of the new regional autonomy movements of the post-war period, as well as to the mood of conscious resistance to the incipient invasion of cultural massification with the resulting timely intensification of anthropological popular tradition studies (we are in the late 50s), closes with a research, psychological and formal, aimed at the most refined, ineffable, quintessential subjective expressiveness, based, in the context of the less ephemeral connotative tension of “modernist” style, on an almost mystical treatment of the parole, in this case dialect, which is dilated to absolute dimensions, in its semantic and

phonosymbolic effects.

We again cite, for its precision, Luigi Biscardi's exhaustive profile, necessarily succinct, of the poet Eugenio Cirese: "Cirese's transition to a new poetic season is marked by the existential experience during the years of the Second World War, by the poet's physical separation from his region, by the recovery after the war, with its intense, fervent intermingling of cultural orientations and perspectives, and by a longing for deprovincialization. Cirese furnished a few concise but lucid and convincing insights concerning the radical renewal of his poetry in reply to questions by P.P. Pasolini:

Dialect is a language. In order for it to be a means of poetic expression and transform itself into literary language and images, it is necessary that it be possessed totally; that

one be conscious of its cultural content and its human expressive power. In my childhood and early youth... I have spoken, I have collected songs, I have been happy, I have wept, thought in dialect.

I am not about to maintain the greater expressive effectiveness of dialect over the literary language — a commonplace without merit, because every language has fullness and effectiveness of forms —: I am only saying that the possession of dialect facilitates the search for forms in effective attitudes and proper imagery: in sum, it increases the possibility of giving — and this is for me the vital need of dialect poetry — something new to itself and, why not?, to the literary language (1953).

Cirese will make the poetic significance of *Lucecabelle* (1951) explicit: no longer the use of dialect in the sense of memory and

vernacular reconstruction, rooted, therefore, in an “objective” or realistic mimesis, but rather chosen exclusively to serve a subjective expressive need, for a linguistic incisiveness and stylistic poignancy more adequate and suitable with respect to literary language. Thus, it is not by chance that calques and transpositions from Italian to dialect, present to a conspicuous degree in so much “poetry in dialect” of the Twentieth Century, are not detectable in Cirese’s poetry.

Cirese’s approach to the formal methods characteristic of Twentieth-Century poetic experiences may seem different, but only *prima facie*. As was said already, Cirese’s poetic work, through selections, rejections and linguistic probings, was inspired by a rigorous tension toward a rarefied expressiveness at the edge of silence, which

found convergence and confirmation in Twentieth Century sensibility and quest for an “essential” poetry.”

1 Cf. Luigi Biscardi, “Eugenio Cirese”, in *Poesia Dialettale del Molise. Testi e Critica* (edited by Luigi Bonaffini, Giambattista Faralli, Sebastiano Martelli), Isernia, Marinelli, 1993, p.118.

2 Indeed, to this epoch belongs the publication of *La Lapa* (1953-55), a review of Popular History and Literature, edited by Eugenio Alberto Mario Cirese, and of the *Canti Popolari del Molise* (1957), edited by the same authors.

3 L. Biscardi, op. cit., p. 126.

Serenatella

Iè notte e iè serene
dentr'a ru core e 'n cieie.
Le stelle
fermate
vicine,
a còcchia a còcchia
o sole,
com'a pecurelle
stanne pascenne
l'aria de notte
miez'a ru campe
senza rocchie
e senza fine.
Sponta la luna
e pare lu pastore
che guarda e conta
la mandra sparpagliata,
e z'assecura
che nisciuna
ze sperde
miez'a ru verde.
Canta nu rasciagnuole

la litania d'amore
dentra na fratta.

Serenatella — È notte ed è sereno / nel cuore e nel cielo. /
Le stelle / fermate / vicine / a coppia a coppia / o sole, /
come pecorelle / stanno pascendo / l'aria di notte / in
mezzo al campo / senza cespugli / e senza fine. / Spunta la
luna / e pare il pastore / che guarda e conta / la mandra
sparpagliata, / e si assicura / che nessuna / si perde / in
mezzo al verde. / Canta un usignolo / la litania d'amore /
dentro una fratta.

Serenade

It's nighttime
my heart and the sky
are clear.

The stars
stopping
near,
in pairs
or alone,
graze
the night air
like sheep
in the field
without shrubs
and without end.

The moon comes out
and seems a shepherd
that watches and counts
the scattered flock,
and makes sure
that none
gets lost
amid the green.

A nightingale sings
a litany of love
inside a thicket.

Canta pe te
che viglie, bella,
e siente
la serenata
dent'a la stanza
areschiarata.

Nen t'addurmì, dolcezza,
veglia fin'a demane,
e penza a me che stonghe
a repenzà luntane,
e garde
la luna ghiancha
che t'accarezza
e pare che t'arrenne
ridènne
ru vasce che te donghe.

da *Poesie molisane*, 1956

Canta per te / che vegli, / bella, / e senti / la serenata /
dentro la stanza / rischiarata. / Non addormentarti,
dolcezza, / veglia fino a domani, / e pensa a me che sto / a
ripensare lontano, / e guarda / la luna bianca / che
t'accarezza / e pare che ti rende / ridendo / il bacio che ti

do.

(Traduzione di Luigi Bonaffini)

(cont.d)

It sings for you
who're still awake, my love,
and hear
the serenade
inside
the brightened room.
Don't fall asleep, my darling,
stay awake till tomorrow,
and think of me who keep
thinking far away,
as I watch
the white moon
its light touch
that seems to return
with a smile
the kiss that I give you.
(Translated by by Luigi Bonaffini)

Canzone d'atre tiempje

I' parte pe na terra assai luntana,
l'amore m'accompagna e me fa lume.
A notte passe e beve a la funtana,
me ferme a la pagliara 'n faccia a sciume.
Ma l'acqua de la fonte è n'acqua amara,
repose chiù nen trove a la pagliara.
Nen tenghe chiù pariente né cumpagne,
nen tenghe chiù na casa pe reciétte;
perciò mo vaglie spiérte, e nen me lagne,
ca tu me rieste, amore benedette!
Te sola m'à lassata ru destine,
lampa che scalle e nzegne ru camine.
La via è longa e sacce addò me porta:
me porta a nu castielle affatturate
dó campene la gente senza sorta,
dó scorde ru dolore appena ntrate.
Tu famme core a core cumpagnia,
nen fa stutà la lampa pe la via.
da Poesie molisane, 1956

Canzone d'altri tempi — Io parto per una terra assai lontana, / l'amore m'accompagna e mi fa lume. / A notte passo e bevo alla fontana, / mi fermo al pagliaio davanti al

fiume. / Ma l'acqua della fonte è un'acqua amara, / riposo
più non trovo nel pagliaio. / Non ho più parenti né
compagni, / non ho più una casa per ricetto; / perciò ora
vado sperduto, e non mi lagnò, / che tu mi resti, amore
benedetto! / Te sola mi ha lasciato il destino, / lampada che
scaldi e insegni il cammino. / La via è lunga e so dove mi
porta: / mi porta a un castello affatturato / dove campa la
gente senza sorte, / dove scordi il dolore appena entrato. /
Tu fammi cuore a cuore compagnia, / non far spegnere la
lampada per la via.

(Traduzione di Luigi Bonaffini)

Song of Times Past

I'm leaving for a very distant land
accompanied by love that lights my way.
At night I drink the water from the fountain
I stop along the river in the hayrick.
But now the water has a bitter taste,
in the hayrick I can no longer rest.
I have no longer relatives nor friends,
I do not have a house to call a home;
and so I wander lost, but do not bend,
because I still have you, my blessed love!
You alone my fate didn't take away
lamp that gives me warmth and shows the way.
The road is long and I know where it ends:
it takes me to an old enchanted fortress
where only ill-starred people go to stay,
where once inside I'll soon forget my pain.
Stay close to my heart, and keep me company,
don't let the light die out along the way.
(Translated by Luigi Bonaffini)

Ritorne

Me guàrdene le case a uocchie apierte:

— Quisse chi iè?

Da donda vè? —

La casa méia

tè l'ucchie chiuse e morta pare.

Sciume, tu sule tié la stessa voce,

tu sule, sciume, m'é recanusciute.

Chi songhe, donda venghe

e dó so iute spierte,

raccóntele a lu mare.

[1945]

Ritorno — Le case mi guardano ad occhi aperti: / —
Questo chi è? / Da dove viene? — / La mia casa ha gli occhi
chiusi e morta pare. / Fiume, tu solo hai la stessa voce, / tu
solo, fiume, mi hai riconosciuto. / Chi sono, da dove vengo
/ e dove sono andato perduto, / raccontalo al mare.

(Traduzione di Luigi Bonaffini)

Return

The houses look at me with open eyes:

— Who is he?

Where does he come from? —

My house

keeps its eyes closed and it appears dead.

River, you alone have the same voice,

you alone have recognized me, river.

Who I am, where I come from

and where I wandered lost,

tell it to the sea.

[1945]

(Translated by Luigi Bonaffini)

Niente

Né fuoche né liette né pane
né sciate de vocca
né rima de cante
né calle de core.

Niente.

— E tu? e tu? e quille?

Niente.

Finitoria de munne.

L'ucchie sbauttite

ìè ssutte.

[1945]

da *Poesie molisane*, 1956

Niente — Né fuoco né letto né pane / né fiato di bocca /
né rima di canto / né caldo di cuore. / Niente. — E tu? e tu?
e quello? / Niente. / Fine del mondo. / L'occhio sbigottito /
è asciutto.

(Traduzione di Luigi Bonaffini)

Nothing

Neither fire nor bed nor bread
nor breath from a mouth
nor rhyme from a song
nor the warmth of a heart.

Nothing.

— And you? and you? and him?

Nothing.

World in ruins.

The eyes, bewildered,
are dry.

[1945]

(Translated by Luigi Bonaffini)

La svota

Z'affonna
com'a chiumme
pesante lu passe.
Pe copp'a la maiese sementata
la morra de curnacchie ze spaleia
e chiama e scennechéia.
Chi chiama?
dall'anne e la fatía appesantite
ru nome
sprufonna.
Z'è fatte scure e ze ntravede
la svota;
nu lume z'arrappiccia.
Ce sta, ce sta, ce sta chi me la leva
da 'n cuolle la vesazza e l'arrappénne
pe chi vé ppriése.
Penna de piette
la pesantezza è diventata.
Nesciuna via chiù
né chiù maiése né curnacchie
sott'a ru vule.
Lu suonne antiche torna sule sule.

Viente de ciele passa, zitte zitte.

[1954]

da *Poesie molisane*, 1956

La svolta – Affonda / come piombo pesante / il passo. /
Sopra il maggese sementato / una banda di cornacchie si
sparpaglia / e chiama e batte le ali. / Chi chiama? / dagli
anni e la fatica / appesantito / il nome / sprofonda. / Si è
fatto scuro e si intravede la svolta; / un lume si riaccende.
/ Ci sta, ci sta, ci sta chi me la leva / di dosso la bisaccia e la
riappende / per chi viene dopo. / Penna di petto / la
pesantezza è diventata. / Nessuna via più / né più maggese
né cornacchie / sotto il volo. / Il sonno antico torna solo
solo. / Vento di cielo passa, zitto zitto.

(Traduzione di Luigi Bonaffini)

The Crossroads

The footstep

sinks

like heavy lead.

Over the fallow ground already sown

a band of crows scatter and call

and flap their wings.

Whom are they calling?

Weighed down by the years and the hardships

the name

drops to the depths.

It's getting dark, and you can make out

the crossroads;

a light comes on again.

There is, there is, there is someone to take

the knapsack from my back and hang it up

for those who follow.

A feather from the breast

the heaviness has become.

No longer any roads

nor any fallow fields nor crows

beneath the flight.

All alone returns the ancient sleep.

A wind from the sky passes, very still.

(Translated by Luigi Bonaffini)

Sole de vierre

Nu sulecielle

che ze n'è sciute apposta da la negghia

pe fa rrivà na spera e dà nu fiato

a llu curnicchie de purtone

addó alméia,

de sotto

nu cence de cappotte,

nu mucchietielle d'ossa arrannecchiate.

da Poesie molisane, 1956

Sole di inverno — Un solicello / che se n'è uscito apposta
dalla nebbia / per fare arrivare un raggio e dare un fiato /
all'angolo di portone / dove respira appena, / sotto / un
cencio di cappotto / un mucchietto d'ossa rannicchiato.

(Traduzione di Luigi Bonaffini)

Winter sun

A faint sun
that has come out on purpose from the fog
to send a shaft of light and give some breath
to the niche in the doorway
where a huddled pile of bones
wheezes softly
beneath a ragged coat.
(Translated by Luigi Bonaffini)

GIUSEPPE JOVINE

Giuseppe Jovine was born in Castelmauro in 1922 and lives in Rome, where he has worked as a teacher and secondary school principal. He has been a frequent contributor to dailies and periodicals, mainly in the area of literature and criticism, also with two full-length books: *La poesia di Albino Pierro* [The Poetry of Albino Pierro], Rome, 1965; *Benedetti molisani* [Blessed Molisans], Campobasso, 1979. But it is with dialect poetry that Jovine secures a significant position in twentieth-century Molisan poetry in dialect: *Lu pavone* [The Peacock], Bari 1970, 2nd edition with unpublished poems and a preface by Tullio de Mauro, Campobasso 1983) and now the original translation into Molisan dialect of poems by

Martial, Horace and Montale, *Chi sa se passa u' Patraterne* [Who Knows If the Almighty Will Go By], Rome 1992. Necessarily linked to this work is also the narrative experiment in Molisan, *La "sdrenga". Racconti popolari anonimi molisani* [The "Scraper." Anonymous Molisan Folktales], Campobasso 1989 and *Cento proverbi molisani* [One Hundred Molisan Proverbs], Campobasso 1991.

Among his prose writings one should mention the book of short stories *La luna e la montagna* [The Moon and the Mountain], Bari, 1972. Jovine has also published a collection of poetry in Italian, *Tra il Biferno e la Moscòva* [Between the Biferno and the Moscova], Rome 1975.

With Giose Rimanelli, Jovine represents the outpost, in the current season, of the evolutionary line of Molisan dialect poetry,

and maybe the figure in whom the problem of the relationship language/dialect, cultured poetry/primitive-popular poetry is posed first and foremost in more “reasoned” terms, more peremptorily “ideological” and existential, and then in technical terms, as the instruments of his craft are developed and rigorously realized.

The reasons, then, for his writing “dialect” poetry — closely related to a deep awareness of the lack of connotation in the official literary language and of the “deviations” of the massmedia society — are certainly to be found, in my opinion, in the field of memory/childhood, but also and above all in the sociological and anthropological dimension of an area of Southern Italy, the region of Molise, to which he bears witness and of which he is an original, open-minded and well-informed

observer.

To these fundamental interpretive keys to Giuseppe Jovine's dialect works should be added the declared and provoking perception, or discovery, of dialect as a connotative instrument well capable of understanding, expressing, and even amplifying the semantic makeup of the "classics," thus asserting itself, with undoubted dignity, as a code which is not only denotative, limited to an emarginated community of speakers, but as an "autonomous" system, perfectly able to capture, formalize and communicate the "sublime" meanings of life, be they projected onto the classical world or found in modern reality. This is the sense of *Chi sa se passa u' Patraterne* [Who Knows If The Almighty Is Going By], 1992 — a collection of translations from Martial, Horace and

Montale, “classics” par excellence and in every meaning of the word — ; in the foreword Jovine himself notes: “[...] Common to dialect and language are intuitive syntheses and cultural montages; if we believe in the natural and popular foundation of languages and in the identity between imagination and intellect, we must admit the coexistence of logical and poetic faculties even in the ‘popular’ [...],” declaring himself convinced that “The reader will gradually be able to verify the correspondence between ‘cultured’ and ‘popular’ customs and the aesthetic realization of both [...]” This is an old, belabored question, from Vico to Croce to Gramsci, to the structuralists and anthropologists of the Sixties: what is interesting in this line of study, aside from the Author’s Gramscian convictions, are

Jovine's translations, egregiously carried out, but betraying a substantial and distinctive expressionistic, hyperbolic tendency underpinning all his works, which reinforces our instinctive and tested evaluation of his texts: which constitutes a good signpost for entering the vital core of his creativity, or rather of his relationship with reality, with nature, with himself, with others, material presences or ghosts of memory.

A more or less complete biographical-professional sketch can be drawn from the notes written for him by L. Bonaffini: "Giuseppe Jovine, poet, short story writer, journalist, as well as literary and social critic, has emerged [...] as one of the most serious and committed writers and intellectuals of the region of Molise. [...] at the heart of his work is an abiding concern for the social, economic and political problems confronting

his relatively less developed native region in a world dominated by mass communication and extremely rapid changes at all levels of the social spectrum. His political commitment, variously manifested both in his literary production and in his activity as a journalist and lecturer, exhibits manifold components, variously articulated and complex, which gravitate around a single original emotional core: the attachment to his land and the need, anthropological in nature, to bear witness to a culture which, while in strong regression with respect to the dominant culture, is a conveyer of values whose horizon is vaster than the historical moment of crisis, both in depth, that is rooted in the human psyche and therefore metahistorical, and in extension, in their transnational and transclassist aspect. Therefore the use of dialect in the poems of

Lu pavone [The Peacock], and in his most recent work of narrative — (La sdrenga [The Scraper] and of translation into dialect of Martial, Horace and Montale (Chi sa se passe 'u Patraterne) [Who Knows If the Almighty Will Go By] — is indicative not only of a precise literary stand within the context of both regional and national literature, but is grounded in a substratum which is not only emotional, but clearly ideological as well, in a profound awareness [...] of the complex symbiotic relationship between dialect, as expression of a 'subordinate', but not inferior, culture and Italian language and society. As in Cirese, but perhaps with greater ideological clarity, dialect, with its deep-rooted and wonderfully rich world of experiences, represents, as Jovine himself acknowledges, the inalienable, fundamental core of all of his writings, including those in

Italian." All this takes place after "[...] an early critical-analytical phase, especially in the essay on Albino Pierro (*La poesia di Albino Pierro*, Rome: Il Nuovo Cracas, 1965), where Jovine's stance, conciliatory between Christian and Communist thought, and between idealism and Marxism, aims at a necessary convergence of historical and literary phenomena."

Finally, beyond Bonaffini's erudite considerations, I would like to make one concept clear, with regards to Jovine creative wordplay, whether or not dependent on A. Pierro's "dramatic" or "ritualistic" models, or on the notion, never gelid or aseptic, of the hardships of southern society, which is historical, and I would say even metaphysical, that is, fatalistic. Even his "memorial" poems, despite their solar display of images, almost always afford an

impression of the “tragic” or the “grotesquely” tragic, and never give in to elegy, to regret and sentimental longing, to games of imagination, of oblivion and flight: that past, his past, is a nail, a boulder, a solid consciousness of living that was, that is and remains within, in spite of the deforestation carried out by the culture of standardization in the last forty years. In sum, a metaphor conceived through a linguistic research in the recovered, or to be recovered, archaic warp, which does not give rise to gratuitous phono-lexical preciousities, but rather the will, eruditely constructed, to capture human, social, natural identities not representable in any other way: mystifying mixtures of Italian and dialect, unfortunately very common, are alien to Jovine, to his rigorous linguistic and philological discipline.

Criticism: P. Serarcangeli, "La poesia dialettale di Jovine", Calandrino, (June 1986); O. Tanelli, "Poesie in dialetto molisano di Giuseppe Jovine," *Nuova Dimensione* (October 1986): 3-4; L. Bonaffini in *Twentieth-Century Italian Poets, First Series, Dictionary of Literary Biography, Detroit-London 1991*; in *Poesia dialettale del Molise, Isernia 1993*; introduction to *Lu pavone - La sdrenga / The Peacock - The Scraper, trilingual edition, New York, 1994*.

1 Cf.: Giuseppe Jovine, *Chi sa se passa u' Patraterne*, Campobasso, 1992, p.10.

2 Cf. L. Bonaffini in *Poesia dialettale del Molise, cit.*, p.248.

3 *ibidem*.

Lu pavone

A Miserere

Tamiente mò quille ciardine

'ncima a lu paiese.

É 'na macera.

Mmane a lu Barone

ce steva 'nu pavone;

'ncopp'a chella costa assulagnata

iava pascenne coma 'na cumeta,

ma s'alluccava, Miserè,

pareia 'nu muorte accise.

È passata la guerra,

'nu sunne 'ntruvedate

che nen sacce areccuntà:

ghianche e nire, virde e gialle,

Marucchine e Mereco

prutestante e mussurmane!...

Ieva guerra o carnevale?

Ieva guerra, Miserè!

pecchè de tutte quille terramote

quille pavone sule m'arecorde

ncopp'a cchella costa assulagnata,

c'alluccava e faceva la rota

coma 'nu ventaglie arrecamate
mmane a 'na bella femmena affatata
o 'na signora de lu tiempe antiche...
da Lu pavone, 1983

Il pavone – Guarda adesso quel giardino / in cima al
paese. / É una rovina. / Ai tempi del Barone / c'era un
pavone; / sopra quella costa assolata / andava pascolando
/ come una cometa, / ma se gridava, Miserere, / pareva un
morto ammazzato. / É passata la guerra, / un sogno
torbido / che non so raccontare: / bianchi e neri, verdi e
gialli, / Marocchini e Americani / protestanti e
musulmani!... / Era guerra o carnevale? / Era guerra,
Miserere! / Adesso tu devi sapermi dire, / Miserere, /
perchè di tutto quel terremoto / quel pavone solo mi ricordo
/ sopra quella costa assolata, / che gridava e faceva la ruota
/ come un ventaglio ricamato / in mano a una bella donna
fascinosa / o una signora dei tempi antichi.

(Traduzione dell'Autore)

The Peacock

To Miserere

Look at that garden now
at the top of the town.

It's in ruins.

During the baron's time
there was a peacock:
on that sunny hillside
he went browsing like a comet,
but if it cried out, Miserè,
he sounded like someone led to slaughter.

The war is over,
a murky dream

I don't know how to tell:
white and black, green and yellow,
Moroccans and Americans
Protestants and Moslems!...

Was it a war or a carnival?

It was war, Miserè!

But now you have to tell me why, Miserè,
from all that turmoil
only that peacock I remember
on that sunny hillside,

crying out and spreading its tail
like an embroidered fan
in the hand of a beautiful enchantress
or a lady from days gone by.
(Translated by Luigi Bonaffini)

La tagliola

'Mbaccia a lu fuche dormene le gatte;
scrocchiene cioccre e ceppe allegre allegre.

'Ncoppa 'a la neve senza 'na pedata
nu passarielle stritte 'na tagliola
a vocca aperta sbatte e scennecheia.

da Lu pavone, 1983

La tagliola — Dinanzi al fuoco dormono i gatti; /
scrocchiano ciocchi e ceppi allegri allegri. / Sopra la neve
senza un'orma / un passerotto stretto a una tagliola / a
bocca aperta s'agita e batte le ali.

(Traduzione dell'Autore)

The Trap

The cats are soundly asleep before the fire;
logs and brushwood crackle in good cheer.
Out in the snow unmarked by a single footprint
a little sparrow gripped tightly in a trap
twitches and flaps his wings, his mouth agape.

(Translated by Luigi Bonaffini)

Le cravatte de tata

Quanta cravatte, schiocche e nucchetelle
de seta, de cuttone e de lanetta,
roschie e nere, turchine e rusatelle
appise 'n fila dentr'a la tuletta!

A 'na targhetta lu pennacchie 'e fume
du Vesuvie e lu mare a Margellina,
a nu resvolte nu ponte e nu sciume
sott'a lu Papa che la papalina.

A ogni nude de chille cravatte
ievene sciure le mane de tata,
a ogni nude de chille cravatte
'nnanz'a lu specchie na stanza lucente
sunavene lle mane nu strumente!

Tutte chille cravatte culurate
mò parene struminte senza fiате.

da Lu pavone, 1983

Le cravatte di mio padre — Quante cravatte, fiocchi e
nocchettine / di seta, di cotone e di lanetta / rosse e nere,
turchine e rosatelle / appese in fila dentro la toletta! / Su di
una targhetta il pennacchio di fumo / del Vesuvio e il mare
a Mergellina, / ad un risvolto un ponte ed un fiume / sotto
il Papa con la papalina. / A ogni nodo di quelle cravatte /
erano fiori le mani di mio padre, / ad ogni nodo di quelle
cravatte / innanzi allo specchio nella stanza luminosa /
suonavano quelle mani uno strumento! / Tutte quelle
cravatte colorate / adesso sembrano strumenti senza fiato.

(Traduzione dell'Autore)

My Father's Ties

So many ties laid out, tassels and bows
all made of cotton, of light wool or silk,
rose-colored, deep blue or red and black,
hanging inside the closet in neat rows.
Mount Vesuvius's plume of smoke, and the sea
of Margellina on a picture landscape,
then a bridge and a river on a crease
underneath the Pope wearing his skullcap.
At every knot upon those colored neckties
my father's hands blossomed into flowers,
at every knot upon those colored neckties
in the brightly-lit room before the mirror
those hands played music on an instrument.
Now all those neckties with so many colors
seem instruments that lie bereft of sound.
(Translated by Luigi Bonaffini)

Ogne notte

Ogne notte arepenze a mamma e tata.

Le vede com'arrète a 'na tendina
o pettate nè mure de la stanza
coma chille fegure 'ngiallanite
e tutte pette e crepe e ciammaragne
nè lamie de 'na chiesa addò ce cantene
le grille e le cichèle.

Le vulesse arefà la faccia e l'uocchie
gn'a ddù pupazze spierte a 'nu curnicchie
o ddù sante scurdate 'nda 'na nicchia,
ma me ze squaglia la creta e me lassa
le mane senza sanghe e ragnecose
ca vularria struzzà lu Patraterne
o prehà gna nu pazze pe ssapè
che gghiè che gghiè stu gliommere 'mbrugliate,
'sta matassa d'ardiche de lu munne.

da *Lu pavone*, 1983

Ogni notte — Ogni notte ripenso a mamma e tata. / Li vedo come dietro una tendina / o dipinti sui muri della stanza / come quelle figure ingiallite / e tutte macchie e crepe e ragnatele / sulle volte di una chiesa dove cantano / i grilli e le cicale. / Vorrei rifargli la faccia e gli occhi / come a

due pupazzi sperduti in un cantuccio / o due santi
dimenticati in una nicchia, / ma la creta mi si squaglia e mi
lascia / le mani esangui e rattappite / sicchè vorrei
strozzare il Padreterno / o pregarlo come un pazzo per
sapere / cos'è cos'è questo gomito arruffato / questa
matassa di ortiche ch'è la vita.

(Traduzione dell'Autore)

Every Night

Every night I think of my mother and father.

I see them as from behind a curtain

or painted on the walls of the room

just like those yellowing figures

all spots and cracks and cobwebs

on the vaults of a church where crickets

and cicadas sing.

I would like to do over their faces and their eyes

like two dolls lost in a corner

or two saints forgotten in a niche,

but the clay melts, and it leaves my hands

bloodless and withered.

I would like to strangle God Almighty

or pray like a madman to know

what is this tangled skein,

this world's hank of nettles.

(Translated by Luigi Bonaffini)

Quanne s'ì morta chella sera, má

Quanne s'ì mmorta chella sera, mà,
mmiz'a la chiazza sunava la bbanda
e ie m'addecreiave e nen chiagneie
cà me pareia la muorte 'na canzona
ca te porte lu viente dall'are
o 'na sera d'estate ca nen s'ì
pecchè pe ttanta tiempe tu taminde
la volta arescarate de lu cieie
che te 'ntrona le recchie gna 'na stanza
spiccia ca pare chiena de cichèle.
Pecch'esse, doppe morta, che le vracce
t'ei stritte forte coma 'na tenaglia
e pprima aveie paura de vasciarte.
E chella sera ancora t'arvedeie
a ffà la guardia 'ncima a lu Palazze,
a cannalià da mmonte a la fenestra
la guagliunera abballe nu vallone
o chillu sciucature de Natale
che te 'ntunava gna 'na campanella
ammiz'a la nevefra lla vucella
ca m'arechiama ancora: Peppe, Pè...
Quando sei morta quella sera, mamma — Quando sei

morta quella sera, mamma, / in mezzo alla piazza suonava
la banda / ed io mi rallegravo e non piangevo / perchè mi
pareva la morte una canzone / che ti porta il vento dalle aie
/ o una sera d'estate che non sai / perchè per tanto tempo
tu contempli / la volta chiara del cielo / che t'introna le
orecchie come una stanza / vuota che pare piena di cicale. /
Perciò dopo che sei morta, con le braccia / ti ho stretta forte
come una tenaglia / e prima avevo paura di baciarti. / E
quella sera ancora ti rivedevo / a far la guardia in cima al
Palazzo / a guardare dall'alto della finestra / la festa dei
ragazzi nel vallone / e quella nevicata di natale / che ti
smorzava come una campanel-la / in mezzo alla tormenta
quella vocetta / che mi richiama ancora: Peppe, Pè...

Mother, the Evening When You Died

Mother, on the evening when you died
a band was playing on in the town square
and I was having fun and did not cry
since to me death seemed really like a song
that the wind carried from the threshing floors,
or on a summer evening you don't know
because for such a long time you have looked
at the radiant vault of the big sky
that deafens your ears like an empty room
that seems full of cicadas.

That's why, after you had died, I held you
so tightly in my arms, as in a vice.

Before I had been afraid to kiss you.

And I saw you once again that evening
as you stood guard on top of the Palazzo,
and kept watching from your upper window
the children having fun down in the valley
or that big snowfall once on Christmas day
that like a small bell muffled your frail voice
which was still calling me amid the storm:
Peppe, Peppe....

Pe cch'esse, mà, nen pozze arepenzà
a cchille mene sdreuse de cafune
che z'arrangavene gna ssierpe o sciamme
atturte a lu tavute a strapurtarte
gna 'na quatrara annecchiata na cunnela
o 'na soma de mmaste che traccheia
nnanze e arrète a la scesa e all 'nghianata
e fa ciò ciò fine all'utema svota
miez'a sciure de miendre e spinapoce.

Pecch'esse, mà, nen pozze 'ntrà na casa
mò ca sule le vespe ce cantene
nchille cavute nere de palomme
e nfroscene ne mure le spripingule,
ma tu nen ti la scopa pè sfraccarle
e nen stute la luce pè le stanze
pè ffaie vedè la luna na fenestra
e na scurdia arsentì la cuccavaglia.

da *Lu pavone*, 1983

Perciò, mamma, non posso ripensare / a quelle mani
storte di cafoni / che s'inerpicavano come serpi o fiamme /
attorno alla bara a trascinarti / come una bambina
rannicchiata nella culla / o una soma di basto che traballa /

innanzi e indietro alla scesa e alla salita / e fa capolino fino
all'ultima svolta / tra fiori di mandorlo e biancospini.
/Perciò, mamma, non posso entrare in casa / adesso che
solo le vespe ci cantano / in quelle buche nere di colombi / e
cozzano contro i muri i pipistrelli / ma tu non hai la scopa
per schiacciarli / e non spegni la luce per le stanze / per
fargli vedere la luna alla finestra / o risentire il gufo nello
scuro.

(Traduzione dell'Autore)

(cont.d)

That's why, mother, I cannot bear to think
of those misshapen, twisted peasant hands
that clambered up like snakes or living flames
around the coffin, about to carry you
like a little girl huddled in her cradle
or a pack-saddle that totters and sways
back and forth, down the hill and up again,
and it peeps out as far as the last turn
amid the almond trees and hawthorn blossoms.
That's why, mother, I can't go in the house,
now that only wasps can be heard singing
in those blackish holes once nests of doves,
and bats crash with a thud against the walls,
but you don't have a broom to chase them out
and in the rooms you don't turn off the light
to let them see the moon within the window
or listen to the owl in the deep darkness.
(Translated by Luigi Bonaffini)

GIOSE RIMANELLI

Giose Rimanelli was born in Casacalenda in 1926 and has been living in the United States for the past thirty years, where he has taught in several universi-ties: Yale, Los Angeles, Albany. Having become known as one the most interesting young Italian writers of the Fifties with the publication of novels such as *Tiro al piccione* [The Day of the Lion], Milan 1953, 2nd edition Turin, 1991; *Peccato originale* [Original Sin], Milan 1954; *Biglietto di terza* [Third-class Ticket], Milan 1958; *Una posizione sociale* [A Social Position], Florence 1959; he has contributed regularly to periodicals and journals, with an occasional foray into cinema as a screenwriter. His non-conformism, maladjustment and lack of caution with

respect to literary society, which culminated in the publication of the pamphlet *Il mestiere del furbo*, [The Wily Trade], Milan 1959, force him to emigrate to the U.S, where he must rebuild not only a new life but a new language as well. The link with his mother country and with Italian culture and language is retained in the Sixties through his poetry in Italian: *Carmina blabla*, [Padua 1967], *Monaci d'amore medievali* [Medieval Love Monks], Rome 1967; on the other hand, intense is his narrative work, marked by a forceful experimentation, only a very small part of which has seen the light of publication: *Graffiti*, Isernia 1977; *Il tempo nascosto tra le righe*, [Time Hidden Between the Lines], Isernia 1986.

The existential and memorial recovery of Molise, first through a fictionalized

autobiography, *Molise Molise*, Isernia 1979, then with the Italian poetry of Arcano, Salerno, 1990, has unavoidably brought him back to dialect, with a marked preference for the dialect song (*Moliseide*, Campobasso 1990; *Moliseide*, New York 1992 [Trilingual Edition]).

Criticism: V. Colby, in *World Authors*, New York 1985; E. Bedé, in *Columbia Dictionary of Modern European literature*, New York 1980; L. Bonaffini, introduction to *Moliseide*, New York 1992; L. Reina, in *Il Belli*, n. 5, December 1992; G. Faralli, in *Poesia dialettale del Molise*, Isernia 1993.

With Giose Rimanelli's poetry Molisan literature in dialect is radically emancipated from the shackles of that provincial "peculiarity" inevitably determined by the history of the region (cf. the Introduction to

Molisan poetry in this volume), from the particular socio-economic and demographic context, enduring in its “rural” integrity until the Sixties and Seventies, when there takes place a rather hybrid process of “standardization” (due above all to the mass media), in which human and cultural models in striking conflict will be able to coexist in an unsettling mixture; the tendency to avoid the risk of aberrant calques and contaminations seems to characterize the activity of the “nuovissimi,” whose production is distinguished by their philological rigor and their preference for archaisms.

Meanwhile it must be noted that in Rimanelli (as at any rate in other “nuovissimi,” like Giuseppe Jovine: cf. *Lu pavone*, Campobasso, 1983; *La sdrenga*, 1989) the choice of dialect as a means of expression

is a point of arrival, not a starting point, after a very complex and intense literary experience always at the forefront of European and American culture: and this means that the “arrival,” achieved in a highly specialized workshop, can be better understood as a metalinguistic experiment, not classifiable with the usual hermeneutical schemes (the discovery of “native roots,” the rejection of urban, industrial, technological alienation, the return to the “town hall,” to alleys and piazzas that no longer exist — at least for the historical, communal function of gatherings and oral communication —, to long-gone traditions: real referents objectively erased, if ever truly semanticized by the author, who is curved almost exclusively on the mirror of the self. In reality, for Rimaneli it is dialect itself that become the only referent, which with its

graphic materiality, with its phonic mechanisms, with its syntax and intrinsic rhythm generates emotions, memories, sensorial and psychological perceptions, ghosts of the imagination.

The collection *Moliseide* by Rimanelli is a hard and meticulous attempt to capture an extinct universe through the auscultation of linguistic signs, following an inverse procedure: a procedure, that is, that reestablishes the signified along the lines of the signifier, through expansion and autogenesis. This, regardless of any aesthetic theory, leads us to a "Vichian" reading of poetry, especially when this poetry, with all the instruments of an impeccable troubadoric craftsmanship, utilizes the primordial phonic articulation of dialect (maniacally transcribed), made even more suggestive and oracular by the fact that

dialect has become by now a dead language. Luigi Bonaffini rightly notes that “for Rimanelli, the interest in dialect is first and foremost a search for a poetic language. “One does not start from dialect (from a tradition) to find poetry, but one discovers dialect while searching for poetry (Chiesa and Tesio, intr. to *Parole di legno*).” It is not a local tradition that nourishes and subtends the use of dialect, but a literary language, and the determining relationship is between dialect and poetic languages (Italian poetry, but also other forms of poetic language (...)). This is true of all major dialect poets (Giotti called dialect “*lingua della poesia*”), and what Pancrazi said of Giotti could equally well be said of Rimanelli: “His very dialect seems much more an ‘*écriture d’artiste*’ than a popular language.” (cf. Luigi Bonaffini, *Introduction to Moliseide*, New York, Peter

Lang: 1992, p.XXIV and relative notes.

Another factor affects the quality of Rimanelli's poetry, which confirms what was just said: his condition as an emigrant and voluntary exile in the U.S. obliged to reconstruct his original world (now "dimmed," yet darkly pulsating in his consciousness and memory, never really removed, or rejected, or erased) of that missing part of himself, a man without a home and never really fulfilled, by means of the only way through to something that no longer exists: language. His maternal language, I mean, rediscovered and refurbished in contemporary literary culture, levelled by the desemanticized models of the mass media, as instrument with a high expressive potential, even though endophasic par excellence.

In these "songs" of *Moliseide* the missing

piece has been found again, the lost Molise, through the journey into language: hence the epic title of the collection, metaphor of a voyage of the mind, not heroic, but simply Orphic, as redemptive as dream, illusory as words, “like a fly droning around a globe of light.” Therefore the existential motif (the search for the missing piece) in Rimanelli at least combines with a strict linguistic and literary “recherche.” Again Bonaffini fittingly writes that “This return to origins, so central to Rimanelli’s most recent work and at the heart of the poems of *Moliseide*, is a controlled, purposeful regression, a remapping and a reordering of one’s life in the light of a deeper and fuller understanding. A regression ‘along the planes of being’ through ‘the regression from one language to another — anterior and infinitely purer,’ as Pasolini described his

own 'homecoming'. A regression toward the mythical world of childhood, with its promise of a maternal, archetypal tongue (as in Zanzotto, Noventa, Pierro)" (cf. Bonaffini, *op.cit.*, p.XXV).

U chèmmiènte

Dént' u vòsche
dent' u scúrdèle,
'n miézz' i vasce
che vèrréjène,
dént' a musèche
che zzèrréje
cant' u córe
da mèréje...
Elle sòtte
nu Molise
(com' èmpíse
nè quèllíne)
nu Chèmmiènte
zè strèscíne
tutt' a ggènte
de stu munne.
Là ze magne
cu zèffunne,
là ze sóne
ca rèjèlle;
pur' i surge
tènn' i puce:

'mbrégn'u mule,
pass'a néglie.

Il Convento Dentro il bosco / dentro il buio, / in mezzo
ai baci / che sibilano, / dentro la musica / che ronza /
canta il cuore / dal fresco... / Là sotto / nel Molise / (come
appeso / alla collina) / un Convento / si trascina / tutta la
gente / di questo mondo. / Là si mangia / con abbondanza,
/ là si suona / con il vento; / pure i sorci / hanno le pulci: /
impregna il mulo, / passa la nebbia.

The Convent

In the forest
in the dark,
amid kisses,
with their hisses
in the music
with its whistling
the heart sings
from the shade...

Over there
in Molise
(almost hanging
on a hill)
there's a Convent
that can fill
all the people
of this world.

There you eat
all you want,
you play music
with the wind;
even mice
can carry fleas:

mules get pregnant,
the fog lifts.
Jam'è spréme
nu Chèmmiènte
tutt'a fréfe
de nu viérne.
J' t'ètténde
puz'e récchie,
siént'u piétte
ch'è vèlliènte.

Dént' u vòsche
dént' u scurdèle,
'n miézz' i vasce
che vèrréjène,
dént' a musèche
che zzèrréje
cant' u córe
da mèréje...

Albany, New York, 28 novembre 1983
da Moliseide, 1993

Andiamo a spremere / nel Convento / tutta la febbre /
di un inverno. / Io ti tocco / polsi e orecchie, / senti il petto
/ ch'è bollente. / Dentro il bosco / dentro il buio, / in
mezzo ai baci / che sibilano, / dentro la musica / che ronza
/ canta il cuore / dal fresco...

(Traduzione dell'Autore)

Let's go squeeze
in the convent
all the fever
of the winter.

When I touch
your ears and wrists,
feel my chest
how hot it burns

In the forest
in the dark,
amid kisses
with their hisses,
in the music
with its whistling
the heart sings
from the shade...

Albany, New York, November 28, 1983.

(Translated by Luigi Bonaffini)

Cóm'u hiume

Te véd'i sere — ca lune 'n gopp'i stíglie.
Pur'èddèrasse miglie — te sènte com'u hiùme.
Nè' lóte du chènníte — rèste frèsat'a shcùme
di prime vasce: — n'èddóre de sèmmùche.
Z'èncrud'u viérne. — Mèrtièlle 'n gopp'i bùche.
U fuóch'è fatte vrasce. — Mè tu me fié de lùme.
N'èddóre de sèmmùche — nè' lóte du chènníte.
Tu jésc'e trasce. — Te sènte com'u hiùme.

Termoli, 24 agosto 1984

da Moliseide, 1993

Come il fiume — Ti vedo le sere / con la luna sopra i
covoni. / Anche lontano miglia / ti sento come il fiume. /
Nel fango del canneto / resta ghiacciata la schiuma / dei
primi baci: / un odore di sambuco. / Si fa più crudo
l'inverno. / Martelli sopra buchi. / Il fuoco s'è fatto brace. /
Ma tu mi fai da lume. / Un odore di sambuco / nel fango
del canneto. / Tu esci ed entri. / Ti sento come il fiume.

(Traduzione dell'Autore)

Like the River

I see you in the evening — the moon on sheaves of hay.
Even if miles away — I feel you like the river.
In the mud of the canebrake — the foam of the first kisses
is still a frozen lake: — the scent of common elder.
Winter grows more somber. — Hammers over holes.
The fire turns to ember. — You lead me with your glow.
A scent of common elder — in the mud of the canebrake.
You go out, you enter. — I feel you like the river.
Termoli, August 24, 1984
(Translated by Luigi Bonaffini)

U viénte du pèjése mije

U viént'èmméne cóme nu stèffíle
se nèn t'èccúzze strítte dént'u còtte.
Te vússe chi chèntúne 'ngopp'e sótte:
t'èstrégne, te sdèrrúpe, te ze mbíle.
E' u viénte crúde du pèjése mije.
E' u viénte sícche du pèjése mije.
E' u viénte, é u viénte, è u viénte
èmmàudítte du pèjése mije.
Stu viénte te ze màgne víve víve,
e a vàve te ze chiàtre dént'a vócche.
Ndrèmbíje 'n miézz'a vije chi dènuócchie:
u munn'è stràlènàte, 'n du crèdíve.
E' u viénte crúde du pèjése mije.
E' u viénte sícche du pèjése mije.
E' u viénte, è u viénte, è u viénte
èmmàudítte du pèjése mije.
Nu viénte com'è quíste nèn tu scuórde:
t'ha fàtte 'n óme chi mèntàgne nguólle,
rrèbbànnète i cècèrchie u ràn'e i tólle,
vèssàanne e trattènènnète pa' córde.
E' u viénte crúde du pèjése mije.
E' u viénte sícche du pèjése mije.

E' u viénte, è u viéne, è u viénte
èmmàudítte du pèjése mije.

Il vento del paese mio Il vento sferza come uno scudiscio
/ se non ti rannicchi stretto dentro il cappotto. / Ti spinge
con i massi sopra e sotto: / ti stringe, ti dirupa, ti s'infila. /
E' il vento crudo del paese mio. / E' il vento secco del paese
mio. / E' il vento, il vento, il vento / maledetto del paese
mio. / Questo vento ti si mangia vivo vivo, / e la bava ti si
ghiaccia nella bocca. / Annaspi per le vie con le ginocchia: /
il mondo è stralunato, non te lo credevi. / E' il vento crudo
del paese mio. / E' il vento secco del paese mio. / E' il vento,
è il vento, è il vento / maledetto del paese mio. / Un vento
come questo non te lo dimentichi: / ti ha fatto un uomo con
le montagne addosso, / rubandoti ceci, grano e granturco, /
spingendo e trattenendoti per la corda. / E' il vento crudo
del paese mio. / E' il vento secco del paese mio. / E' il vento,
è il vento, è il vento / maledetto del paese mio.

(Traduzione dell'Autore)

My Hometown's Wind

The wind can strike and lash you like a whip
if you don't huddle tight inside your coat.
He shoves you to and fro along with rocks,
he presses, rips right through you, knocks you down.
It's the raw wind that sweeps across my town.
It's the dry wind that sweeps across my town.
It's the wind, the wind, the wind,
accursed wind of my hometown.
This wind can eat you up alive,
your drivel turn to ice under your teeth,
you brace your knees to grope along the street:
the world is out of joint, you can't believe it.
It's the raw wind that sweeps across my town.
It's the dry wind that sweeps across my town.
It's the wind, the wind, the wind,
accursed wind of my hometown.
A wind like this you never will forget:
He made of you a man who can bear mountains,
stealing your seeds, your ears of corn, your wheat,
ramming against you and strapping you down.
It's the raw wind that sweeps across my town.
It's the dry wind that sweeps across my town.

It's the wind, the wind, the wind,
accursed wind of my hometown.

Mo' so' pèssàte tante de ch'ill'anne
ch'u viènte è nu chèmpagne nnanz'a pòrte.

J' parle e quille sènte: mè strèpòrte
dóce, cóme muórte, sènze fa' d'anne.

E' u viènte viécchie du pèjése mije.

E' sèmb'u viènte du pèjése mije.

E' u viènte, è u viènte, è u viènte
èngiàllèníte du pèjése mije.

Albany, 9 ottobre 1985

da *Moliseide*, 1993

Ora son passati tanti di quegli anni / che il vento è un
compagno davanti la porta. / Io parlo e quello ascolta: mi
trasporta / dolcemente, come morto, senza far danno. / E' il
vento vecchio del paese mio. / E' sempre il vento del paese
mio. / E' il vento, è il vento, è il vento / incartapecorito del
paese mio.

(Traduzione dell'Autore)

(cont.d)

So many years have come and gone, today
the wind is a good friend outside my door.
He listens when I speak, and takes me away
gently, like a corpse; he doesn't harm me any more.
It's the old wind that sweeps across my town.
It's still the wind that sweeps across my town.
It's the wind, the wind, the wind,
yellowing wind of my hometown.
Albany, October 9, 1985
(Translated by Luigi Bonaffini)

A jèrèvèlèlle

A jèrèvèlèlle
du pèjése mije
me vàsce ni frúsce,
me fàsce u cèrvièlle.

A jèrèvèlèlle
du pèjése mije
m'èstrúsce cu viènte,
me vúsce quèntiènte.

A jèrèvèlèlle
du pèjése mije
te' ddóre de hióre:
t'èscàve nu córe.

A jèrèvèlèlle
du pèjése mije
me mbónne ca lune,
me scàlle chi stèlle.

A jèrèvèlèlle
du pèjése mije
t'è u dóce du liétte:
mè scròll'a fètíje.

Albany, 9 febbraio 1986

da Moliseide, 1993

L'erbetta L'erbetta / del paese mio / mi bacia tra le foglie,
/ mi fascia il cervello. / L'erbetta / del paese mio / mi sfiora
col vento, / mi culla contenta. / L'erbetta / del paese mio /
ha odore di fiore: / ti scava nel cuore. / L'erbetta / del paese
mio / mi bagna con la luna, / mi riscalda con le stelle. /
L'erbetta / del paese mio / ha la dolcezza del letto: / mi
scrolla la stanchezza.

(Traduzione dell'Autore)

The Grass

The grass
of my hometown
kisses me amid leaves,
it sheathes my brain.

The grass
of my hometown
grazes me with the wind,
happy to cradle me.

The grass
of my hometown
smells like a flower:
it digs in your heart.

The grass
of my hometown
soaks me with the moon,
warms me with the stars.

The grass
of my hometown
is as soft as a bed:
it shakes off my weariness.

Albany, February 9, 1986
(Translated by Luigi Bonaffini)

U rré du pègliare

T'anne spèccate ù córe cù pendílle,
sèpènne ch'ir'ù rrè de sc-tù pègliare.
Ah, ssè ggènde: nèn ze sàzeje maje
d'èccídese puòrce e àtte e chi tè nnànde!

T'anne spèccate ù córe cù pendílle,
penzàanne ch'íre l'óme da chèmmàre:
nè fémme che z'èrròbbe uéje e cràje,
mè díce ch'à pèrz'à mése e i metànde.

Po' t'anne mísse nùde dénd'i vracce
de nè mèdòne, (sèmbe fessejàanne
vive e muórte,) cà còcce de n'èmande.

Nù sàcce chi te físc-he o ríre mbàcce
còme nù carnevèle, trambejàanne:
j sàcce sùle che pe mé sié sande.

da *Poesie inedite*

Il re del pagliaio — Ti hanno spaccato il cuore col pugnale, / sapendo ch'eri il re di questo pagliaio. / Ah, la gente: non si sazia mai / d'uccidersi maiali e gatti e chi ha innanzi! // Ti hanno spaccato il cuore col pugnale, / pensando ch'eri l'uomo della comare: / una femmina che si ruba l'oggi e il domani / ma dice che ha perso la madia e le mutande. // Poi t'hanno messo nudo tra le braccia / di una

madonna, (sempre deridendo / vivi e morti,) / con la testa
d'un amante. // Non so chi ti fischia o ride in faccia / come
un pagliaccio, barcollando: / io so solo che per me sei santo.

(Traduzione dll'Autore)

The King of the Strawrick

They slashed your heart wide open with a scalpel,
because they knew you were king of this strawrick.
Ah, those people: they always find a way
to slaughter pigs and cats, have heads cut off.
They slashed your heart wide open with a scalpel,
thinking that a woman had made you heartsick:
someone who steals tomorrow and today,
yet says she's lost her undies and her kneading-trough.
Then they placed you naked in the embrace
of a Madonna, (with scorns and jeers toward
the dead and living,) and with a lover's head.
But I don't know who snickers in your face
like a buffoon, reeling and tripping forward:
I only know that in my eyes you're blessed.
(Translated by Luigi Bonaffini)

APULIA

The fervor of studies that since the middle 60's has witnessed the emergence of the "question of language" in Italy in a radically renewed light is due to a few scholars and cultural and educational promoters. Consider Tullio de Mauro, his *Storia linguistica dell'Italia Unita* [Linguistic History of Unified Italy] — whose first edition by Laterza came out in 1963 — with far-reaching consequences both at the of socio-linguistic and at the pedagogic-didactic level. The analysis revealed the close relationships existing between "linguistic policy" and the organization of culture, between socio-economic transformations and the persistence in broad sectors of the population of a vision of the world that was static and passively dependent on

extraneous cultural models. The Italian society was suspended "between dialect and Italian" (to quote the title of a well-known essay by Alberto Sobrero): dialect and language not interacting dynamically, but conflictually opposed, because they are the bearers of cultures wrongly portrayed or deemed to be impermeable. On the one hand, a language-culture in "Italian," "written," standardized, centralistic and monolithic; on the other, a myriad language-cultures in "dialect," "oral," "inferior." Inasmuch as it has been subjected to the burden of this opposition, dialect has remained the language of the subaltern, the poor, the voice of a plurality of cultures about to disintegrate. This phenomenon has had a clearer effect in the South, where, due to particular historical circumstances, dialects have withdrawn even more into a

barren attachment to the municipality, thus becoming dependent upon Neapolitan models in their literary output.

Even the dialect literature of Apulia has been, until the aftermath of the Second World War, imitative and repetitive. So that we could certainly subscribe to what Pasolini was saying in the remote 1952 in his introductory essay to *Poesia dialettale del Novecento* [Dialect Poetry of the Twentieth Century], published by Guanda, complaining about a belated Romanticism, devoid of any polemical or realistic views, notwithstanding the dramatic historical events that have unfolded in the South from the Seventeenth Century to the Unification, and from then on until the middle of this century. The last forty years, however, have ushered in such great economic and social changes (the demographic displacement,

that is, of almost 5 million people involved in emigration; the technological revolution; the political-cultural emancipation of the old subaltern classes), that the relationship between language and dialect, and therefore the manner in which dialect literature is produced, has been deeply affected. It has been indeed the process of Italianization to better define the functional reach of dialect, so that even dialect poetry, and dialect poetry from Apulia in particular, has vastly extended its expressive range, aiming increasingly at the recovery of its own historical memory and the awareness of its own cultural identity.

One can speak at this point of “progressive dialect,” according to the terminology preferred by Ernesto De Martino, of a dialect matured historically and ideologically, closer to the demands of

contemporary reality and open to completely renewed forms and contents. No longer solely the dialect of the vignette and the farce, the caricature and the idyll, the sonnet and the maxim, but a dialect that comes to grips with social and political themes, for example, endowing them with new referents and new meanings; or a dialect that expresses the inner world of the poet, projecting his feelings onto a backdrop of solitude and anguish, everyday ingredients of the civilization of the machine. What takes place, in short, is a closing of the gap between the exigency of the real event, or rather of the realism of dialect poetry, and the exigency of aesthetic representation, based on a well-defined and mature expressive capacity.

One can maintain that Apulia has also achieved these results, freeing dialect from

its provincial ghettos in order to place it in open confrontation with other idioms, from those belonging to sub-regional cultures to those without communication boundaries. Apulian dialects have thus become alternative codes of an open linguistic system, abandoning the subaltern function as a consequence of the unification required by Bembo's sixteenth-century standard. In such a perspective, they have emerged as vehicles of recognition in an universe of pervasive standardization that is taking place with the spread of English and the diffusion of mass media: with its lexical and semantic richness, dialect has reclaimed a communal space, made of people, places, recognizable relationships.

The journey, nevertheless, has been long and difficult. Apulia is a heterogenous region, a product of the grafting of various

peoples and diversified relationships (suffice it to consider the ties between the Capitanata — Foggia's province — and the Abruzzi region, and Bari's vocation for the Orient). For various centuries it followed the destiny of the Kingdom of Naples. As a marginalized province, it passively suffered the influence of the capital, not being able to produce a cultured class that could elevate dialect to the language of poetry. For this reason the latter, "due to the absence of a Court, of centers of lively culture, but also to the narrowness of life experiences, of needs other than the primary ones that involved the immediate necessities of a poor society, restricted and subjugated, was almost limited to the nucleus of family relationships, of domestic and municipal life, of hunger, of survival, of material culture, of faith and superstition, of coarse laughter, of

plebeian obscenities, without that capacity for sublimation, contemplation and protest that elsewhere even humble and wretched societies, in possession of a strong dialect, were able to express" (M. Dell'Aquila, *Parnaso di Puglia nel '900*, Bari, Adda, 1983, pp. 305-306). It must be pointed out, however, that this is not the case in the Salento (southern Apulia), where the presence of a vigorous local culture has promoted a rather different tradition, which we will examine further on.

Since the texts produced between the Sixteenth and Eighteenth centuries are classifiable only as being generically Apulian, the region's dialect literature begins just before the middle of the Nineteenth Century with Francesco Saverio Abbrescia from Bari and Francescantonio D'Amelio, that is to say, two names of

modest literary interest, according to Pasolini in the aforementioned anthology. Still able to interest us today, on the one hand they well represent the spirit of the people of Bari, which borders on "irreverence and obscenity" (Dell'Aquila, op.cit.) without sentimental mewling, and on the other, that of the people of Lecce, characterized instead by an elegant air with popular overtones. Not much better fare David Lopez and Antonio Nitti, who also arrive late with respect to the expectations of a nation unified with great difficulty. "Consider — adds Pasolini — what intense, imaginative poetry could have been produced by an inspiration conscious of an element then potentially vital to poetry in a southern dialect, that is, an anti-unification or even pro-Bourbon political stance. This carried-over literature, positioned between

Pascoli and Di Giacomo, continues without interruption astride the last two centuries, even though it receives a few beneficial jolts here and there, as in the case of Giuseppe De Domenicis from the Salento (alias Captain Black), who tackles satire and historical themes. The fact is, as Pasolini notes, that one should study how a certain minor literature of the Nineteenth century (from De Amicis to Stecchetti) could be so successful in the provinces of the former Neapolitan kingdom, where indeed a great author like Verga had made the broadest possible use of dialect, until then compressed by the ruling sentimental-nationalistic rhetoric, to give "reality" to his works.

The misconception of dialect as sub-language or language as reservoir of expressionistic specimens to be used by late-

Romantic writers and veristi, will not die easily and favors versifiers of diverse temperaments equally distributed among Terra di Bari, Capitanata and Salento.

In the Bari area, various generations born between the epoch of Umberto I and Fascism ensure a more or less successful tradition. They are Peppino Franco, Gaetano Savelli (famous for the dialect translation of Dante's *Comedy*) Vito Barracano, Vito De Fano, Vito Maurogiovanni (who is also a noted playwright), Pasquale Sorrenti (tireless student of things Apulian), Gianni Custodero. None of them attains the results of someone like Giotti, Noventa or Marin, but in the regional sphere they have been able to develop a dialect capable of mediating between past and present, and to strike both the lyric and the narrative chord. Upon these experiences is grounded the

work of the younger Lino Angiuli, born after the Second World War. His is no longer the difficult recovery of a disappearing tradition, of something forgotten; it is instead a mutilated and intermittent language, wedded to a sometimes harsh and bitter irony that knows it can avail itself of only the shreds of a transfigured people.

More diversified appears to be the dialect landscape of the Capitanata. The intimist generation of Filippino M. Pugliese, Giovanni De Cristofaro and Alfredo Petrucci (with the exception of a satirist such as Saverio Napolitano in the middle of the Nineteenth Century) also includes a noteworthy poet like Giacomo Strizzi, keen and delicate painter of his small rural world. But there are other surprises. The ironic and satirical vein of Enrico Venditti, the “dark and melancholy” muse (Dell’Aquila) of Gino

Marchitelli, the epic inspiration of Michele Sacco. A more traditional approach appears in the works of Raffaele Lepore and Osvaldo Anzivino, of Michele Capuano and Joseph Tusiani (much better known for his activity as Italianist and poet in English). Published posthumously, Francesco P. Borazio's work has been able to attain a complete adherence to the "culture of poverty," to the southern condition rescued in a true anthropological recovery. To the last generation belong Pasquale Ognissanti and Francesco Granatiero. The former's poetry, highly regarded by Tommaso Fiore, is characterized by a meditation filled with sadness, by a bitter solipsism rarely seen in other dialect poets. Granatiero, on the other hand, is capable of a careful memorial and anthropological recovery, which places him among the staunchest exponents of a dialect

that is both lyrical and narrative.

Going on to southern Apulia, we have already mentioned the particular cultural position of this area, that at the beginning of the Sixteenth Century produced a poet like Galateo (Antonio De Ferrariis). The fact is, that unlike other Apulian realities, this land has granted dialect a life of dignity equal to Italian, having always been the means of communication of the cultured class and the preferred choice in the Academies and cultural gatherings. Therefore there are many names worthy of mention: from Lorenzo Casarano to Oberdan Leone (alias Don Kaber) to Francesco Marangi (alias Gamiran), Giuseppe Susanna, Giuseppe Marzo, Salvatore Imperiale (inspired also by the drama of emigration), Emilio Passeri, the already mentioned Giuseppe De Dominicis (alias Captain Black), till the contemporary

Nicola G. De Donno, who has considerably ennobled dialect not only from a political and polemical point of view, but more broadly by extending its expressive power toward a pessimistic look at the human condition.

Taranto and Brindisi also, with their respective provinces, have given an abundant production in dialect. The Taranto area "is linguistically closer to Metaponto and is connected to the poleis of Greater Greece" (*Poesia dialettale dal Rinascimento a oggi - Dialect Poetry From the Renaissance Until Today* —, edited by G. Spagnoletti and C. Vivaldi, Milan, Garzanti 1991, vol. 2, p. 1002). For this area it will suffice to remember Michele Scialpi, Emilio Consiglio, Cataldo Acquaviva, Michele De Noto, Diego Marturano, Giuseppe Cravere. Brindisi, in turn, can boast of an ancient tradition, that

began in the Seventeenth Century with Giacomo de Matteis Turrese e Girolamo Bax (Alias Ciommo Baccisi) and has continued in other periods with Agostino Chimienti, Arcangelo Lotesoriero, Francesco A. Nucci, Oronzo P. Orlando (alias Lu Stunese), Pietro Pignatelli (alias Lu Barcalaru), Francesco Tamborrino (alias Tam-Tam). Today at Ceglie Messapico there is the best poet of this part of Apulia, Pietro Gatti, epic bard of his land in broad stanzas that express “an alluring play of sounds and assonances in which is reflected the contemplation of many mascìe [magic spells]” (*Poesia dialettale dal Rinascimento a oggi*, cit., p. 1008).

In conclusion, we think we can say that with its leading exponents, who have reached maturity far into the Twentieth century, dialectal Apulia has overcome the complex of the old mask of Don Pancrazio

Cucuzziello, called “the Biscegliese,” symbol of the submissive and improvident Apulian, eternally jeered for his provincial spirit. The region has been able to gain places on the linguistic keyboard of stylistic deviations and innovations: which means being able to create the future of literature even with dialect.

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PIETRO GATTI

Pietro Gatti (Bari, 1913) has been living since childhood in his family's native town, Ceglie Messapico. He worked at the Town Hall as vice-secretary. He published *Nu vecchie diarie d'amore* [An Old Love Diary] Ceglie M.: *La Messapica*, 1973; *A terra meje* [My Land], Fasano: Schena, 1976; *Memorie d'ajere i dde josce* [Memories of Yesterday and Today], *Cavallino di Lecce*: Capone, 1982; *Nguna vita* [Some Lives], Fasano: Schena, 1984; "Omaggio a P. G.," in *L'Incantiere*, v. VIII, n.31-32, Dec. 1994 (contains unpublished poems). There is no Apulian author more radically bound to the chthonic myth, to the Orphic call of nature. Gatti has undertaken from the very start (since *Nu vecchie diarie d'amore* [An old Love Diary]) a

very personal and painful journey into the depths of his spirit, which identifies completely with his land of Ceglie, named after the ancient Messapian people; while still a part of Salento it is, with its Samnitic tones, a linguistic island. With this dialect Gatti has built his expressive world, instinctively opposing this bitter and stony South, its toil and beauty, to the inexorable advancing of industrial society. Nevertheless, rather than turning it into a reactionary and obscurantist motif, falling into the incontaminated-reality trap, the author has tried to keep alive the alternative reason for such a peremptory reality: namely to give voice, through a descent to hell, to the unconscious, the unutterable, the unpredictable, to forms still unformed. Far from indulging in nostalgia or cult of the past, Gatti's poetry proposes to signify,

through the natural landscape, the defense of interiority and psychicness against the alienation of reality.

The return to origins, in brief, has meant the rescue of his own authenticity and the recognition and preservation of a civilization, both in its material and magical-spiritual aspects. In Gatti's later work one can perceive the disquiet caused by the sense of death. Existence appears nearly completed, experiences remote in memory, and present sensations merely tremors, ripples, barely suggested epiphanies. The most visible sign is that of the waiting and enjoyment of sunset, in a flickering of flowers, fires, butterflies, threads of light: desire is enough to give rise from all this, once again, to the supreme happiness of words and poetry.

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Quide suenne! metute a lla perdute
 quanne u sole: na ròzzele de lusce
 granna granne frevveve ind'a nnu ciele
 de fueche.

Po nu manucchje sott'ô calaprisce:
 stennute a 'n derre me ppuggiave a cape
 sobbe, pe jate suenne a uecchje apierte
 a lluonghe.

Mu tott'a pezze aggire: na respiche.
 I ppetre i spine i ll'òssere me dòlene
 gghjecanne i qqnessa mane ca me trèmele
 credenne ca sté strenghe nu tresore
 na spiche.

Speriamе cré. Ma pure nu graniedde.
 Spergiute sott'â chjofe. Jind'ô core.
 A scchange: quatte zzèppere d'ariene.
 Nu fiore.

Nu fiuru sule. M'accundende. O pure,
 megghje assé: ci me jénghje le do pase
 cu 'ngunu piungiedde de papaggne.
 Pe ddorme.

Na negghje senza trièmele de suenne.

A 'm basce.

(da "L'immaginazione", Lecce, nn.64/66, 1989)

Quei sogni! mietuti perdutamente / quando il sole: una
girandola di luce / immensa ferveva in un cielo / di fuoco.
// Poi un covone sotto il perastro: / disteso per terra mi
poggiavo il capo / sopra, per altri sogni ad occhi aperti / a
lungo. // Ora tutto l'appezzamento mi giro: una
spigolatura. / E sassi e spini e le ossa mi dolgono /
piegandomi e questa mano che mi trema / credendo che stia
stringendo un tesoro / una spiga. // Speriamo domani. Ma
pure un granello. / Perduto sotto la zolla. Dentro il cuore. /
In cambio: quattro steli d'origano. / Un fiore. // Un fiore
solo. M'accontento. / Oppure, / meglio assai: se mi empio le
due tasche / con qualche pugnello di papavero. / Per
dormire. // Una nebbia senza tremi di sogni. / In pace.

(Traduzione dell'Autore)

Dreams... reaped... strewn...
came the sun: pinwheel of
fervent firmament — all
fire.

Sheaf beneath a wild
pear, my head propped to
dream, eyes open:
expanse.

Now I glean landscapes:
stones, thorns, my bones ache
and I bend — hands trembling
as if to snatch treasures:
tassel.

One more day? Another seed?
Interred in clods? Or heart?
A deal?: four oregano sprigs?
Flower.

One flower, enough — or perhaps
I might fill my pockets
with two fists of poppies:
to sleep.

Fogs with no dream tremens:

peace.

(Translated by Justin Vitiello)

Ci jere navecande, me puteve
disce: ete tiembe cu rravoghje a vele.
Sonde june de fore: ind'â casedde .
me mmasoggne, nu ciedde, angocchje ô fueche,
u pesule de fiche lièggiu liegge
— l'arve seccò p'a muche — m'u serriève
nu ggiurne, na tteneve da fa niende.
Ô candone sté angore na frangate
de fraffughje. Do zzèppere ggne ttande
cu nna ss'astute u fueche. De ccussì
me stoche. Nange penze a nniende. Spette.
Ma me vene a lle vote cu mm'attande
a 'm base a vite: sté na matassodde
mùscete de muddichele i ppelocce.
A 'n gape na strafinzele de nùvele
ca vole sconne u cieles; nu penziere:
ci m'a scettave ô mienze d'a cenise?
Do lùrteme sprascidde, do refiate
uecchje de lusce: na palora sole.
A prima sole de na puesie.
A l'ùrteme.
Me passe. Jind'ô core

nu nute. Po me ccorde cu nnu rise.

Però queda palore! Jer'a ll'esse:

u sole. De secure. U sole. U sole.

U sole...!

(da "L'immaginazione", Lecce, nn.64/66, 1989)

Se fossi navigante, potrei / dirmi: è tempo che avvolga la
vela. // Sono uno di campagna: nella casella / mi ritiro, un
uccello, presso il fuoco, / il pezzo di tronco di fico leggero
leggero — / l'albero seccò per la monilia — me lo segai / un
giorno, non avevo da far nulla. // Al cantone sta ancora
una bracciata / di minutaglia. Due fuscilli ogni tanto / che
non si spenga il fuoco. Così / me ne sto. Non penso a niente.
Aspetto. // Ma mi viene alle volte che mi tasti / nella tasca
la vita: c'è una matassina / sporca di briciole e peluria. //
Nel capo uno sbrendolo di nuvola / che voglia nascondere il
cielo; un pensiero: / se me la buttassi nel mezzo della
cinigia? // Due ultimi sprazzi, due respiri / occhi di luce:
una parola sola. / La prima sola di una poesia. / L'ultima.
// Mi passa. Nel cuore / un nodo. Poi mi racconsolo con un
sorriso. // Quella parola, però! Dovrebbe essere: / il sole. Di
certo. Il sole. Il sole. / Il sole...!

(Traduzione dell'Autore)

If I was a seaman, I could
say: time to wind in the sail.
But, peasant, bird-nesting,
I retire to my hearth
where a fig-trunk flickers
(a toadstool sapped the tree and
one day I felled it for a prayer)...
in my niche remains a heap
of splinters, a twig or two
to stoke the flames so I a-
bide: no cares, just patience.
Above, the shred of a cloud
presumes to veil the sky —
if I dive into the embers...
The last few flashes, gasps,
eyes of light: lone word.
First and only a poem.
The last.
Escapes me. My heart's
a knot. With a smile undone.
That word should be sun,
yes, sun and sun...

yes, sun.

(Translated by Justin Vitiello)

A sbende quanda vote! jind' a ll'àneme
cu ppigghje u passature ca me porte
ammer' a qqueda peccennezza meje.
Josce na ppozze ddemmurà cà sere
ggià se sté ffasce ì ll'ombre ca se llonghe.
Petu pete, cu a mazze, javetanne
pure cu ttruppuchesce anguna petre,
cu stombe nu zangone.
Jind' ô core
na negghja léggia legge de penziere.
Bbrivete de recuerde de recuerde.
Strefînzele, angunune, de le fatte
ca na vote, ô lundane, — n'ata vite! —
me janghjèrene tutte spetterrane
de lusce i spetterrave pure u ciele.
Jombre de facce de cumbaggne sciòchere
chjande resiate tande pe nnu niende.
Po a ssule me ne sceve jind' ô sole
i u sole jere tuttu mije.
A ppicc' a ppicche svapuresce u sanghe.
Nange sende cchjù nniende. Me rumaggne
tuttu stunate. Sobb' ô paretiedde

aggne ttande me ssette: nu repuese.

La spinta quante volte! nell'anima / di prendere il
tratturo che mi porta / verso quella fanciullezza mia. //
Oggi non posso indugiare ché sera / già si sta facendo e
l'ombra che si allunga. // Lentamente, con la mazza,
evitando / pure di sfiorare qualche sasso, / di calpestare un
sonco. // Nel cuore / una nebbia lievissima di pensieri. /
Brividi di ricordi di ricordi. / Sbrendoli, qualcuno, delle
favole / che una volta, in lontananza, — un'altra vita! — /
mi empirono tutto traboccando / di luce e traboccava pure il
cielo. / Ombre di volti di compagni giochi / pianti risate
tante per un niente. / Poi da solo me ne andavo nel sole / e
il sole era tutto mio. // Poco a poco svapora il sangue. /
Non sento più niente. Resto / tutto stordito. Sul muretto /
ogni tanto mi seggo: un riposo.

My soul urges, insists
I take the rugged path
back, back into childhood...
Today I cant tarry for evening
is here and the shadow stretches...
Slowly, cautiously with my staff
not to graze a single stone
or tread a furrow...
My heart,
a pale mist of thoughts.
Chills of memories of memories.
Shreds, here and there, of tales
that once, afar — another life? —
filled me over the brim
with light — as sky overflowed.
Shades of friends' faces, games,
tears, laughs: so much for naught.
(I'd go off alone in the sun
and the sun was all mine.)
Drop by drop blood transpires.
I no longer feel. I am
numbness. On a stone wall

I sit now and then: rest.

U sole ggià ì ppunute. Vé calanne
n'oggne de fridde. Gret'â spadde u discete
dòsciu dosce d'a murtuscedde assciuvele.
Jete tiembe cu mm'arretire a ccase:
do sarmiende p'u fueche stone angore.
Ccussì, pure m'arrocche, a ppuvuriedde,
u uegghje p'a luscecchje. N'à rrumase
nu fele ind'ô bbucchjere. P'a nuttate.
Cà a lùrteme pò ll'esse.
Come vole.

(da "L'immaginazione", Lecce, nn.64/66, 1989)

Il sole già è tramontato. Va calando / un po' di freddo.
Dietro la spalla il dito / dolcissimo della morte piccola
scivola. / È tempo che mi ritiri a casa: / due sarmenti per il
fuoco stanno ancora. // Così, pure mi conservo, da
poverello, / l'olio per la lucerna. Ne è rimasto / un filo nel
bicchiere. Per la notte. / Ché l'ultima può essere. Come
voglia.

(Traduzione dell'Autore)

(cont.d)

The sun has set. A slight chill
descends. The gentle touch of mi-
nute death now grazes my flanks.
It's my time to go home.
There, for the hearth, two bundles of twigs...
In my poverty I've saved
oil for my lamp — left at
the bottom of the jar. For night.
Perhaps the last.
So be it.
(Translated by Justin Vitiello)

A 'n gape m' à vvenute cu accumenze
 ô sole a ssetecà na copplapenne.
 U peccinne, stu vecchje! Statte sote.
 Le jamme trabballèscene. Te trèmele
 u vrazze. Pué spruscià sobb' a nna petre.
 Ce tte ué stringe! Làssela vulà
 a vita sove a llebbertà. T' avaste
 sine t' avaste cu tt' a vite gote
 cudu n' oggne de ciele. Te piasceve
 cu tt' azzecave queda cosa bbelle
 totta lusce! Jete a feliscetà.
 Làssela scì. Pò mmore. O pure n' oggne
 de porve te rumane sobb' â ponde
 de le dèscete. Játe: reste niende.
 Tuèrnete a bbellu bbelle a lla casedde.
 Sobb' â scaledde assittete. Te ppuegge
 ô parete. A lla lusce te bbanduene
 de stu sole. Nu picche, i tt' appapagne.
 Ggià na mosse de rise sobb' â facce.
 Sinde bbuene: pe nniende t' accundiende.
 (Inedita)

In testa mi è venuto di cominciare / al sole a inseguire

una farfalla. // Il fanciullo, questo vecchio! / Le gambe
traballano. Ti trema / il braccio. Puoi sdruciolare su una
pietra. // Che cosa ti vuoi stringere! Lasciala volare / la vita
sua in libertà. Ti basti / sì ti basti di vedertela godere / quel
poco di cielo. Ti piacerebbe / che te l'afferrassi quella cosa
bella / tutta luce! È la felicità. // Lasciala andare. Può
morire. Oppure un poco / di polvere ti rimane sulla punta /
delle dita. Soffi: resta niente. // Tornatene pian piano alla
casella. / Siediti sullo scalino. Ti poggi / al muro. Alla luce ti
abbandoni / di questo sole. Un poco, e t'addormenti. / Già
un moto di sorriso sul viso. / Sei buono: per nulla
t'accontenti.

(Traduzione dell'Autore)

It struck me I should track
a butterfly under the sun.
Old man, deep down, child.
Legs shaky. hands trembling.
Might slip on a rock.
Why grasp? Let it fly:
life all freedom. Be content
to watch it enjoy
wisps of sky. You'd like
to seize that lovely thing:
all light. That's happiness.
Let go or it'd die. Strange how
it leaves its dust on your fingertips.
Then puff! There's nothing.
Wend your way back home.
Sit on the stoop. Lean against
the wall. Yield to this
sun's light. A while, and you doze
with the stitch of a smile on your face.
You're good: content with nothing.
(Translated by Justin Vitiello)

Sté llisce nu rumanze de Merline,
 u mache andiche. Agghjut'u. Jind'a ll'àneme
 te fiurèscene tutte le mascie,
 tutte le suenne, le cchjù mmegghje, tutte
 quide ca vole u core, na fraffalle
 pure, cchjù bbelle assé. Senza bbesueggne
 de na bbacchette. Avaste u desedèrie.
 Cu tte nasce nu munnu tuttu tuve.
 Avaste cu tte rusce na palore,
 a cchjù ccorte: i u meràchele sbuccesce.

(Inedita)

// Stai leggendo un romanzo di Merlino, / il mago
 antico. Chiudilo. Nell'anima / ti fioriscono tutti gli
 incantesimi, / tutti i sogni, i più belli, tutti / quelli che vuole
 il cuore, una farfalla / pure, più splendidi assai. Senza
 bisogno / di una bacchetta. Basta il desiderio. / Perché ti
 nasca un mondo tutto tuo. / Basta che ti mormori una
 parola, / la più breve: e il miracolo sboccia.

(Traduzione dell'Autore)

You're reading a romance of Merlin,
old magician. Shut it. In
your soul sprout all the charms,
the loveliest dreams, all those you
cherish, butterfly too:
impeccable splendor. No need
of wand. Desire's enough.
Born is a world all yours.
Just by whispering your word,
the briefest: miracle blooms.
(Translated by Justin Vitiello)

Quide do vermezzule da quand'ave!
 co stone sobb'â rose appene aprute
 cu qquide fraschetèddere a vvellute
 jardurose.

Ci putevve parrà descevve: "A vite!
 sta vite totta priesce totte amore.

I ppo a morte.

I cce 'mborte."

None none. Jasàteve a nnu vole
 Angielangiele. Cu vv'addevendate
 totta lusce.

Sine. I ppo cu vve pigghje a morta bbelle,
 i ppecciate
 jind'â rasce
 de stu sole.

I dde secure a vambe pò ddà vite
 a nn'ata vite
 a cchjù bbelle
 pe mmascije.

I a mme da cudu 'ngande me po' nnasce
 na puesie:

stu fiore stu core stu fueche

sta morte sta vite
stu chjande stu cande
de l'ànema meje.

Stu meracle

sta bbellezze

ca scatte pe jind'a nnu ciele

i spetterre de lusce pe ggne vvanne.

Stu 'mbierne abbunne i sscenne assé cchjù bbassce
de le rape. Stu sole vivu vive.

Quei due insettucoli da quanto! / stanno sulla rosa
appena sbocciata / con quei petali di velluto / odorosa. //
Se poteste parlare direste: "La vita! / questa vita tutta gioia
tutto amore. / E poi la morte. / E che importa." // No no.
Levatevi a volo. / Incielincielo. Che diventiate / tutta luce.
// Sì. E poi vi prenda la morte bella / e ardate / nel raggio /
di questo sole. / E di certo la vampa può dar vita / a
un'altra vita / la più bella / per magia. // E a me da
quell'incantesimo può nascere / una poesia: // questo fiore
questo cuore questo fuoco / questa morte questa vita /

Those two bugs around so long
poised on the rose bud opening
in new velvet petals —
redolent.

If they could, they'd say, "Life.
Life all joy all love.
And then death.

What matters?"

No. Take off. Soar.

All sky sky. Become
wholeness. Light.

Yes. Yield to lovely
death and burn
in the glow of
this sun.

Surely the blaze gives life
to newer life,
the most lovely:
magic.

From that charm can spring
my poem:
this flower this heart this flame

this death this life
this dirge this psalm
of my soul.

This miracle
this loveliness
that bursts from within sky
and pours light toward toward every whereness.
This hell, descending deeper
than all roots. This razing sun.

Sta funnate

granna granne de làcreme. Stu rise
dosciu dosce de n'arbe sobb'ô criate.

Quessa stelle c'andraversesce u cieles
a 'm bizzateche a na strisce d'argiende.

Sta fasciodde de lune sobb'ô chjuppe.

Stu viende ca travote i mmare i tterre.

Stu fattarieddu bbuene angocchje ô fueche,
appapagnate.

Cussu sgrame a mmenazze de morte.

Cussu tutte de l'omme. Ma ce ccose
na puesie!

Stu cravone ca jusche a carna vive
tenute strengiute ind'â mane,
ma n'oggne de lusce trapane
a ffa lusce pe qqessa nuttate.

(da "L'Incantiere", Lecce, a. VIII, n. 31-32, dicembre
1994)

// Questa vallata / sterminata di lacrime. Questo riso /
dolcissimo di un albero sul creato. // Questa stella che
attraversa il cielo / in punta a una striscia d'argento. /
Questa piccola falce di luna sul cipresso. // Questo vento

che sconvolge e mare e terra. / Questa favola buona accanto
al fuoco, / assonnati. // Questo urlo a minaccia di morte. /
Questo tutto dell'uomo. Ma che cosa / una poesia! //
Questo carbone che brucia la carne viva / tenuto stretto
nella mano / ma un po' di luce filtra / a far luce per questa
nottata.

(Traduzione dell'Autore)

This boundless
vale of tears. This sweetmost
laugh of a dawn of Creation.
This star that crosses the sky
arcing in a streak of silver.
This minute sickle of a cypress moon.
This wind overturning: sea and earth.
This good fireside tale while
we doze.
This shout foreboding death.
This totally human. What a thing
is a poem!
This ember searing flesh
as hands clutch it
filtering tenuous light
to illuminate the dark that lingers.
(Translated by Justin Vitiello)

FRANCESCO PAOLO BORAZIO

Francesco Paolo Borazio (San Marco in Lamis, Foggia, 1918-1953) worked as mason and in stone quarries, while teaching himself the study of literature. During World War II he was stationed in Yugoslavia, where he contracted a lung disease. He lived in Imola for a time, but later moved back to his hometown for good. In 1952 he founded with some friends the cultural society "M. De Bellis."

His works, published posthumously, are: *Lu trajone* [The Dragon], ed. M. Coco, A. Motta and C. Siani, pref. F. Sabatini, San Marco in Lamis: *Quaderni del Sud*, 1977; *La preta favedda* [The echo], ed. S. D'Amato, A. Motta e C. Siani, pref. T. De Mauro, Manduria: *Quaderni del Sud/Lacaita*, 1982.

The publication and critical recognition of Borazio's works has taken place only many years after his death: from the linguists Sabatini and De Mauro who presented them in a volume, to the anthropologists and critics De Nola, Bronzini, Dell'Aquila and Augieri who have underlined their cultural and literary significance. During his brief lifespan (35 years) he had the capacity and will to become self-taught, to write many poems in Italian and finally move on to dialect with the utmost awareness. It was a fruitful apprenticeship that produced numerous handwritten notebooks, a small etymological dictionary, a few sheets-newspapers (one of Borazio's inventions, a sort of satirical-popular publication with vignettes and varied pleasantries). The author from the Gargano area, then, immediately felt the

necessity of bringing dialect and Italian face to face, also because his land, still deeply agricultural and pastoral, did not offer any literary tradition at the time of his vocation. In so doing, he was able to find stylistic deviations and interferences well-suited to a written expression that could cut corners precisely because it was free from deference to convention.

All this, even though Borazio kept his hometown, San Marco in Lamis, very realistically, as a privileged reference point: which really is his world, or rather the symbol of the world to be elevated to autonomous artistic discovery. In addition to numerous compositions that range from the pathetic to the elegiac, from depiction of the landscape to local color, from parodic to moralizing emphasis, Borazio has bestowed his greatest energies on the realization of *Lu*

trajone [The Dragon], a mock-heroic poem made of seven cantos plus an interlude-idyll in rhymed sestinae. The work, that betrays a remote echo of the poems by Pulci, Tassoni and Ariosto, harks back to the popular fairytale of the dragon that terrifies a peaceful community of common people. The uniqueness of this singular accomplishment lies in its ironic reversal of popular tradition, which has led some critics to discern in it a soothing and placating message, as a deliverance from the sorrows of war and anachronistic ancestral fears.

To be sure, Borazio's strenuous training as a self-taught man has allowed the Garganic, and Apulian, dialect to make some gains in the expressive and folkloric spheres: if by "folklore" one understands, with Ernesto De Martino, a progressive culture, conscious of its relationships in a field of

plurilinguistic tensions.

Criticism: M. Melillo, *Lingua e Storia in Puglia*, 4, 1977; M. Picchi, *L'Espresso*, April 24, 1977; G. Galzerano, *Il Cantastorie*, novembre 1977; R. Nigro, *Cronache della regione Puglia*, 2, 1978; R. Cera, *Lingua e storia in Puglia*, 10, 1980; G. Custodero, *Puglia letteraria del Novecento*, Ravenna: Longo, 1982; M. Dell'Aquila, *Parnaso di Puglia nel '900*, Bari: Adda, 1983; S. D'Amaro, *Diverse Lingue*, VI, 9, 1991; C. Siani, *Microletteratura*, S. Marco in Lamis, QS Ediz., 1994.

Lu trajone

(Un terribile dragone sconvolge la comunità del piccolo centro garganico, San Marco in Lamis. Vittime d'un'ennesima violenza del mostro sono due giovani innamorati: Velina e Seppantonio. L'assemblea consiliare, dopo una vivace e contrastata seduta, decide di armare il popolo che, munito di roncole ed accette, di zappe e sputafuochi, di picconi e di coltelli, sotto l'alta protezione dell'Arcangelo Michele, parte alla caccia del dragone. Intanto si sparge la voce che in località "Canalone" si è dato l'assalto al mostro. Tutto finisce tra la meraviglia e la gioia degli assalitori, quando al suo posto, rannicchiati nel pagliaio, ritrovano, sani e salvi, Velina e Seppantonio. Il poemetto si conclude, nell'esultanza generale, con il matrimonio chiacchierato tra i due giovani).

16

Prime de tutte parla mast'Andreja,
Ch'è mastre de cucchiara e sape legge: ~
"Signori, io prepono all'Assembleja
Che bisogna appurare lu pustegge,
Dove il Tragone si ni va a dormire:
Murare il buco... in modo... che pe' uscire..."

17

Lu Secretarie dice: “È mai possibile
Accogliere un progetto sì infelice?
Perché come può essere accessibile
Il covo di quel mostro? Ce lo dice
L’amico?” Grida n’atu Consigliere:
“Quillo che dice il Sacritario è vere!”

Il drago: la seduta — Prima di tutti parla mastro Andrea,
/ che è mastro di cazzuola e sa leggere: / “Signori, io
propongo all’assemblea / che bisogna appurare il
nascondiglio, / dove il dragone se ne va a dormire: / murare
il buco...in modo... che per uscire...” // Il segretario dice: “È
mai possibile / accogliere un progetto sì infelice? / Perché
come può essere accessibile / il covo di quel mostro? Ce lo
dice / l’amico?” Grida un altro consigliere: / “Quello che
dice il segretario è vero!”

The Dragon

(A fearful dragon wreaks havoc in the community of the small town on the Gargano, San Marco in Lamis. The victims of one more violence by the monster are two young lovers: Velina and Seppantonio. The council assembly, after a lively and much-debated session, decides to arm the people who, wielding sickles and axes, hoes and firearms, picks and knives, under the high protection of the Arcangel Michael, leave in search of the dragon. Meanwhile there is a rumor going around that in a place called "Canalone" an attack on the monster is under way. All ends amidst the wonder and joy of the attackers, when instead of the monster they find, crouching in the hayrick but safe and sound, Velina and Seppantonio. The poem ends in general exultation, with the talked-about wedding between the two young people).

16

The first to speak was Master Andrea
Tops with the trowel who can also read:
"Gentlemen, I propose to this assembly
That the dragon's hiding place we need
To scout, where he rests at night:
When ready to come out...he's walled up tight."

17

The secretary says: "How can it ever be possible
To accept such an ill conceived project?
Because how can it be accessible
That monster's den? You think he'll let
Us know, our friend?" Then shouts another adviser
Yes, there is truth in the secretary's answer."

18

Cu' bella voce e cu' parlà scosite
Mo pigghia la parola 'umpà Lazzare
Ch'è n'atu capemastre assà 'struite,
E dice: "Pe' piglià qualche ripare
Dobbiamo fabbricare un muro grande
'Ntorno al paese da tutte le bande".

19

Ci vota allora Chele Colasanta,
Persona addutturata de sicure
ché ha letto Genoveffa tutta quanta,
E dice: "Voi volete fare un mure
Alto e robusto attorno allu paese...
Ma vi rendete conto delle spese?"

20

"Senza cuntà lu tempo" stocca 'nnante
Michele Zazzaredde, falegname,

“Ma se m’annusulate un solo istante,
Io vi consiglio invece che facciamo
Tutto attorno al paese uno steccato
Di buon legname forte e stagionato”.

// Con bella voce e con parlar squisito / ora prende la
parola compar Lazzaro / che è un altro capomastro assai
istruito, / e dice: “Per pigliar qualche riparo / dobbiamo
fabbricare un muro grande / attorno al paese da tutti i lati”.
// Si gira allora Chele Colasanta, / persona addottorata di
sicuro / che ha letto Genoveffa tutta quanta, / e dice: “Voi
volete fare un muro / alto e robusto attorno al paese... / ma
vi rendete conto delle spese?” // “ Senza contare il tempo”
interrompe / Michele Zazzarello, falegname, / “ma se mi
ascoltate un solo istante, / io vi consiglio invece che
facciamo / tutto attorno al paese uno steccato / di buon
legname forte e stagionato”.

18

With pleasant voice and speech that's mellow
Now Lazzaro, our trustworthy friend has the floor,
A born master mason and a learned fellow,
He says: "If our own safety we've in store
Then in every direction all around
Our town with a wall we must surround."

19

Chele Colasanta turns to reply then,
A person of learning, without a doubt
Because he's read Genoveffa start to end,
He says: "You want to build a wall out
There around the town high and stout
But the costs you aren't even worrying about."
20

"And that's without thinking of the time" cuts in
Michele Zazzarella, a carpenter,
"If for just an instant you would listen
My suggestion to you is yet another,
All around our town a fence we should
Make of good strong and seasoned wood."
21

"Macchè", risponne n'atu Cunsigliere -
"Che vu' apparcà li crape? A me mi pare
- In qualità di vecchie terrazziere -
Che più meglio sarebbe di scavare,
Un fosso tanto fuco... ossia... profondo,
Per quanto è lu paese tondo tondo".

[...]

24

"Macché!" Grida lu Sinneche. -"Mo basta!
Voi parlate di fossi e muri e detti,

Che per poterli fare non ci basta
Un tempo, come dire, dieci annetti.
Senza contare i soldi e la fatica
E tutto il materiale che si sprica”.

[...]

28

Io avanzo pertanto una proposta:
Cioè, direi di fare armar la gente
E di uscire e di andare a far la posta
Fin dove si rintana quel serpente:
Dargli battaglia e... Insomma io vi dico
Che bisogna affrontarlo l’inimico”.

(da *Oltre Eboli: la poesia*, 1979)

// “Macché” risponde un altro consigliere, / “Che vuoi
apparcare le capre? A me mi pare / — in qualità di vecchio
terrazziere — / che più meglio sarebbe di scavare, / un fosso
tanto fuco... ossia profondo, / quanto è il paese tutto in
tondo”. // [...] “Macché!” Grida il sindaco, “Mo’ basta! /
Voi parlate di fossi e muri e detti, / che per poterli fare non
ci basta / un anno, come dire, dieci annetti. / Senza contare
i soldi e la fatica / e tutto il materiale che si spreca”. // [...]
Io avanzo pertanto una proposta: / cioè, direi di fare armar
la gente / e di uscire e di andare a far la posta / fin dove si
rintana quel serpente: / dargli battaglia e... insomma io vi

dico / che bisogna affrontarlo l'inimico".

(Traduzione di M. Coco, A. Motta e C. Siani)

21

"Nonsense" another councilman replies
"That's not goats you want to station there.
The solution, old digger that I am, for me lies
In digging, that's in fact much better,
A ditch so deep... I mean to say so deep
All around the whole entire town indeed."

[...]

24

"Nonsense" the Mayor shouts. "Now that's enough!"
You speak of ditches of walls and other such matters
That to accomplish them would not be enough
A period, let us say, of about ten years.
Neither the labor nor the money we're considering
Nor all the materials we'd be waisting."

[...]

28

I put forth therefore a plan:
Let's give arms to all our people I say
And go and keep a watch up to the den
Where that serpent's hiding place may
Be and engage in a battle... In sum I tell you

This foe it's necessary that we stand up to."
(Translated by Joseph Perricone)

NICOLA GIUSEPPE DE DONNO

Nicola Giuseppe De Donno (Maglie, Lecce, 1920) worked as teacher and high-school principal.

He published: *Cronache e paràbbule* [Chronicles and Parables], pref. by D. Moro, Bari-S. Spirito, Ed. Del Centro Librario, 1972; *Sìdici sunetti pe llu divorziu* [Sixteen Sonnets for Divorce], Maglie: Gioffreda, 1974; *Paese* [Town], intr. by D. Valli, Cavallino di Lecce: Capone, 1979; *Ministri e rriforme* [Ministers e Reforms], Maglie: *Tempo d'Oggi*, 1980; *Mumentì e ttrumenti* [Moments and Torments], Lecce: Manni, 1986; *La guerra guerra* [The War War], Fasano: Schena, 1987; *La guerra de Utràntu* [The War of Otranto], Milan: Scheiwiller, 1988; *Lu senzù de la vita* [The Meaning of Life], Milan: *All'Insegna del*

Pesce d'Oro, 1992;; *Lu Nicola va alla guerra* [Nicola Goes to War], *ibid.*, 1994..

Criticism: D. Moro, preface to *Crònache e paràbbule*, *cit.*; A. Vallone, *Nuova Antologia*, April 1972; D. Valli, *L'Albero*, 48, 1972; N. Carducci, *La Gazzetta del Mezzogiorno*, April 3, 1979; M. Marti, *Rassegna salentina*, January-April 1981; *id.*, in *La letteratura dialettale in Italia*, a cura di P. Mazzamuto, Palermo: Società Grafica Artigiana, 1984; G. Spagnoletti, *Il Belli*, 3, 1992.

Someone has aptly mentioned the subtle relationship binding Gatti's "land" to De Donno's "town" (*Poesia dialettale dal Rinascimento a oggi*, p. 1009). The latter is also from the Salento area (Maglie) and has elevated the local dimension to the paradigm of a universal condition, concerning the human as well as natural

spheres. De Donno has brought his classical and secular background to this study of dialect, characterized by a resentful and polemical humanism. It is not by chance that he contributed to the review *La Rassegna Pugliese* and other cultural publications, and added to his fertile creative vein the study of the folk culture of his territory.

De Donno's work seems to aim at summarizing and confirming what is meant today by dialect poetry as an alternative code to writing in Italian. In the first place, De Donno has generally preferred the brief and refined measure of the sonnet, demonstrating that even the apparently humblest dialect has a no less wide range of rhythms and accents. The richness of the technical solution is paralleled by the endless variety of themes: whether it is the polemical treatment of civil and social issues

(toil, unemployment, inequality, injustice) or the depiction of the Salento landscape with strong mythical-symbolical tints, following the tradition that from Vittorio Bodini harks back to Spanish poetry.

Homecoming and estrangement, identity and reference to otherness, in an itinerary that goes from town to land, from land to world. In a play of mirrors that can be seen as a disillusioned and desperate warning about life, a spendthrift and mendacious nothingness, about the absurdity of History, this treasure that blossomed in the childhood of man.

Neja su nneja

Intra stu puzzu cupu de culozza,
rretu la nuta frunte nu nc'è gnenti,
nc'è ll'u vacante, e fforsi, a stenti a stenti,
na pruledda de gnignu. Ma la ozza
de li pinzieri e dde li sentimenti
ca lu mpurpâne, nu nc'è ci ne pozza
cchiúi risbijare sia puru na stozza,
n'àlitu, nu profumo. Parimenti
passa lu nume, passa la memoria,
lu litrattu, gnancosa ca eri tie,
comu neja de state a mmenzité.
Neja su nneja se nnija la storia:
a bborie, e ppreputenze, e vvanagloria
ssenzate, e straggi, e ddoje, e ccaristíe.
(Inedita)

Nebbia su nebbia — Dentro questo pozzo cupo del
teschio, / dietro la nuda fronte non c'è niente, / c'è il vuoto,
e forse, a stento a stento, / una polverina di cervello. Ma la
giara // dei pensieri e dei sentimenti / che la impolpavano,
non c'è chi ne possa / più risvegliare sia pure un pezzetto, /
un alito, un profumo. Ugualmente // passa il nome, il
ricordo, / il ritratto, tutto ciò che tu eri, / come nebbia

d'estate a mezzodì. // Nebbia su nebbia si caglia la storia: /
a borie, e prepotenze, e vanagloria / insensate, e stragi, e
dolori, e carestie.

(Traduzione dell'Autore)

Haze Upon Haze

In this grim deep pit of a skull
behind the naked brow there's naught
and void — at most it is fraught
with the brain's dust. And the receptacle
of thoughts and sensations strained
to give it pulp? There is no sump
to stir ana raise its merest lump:
no breath, no redolence. In this vein,
all passes by: name, memory,
image, what you were has died —
like summer haze by noontide.
Haze upon haze, clots history:
its airs, presumptions, vanity,
depravations, carnage — pains all dried.
(Translated by Justin Vitiello)

Bbonzenzu

Bbonzenzu, dícune, nciole bbonzenzu.

Ma cce bbonzenzu è, se nu ccapisce

ca la vita ète tutta a cconrusenzu?

Sine, vene ca a ogni arba ne llucisce

rregularare lu sole, e cca cumpenzu

nc'è (armenu fencia a mmoi) ra cquantu crisce

la luna e cquantu cala, e cca, se penzu

subbranamente a cquale me pparisce,

n'orologgiu è llu celu. Ma però

cce ssenzu l'ommu? e ppercè Tizziu campa

riccu, sanu, piacente, e Ccaju no?

percè lu Terzo Mondo? percè vvàmpane

una su ll'àutra le guerre? o sinò,

Stalin e Ppinuscè percè la scàmpane?

(Inedita)

Buon senso — Buon senso, dicono, ci vuole buon senso. /

Ma che buon senso è, se non capisce / che la vita è tutta a

contro senso? / Sì, avviene che ad ogni alba ci sorge //

regolare il sole, e che c'è compenso / (almeno fino ad oggi)

tra quanto cresce / la luna e quanto cala, e che, se penso / a

quale mi apparisce superficialmente, // il cielo è un

orologio. Però / che senso c'è nell'uomo? e perché Tizio

campa / ricco, sano, bello, e Caio no? // perché il Terzo
Mondo? perché avvampano / una sull'altra le guerre? o
almeno, / Stalin e Pinochet perché la fanno franca?

(Traduzione dell'Autore)

Common Sense

You must, they say, have common sense.
But what sense if you don't surmise
life does all to counter intelligence?
It happens that the sun, daily, rises
again, and there's someway recompense
(at least today) for how the moon
goes from full to new and, hence,
on the surface it seems, to my tune,
like a clock, the firmament ticks —
but what sense has Man? Why does Tom get
rich, healthy, chic — and not Dick?
Why the Third World? Why beget
war upon war? Is that the trick
of Pinochets' and Stalins' slyest bet?
(Translated by Justin Vitiello)

Luna luna

Subbrapinzieri la luna stasira
mani a lla frunte se passa de nule
chiare, a sbrindelli, quasi carisciule
de paure e speranze su lla cira
de na mònica ntica. D'oru prule
àute le stelle lentíssimc ggírane
àuta la rota. Sulenziu respira
la terra, dopu l'urlu de lu sole.
Luna, o luna, cce ppenzi? Na notte
de bbientu, frisca, rriva mai pe nnui,
na notte cu ndurmíscane le lotte
ntistine, luna luna, a ll'ommu cchiú
de l'ommu stessu, e ccu ndirizza rotte
àute de terra e sse mparija a vvui?
(Inedita)

Luna luna — Soprappensiero la luna stasera / si passa
sulla fronte mani di nuvole / chiare, a sbrindelli, quasi
corteggi / di paure e speranze sulla cera // di una monaca
antica. Polvere d'oro, / alte le stelle lentissime girano / alta
la ruota. Silenzio respira / la terra, dopo l'urlo del sole. //
Luna, o luna, che pensi? Una notte / di riposo, fresca
arriverà mai per noi, / una notte che si addormentino le

lotte // intestine, luna luna, all'uomo più / dell'uomo stesso,
e che indirizzi rotte / alte da terra, e si apparigli a voi?

(Traduzione dell'Autore)

Moon, Moon

Lost in thought — tonight the moon —
grazing the brow, translucent clouds
fleeced and stripped as if to croon
in hope and fear the waxen shroud
of an aged nun. Aureate dust,
the stars on high wheel slow
and earth breathes silence — just
as the sun blares its primal glow.
Moon, oh moon, what do you reflect?
Will we ever sleep, fresh and cool,
the night we internecine wars deflect
and rest — oh moon — why is Man the tool
of perverse impotence to select
your high coursing, not be lunatic fool?
(Translate by Justin Vitiello)

L'acchiatura

De quale sale an galla funnità
am parù cu sta luce d'arba incerta
e nneja, fore de la scurità
stu nnutu de parole, sta scupertà
de n'acchiatura ca era sciuta sperta
e ddimerta, a llù scialu de l'età
e dde la vita dissipata, perta
a lli fronzuli d'ogne ufanità?
Erba liggera e ttènnera cijata
la notte ntica, e tte la roi la mmane
mpruisamente a lluce, erba fatata,
comu, vagnone, quannu me chiamâne
de lu lettu a lla prima matinata
pe lla nuvena. Eccu cce mme rrumane.
(Inedita)

Il tesoro — Da quale profondità sale a galla / insieme con
questa luce d'alba incerta / e nebbia, fuori dell'oscurità /
questo nodo di parole, questa scoperta // di un tesoro che
era andato disperso / e perduto, nello scialo dell'età / e
della vita dissipata, aperta / ai fronzoli di ogni vanità? //
Erba leggera e tenera germogliata / nella notte antica, e te la
trovi al mattino / improvvisamente in luce, erba fatata, //

come, da fanciullo, quando mi chiamavano / dal letto al
primo albeggiare / per la novena. Ecco cosa mi rimane.

(Traduzione dell'Autore)

Horn of Plenty

From what depth does there emerge
with this light of dawn, so bleary
in the haze, so dank from its surge,
this knot of words, this discovery
of my horn of plenty, cast away
once amid the ravage of the ages,
of life frittered down to be a prey
to the fripperies of vain ambages?
Gently rippling grass, decanted
in ageless night anew and, come morn,
revealed in splendor, grass enchanted
like childhood when, called to be reborn,
I stirred from bed at dawn and panted
the novena — from me this cant be torn!
(Translated by Justin Vitiello)

Fusce la tila

Ogne annu ca passa è ccomu se ète
na minata cchiú llesta a ll'u talaru
unca se vanza pete cata pete
la tila de u gnenzi bbusciardaru
ca jeu me suntu a mmie. E mme suntu paru
cose e ppersone: tutte le munete
ca le spenne lu gnenzi spennacciaru
cu sse scunne ca è gnenzi (a cci li crete).
E ogni state de cchiú lu sule mbruscia
sta pelle vecchia, e cchiú srusciuta pare
la tila, cunzumata finu a ll'uscia.
Fusce la tila e nnu sse po' ffermare.
ra rricchia e rricchia lu gnenzi me ruscia
ca nu lla cangi comu le sacare.
(Inedita)

Corre la tela — Ogni anno che passa è come se sia / una
trama più lesta al telaio / dove avanza piede dietro piede /
la tela del nulla bugiardo // che io sono a me stesso. E mi
sono del pari / cose e persone: tutte le monete / che il nulla
spendaccione / spende per nascondere che è nulla (a chi gli
crede). // E ogni estate di più il sole brucia / questa pelle
vecchia, e più lisa appare / la tela, consunta fino alla

cimosa. // Corre la tela e non si può fermare. / Tra orecchia
e orecchia il nulla mi romba / che non la si cambia come le
bisce.

(Traduzione dell'Autore)

The Web Ravels

Each year that passes is like the weave
spinning ever faster on the loom
where there presses without reprieve
the web for lies leaving no room
but for what I am and forfend
to be: things and beings, all the coins
that spendthrift nothingness spends
to hide from its faithful what it purloins.
And each summer the sun still ravages
this aged skin, and this subtle web
seems more consumed down to its selvage.
The web ravel, blunting every neb.
Between my ears, nullity's barrage
hisses that nothing can stem the ebb.
(Translated by Justin Vitiello)

JOSEPH TUSIANI

Joseph Tusiani (San Marco in Lamis, FG, 1924) was for many years professor of Italian Literature in several American universities. A multilingual and prolific writer of verse as well as prose, has published in English *Rind and All*: New York, Monastine, 1962; *The Fifth Season*, New York: Obolensky, 1964; *Gente mia and Other Poems*, Stone Park IL: Italian Cultural center, 1978; in Latin *Carmina latina*, edited by E. Bandiera, Fasano: Schena, 1994; in Italian the three volume autobiography *La parola difficile*, 1988; *La parola nuova*, 1991; *La parola antica*, 1991, Fasano: Schena. Very vast is his work as a translator of international repute: *The complete Poems of Michelangelo*; *Tasso's Jerusalem Delivered and Creation of the World*; *Boccaccio's Nymphs of Fiesole*; *The Age*

of Dante; Italian Poets of the Renaissance; From Marino to Marinetti; Leopardi's Canti; Dante's Lyric Poems, and Pulci's Morgante Maggiore.

Tusiani's dialect work consists of four volumes: *Làcreme e sciure* [Tears and Flowers], prefaced by T. Nardella: Foggia, Cappetta, 1955; **Tìreca tàreca**, edited by A. Motta, T. Nardella and C. Siani: San Marco in Lamis, Quaderni del Sud, 1978; *Bronx, America*: Manduria, Lacaita, 1991; *Annemale parlante* [Talking Animals]: San Marco in Lamis, Quaderni del Sud, 1994.

On the dialect production see : T. Nardella, preface to *Làcreme e sciure*; S. D'Amato, in *La parola del popolo*, Chicago, July 1978; L. Bonaffini, "La poesia dialettale di Joseph Tusiani", in *Joseph Tusiani: Poet Translator Humanist / An International Homage*; C. Siani, *Microletteratura*: San Marco

in *Lamis*, QS ed., 1994. Tusiani is also included in the anthology by P. Sorrenti, *La Puglia e i suoi poeti dialettali*: Bari, De Tullio, 1962 (anastatic reprint by Forni, Sala Bolognese, 1992).

The plurilinguistic character of Joseph Tusiani's literary activity, far from erasing or diminishing the use of dialect, seems instead to exalt the role it plays in the writer's complex psychodynamics. Formulating for Tusiani the binary function of four languages — dialect and Latin being committed to the expression of archetypal worlds, while Italian and English to the expression of composed and rationalized experiences —, it is possible to assign to the dialectal vehicle (specifically the dialect of the Gargano town of San Marco in Lamis) a marked connotation of appeal to memory

and retroactive compensation for the loss of the original culture, religiously and humanistically elevated, however, to a “lament” for lost worlds. In the general framework of the author’s poetics and thematics it is possible, moreover, to establish an internal link between the defensive function of the culture of the small homeland and exaltation of the “ethnic” values contained in the most significant collection of English poems, *Gente mia* and other poems (1978).

From this it can be inferred that for Tusiani saving a language means saving the memory of a community, in addition to his own psychological and artistic integrity, as a man who does not reject any of his previous acquisitions, or apparently antithetical to a more prestigious linguistic and expressive standard. The image that emerges is that of a

“neodialect” Tusiani, namely a writer who uses dialect both as an alternative keyboard for concurrent and stratified experiences and as witness to an existential estrangement redressed by now only by the myth of a vanished age: the town, the mountain, the convent, the roads, the ancient crafts, the minor and minimal figures of the ancestral “village” are the maternal counterpart of a life which decided to accept the challenge of a world radically different, the exact future of that past.

Criticism: there is a large bibliography on his multiform production. Besides L. Petracco Sovran’s monograph, *Joseph Tusiani poeta e traduttore* [Joseph Tusiani Poet and Translator], Perugia: *Sigla Tre*, 1984, two miscellaneous studies should be pointed out: *Omaggio a Joseph Tusiani*, edited by G.

Cipolla, in *La parola del popolo*, Chicago, 1979, and *Joseph Tusiani: Poet Translator Humanist / An International Homage*, edited by Paolo Giordano, West Lafayette IN: Bordighera Inc., 1994. Essays and articles on Tusiani can be also found in the following anthologies: *Italian Ethnics: Their Languages, Literature and Lives*, New York: AIHA, 1990; *From the Margin: Writings in Italian Americana*, edited by A. J. Tamburri, P. A. Giordano and F. L. Gardaphé, West Lafayette IN: Purdue UN, 1991; and *La letteratura dell'emigrazione*, edited by J.J. Marchand, Turin: Ed. Fondazione Agnelli, 1991.

Ce stà nu cante

Ce stà nu cante che m'unneja 'mpette
come nu mare che ce stennerica
sope na šcuma gghianca de merlette
e non fa cchiù penzà a tempesta antica,
e quistu cante iè lu 'ndijalette
de dda Muntagna (Ddì la bbenedica)
che mme dà pace e no mme dà recette,
me dà tremente ma m'è ssempe amica.
Inte 'sta bbella scjema de parole
ce scròzzene fulimmije frustere,
ce annetta cullu core ogni penzere.
Inte quest'acqua che addora de sole
facìteme annijà, come ce anneja
inte la luce l'ùtema mureja.
(da *Bronx, America*, 1991)

C'è un canto — C'è un canto che m'ondeggia nel petto /
come un mare che si distende / sopra una schiuma bianca
di merletto / e non fa più pensare a tempesta antica, / e
questo canto è il dialetto / di quella Montagna (Dio la
benedica) / che mi dà pace ma non mi dà requie, / mi dà
tormento ma mi è sempre amica. // In questa piena di
parole / si disperdono fuliggini straniere, / si netta col cuore

ogni pensiero. / Dentro quest'acqua che odora di sole /
fatemi annegare, come annega / dentro la luce l'ultima
ombra.

(Traduzione di Tommaso Nardella)

There Is a Song

There is a song that surges deep inside
and it's an ocean heaving to extend
over a spotless lacework of white tide
and brings thoughts of old storms to sudden end.
This song's the dialect spoken on the hillside
of that blessed Mountain, forever a godsend,
that gives me peace, yet leaves me unsatisfied,
that makes me suffer, but is still a friend.
Swept by this tide of words, no foreign,
no alien shadow ever will endure,
every thought is cleansed, the heart is pure.
Within this water scented by the sun,
let me be drowned, as the last black of night
is drowned within the flooding of firstlight.
(Translated by Luigi Bonaffini)

Lu refugge

Sciò sciò! Musce muscille! Sciò!
'Ndì 'ndò! 'Ndì 'ndò!
La campana de Sant' Antó!
None none! I' non stegne sbalijanne:
me stegne 'mbrijacanne
de quiddi sóne che senteva 'ntanne,
quanne teneva sett'anne,
fore lu Puzzeranne.
Scì e nno! Scì e nno! Cicche ci vò!
Cicche ciacche, cicche ciacche!
Petre Mola e Vacchevacche!
Nucenzie e Nespelone!
Tirolò e Trufelone!
None none! I' non stegne sbalijanne:
me stegne 'mbrijacanne
de lla mùseca cchiù ddocia
che non pozze sentì cchiù.
Tùppete-tu! Tùppete-tu!
Chi l'ha ffatta la loffa fetenta?
'Mpuzzenisce tutta la ggente...
Tùppete-tu! E cchi si' ttu!
Iuna duva e tre,

donna cavalle e re,

àdda menì Nuè...

Tùppete-tu! Chiove a deddù...

E va bbone! Mo mme ficche

inte la cchiesa de Sant'Antóne.

(da *Bronx, America*, 1991)

Il rifugio — Sciò sciò! Musce muscille! Sciò! / 'Ndì 'ndò!
'Ndì 'ndò! / La campana de Sant'Antó! / No no! Io non sto
farneticando: / mi sto ubriacando / di quei suoni che
ascoltavo allora, / quando avevo sette anni, / fuori
"Pozzogrande". / Scì e nno! Scì e nno! Cicche ci vò! /
Cicche ciacche, cicche ciacche! / Pietro Mola e
Vacchevacche! / Nucenzio e Nespolone! / Tirolo e
Trufelone! / No no! Io non sto farneticando: / mi sto
ubriacando / della musica più dolce / che non posso sentire
più. / Tùppete-tu! Tùppete-tu! / Chi l'ha fatta la loffa
fetente! / Impuzzisce tutta la gente... / Tùppete-tu! E chi sei
tu! / Uno due e tre, / donna cavallo e re, / deve venire
Noè... / Tùppete-tu! Piove a diluvio... / E va bene! Ora mi
rifugio / nella chiesa di Sant'Antonio.

(Traduzione di Tommaso Nardella)

The Shelter

Sciò sciò! Musce muscille! Sciò!

'Ndì 'ndò! 'Ndì 'ndò!

The bell of Saint Anthony!

No, no! I am not going crazy

I am just getting dazed

by the sound I heard then

when I was only seven,

outside Pozzogrande.

Scì e nno! Scì e nno! Cicche ci vò!

Cicche ciacche, cicche ciacche!

Pietro Mola e Vacchevacche!

Nucenzio e Nespelone!

Tirolò e Trufelone!

No no! I'm not going crazy

I am just getting dazed

by the sweetest of musics

I can't hear any more.

Tùppete-tu! Tùppete-tu!

Who let out that stinker!

It smells up everybody...

Tùppete-tu! And who are you!

One two three,

king knight queen
We're waiting for Noah...
Tùppete-tu! It's a downpour...
All right! Now I'll sneak
in Saint Anthony's church.
(Translated by Luigi Bonaffini)

Li tataranne

Non sacce chija sònne; sacce sule
che, iune de quisti iurne,
j'a ù a ffà pe' sempe cumpagnia
a ddi vicchiune de lla terra mia,
a quiddi tataranne che, na vota,
cullu mente appuiate allu bastone,
ce assettàvene fore
allu sole lijone,
e ffacevene sempe nu trascurse,
quiddu trascurse che mmo fanne ancora
cu ccerre e vente, cu rradice e rrame,
e culla prima ièreva ch'addora.
(da *Bronx, America*, 1991)

I nonni — Non so chi sono; so solo / che, uno di questi
giorni, / devo andare a far compagnia / a quei vecchioni
della terra mia, / a quei nonni che, una volta, / con il mento
poggiato sul bastone, / sedevano fuori / al solleone, / e
facevano sempre un discorso, / quel discorso che
continuano a fare / con alberi e vento, con radici e rami, / e
con la prima erba che odora.

(Traduzione di Tommaso Nardella)

Grandfathers

I don't know who I am; I only know
that one day very soon
I will keep those old timers from my land
forever company, all those grandfathers
who used to sit outside
in the August sun
chin leaning on a cane,
and endlessly repeated the same things,
the same old things they still repeat today
to trees and wind, to roots and branches,
and to the first fragrant grass of spring.
(Translated by Luigi Bonaffini)

Lu trajenere

Ce steva na vota nu trajenere
che, lente lente,
cullu sole e cullu vente
ce n'ascegnava
da Sante Marche a San Severe.
Passava pe' Stignane
e già senteva
n'addore de 'rane,
passava pe' Iancugghia
e già addurava
vine de Pughia.
Da Sante Marche a San Severe
ce n'ascegnava lu trajenere...
Ma non è cchiù allu vere.
Lu trajenere è quiste penzere,
e llù traîne
è llù destine:
iè llù destine de lla vita mia
che ffa sempe,
sempè la stessa via,
Sante Marche e San Severe...
Ammèn e cusissia!

(da Bronx, America, 1991)

Il carrettiere – C'era una volta un carrettiere / che, lento
lento, / con il sole e con il vento / se ne scendeva / da San
Marco a San Severo. / Passava per Stignano / e già sentiva
/ odore di grano, / passava per Jancuglia / e già odorava /
vino di Puglia. / Da San Marco a San Severo / se ne
scendeva il carrettiere... / Ma non è più vero. / Il carrettiere
è questo pensiero, / e il carretto / è il destino: / è il destino
della vita mia / che fa sempre, / sempre la stessa via, / San
Marco e San Severo.../ Amen e così sia!

(Traduzione di Tommaso Nardella)

The Carter

There was a carter once
who, very slow,
wind or sun,
would come down
from San Marco to San Severo.
He went through Stignano
and already smelled
the fragrant wheat,
he went through Jancuglia
and already smelled
the wine of Puglia.
From San Marco to San Severo,
the carter came.
But no longer.
The carter is this thought,
and the handcart
destiny:
Always, always follow
the same path
is my life's destiny.
San Marco and San Severo...
Amen, so shall it be!

(Translated by Luigi Bonaffini)

La léttèra ma' 'mpustata

Gargane mia, te scrive questa lettera
pe' ffàrete capì che, dallu iurne
che sso' partute, me vù sempe 'nzonne
come vè 'nzonne allu zite la zita,
come vè 'nzonne allu figghie la mamma.
Me sònne che mme trove, come pprima,
ammeze la Padula e, sse mme cride,
te diche pure che sente sunà
la campana 'la Cchiesia de Sant' Antóne
e, quanne annòsele dda voce santa,
che pozze fà? tegne nu nùdeche 'ncanna
che ssule chi è emigrante pò capì.
Te scrive sempe, ma tutte li lettere
non te li 'mposte, ché pésene assà,
e llu pustere ce mettesse a rrire
se lli dicesse che vogghie mannà
na lettera lu iurne a nna Muntagna.
L'ha' cumpatì: iè mmerecane nate
e non capisce che ssi' mmegghie tu
de tutte quiddi ch'anne studijate.
Dunqua, Gargane mie, Gargane belle,
te scrive questa lettera pe' ddicete

che, doppe quarant'anne de 'sta Mereca,
na cosa sola è certa: quasa quasa
me pare che non zo' manche partute
e cche ddu bastemente l'ej sunnate

La lettera mai imbucata — Gargano mio, ti scrivo questa lettera / per farti comprendere che, dal giorno / in cui son partito, mi vieni sempre in sogno / come viene in sogno al fidanzato la fidanzata, / come viene in sogno al figlio la mamma. / Sogno di trovarmi, come prima, / in mezzo alla "Palude" e, se mi credi, / ti dico pure che sento suonare / la campana della chiesa di Sant'Antonio / e, quando ascolto quella voce santa, / che posso fare! mi viene un groppo alla gola / che solo chi è emigrante può comprendere. / Ti scrivo sempre, ma tutte le lettere / non te le imbuco, ché pesano assai, / e il postino si metterebbe a ridere / se gli dicessi che desidero mandare / una lettera al giorno ad una Montagna. / Lo devi compatire: è americano nato / e non comprende che sei migliore tu / di tutti quelli che hanno studiato. / Dunque, Gargano mio, Gargano bello, / ti scrivo questa lettera per dirti / che, dopo quarant'anni d'America, / una cosa sola è certa: quasi quasi / mi sembra che non sono nemmeno partito / e che quel bastimento l'ho sognato

The Letter Never Sent

Dear Gargano, I write this letter to you
to make you see that, from the day I left,
you never fail to come into my dreams,
as the beloved comes to a lover's dream,
and as a mother comes to a son's dreams.
I dream I'm there — down in the Marsh again —
as long ago, and if you can believe me,
I'll also tell you that I hear the toll
of the bell of St. Anthony,
and when I listen to that sacred voice,
what can I do? an emigrant alone
can know the lump that rises in my throat.
I always write letters to you, but then
don't mail them all because they weigh too much,
and the mailman would have a roaring laugh
if I ever said I want to send
a letter to a Mountain every day.
You have to sympathize: he's an American,
and doesn't understand that you are better
than all the people who have been to school.
So, my Gargano, my beautiful Gargano,
I'm writing you this letter so you'll know

that, after forty years of this America,
one thing alone is definite: it seems
almost as if I had never made that trip,
and that the ship sailed only in my dreams

o viste inte li libbra de lla scola.
 Ma po' ce penze e m'accorge che facce
 peccate se tte diche na buscìa:
 sope ddu bastemente ce so' state,
 inte sta terra so pure sbarcate,
 e tre quarte de vita so ppassate.
 In ogni lettera che tt'eje scritte
 e ppo' non eje 'mpustate, quanta vote
 t'eje ditte 'ncumpedenza come passe
 inte sta terra la iurnata mia.
 Embè, mo tte lu diche n'ata vota.
 Fatije come ttutte quante l'ati,
 ma l'ati ce repòsene cuntente;
 invece i' me facce sti dumanne:
 "Pecché so nnate? pecché so partute?
 pecché non zo' rrumaste pure i'
 sope ddu bbelle Monte risciuurute?"
 Gargane mia, iàvete che durmì!
 Penze a ddi stelle fute fute e bbelle
 e tutte quante me pàrene fatte
 a fforma de nu bastemente chijne
 de povere emigrante come me...

Lu vi', lu vi', che mmo me vè lu chiante
comme ddu iurne allu pórte de Nàpele?

E allora è megghie che me ferme qua...

/ o visto dentro i libri della scuola. / Ma poi ci penso e mi
accorgo che faccio / peccato se ti dico una bugia: / su quel
bastimento ci sono stato, / su questa terra sono anche
sbarcato, / e tre quarti di vita sono passati. / In ogni lettera
che ti ho scritto / e poi non ho imbucato, quante volte / ti
ho detto in confidenza come trascorro / in questa terra la
giornata mia. / Embé, ora te lo dico un'altra volta. / Lavoro
come tutti quanti gli altri, / ma gli altri si riposano contenti;
/ invece io mi faccio queste domande: / "Perché sono nato?
perché sono partito? / perché non sono rimasto anch'io /
sopra quel bel Monte rifiorito?" / Gargano mio, altro che
dormire! / Penso a quelle stelle folte folte e belle / e tutte
quante mi sembrano fatte / a forma di un bastimento pieno
/ di poveri emigranti come me... / Lo vedi, lo vedi, che ora
mi viene il pianto / come quel giorno nel porto di Napoli? /
E allora è meglio che mi fermi qui...

or in the books I loved to read in school.
But then I reconsider, and realize
it would be a sin for me to tell you a lie:
indeed, I did sail once upon that ship,
and I did come ashore upon this land,
and now three quarters of my life are gone.
In every letter that I wrote to you
and never mailed, how many times it was
in confidence I told you how I spend
the hours of my day upon this shore.
Well then, I'll tell you what I said once more.
I do my work like everybody else,
but other people go to sleep content;
instead, I ask myself these selfsame questions:
"Why was I born? why did I ever leave?
why didn't I stay behind with all the others
on that beautiful Mountain in full bloom?"
My dear Gargano, there is no sleep for me.
I think about your teeming, glorious stars,
and to my eyes they all appear to be
in the shape of an ocean liner filled
with a throng of poor emigrants like me...

You see, you see, now I can feel the tears,
as on the day I stood in Naples' harbor.
It might be better if I stopped right here...

Non mi prolunghe... 'Ntante tu ssalùteme
 tutte li strate 'lu paiese mia,
 pure l'appartamente ricche e bbelle
 che ci hanne frabbecate tutte quante,
 e – requijemmaterna – ddi cappelle,
 ah, li cappelle de llu Campesante
 ddova dda santa de Mamma Lucia
 stà sutterrata cu la crona 'mmane...
 Cara Muntagna mia, sti duje uasce,
 iune è ppe' gghiessa, l'atu jè ppe' tte.
 Cu ttant'affette e amore,
 Tusijane.

(da *Bronx, America*, 1991)

/ Non mi prolungo... Intanto tu salutami / tutte le strade
 del paese mio, / anche gli appartamenti ricchi e belli / che si
 sono costruiti tutti quanti, / e - requiem aeternam – alle
 cappelle, / ah, alle cappelle del camposanto / dove quella
 santa di Mamma Lucia / sta sepolta con la corona in
 mano... / Cara Montagna mia, questi due baci, / uno è per
 lei, l'altro è per te. / Con tanto affetto e amore, Tusiani.

(Traduzione di Tommaso Nardella)

I won't go on...But you must say hello
to all the streets and alleys of my town,
even the rich and beautiful apartments
that everybody has erected there,
and — *requiem aeternam* — to the chapels too,
ah, the chapels in the cemetery
where my devout Mamma Lucia is buried
with her hands still closed upon the rosary...
Of these two kisses, my dear Mountain, one
is meant for her, the other one for you.
With all my everlasting love,
Tusiani.
(Translated by Luigi Bonaffini)

L'acridde 'mmita la cecaria allu festival de San Remo

Cara cecaria mia,
cumpagna de fatija,
a San Reme, vu' o non vvu',
stu febrare, ha' d'a jì tu.
Se í jésse alla Leguria
me menesse la ciamoria;
ddà ce stanne tante sciure
e a mme vè la malatia
che mmo chiamene allergia;
ma pecché non ce va' tu?
Tì na voce bbella e calla,
megghia assa' de Lucie Dalla.
Pavarotte è mmanche fregna
'nnante tte, che ssi' cchiù ddegna!
Se a San Reme te presinte,
tu lli vince a ttutte quante:
cunnu poche de fertuna
te fa' cente melijune:
cunnu dische sí ssecura
che de fame cchiù no mmure.
'Ntinne a mme, cumpagna bbona,
e, te sùppleche, arraggiona:

cante e ccante e cche te truve?

Quacchedune te recogghie

morta secca inte li ruve.

Vè lu verne e non tì nente:

non ce campa culle vente.

Il grillo invita la cicala al festival di San Remo – Cara cicala mia, / compagna di fatica, / a San Remo, vuoi o non vuoi, / a febbraio, devi andare anche tu. / Se io andassi in Liguria / mi verrebbe il raffreddore; / lì ci stanno tanti fiori / e a me viene la malattia / che ora chiamano allergia; / ma perché non ci vai tu? / Tieni una voce chiara e calda, / meglio assai di Lucio Dalla. / Pavarotti è proprio niente / rispetto a te che sei più degna! / Se a San Remo ti presenti, / tu li superi tutti quanti: / con un poco di fortuna /ti fai cento milioni: / con un disco sei sicura / che di fame più non muori. / Ascolta me, compagna cara, / e, ti supplico, ragiona: / canti e canti e che ti trovi? / Qualcuno ti raccoglie / morta stecchita tra i rovi. / Arriva l'inverno e non possiedi niente: / non si campa col vento.

The Cricket Invites the Cicada to the San Remo Festival

My dear cicada,
my good friend and workmate,
whether you want to or not, you have to go
this February next down to San Remo.
If I myself went to Liguria
I would get a cold for sure;
that place is full of flowers,
and I would get the malady
they now call allergy;
but why not go yourself?
Your voice is warm, melodious
better than Lucio Dalla's.
Pavarotti is a bleater
compared to you, and your song is sweeter!
If you go to the San Remo festival
you're sure to vanquish one and all:
a little luck is what it'll take,
and then a hundred million is at stake:
with an L.P. you no longer
need to fear the pangs of hunger.
Take my advice, my good friend,
and I beg you, condescend:

you always sing, but to what end?
So that someone can discover
your dead carcass mid the clover?
Winter comes, and what do you own?:
you can't live on wind alone.

Se ttu ffa' com'i' te diche,
 alla faccia 'li furmiche:
 vanne e vvènne chiene e cchiane
 pe' nnu mùcceche de pane.
 Inte n'ora, cchiù dde lore,
 te uadagne nu trasore:
 magne e vvive tutte l'anne,
 e cce freca chi ce danna!

(da *Annemale parlante*, 1994)

/ Se tu fai com'io ti suggerisco, / alla faccia delle
 formiche: / vanno e vengono cariche e lente / per un
 boccone di pane. / In un'ora, più di loro, / tu guadagni un
 tesoro: / mangi e bevi per tutto l'anno, / e si danni chi si
 affanna!

(Traduzione di Tommaso Nardella)

If you follow my advice,
ants will have to think twice:
heavy and slow they plod and tread
for a tiny crumb of bread.
You in an hour fill their measure,
and may win an entire treasure:
eat and drink the whole year,
and to hell with cares and fear.
(Translated by Luigi Bonaffini)

LINO ANGIULI

Lino Angiuli (Valenzano, Bari, 1946) lives and works in Monopoli, where he directs a Center for Cultural Services for the Region Apulia.

He has published in Italian: *Liriche*, Cosenza: Pellegrini, 1967; *La parola l'ulivo* [The Word the Olive Tree], Manduria: Lacaita, 1975; *Campi d'alopecia* [Alopecia Fields], ib. 1979; *Amar clus*, Foggia: Bastogi, 1984; *Di ventotto ce n'è uno*, Fasano: Schena, 1991. In dialect: *Iune la lune* [One the Moon], Fasano: Schena, 1979; *U àrune d l Crestiane* [The Tree of the Christians], in *Il belpaese*, 4, 1989. For Schena Publishing he edits, with Giovanni Custodero, the poetry series *Aggetti*; with Giovanni Dotoli and Raffaele Nigro the section Meridioni of the Biblioteca

della Ricerca.

He contributes cultural reports to RAI, and writes for periodicals and journals.

Criticism: F. Rossi, in *La Gazzetta del Mezzogiorno*, October 27, 1979; G. Zagarrìo, *Febbre, furore e fiele*, Milan: Mursia, 1983. On his work have written among others, G. Manacorda, L. Mancino, L. Fontanella, S. D'Amaro, G. Spagnoletti, M. Dell'Aquila, R. Nigro, R. Di Biasio, E. Catalano.

Lino Angiuli pointedly represents, after the generations that had lived for a long time in a still deeply rural Mezzogiorno, a coherent search for mediation between places and idioms, distributed in a continuum that goes from North to South, from the center to the fringes, from the present to the past. Before opting for dialect, Angiuli was one of the most significant

poets in the region. Since his revealing *La parola, l'ulivo*, he has brought to light the historical dimension of an exploited and subaltern Mezzogiorno. Angiuli, who comes from a line of farmers, has assimilated the heritage of tradition, extracting from it a culture of protest and emancipation, discovering that the new South could be born autonomously from its own roots, avoiding the logic of a mere mimetic reproduction of imposed models. In the ever pressing rhythm of alienation, he has been able to define an identity without compromises, and a language capable of generating semantic chains that highlight the collision between two cultures and the necessity to integrate them in a conscious relationship.

This continuous tension has engendered, more directly in dialect, a playful and

corrosive poetic language, frequently engaged in a dialogue with memory and the unconscious, with the city and the village, with history and current events. The reality that traverses Angiuli displays forms that are unfamiliar and yet in a strange way already seen, already presaged. Nostalgia, melancholy, regrets, are abolished: under the author's knowing eye there unfolds a mottled and chaotic landscape, stony and iridescent. Dialect becomes the conveyor of dreams, of oneiric fragments, of flashes of the Other and the Elsewhere. In the shipwreck of every certainty and every memory the descent to hell seems the only way out: "Descend the stairs to the end etc..."

Nan fesse a rozze nan se strusce m_
 l'ucchie 'nziste magabbonde du sunne.
 Tremende jind'i 'ndreme p'acciaffé i pepunne.
 Se veste de murescéne prucine zambene.
 A chevadde u gride bienghe de nu trene
 'nghiene rote i totte sop'u litte
 sope i sottte figh' azzurre vene.
 Pecchesse nan u pute m_ f_ fesse
 u spirde verde rampechende du sunne
 pure ce u pigghie cu pete a stambete
 com'a nu iatte se volde 'ndrete
 i sobete s'ammene i mene arrete.
 Se mudruscesce jind'o scesceminde
 moscete de peloscene senghe
 de semende i vinde
 te sfolge a chiene a chiene totte i sinze.
 Tu iapre i porte i mittete all'anude
 acche__e quenne mene t'u sta pinze
 prime che l'oldem_ stedde se stute
 chi pite all'arie i senz_ tuzzé
 costecoste cettetitte
 te ven'acchié.

(da "Porta Nuova", n.25, dicembre 1990)

Non fa la ruggine non si consuma mai / l'occhio svelto
vagabondo del sogno. / Guarda nelle budella per acciuffare
i fantasmi. / Si veste da ombra pulcino zanzara. / A cavallo
al grido bianco di un treno / sale ruote e tutto sopra il letto /
sopra e sotto finché l'azzurro viene. // Per questo non lo
puoi mai fare fesso / lo spirito verde rampicante del sogno /
pure se lo prendi col piede a calci / come un gatto si volta
indietro / e subito appresta le mani di nuovo. / Si rivoltola
dentro il caos / sporco di muffa sangue / di semenza e
vento / ti stura piano piano tutti i sensi. // Tu apri le porte
e mettiti nudo / così quando meno te lo stai pensando /
prima che l'ultima stella si spenga / coi piedi all'aria e senza
bussare / costacosta zitto zitto / ti viene a trovare.

(Traduzione dell'Autore)

It doesn't rust it never wears away,
the quick vagabond eye of dream.
Inside the entrails to catch ghosts it peers.
It masks as chick mosquito shade.
Astride a train's white scream
it climbs on wheels and all upon the bed
over and under until the sky clears.
That's why you can never trick it,
the scrambling, green spirit of dream
even if you begin to kick it
like a cat it quickly spins around
and instantly puts its hands behind.
It rolls over inside chaos
filthy with mold and blood
with seeds and wind
it slowly uncorks your senses.
Open the doors and get undressed
so that when you least expect it
before the final star dies out
feet in the air and without knocking
hugging the wall very quiet
it will come to visit you.

(Translated by Luigi Bonaffini)

Fore. Nu mecidde de crestiene, viete a lore.
U scerrocche pestrighie 'minz'i ligghie.
Fesce sfesce i sfusce
(cià d_ f_, nan'u pigghie!).
D_ 'minze i remagghie
agguandete a nu ferfelete gnure
se chele nu schezzeridde de pagghie
(cià peiure, avesse iesse chesse a iure!)
Po' alla 'nzegherdune fesce notte
a lune v_ chiengenue, vole attene.
Puff: scriescene i crestiene
totte totte jind'e n_ botte
(n'asckuore abbotte a venne de sott!).
'Nderre se scazzechesce n_ scarrasse
d_ jinde iesse a ferve n_ masse
de pene d_ trumbé dolcedolce chi mene.
Trumbenne trumbenne pere
d'attendé do menne.
D_ sott'i mene a chiene a chiene
cresce n_ stacche de crestiene.
"Mbasteme" discene l'ucchie i le chepidde
(cià cazze sepe f_ nu scazzeridde!).

In campagna. Un macello di cristiani, beati loro. / Lo scirocco pasticcia fra gli ulivi. / Fa disfa e sfugge / (Che devi fare / non lo pigli!). // Da in mezzo in mezzo alle ramaglie / attaccato a un ferro- filato nero / si cala uno scazzarello [folletto] di paglia / (che paura, doveva essere questa la iura [animale dei sogni]!). // Poi all'improvviso fa notte / la luna va piangendo, vuole il padre. / Puff: svaniscono i cristiani / tutti tutti in una botta / (un bruciore gonfia alla parte di sotto!). // In terra si solleva una fessura / da dentro esce a fermentare una massa / di pane da lavorare dolcedolce con le mani. / Lavorando lavorando pare / di palpare due seni. / Da sotto le mani piano piano / cresce una cavalla di cristiana. / "Impastami" dicono gli occhi e i capelli / (che cazzo sa combinare uno scazzarello!). //

The countryside. A swarm of people, lucky for them.
The scirocco romps among the olive trees.
it eases up unleashes it flees
(what can you do, you'll never catch it!)
From the brier
a straw goblin drops through the air
stuck to black barbed wire
(what a fright, what if it's the bugbear!)
Then suddenly it's nightfall
the moon rises in tears, it's her father she wants.
Puff: the people vanish one and all
all of them all at once
(a burning swells the underbelly!).
A crevice opens in the ground
and lets out a mass of rising dough
to be kneaded gently by hand.
Kneading it seems as though
I were palpating breasts.
From beneath the fingers a mare
of a woman starts slowly to grow.
"Knead me" say her eyes and her hair
(what a devilish imp can prepare!)

'Mbaste i trombe trombe i 'mbaste
sbotte u lanzule i abbotte
i m_ m'evaste.

Ah, sé. U pene é state fatte
(i pure cinghe se' chile de paste!).

(da "Porta Nuova", n.25, dicembre 1990)

Impasta e lavora lavora e impasta / sgonfia il lenzuolo e
rigonfia / e mai mi basta. / Ah, sì. Il pane è stato fatto / (e
pure cinque sei chili di pasta!).

(Traduzione dell'Autore)

(cont.d)

Knead and work work and knead
deflate and inflate the spread
but it's never enough.
Oh, yes! I've finished the bread
(and ten twelve pounds of pasta to boot!).
(Translated by Luigi Bonaffini)

Sop' i pendeme nu ponte.

Acchie d_ nande nu levende. Cià fetende!

'Nzicche i 'nzacche se sckaffe jind' i mutende
p' abbutté malenghe i vendre.

Me mette à vevere a nu rezzule

gioste p' addefrescké u lanzule

po' allende i vrazze pe nghiené 'ngile.

M_ na' succete propie nodde

(non agghie forse deggerite a cepodde!).

Auende auende, apprisse o levende

st_ vene figghieme a menarme n_ spende

nu gaggéne me fesce cu l'ucchie

se movene d_ 'nderre iemme i scenocchie

(n' alde volde egghia mangé fenocchie!).

U sole d_ 'ngile se fesce n_ resete

(rerime 'nzime c'ama passé a nuttete!).

(da "Porta Nuova", n.25, dicembre 1990)

Sugli scogli un ponte. / Trovo davanti un levante. Che
fetente! / In un batter d'occhio si schiaffa dentro le mutande
/ per gonfiare borse e ventre. / Mi metto a bere a un orciolo
/ giusto per rinfrescare il lenzuolo / e allento le braccia per
salire in cielo. / Ma non succede proprio nulla. / (non ho

forse digerito la cipolla!). // Attenzione, appresso al levante / sta venendo mio figlio a menarmi una spinta / un gabbiano mi fa con l'occhio / si muovono da terra gambe e ginocchi / (un'altra volta devo mangiare finocchi) // Il sole dal cielo si fa una risata / (ridiamo insieme ch  dobbiamo passare la nottata!).

(Traduzione dell'Autore)

Over the rocks a bridgespan.
I run into an easterly wind. What a thug!
It slips inside my shorts like a shot
and swells up bags and pot.
I start to drink from a jug
just to freshen the sheet
and relax my arms to rise to the heavens.
But nothing at all happens
(maybe I didn't digest the onions!)
After the easterly, careful,
here comes my son to shove me around
a bird gives me the eye, a seagull,
legs and knees leave the ground
(next time I'll eat fennel)
The sun laughs down from its height
(we laugh together to get through the night!)
(Translated by Luigi Bonaffini)

Novele novele novele i novele.

D'acque negghie neve i grenele.

U cile ié nu mire che se 'ntrovele.

Sotte se stone a sfraghené i monde
acquenne d_ iune sponde nu discete
che tene 'mbonde n'ucchie a tra ponde
(m_ tu treminde accome me tremende!).

St_ pure u mere, sine, m_ ié rosse
i nan é propie d'acque, ié de iossere
(parene assute tennetenne d'i fossere!).

M'auandene i m'accarrene d_ nende
tende capere de murte de sende
segnure i menzegnure chi dinde totte rotte.

Ammerescene, ammenazzene brotte i novele
n'engele fesce a mazzete cu nu diavele
scidde furcine spete tronere i lembe
(na' m'arrecorde ce so morte o chembe!).

Nuvole nuvole nuvole e nuvole. / D'acqua nebbia neve e
grandine. / Il cielo è un vino che s'intorbida. / Sotto si
stanno a frantumare i monti / quando da una spunta un
dito / che tiene in punta un occhio a tre punte / (ma tu
guarda come mi guarda!). // Sta pure il mare, sì, ma è rosso

/ e non è proprio d'acqua, è di ossa / (sembrano usciti allora
allora dalle fosse!). // Mi prendono e m'investono davanti /
tante teste di morti di santi / signori e monsignori coi denti
tutti rotti. / Amareggiano, minacciano di brutto le nuvole /
un angelo fa a mazzate con un diavolo / ali forcine spade
tuoni e lampi / (non mi ricordo se son morto o campo!). //

Clouds clouds clouds and clouds.
Rain fog hail and snow.
A wine that gets cloudy is the sky.
The mountains are coming apart down below
when from one of them a finger slips
with a three-pointed eye on its tip
(just look how it looks me in the eye!)
The sea is there too, but has no reddish tones
and it's not water either, it's all bones
(they seem to have just left their gravestones!)
A throng of heads of dead men and of saints
overtake me and stand before my feet
big shots and monsignors with broken teeth.
The clouds are menacing, bedeviled,
an angel slugs it out with the devil
wings pitchforks swords thunder and lightning
(I don't remember if I'm dead or living!)

Me stoche a sende loffe, loffe assé
 me dole l'eneme i sanguine,
 sine m'aggire forte a chepe.

Sop'a n_ crepe sta vene nu Re
 n'ucchie ié bune l'alde de vitre
 (me vole dé n_ mene o accidere?).

Sckatte u terremote a u centre du core
 (u mere spende addevene sudore!).

(da "Porta Nuova", n.25, dicembre 1990)

Mi sto sentendo abbattuto assai / mi duole l'anima le
 gengive, / sì mi gira forte la testa. / Sopra una capra sta
 venendo un Re / un occhio è buono l'altro di vetro / (mi
 vuole dare una mano o uccidere? // Scoppia il terremoto al
 centro del cuore / (il mare balza diventa sudore!).

(Traduzione dell'Autore)

I'm feeling very, very glum
my soul hurts,so do my gums,
I feel dizzy, my head hums.
Here comes a king riding a goat
one eye is sound the other glass
(does he want to help me or kill me?)
An earthquake rages inside my heart
(the sea lunges and turns to sweat!)
(Translation by Luigi Bonaffini)

Scinne i schele fonne a fonne
 jind'u sprefunne d'u sunne
 ch_ 'nge st_ nu sorte de pozze
 chjine de fervecchie chetene i catenazze
 iarve anemele chiente d'ogni razze
 gnomere i gnomeridde a mozze a mozze
 i nu bastemende sene de perole
 bone pe pegghié u mere
 o mechere u vule.

(da "Porta Nuova", n.25, dicembre 1990)

Scendi le scale fondo a fondo / dentro il burronc del
 sogno / che ci sta una sorta di pozzo / pieno di ferrivecchi
 catene e catenacci / alberi animali piante di ogni razza /
 gomitoli e gomitolini all'ingrosso / e un bastimento intero di
 parole / buone per prendere il mare / o magari il volo.

(Traduzione dell'Autore)

Go down to the end of the staircase
into the abyss of dream
where you'll find a sort of well
full of chains, padlocks, scrap metal
trees animals all kinds of plants
wholesale yarns large and small
and a shipful of words
good to catch the sea
or flight maybe.

(Translated by Luigi Bonaffini)

FRANCESCO GRANATIERO

Francesco Granatiero (Mattinata, Foggia, 1949) lives and works in Turin as a laboratory physician.

After a few volumes in Italian he published: *A ll'acchjtte* [Sheltered from the Wind], Turin, 1976; *U iréne* (The Wheat), pref. by G. Tesio, Rome: Dell'Arco, 1983; *La préte de Bbacucche* [Bacucco's Stone], intr. by G. Tesio, Mondovì: "Ij babi cheucc", 1986; *Énece* (Nesting Egg), pref. by P. Gibellini, Udine: Campanotto, 1994; *Iréve* [Abyss], Monte S. Angelo: Comunità Montana del Gargano, 1995.

He has sharpened his expressive instruments working on a *Grammar of the Mattinata Dialect* (Foggia, 1987) and a *Dictionary of the dialect of Mattinata-Monte S.*

Angelo (Monte S. Angelo, Centro Studi Garganici, 1992). He has edited the series *Incontri* for the publisher Boetti.

For Granatiero, unlike Angiuli, there has been a radical conversion to dialect from the initial Italian writings. The main trait of the poet from Mattinata (Foggia) consists, in fact, in a more piercing need to return to his mother tongue, to delve deeply into the humus that nourished his childhood and his culture. This is also due, perhaps, to the fact that the author emigrated to Turin and feels the sorrow for his lost land more keenly. His becomes therefore a search for harmony, for psychological and existential well-being, in order to resist the violence of a levelling reality.

Delving into his ancient universe, Granatiero explores every nook, place, gesture, object. It's the ancient universe of

the southern peasants, of their seasonal work, of their unslaked thirst for freedom and happiness. Granatiero evokes and contemplates, but also empathizes and condemns, understands and gets angry. Lyricism and social participation are the two sides of this poetry.

As an exponent of the last generation of dialect poets in Apulia, Granatiero summarizes the encounter of two types of discourse that intersect with increasing awareness at the terminus of this kind of artistic expression. On the one hand, the valorization of the least conscious details, of the deepest sensations; on the other, the desire to "narrate," in poetry, a part of history, by this means recovering communal memory.

Criticism: T. Bolelli, *La Domenica del Corriere*, July 21, 1984; P. Gibellini, *Diverse*

Lingue, 3, 1987; G. Tesio, *Lunario nuovo*, 45, 1987; S. D'Amato, *Diverse Lingue*, 6, 1989; F. Brevini, *Le parole perdute*, Turin: Einaudi, 1990; L. Angiuli, *La Gazzetta del Mezzogiorno*, November 19, 1991; D. Bisutti, *Il Belli*, 4, 1992; C. Siani, *L'Indice*, 4, April 1995.

Dajindre

Na tèrra jarse, sòule,
sènza fatije o paròule,
tutte iraménghie e ššúegghie,
ije me la pòrte all'úegghie.
E nnòune, affunne affunne,
dajindre ije me la pòrte,
cume fòsse lu munne,
cume fòsse la mòrte.
Na tèrre tutte préte,
citte, kujéte e ssòule,
ije me la pòrte mbiette
cume fòsse lu sòule.
(Da Énece, 1994)

Dentro — Una terra arsa, sola, / senza fatica o parola, /
tutta gramigna e loglio, / io me la porto addosso come otre
d'olio. // E no, profondamente, / dentro io me la porto, /
come fosse il mondo, / come fosse la morte. // Una terra
tutta pietre, / zitta, quieta e sola, / io me la porto in petto /
come fosse il sole.

(Traduzione dell'Autore)

Deep Inside

A dried up land, a land abandoned
untilled, without words
all dog tooth and darnel
a goatskin heavy with oil
I carry on my back.

But very, very deep
inside of me I carry it
as if it were the world
as if it were death.

All rocks is this land
silent, peaceful and alone
I carry it in my breast
as if it were the sun.

(Translated by Joseph Perricone)

Cafúerchie irótte iréve

Ije che véche truuènne
cafúerchie irótte iréve
affunne ped ascénne
a stuté quéssa fréve
e nd'u mmucòure schéve
p'i mméne, pe la pénne,
cchéd èje che véche acchiènne
au funne de ssa chéve?
Pót'èsse ca na fòsse
cravótte, nd'i famurre
la tèrre, scurde e mbósse,
opure n'atu sòule
ije sciòppe, n'at'azzurre
e a lla mòrte paròule.
(da *Énece*, 1994)

Tane grotte voragini — Io che vado cercando / tane grotte
voragini / profonde per scendere / a spegnere questa febbre
// e nell'humus scavo / con le mani, con la penna, / che
cosa vado cercando / al fondo di questa cava? // Può essere
che una fossa / scavi, nelle viscere / della terra, umida e
scura, // oppure un altro sole / scippo, un altro azzurro / e
alla morte parole.

(Traduzione dell'Autore)

Lairs caverns chasms

I who look for
caverns lairs
chasms to explore
and slake this fever
dig in the soil
with my hands, with the pen
what am I looking for
at the bottom of this den?
It may be I'll unearth
a damp dark basin
in the entrails of the earth
or maybe I'll snatch
another blue, another sun,
and words from death.
(Translated by Luigi Bonaffini)

Paròule cìerche, singhe

Paròule cìerche, singhe,
mìerche d'u tiembe,
che mbíette púerte e mmòcche
cume la crépe l'òcche
a lli rrécchie,
scurdète, arratechéte,
cungrejète pe ll'arte
e lla fatije ch'accite,
andiche andiche (pòuse,
fèzze, pòleve, lénga
frašète?) chi l'appure
accume acchiète, néte
andecòreje, mòrte
e nne mmòrte, dajindre
nu sòrte munuzzéle
— muste de la memòreje.
(da Énece, 1994)

Parole cerchi, segni — Parole cerchi, segni, / marchii del tempo, / che in petto porti e in bocca / come la capra le incisure / alle orecchie, // scordate, radicate, / concreate con l'arte / e la fatica che sposa, / antichissime (posa, / feccia, polvere, lingua / abortita?) chissà / come ritrovate,

rinate / remote, morte / e non morte, dentro / un grande
mondezzaio / – mosto della memoria.

(Traduzione dell'Autore)

Words Circles, Signs

Words circles signs
branded by time you carry
in your breast and on your lips
marks on the goat's ears,
forgotten, rooted
reborn with art
and very hard, tiring work
very ancient (sediments, dregs, dust, language
aborted?) perhaps
found again, born anew
remote, dead
not dead, inside
a great garbage heap
— must of memory.
(Translated by Joseph Perricone)

Épe ciòtele ajénghe
còleme de nu mméle
ch'a lla lénghe ne mméle
nu suche de iraménghe.
Taràndeles me tèsse
nu sòrte pappelònne
p'i tràndeles òue me sònne
de quédde ch'av'a jésse.
(da *Énece*, 1994)

Ape — Ape celle riempio / colme di un miele / che alla
lingua non vale / un succo di gramigna. // Ragno mi tesso
/ un'ampia ragnatela / per l'altalena dove sogno / di quel
che sarei dovuto essere.

(Traduzione dell'Autore)

Bees

Like the honey bee, bowls to the brim
I fill with honey
but to the palate
it tastes worst than juice of bitter weeds.
Like the spider I weave
a large web
for my swing where I dream
what I should have been.
(Translated by Joseph Perricone)

Paròule énece

Paròule stíerche lòute
fanghe fumíere fèrevene
nfluquète nd'i famurre
de nu munne sfunnéte.

Paròule andiche vóttene
scurdéte, scangeddéte,
refutéte: paròule ammutaléte
mummulušéte.

Ije crépe sèrpe rúespe
vucíedde vèsteje vòlepa
sularine, paròule vècchie
pòrche nzine, ije veddiche
pile pénne scúerzele,
paròule spòrche.

Paròule tèrre, paròule
jasteméte, ch'acque
nne sciacque, úegghie nn'ammòdde
mbicche ndulucisce,
paròule chiéje, premeture,
paròule fatije de feggianne,
paròule affunne, còreje
còre carne, cereviedde

stuté, mangéte,
murtefechéte.

Parole nidiandolo — Parole immondizia fango / limo
letame fermentano / infocate nelle viscere / di un mondo
inabissato. // Parole antiche urgono / dimenticate,
cancellate, / rimosse: parole umiliate / mormorate. // Io
capra serpe rospo / uccello bestia volpe / solitaria, parole
vecchie / porto in grembo, io ombelico / pelo piume pelle di
muta, / parole sporche. // Parole terra, parole /
bestemmate, che acqua / non sciacqua, olio non ammolta /
né addolcisce, / parole piaga, guidaleschi, / parole fatica di
gravidanza, / parole profonde, cuoio / cuore carne, cervello
/ spento, mangiato, / mortificato. //

Nesting Egg Words

Trash-words mud
mire manure ferment
scorching in the bowels
of a sunken world.

Ancient words push,
forgotten, erased
rejected: words spurned,
murmured.

I goat snake toad
bird beast lone
fox, ancient words
I carry inside, I belly-button
hair feathers molted skin,
dirty words.

Earth-words, cursed
words that water
doesn't rinse, oil doesn't soften
or sweeten,
sore-words, ulcers,
labor-pain-words,
deep words, leather,
heart flesh,

spent brain, eaten,
mortified.

Paròule de múerte,
ràteche de murtèdde,
de trigne, de tume.
Paròule, avanzatòure
de stigghie uarnemiende,
funurighie d'úegghie de lume,
mòreja d'úegghie,
mammazze, renazze, rumasugghie
de memòreja quagghiète,
sculatòure de muste,
raretòure, scòrze (d'óve,
de fróttère, d'àreuele),
scademènde, lajanèdde, secature,
scapatòure de súenne,
scurpicce d'àneme,
speculature, restucciume,
šcundatòure...
Paròule énece
me chiàmene sòule.
Ate munne, ate sòule,
ate cande de jadde
ajénghe l'óve

de la puisije.

Parole di morti, / radici di mirto, / di pruno, di timo. //
Parole, avanzi / di attrezzi finimenti, / fondiglio d'olio di
lume, / morchia d'olio, / feccia, tritume, frammenti / di
memoria rappresa, / scolatura di mosto, / raschiatura di
madia, gusci, / bucce, cortecce, / rimanenze, trucioli,
segatura, / residui di sogni, / brandelli d'anima, /
spigolatura, vanume, / olive cadute fuori dal telo... //
Parole nidiandolo / mi chiamano sole. / Altro mondo, altro
sole, / altro canto di gallo / riempie le uova / della poesia.
//

Words of the dead,
roots of myrtle,
of prune tree, thyme.
Words, remnants
of tools harnesses,
dregs of lamp oil,
oil sludge,
residue, shreds, fragments
of clotted memory,
must deposit,
scrapings from the kneading trough,
shells,
peels, rinds,
scraps, wood shavings, sawdust,
splinters of dreams,
slivers of soul,
gleanings, kernels...
olives fallen outside the net...
Nesting-egg-words,
call me sun.
A different world, a different sun,
a different rooster crow

fills the eggs
of poetry.

Paròule frevute,
ai labbre arašéte
me tòrnene, fúeche
de Sand'Andòneje.

A ddàrele audènzeje ne ndròve
rècchie p'accundàrele,
vrevegnuse.

(da Énece, 1994)

Parole incandescenti, / alle labbra screpolate / mi
tornano, fuoco / di Sant'Antonio. // A dar loro ascolto non
trovo / orecchi per raccontarle, / vergognoso.

(Traduzione del'Autore)

(cont.d)

Incandescent words,
come back
to my cracked lips,
St. Anthony's fire.
As I listen to them,
in shame,
I can't find ears to utter them.
(Translated by Luigi Bonaffini)

CAMPANIA

In order to understand fully the reasons leading to Neapolitan poetry of the Twentieth century, one must read very carefully the introductory essay by Alberto Consiglio, "Spiriti e forme della poesia napoletana" [Spirit and Forms of Neapolitan Poetry], in the now classical *Antologia dei poeti napoletani*.¹

Consiglio goes far beyond the task at hand, and investigates the historical and social reasons in order to connect them to the phenomenon, especially in the results and nuances of certain expressive twists attained by means that might seem improbable to a reader unfamiliar with the history of Naples. The path followed by Consiglio may seem even impervious, due to

the frequent digressions and subtlety of reasoning, but in the end one realizes that his theses are rooted not only in his inveterate convictions, but above all in the contentions always supported by strong documentation. When he states that "Neapolitan poetry, between the Nineteenth and Twentieth centuries, is the center of all Italian literature. Better still, it is the real, representative Italian literature,"² he does not commit an act of pride, but only manifests a reality that any reader could plainly see. In any case, in the study by Mario Chiesa and Giovanni Tesio, "La poesia del Novecento in dialetto," [Twentieth-Century Dialect Poetry] which introduces the two volumes *Le parole di legno* [Wooden Words]³, Consiglio's statements are accepted and amplified precisely because

not prompted by patriotic fervor. Chiesa and Tesio write: "In the attempt to find a criterion to mark a point of departure for Twentieth-Century dialect poetry, we have had to concede that the numbers don't add up: there is no date in which chronological and critical reasons coincide; or at least we have not seen it. Di Giacomo published various collections before 1901 (and in fact he does not appear in Mengaldo's anthology to throw off the reckoning); yet anyone working on dialect poetry cannot—it seems to us —begin to talk about the Twentieth Century without Di Giacomo: it would not be possible to find the origin of the poetic line that was to bear such fruits in our century. It is precisely in Di Giacomo's experience that one can observe how an epigon of the Nineteenth Century can become the first poet in dialect of the

Twentieth Century”⁴ Of course this thesis stems from precise and specific analysis, and the two authors choose, among other critics, Ettore Bonora who, for instance, shows the link between Di Giacomo and the French symbolists, in an essay rich with pointers and suggestions.

This, however, should not unnerve either Mengaldo or Brevini, who have neglected Di Giacomo’s importance⁶; the tradition of dialect poetry in Naples is deeply rooted and persistent, and even if we refused to accept Alberto Consiglio’s thesis (“the first vernacular poetry was Sicilian”), who found the information in *Del Dialetto napoletano* by Galiano and Meola⁸, or those put forth by Mario Sansone⁹, there still remain the texts of authors such as Velardiniello, Giulio Cesare Cortese, Giambattista Basile, Filippo

Sgruttendio, Giambattista Velentino, Andrea Perrucci, Francesco Biondi, Nicolò Lombardo, Nicola Capasso, Nunziante Pagano, Sant'Alfonso Maria de' Liguori, Giacomo Antonio Palmieri, Antonio Villani, Carlo Mormile, Duca Carlo Morbilli, Domenico Piccinini, Giulio Genoino, Michele Zezza, Rocco Mormile, Raffaele Sacco, Marchese di Cavaccone, Gabriele Quattromani, Marco D'Arienzo, Luigi Chiurazzi, Pasquale Cinquegrana, Raffaele Ragione, Alfonso Fiordelisi, Giovanni Capurro¹⁰ and *Rimatori napoletani del Quattrocento* [Neapolitan Poets of the Fifteenth Century]¹¹ to attest to a continuity, a constancy, a patrimony, in sum, in whose veining one can read connections and developments, inquiries and choices that have later engendered a poetry to be

considered in all its scope. Plainly put, Di Giacomo is to the Twentieth Century as Porta is to the Nineteenth, and this takes nothing away from the poetry of Belli, who looks to Porta, nor from the poetry of Giotti, of Tessa, of Marin, of Noventa, which has Di Giacomo behind it.

Having firmly established this point, one can tackle all possible arguments in order to unravel correlations, allegiances, affiliations and Freudian patricides; what is certain is that Di Giacomo is “something unique”¹² and is also a great precursor of underworld poetry, which flourished in European literature in the Twenties.¹³

His recognition as a founding figure, as can be seen, comes from various parts, and looking at the studies by Benedetto Croce, Francesco Gaeta, Borgese, Bracco, Cecchi,

Contini, Doria, Gatto, De Robertis, Galletti, Pancrazi, Montale, Pasolini, Luigi Russo, Serra, Serao, Vossler, Vinciguerra, Flora, one immediately forms the right impression of the "magical quality" of the poet who, even among conflicting judgments, remains for everyone "the sentimental verista," as he liked to describe himself, the writer who never refrains from giving words and expressions their primal meaning, their simplicity devoid of the accumulations that time, for ill or good, has deposited on them. It is true, Di Giacomo's poetry is intrinsically musical, fresh, almost olfactory, but musicality and freshness are never produced through vagueness and indefiniteness; in the poet there is a strong sense of measure, which allows him to paint at his pleasure with more brilliant colors and the most persuasive notes without the risk of

overdoing it. It has been chorally written that he was able to untangle himself from the knotted skein of Verismo and was able to free himself from the limitations of the local sketch, thanks to that very innate grace that prompted him to measure theatrical effects without distorting into caricatures or "figurines" certain portraits smelling of times past, but also capable of gazing beyond the curtain of the present. His works should be examined as they evolved, in order to understand that he was gradually able to find adequate means to express content and subject matter fashionable at the time, but without turning them into stereotypes or depriving them of that subjective dimension capable of breathing life into a description, a sentiment, an emotion. The subject matter of his verse is that of the southern repertory of the time, yet the obvious and the trite have

no place in the songs of the farmers, of the street vendors, of the idlers and those who loiter in the streets, in the slums and in the harbor, living by their wits.

On the contrary, he was able in my opinion to restore a distant poetic truth through "Canzone 'e copp' 'o tamurro," in which he "invokes," silently and gently, the necessity of bringing back into piazze and alleyways the "carnascialeschi" of ancient memory. But this time not only with the intent to offer spectacle and amusement, but to share with the people the shivers of the never-spent fire reflected in everyday occurrences.

In this sense we could interpret Di Giacomo as one of those theatrical specimen (Lope de Vega, Shakespeare, Calderón, Goldoni, Molière, Pirandello) who in every instance feel the vibrations of the stage and

find a way of putting on a show. Di Giacomo, however, was also a journalist and careful student of events, of Neapolitan history, what one might call an erudite, who did not miss the particulars of a people and a culture thirsting for truth, though never meant to become tyrannical. The journalist, the man of theater, the erudite, then, do their inlay work in the "ariette," in the sonnets, in the short poems, in which we find alternating voices, allusions, suggestions; in which we perceive, in the background, the lament of a Chimera that devours men and things to make them new, perennially new. He had made his debut with tales that he defined "Germanic," to the extent that he awoke the suspicion of plagiarism in Cafiero and Verdinois who had invited him to contribute to the *Corriere del Mattino*; they were "fantastic" stories, and if

they showed something “photographic” (as did other works of his later on), it could not be regarded as a sort of “sin” other than to the eyes of Croce’s Esthetics.

Di Giacomo, putting his various natures “on a burner,” utilizing a more and more refined alchemy of language, tempered with a semantic density consonant with the varied linguistic experiments taking place in contemporary Italy, was able to find a personal voice, rare and authentic, that never degenerated or festered into the open boils taken from French literature (Zola or Maupassant), ever more pervasive and abundant. The Eighteenth Century no doubt enters his world, not only with the modulations of Metastasio, Zappi, Frugoni, Lamberti, Meli, Martello, but also with the energy of Giacomo Casanova, whom he translated with masterful discernment and

whose style he admired.

Perhaps it was also these studies on the Eighteenth Century, these exercises addressing authors of international repute, that allowed him to be considered by Renato Serra already an innovator at the time of *La Voce*, as Giacinto Spagnoletti reminds us¹⁴; certainly Di Giacomo cannot be ignored or liquidated as one of the many minstrels that have infested Romantic, Verista and Decadent literature.

The weight of his personality, of his humanity, of his notoriety bothered quite a bit Ferdinando Russo who, at the outset, was not able to touch in the least Di Giacomo's presence. Critics remained almost indifferent to his early work which seemed to be taking belated populist positions of early Romanticism. Now the studies on

Russo have become more numerous and the publication of his works (often ill-conceived and improvised) has created a new, revitalized interest which is establishing some order and disciplining a subject matter already varied and confused in itself due to the ease with which the author commented on different topics. As for the dialect, Luigi Reina remarks: "Without wishing to take up the well-known distinction between reflected dialect literature and spontaneous dialect literature, it must be noted how for Russo dialect was almost a sort of restoration of primitive, elementary language, with norms of its own, autonomous with respect to those of common language"¹⁵. This naturalness allows him a great freedom in his inventions and hyperboles, in his Baroque metaphors and in his full-relief portraits of heroes-protagonists caught in a

superficial psychological posture. But Russo's world is not just tied to what has been described as his "Baroque surrealism," but spills over into many directions, advancing a sort of claim over all that concerned the *maudit* in the province, at times with dark tones. He also employs Ariosto's type of irony, and harks back to Pulci and Berni, going as far as the double theatricalization of narration"16. In many respects he catches old and fresh aspects of the Neapolitan spirit, which however appears, from one book to the next, at times pathetic and at times melodramatic, at times humorous and at times festive, without ever coming face to face with the burning core of a feeling that smolders to the end and turns to ashes so it can rise again and regenerate itself, or vanish in the desert and live the sense of emptiness, abandonment, anguish.

The crisis of Decadentism seems to leave no trace in Russo; it passes over him and he remains intact in his cocoon as it gathers the remnants of old melodies, the heartfelt or violent calls of the slums, the rhythm of a slyness, of a dignity and heroism without future altars. Russo is the bard of a present entirely played in the cracking whips of the coachmen, in the cries of water-carriers, in the tavern scuffles, in the houses of common women, in the demeanor assumed in downtown streets. He is the bard of a solarity of twilight, the haughty backflow of a society that has its rites and feasts, its sad moments and repetitions, its particular thrills. Carlo Bernari, while editing in 1984 *Poesie del Russo*¹⁷, has pointed out, besides the discrepancies in earlier editions, certain poetic postures of the Neapolitan attributed to his often evident “secularity”. One thing

is irrefutable: Russo does not browbeat his reader by turning to “nostalgia,” even when it seems that he is willing to curl up in the spires and sighs of the good and beautiful sentiment of the past. His dialect is a chronicle, a diary of everyday ferment, as is his poetry, rich with echoes and allusions, often satisfied with wordplay and deftness.

The other poet in the anthology, if with only one text, is Raffaele Viviani. It was extremely difficult to choose after the happy season of Di Giacomo and Russo, especially because the world of song (an interesting chapter for further investigation on Neapolitan and other dialects) had produced authors of great dignity, such as Pasquale Ruocco, Tito Manlio, Emma Coppola di Canzano, Fusco, Bovio, G.B. De Curtis, E.A. Mario, Totò, De Filippo, Nicolardi, De Mura, Panza, De Gregorio, Pacifico Vento; Viviani,

however, interprets better than anyone the change, the continuity and the synthesis of what took place approximately in the Twenties and Thirties until the flourishing of neodialect poetry, but he interprets even that spirit of a thousand spirits, that international Neapolitaness that saw him as a chansonnier, actor, author, mime, acrobat, playwright. His poetry, as was said, is unpredictable, it moves by fits and starts, in waves, creating at first a feeling of disorientation. At any rate, there is a predilection for the spoken word, that seems to assign to things and emotions an irreverent, conspiratorial sigh, as if Viviani were at the same time pupil and teacher, thief and policeman.

The list of poets becomes longer (even if the quality of the texts increases on average with respect to previous decades), but

almost all follow the line drawn by Di Giacomo, Russo and Viviani, some emphasizing melody, others rhythm, others recapturing certain beguiling moods and feelings. The tradition of Neapolitan dialect poetry has no pauses, but, except for some poets tied to Piedigrotta, the standard of the texts remains identical to that of the past, as if quicksand were making it impossible to leave the assigned groove. Is Di Giacomo's era over? No doubt it is, but in the end it is always with him that one must come to terms.

So it was for Achille Serrao who, while born in Rome, uses the dialect of Caivano, in the province of Caserta. After an intense activity in Italian, he begins to write in dialect in 1990, with *Mal'aria*, and one immediately realizes that those texts have forcefully left behind the beguiling sirens of

the ariette and Neapolitan songs and demand a new kind of attention, free of commonplaces. The significance of this has been noted by Franco Loi, by this writer, Spagnoletti, Vivaldi, Brevini, who underline the change taking place in a linguistic area in which the difficulty of change remained enormous, precisely because Naples and the surrounding areas had gone through several intense periods overflowing with poetry (the Fifteenth, Seventeenth, Nineteenth centuries, the beginning of the Twentieth).

Serrao, with his long, rugged verses, not devoid of tenderness and nuances, inaugurated a season which attests to the readiness of Campania's poetry to question everything in order to start moving forward again. In the musicality that unfolds not under the soft caresses of Donizetti and Bellini, but under the apparently metallic

tumult of Stravinsky, we find a text that denies agnitions by the sea or Mt. Vesuvius, and stands on a promontory where there is no room for vagueness or lyrical and metaphysical indefiniteness. And yet pain and feelings abound, but they do not unthread in rivulets, in assonances, in plaintiveness: they intend to remain what they are, to exist without false unions.

Interesting, for a different reason, is the poetry in the dialect of Cappella, in the province of Naples, of Michele Sovente, who adopts the mother tongue after writing in Italian and Latin. Sovente, like almost all contemporary dialect poets, is a man of vast and refined culture, and his poetry (until now available only in journals and anthologies) is affected by this, maybe because his education was too grounded on the Latin classics, their quantitative music,

their rigor. One gets the impression that he is amused in discovering in verses written in the Cappella dialect the hidden sense of a rhythm that would otherwise be a rigid and perfect hexameter. But one also senses that the motivations which prompt him to delve into his childhood self are authentic and conceal a dense core that at times sparkles and breaks into fireworks.

The anthology ends with Tommaso Pignatelli (pseudonym of an unidentified Italian politician) who with *Pe cupia' 'o chiarfo* appears as an authentic revelation of the poetry from Campania. Tullio De Mauro in the preface, Natalino Sapegno in the inside cover, and Franco Loi in *Sole 24 Ore* have cited Pignatelli as a high and extraordinary voice that at the opportune moment is able to leave behind the usual melodic flow of tradition and, at the same

time, can organize an effective and vigorous poetic discourse which utilizes both ancient and recent Neapolitan patrimony by restructuring it in a new expressive fullness with convincing and, I would say, significant results. Sapegno points out that Pignatelli is “within tradition, but beyond the line of Di Giacomo and Russo, he knows how to take the humors of Neapolitanness without exploiting them, and transforms the Neapolitan language into a high instrument of poetry by infusing it with new freshness and renewing its expressive felicity.”¹⁸ This seems to me a promising view for poetry, whether or not Neapolitan. De Mauro has also mentioned the “refined quality of these poems”¹⁹, stressing how they remain impressed in memory. This is still, if I am not mistaken, “the deep, exciting manifestation

of a people, a nation.”²⁰

Since the anthology is meant primarily for foreign readers, we have preferred to give a selection of rather well-known texts: many of these, in fact, have become tunes sung even by famous tenors or American singers.

One should keep in mind that an anthology is always like sipping precious liquor, a small advance, a promise.

NOTES

1 Alberto Consiglio, **Antologia dei poeti napoletani**: Milan, Arnoldo Mondadori, 1973.

2 Ibid, p.36

3 Mario Chiesa-Giovanni Tesio, *Le parole di legno. Poesia in Dialetto del '900 italiano*: Milan, Oscar Mondadori, 2 vls., 1984.

4 Ibid., p.8

5 Ettore Bonora, “Il dibattito sulla letteratura dialettale dall’età veristica a oggi,” in *Giornale storico della letteratura italiana*, CLVIII, 1981.

6 Cf. Pier Vincenzo Mengaldo, *Poeti italiani del Novecento*:

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7 Alberto Consiglio, *Antologia dei poeti napoletani*, cit., pp.7-11.

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10 Ettore De Mura, *Poeti napoletani dal '600 a oggi*, Naples, Conte Editore, 1950.

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12 Elena Croce, Preface to Salvatore Di Giacomo, *Poesie e prose*: Milan, Mondadori, "I Meridiani", 1977 (IV ed. 1984) p.XV.

13 Ivi, p. XXI.

14 Giacinto Spagnoletti - Cesare Vivaldi, *Poesia dialettale dal Rinascimento a oggi*: Milan, Garzanti, 1991, vol.II, p.857.

15 Luigi Reina, *Ferdinando Russo - popolarità, dialetto, poesia*: Naples, Ermanno Cassitto Editore, 1983, p.19.

16 Ivi, p.24.

17 Carlo Bernari (ed.), **Ferdinando Russo, Le poesie**:

Naples, Guida, 1984.

18 Natalino Sapegno, inside cover of *Pe cupià 'o chiarfo*:
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1960*, edited by I. De Feo e V. Talarico, Naples, 1968.

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SALVATORE DI GIACOMO

In the Mondadori volume of *I meridiani* entitled *Poesie e prose* (1977), Elena Croce reminds us that “The complete bibliography of the writings of Salvatore Di Giacomo, collected by F. Schlitzer in the volume *Salvatore Di Giacomo. Ricerche e note bibliografiche*, edited by G. Doria and C. Ricottini (Florence, Sansoni, 1966), crowded with librettos, pamphlets, articles, single issues, bibliographical rarities, reeditions, reprints, consists of 1543 entries until Di Giacomo’s death.” With the passing of time and interest in the poetry and theater of Di Giacomo never flagging, the number has increased and it would be therefore, if not impossible, cumbersome and perhaps even misleading to offer here an endless list of

publications. On the other hand, indispensable might be the work cited above, edited by Elena Croce and Lanfranco Orsini, and certainly the complete collection of *Poesie e Novelle* [Poems and Stories], of Teatro, of Cronache [Chronicles], in two separate volumes, published in Milan by Mondadori in 1946 and edited, respectively, by Francesco Flora and Mario Vinciguerra.

Unfortunately, the same applies to the critical bibliography on Di Giacomo which is replete with contributions and important names. Excluding those studies that have privileged the strictly Neapolitan aspects as well as those concerning the theater, the short stories, the prose in general and works of erudition, some essential indications are given below in alphabetical order: (T.H.Bergen, in *The Nation* (New York),

September 12, 1907; G.A.Borgese, *La vita e il libro*, I: Turin, Bocca 1910; III, *ibid.*, 1913; R. Bracco, in *Corriere di Napoli*, October 16, 1888 e February 17, 1892; J. Carriere, in *Le Temps*, July 26, 1909; E. Cecchi, **Di giorno in giorno**: Milan, Garzanti, 1954; A. Consiglio, in *Nuova Antologia*, January 1st, 1931 e April 16, 1934; G. Contini, *La letteratura dell'Italia unita (1861-1968)*, Florence: Sansoni, 1968; B. Croce, *Letteratura della Nuova Italia*, III, Bari: Laterza, 1915; *Uomini e cose della vecchia Italia*, *Ibid.*, 1927; G. De Robertis, in *La Voce*, May 16 and 23, 1912; *Altro Novecento*, Florence: Le Monnier, 1962; W. Hagelstam, in *Hufoudstadsblader* (Helsingfors), January 24, 1909; M. Jeuland-Meyneaud, *La Ville de Naples après l'annexion (1860-1915)*, Aix en Provence: Editions de l'Université de Provence, 1974; E. Montale in *Corriere della*

Sera, Feb. 28, 1960; U. Ojetti, *Più vivi dei vivi*, Milan: Mondadori, 1938; P. P. Pasolini, *Passione e ideologia*, Milan: Garzanti, 1960; L. Russo, *Salvatore Di Giacomo*, Naples: Ricciardi, 1921; K. Vossler, *Salvatore Di Giacomo, ein neapolitanischer Volkdichter in Wort, Bild und Musik*, Heidelberg: Carl Winter's Universitätsbuchhandlung, 1908).

It might be useful, in order to better understand the poet, to add information about his life and some suggestions for further reading, even if some interpretations and judgments have been indicated in the general introduction.

Salvatore di Giacomo was born in Naples in 1860. He enrolled in the School of Medicine but withdrew because of the horror he felt every time he went into the anatomy room, as he himself recounts in an

autobiographical note. He then took up journalism, at first with the pseudonym "Salvador" and later with his real name. He contributed to the *Corriere del Mattino*, the *Pungolo*, the *Corriere di Napoli*. He soon became well known for his verses that were set to music and sung in the streets, but also for his theater, rooted in a pristine, authentic Neapolitan spirit, but always filtered through his culture, which tended to lend lightness and simplicity to his writing. Among all his plays one should at least remember *Assunta Spina* for the intensity of its verismo. The books of short stories were also numerous, but they remain the work of a good craftsman and do not achieve the level of his poetry or certain parts of his theater.

Unlike his writings, so limpid and open for the reader, he was withdrawn and shy,

living in isolation and spending his days in his favored studies, the Eighteenth Century. In this regard, it should be remembered that he edited, for the Publisher Sandron in Palermo, an Eighteenth-Century Collection that offered more than one surprise.

For many years, until his death, he was a librarian for a section of the Biblioteca Nazionale di Napoli. In 1924 he was proposed as a possible candidate for senator, but never chosen, maybe because he did not get the support of Benedetto Croce, who did have great esteem for him, but apparently did not regard him competent enough for the political office. Five years later he was nevertheless elected to the Accademia D'Italia. We have already mentioned his varied and immense production; maybe it should be added, otherwise it would be hard to explain why he is at the source of

contemporary Italian poetry, that the choice to write in dialect had not been made only out of love of “country,” but because (and Croce reiterated it on more than one occasion) he was firmly convinced that poetry “is not subjected to limitations of genre or enslavement of form.”

He died in Naples in 1934.

Marzo

Marzo: nu poco chiove
e n' ato ppoco stracqua:
torna a chiovere, schiove,
ride 'o sole cu ll'acqua.
Mo nu cielo celeste
mo n'aria cupa e nera:
mo d' 'o vierno 'e tempeste
mo n'aria e primmavera.
N'auciello freddigliuso
aspetta ch'esce 'o sole
ncopp' 'o tturreno nfuso
suspireno 'e vviole...
Catarì!... Che buo' cchiù?
Ntienneme, core mio!
Marzo, tu 'o ssaie, si' tu,
e st'auciello songo io.
da Poesie e prose, 1977

Marzo — Marzo: un po' piove / e dopo un po' cessa di
piovere: / torna a piovere, spiove, / ride il sole con l'acqua.
/ Ora un cielo celeste, / ora un'aria cupa e nera: / ora le
tempeste dell'inverno, / ora un'aria di primavera. / Un
uccello freddoloso / attende che esca il sole: / sopra il

terreno bagnato / sospirano le viole... / Caterina!...Che vuoi
di più? / Cerca di capirmi, cuore mio! / Marzo, lo sai, sei tu,
/ e quest'uccello sono io.

(Traduzione di P. P. Pasolini)

March

March: there's a bit of rain,
just a bit later it stops:
it starts, then it stops again,
the sun laughs with the drops.
A moment of clear azure,
a moment of clouds threatening
a moment of winter's fury,
a moment of glorious spring.
A shivering bird nearby
waits for the sun to return,
while all of the violets sigh
over the sodden terrain.
Caterina!... Isn't it clear
from what you've already heard?
You know, you are March, my dear,
and I am that little bird.
(Translated by Michael Palma)

Pianefforte e notte

Nu pianefforte 'e notte
sona, lontanamente,
e 'a museca se sente
pe ll'aria sospirà.

E ll'una: dorme 'o vico
ncopp a sta nonna nonna
'e nu mutivo antico
'e tanto tiempo fa.

Dio, quanta stelle ncielo!
Che luna! E c'aria doce!
Quanto na bella voce
vurria sentì cantà!

Ma sulitario e lento
more 'o mutivo antico;
se fa cchiù cupo 'o vico
dint' a ll'oscurità.

L'anema mia surtanto
rummane a sta fenesta.
Aspetta ancora, e resta,
ncantannose, a penzà.
da Poesie e prose, 1977

Pianoforte di notte — Un pianoforte di notte / suona in

lontananza, / e la musica si sente / per l'aria sospirare. / È
l'una: dorme il vicolo / su questa ninna nanna / di un
motiuo antico / di tanto tempo fa. / Dio, quante stelle in
cielo! / Che luna! e che aria dolce! / Quanto una bella voce /
vorrei sentire cantare! / Ma solitario e lento / muore il
motivo antico; / si fa più cupo il

vicolo / dentro all'oscurità. / L'anima mia soltanto /
rimane a questa finestra. / Aspetta ancora, e resta, /
incantandosi, a pensare.

(Traduzione di P. P. Pasolini)

A Piano in the Night

A piano in the night
plays softly, off somewhere;
a sigh comes through the air,
borne upon the melody.
It's one o'clock: the lane
sleeps to the lullaby
of a long ago refrain
of a time that used to be.
God, so many stars above!
Such a moon! And such sweet air!
How I wish that I could hear
someone singing tenderly.
But solitary, slow,
dies the long ago refrain;
darkness deepens as the lane
fades into obscurity.
My soul remains alone,
here at the window, caught,
still awaiting, sunk in thought
and enchanted reverie.
(Translated by Michael Palma)

Dint'ò ciardino

A vi' llà, vestuta rosa
e assettata a nu sedile,
lisciatanno st' addurosa
e liggiera aria d'abbrile,
cu nu libro apierto nzine,
cu nu vraccio abbandunato,
sott''o piede 'e mandarino,
sola sola Emilia sta.

C'aggia fa'? M'accosto? (E quase
arrivato lle so' ncuollo...)

Core mio! Cu quanta vase
te vulesse salutà!

Nun me vede, nun me sente,
legge, legge, e nun se move:
e io ncantato 'a tengo mente
cammenanno ncopp' a ll'ove...

Ah!...s'avota!...— Emì... che liegge?

— Tu ccà stive?... E 'a dó si' asciuto?

— M'accustavo liegge liegge...

— Pe fa' che? — Pe t'abbraccià!

— Statte!...— Siente...— (E 'o libro nterra
cade apierto...) Essa se scanza,

se vo' sósere, mm'afferra,
rire e strilla: — Uh! no! no! no!... —

Dentro il giardino — La vedi là; vestita di rosa / e seduta
su una panchina / respirando questa odorosa / e leggera
aria d'aprile, / con un libro aperto grembo, / con un braccio
abbandonato, / sotto l'albero di mandarino, / sola Emilia
sta. / Che devo fare? M'avvicino? (E quasi / le sono
addosso...) / Cuore mio! Con quanti baci / ti vorrei salutare!
/ Non mi vede, non mi sente, / legge, legge e non si muove;
/ e io incantato la contemplo / camminando in punta di
piedi... / Ah!... si volta!... Emilia, che leggi? — / — Tu stavi
qui?...E da dove sei uscito? — Mi avvicinavo leggero
leggero... / — Per far che? — Per abbracciarti! / — Fermo!... —
Senti... — (E il libro cade a terra / aperto ..! Essa si
schermisce, / vuole alzarsi, m'afferra, / ride e grida: — Uh!
no! no! no!...

In the Garden

All in pink, upon the seat
in the garden, see her there
as she breathes in the sweet
and tender April air;
a book upon her knee,
an arm spread casually,
under the orange tree
sits Emilia: no one knows.
What to do? Slip to her side?
(I'm already halfway there...)
To enfold her in a tide
of kisses for hellos!
She doesn't hear or see me
(gently, gently), doesn't stir:
how carefully (how dreamy)
I come tiptoeing toward her.
She turns... — What are you reading,
Emmy? — How did you come here?
— I was stealthily proceeding...
— To do what?... — To hold you close!
— Stop it!... — Listen... (Suddenly
the book falls...) Now she eludes me,

tries to rise, takes hold of me,
laughs and calls: — Uh! no! no! no!...

Na lacerta s'è fermata
e ce guarda a tutte e dduie...
Se sarrà scandalizzata,
sbatte 'a coda e se ne fuie...
da *Poesie e prose*, 1977

/ – Una lucertola s'è fermata / e ci guarda tutti e due. Si
sarà scandalizzata, / sbatte la coda e se ne fugge...

(Traduzione di P. P. Pasolini)

(Cont.d)

A passing lizard, surprised,
stops and stares at what he sees,
then, as if scandalized,
quickly flicks his tail and flees.
(Translated by Michael Palma)

A Capemonte

Sotto a chist'arbere vecchie abballaveno
'e cape femmene, cient'anne fa,
quanno s'ausevano ventaglie 'avorio,
polvera 'e cipria e falbalà.
Ce se mettevono viuline e flàvute
pe l'aria tennera a sospirà,
e zenniaveno ll'uocchie d' 'e ffemmene,
chine 'e malizia, da ccà e da llà...
Ma si chest'ebbreca turnà nun pò,
nun allarmammece, pe carità!
'E cape femmene ce stanno mo,
cchiù cape femmene de chelli llà!...
Da mmiez'a st'arbere sti statue 'e marmolo
vonno, affacciannese, sentì cantà,
vonno sta museca passere e miérole,
scetate, sèntere, pe s' 'a mparà.
Dice sta museca, ncopp'a nu vàlzere;
"Figliò, spassateve ca tiempo nn'è!
Si 'e core 'e ll'uommene sentite sbattere,
cunzideratele, sentite a me!
L'anne ca passano chi pò acchiappà?
Chi pò trattènere la giuventù?

Si se licenzia, nun c'è che fa',
nun torna a nascere, nun vene cchiù!"

Capodimonte — Sotto questi alberi vecchi ballavano / le
donne più belle, cento anni fa, / quando s'usavano ventagli
d'avorio, / polvere di cipria e falpalà. / Violini e flauti si
mettevano / a sospirare per l'aria tenera, / le ammiccavano
gli occhi delle donne, / pieni di malizia, di qua e di là... /
Ma quest'epoca non può tornare, / non allarmiamoci, per
carità! / Oggi non mancano le donne belle, / più belle di
quelle là!... / In mezzo agli alberi queste statue di marmo /
vogliono, affacciandosi, sentir cantare, / vogliono questa
musica passerì e merli, / risvegliati, sentire per imparare. /
Dice questa musica, sull'onda di un valzer: / "Figliole,
spassatevela, che è tempo! / Se sentite palpitare forte i cuori
degli uomini, / fateci caso, sentite me! / Gli anni che
passano chi può riprenderseli? / Chi può trattenere la
gioventù? / Se se ne va, non c'è rimedio, / non torna a
nascere, non viene più!"

At Capodimonte

Under these trees a hundred years ago
great ladies danced, the fairest of the fair,
in days when ladies carried ivory fans,
those days of furbelows and powdered hair.
The ready flutes and violins would then
breathe forth the tender melancholy air,
and as they danced they winked their flashing eyes,
eyes filled with mischief, darting here and there...
Those days are now forever fled away,
but why should we be sad, why should we care?
Such lovely women are alive today,
more lovely than the ones of old, I swear!...
Amid the trees the marble statues stand,
wishing to hear the songs they once heard there;
wishing to hear the music, reawakened
sparrows and blackbirds long to learn the air.
The music speaks, on a waltz's billowing crests:
"Dear girls, what is time? Live pleasantly.
When you sense the hearts of men beat in their breasts,
consider, girls, you are sensing me!
Who can keep back the years that disappear?
Youth dies away: who can revive it then?"

They go, and there's no strength can hold them here,
no remedy to make them live again.

E si risponnere, luntana e debule,
mo n'ata museca ve pararrà,
allicurdateve de chelli femmene
ca nce ballaveno cient'anne fa.
Vèveno a sèntere st'ombre ca passano
comme se spassano di gente 'e mo:
e si suspirano vo' di ca' penzano
ca 'o tiempo giovene cturnà nun pò...
Figliò, spassateve, c'avimmma fa?
nun torna a nascere la gioventù...
Mme pare 'e sèntere murmulìa
ll'eco nfra st'arbere: "Nun torna cchiù!..."
da Poesie e prose, 1977

E se ora vi parrà che risponda, / lontana e debole,
un'altra musica, / scordatevi di quelle donne / che
ballavano cento anni fa. / Vengono a sentire queste ombre
che passano / come se la spassa la gente d'oggi / e se
sospirano vuol dire che pensano / che il tempo della
giovinezza non può tornare... / Figliole, spassatevela, è più
che giusto: non torna a nascere la gioventù!... / Mi par di
sentire mormorare / l'eco fra gli alberi: Non torna più!..."

(Traduzione di P. P. Pasolini)

(Cont.d)

And if you seem to hear now, far away
and faint, an answering music on the air,
remember how a hundred years ago
those ladies danced, the fairest of the fair.
They come to sense the shadows passing by
as the people of today live pleasantly,
and as they watch them pass, they seem to sigh
to think how short the days of youth must be.
Girls, live pleasantly, why should you care?
When youth is gone, who can revive it then?
I seem to hear an echo murmuring there
amid the trees: "It never comes again..."
(Translated by Michael Palma)

Na tavernella...

Maggio. Na tavernella
ncopp' 'Antignano: 'addore
d' 'anèpeta nuvella;
'o cane d' 'o trattore
c'abbaia: 'o fusto 'e vino
nnanz' 'a porta: 'a gallina
ca strilla 'o pulcino:
e n'aria fresca e ffina
ca vene 'a copp' 'e monte
ca se mmesca c' 'o viento,
e a sti capille nfronte
nun fa truvà cchiù abbiento...

Stammo a na tavulella
tutte e dduie. Chiano chiano
s'allonga sta manella
e mm'accarezza 'a mano...
Ma 'o bbi' ca dint'o 'o piatto
se fa fredda 'a frettata?...
Comme me so' distratto!
Comme te si' ncantata!...
da *Poesie e prose*, 1977

Una trattoriola... — Maggio. Una trattoriola / sopra ad

Antignano: odore / di nepinella fresca; / il cane del trattore
/ che abbaia: la botte del vino / davanti alla porta: / la
gallina che strilla al pulcino; / e un'aria fresca e fine / che
viene da sopra il monte, / che si mischia col vento, / e a
questi capelli in fronte / non lascia trovare pace... / Siamo
seduti a un tavolino / tutti e due.

Piano piano / s'allunga questa manina / e mi carezza la
mano... / Ma lo vedi che dentro al piatto / si raffredda la
frittata?... / Come mi son distratto! / Come ti sei incantata!..

(Traduzione di P. P. Pasolini)

A Little Inn...

May. At an inn above
Antignano: everywhere
the sweet aroma of
fresh calamint in the air;
the innkeeper's dog nearby,
barking; the barrel of wine
by the door; the hen's shrill cry
to her chick; a fresh and fine
breeze so softly flowing
from the mountain, mixing now
with the wind that keeps on blowing
my hair across my brow...
Here we are seated round
a small table, the two of us.
Slowly this slender hand
takes mine in its caress...
How cold the omelet's become
on the plate, unattended to...
Ah, how distracted I am,
ah, how enchanted are you...
(Translated by Michael Palma)

FERDINANDO RUSSO

As did Di Giacomo, Ferdinando Russo also dispersed in myriad publications his writings which, as a well-known journalist, dealt with the most heterogeneous and at times unthinkable topics. He had a penchant, exhibited without ambiguity, for exploring subjects that in the eyes of conventional wisdom seemed "vile and unnecessary," but at the same time he could forcefully examine situations, of a social nature as well, with a confidence that bespoke of a great knowledge of life. Given the impossibility, even in this case, to provide the long list of the bibliography of the works (which in recent years has seen a flowering of clandestine editions, philologically inaccurate even in the critical apparatus, when there is one) we refer to Le

poesie, edited by Carlo Bernari: Naples, Guida, 1984.

For the critical bibliography, besides Bernari's work, we suggest Luigi Reina, *Ferdinando Russo — Popolarità, dialetto, poesia*: Napoli, Ermanno Cassitto Editore, 1983.

Ferdinando Russo was born in Naples in 1866. He was a member of the group formed by Arturo Colautti, Gabriele D'Annunzio, Matilde Serao, Edoardo Scarfoglio, Angelo Conti, Roberto Bracco, who undertook a frenzied literary and journalistic activity in Naples between the end of the last century and the beginning of ours. In the *Mattino*, he ran a column of wordly and literary events, raising endless controversies, to the extent that he even criticized Di Giacomo for possible errors or improprieties in the use of the Neapolitan language. He was passionate and exuberant (he was expelled from the

Mattino for one of his disputes) and had contacts with the camorra, even following very well known judicial cases, such as those of Ciccio Cappuccio and Gennaro Cuocolo.

An official of the National Museum, after having married a chanteuse, he devoted himself to the study of Neapolitan poets of the Seventeenth Century (we should mention at least his books on *Velardiniello*: Rome, Edizioni Modernità, 1913 and, from the same year and with the same editor, Gran Cortese), and his works attained considerable success.

He was always proud of the distinguished friendships he made (Zola, Fogazzaro, Carducci) and of his curiosity as a traveler familiar with several European capitals. He was a "popular" figure, as someone wrote, a "petit bourgeois" who tried to give himself some airs through his

culture. Croce did not have a high regard for him, he considered him to be like so many other Neapolitan poets who wrote smooth verses lacking the resonance of real poetry. One can imagine the dispute Russo gave rise to over the diffidence and shortcomings of the great critic, but also over the comments of other poets, like Murolo, Bovio and Galdieri, who took Croce's side.

But beyond the fracas raised by Russo among friends and enemies, he remained the poet who, in his moments of grace, was able to create unforgettable pages, subtly ironic or "chorally" knowing.

In the conclusion of his book, Luigi Reina describes him as follows: "Russo then was not a champion of regional and dialectal Verismo, *stricto sensu*, but an intellectual typical of the post-unity and southern generation tied to a concept of culture

whose features were changing gradually. He was observant of the shifting reality, in which he was able to capture certain postulates in the blossoming of a new conception of culture and of the world, but without giving in to easy enthusiasm or consolidated certainties." A full-relief portrait, truthful, but which does not exclude the critical orientation that sees Russo as an attentive describer of the Neapolitan spirit, indulging here and there in pathos and sentimentality, "which the programmed naturalism is not capable of concealing."

He died in Naples in 1927.

Viene!

“Viene! Quando te guardo ‘a vocca ‘e fravula
lucente ‘e sole ca me fa ‘mpazzì!

Quando te vedo n’ata vota ‘e ridere!

Quando me credo ca me dice sì!

Quando te parlo! Quando te cunzidero

comm’a na cosa preziosa e amata

comm’a na santa int’a nu scaravattolo,

na perla ca m’avessero arrubbata!

Sto ccà, sto nchiuso a sbarià, penzannote,

e me ricordo sulo ‘e juorne belle.

M’e dato tanto ammore! E nun se scordano

pe cient’anne ‘e tempeste, ‘a luna, e ‘e stelle!

T’aggio date ‘e cchiù belle ‘e tutt’e spaseme!

Aggio pruvato ‘a freva d’ ‘a pazzia!

Nfi ‘a doppio ‘a morte, sempe l’aggia dicere:

Si stata ‘o sciore ‘e chesta vita mia!”

da Le poesie, 1984

Vieni! — “Vieni! Quando ti guardo la bocca di fragola, /
lucente di sole che mi fa impazzire! / Quando ti vedo
un’altra volta ridere! / Quando credo che mi dica sì! /
Quando ti parlo! Quando ti considero / come una cosa
preziosa e amata, / come una santa in un tabernacolo, /

una perla che mi avessero rubata! / Sto qui, sto chiuso a delirare, pensandoti, / e mi ricordo solo i giorni belli. / Mi hai dato tanto amore! E non si scordano / per cento anni le tempeste, la luna, e le stelle! / Ti ho dato i più belli di tutti i miei spasimi! / Ho provato la febbre della pazzia! / Fino a dopo la morte, sempre dovrò dirlo: / sei stata il fiore di questa vita mia."

(Traduzione di Carlo Bernari)

Come!

When I look at your strawberry mouth
alive with sunlight, how it drives me wild!
When I see you laughing once again.
When I think you're saying yes to me.
When I talk to you. When I see you
as something very dear and precious,
as a saint inside a tabernacle,
a pearl they might have stolen from me.
Here, shut in and raving, I think of you,
and I remember only the good days.
You gave me so much love. For a hundred years
you can't forget the storms, the moon and stars.
I have given you the best of all my longings.
I have felt the fever of my madness grow.
I'll always say it till the day I die:
You've been the only flower of my life.
(Translated by Luigi Bonaffini)

Mamma mia ch'a dda sapé!

I

Quanno 'a notte se ne scenne
p'abbrucià chiest' uocchie stanche,
quann'io veglio e tu me manche,
sento 'a smania 'e te vasà!

E te guardo e schiara juorno;
ma è pe' ll'ate stu chiarore!

Tengo 'a notte dint' 'o core
e nun pozzo arrepusà!

Ah, nun me fa' murì!

Tu che ne vu da me?

Mamma mia me vene a di' pecché
chesta smania nun me vo' lassà!

Ah, nun me fa' murì!

Tu che ne vu da me?

Mamma mia ch'ha dda sapé?

Mamma mia ch'ha dda appurà?

Nun me fido d' 'a vasà!

da Le poesie, 1984

Mamma mia che deve sapere! — I — Quando scende la notte / per bruciare questi occhi stanchi, / quando io veglio e tu mi manchi, / sento la smania di baciarti! / E ti guardo e

arriva l'alba, / ma è per gli altri, questo chiarore! / Ho la notte dentro il cuore / e non posso riposare! / Ah, non farmi morire! / Che pretendi da me? / Mamma mia mi viene a dire perché / questa smania non mi vuol lasciare! / Ah, non farmi morire! / Che pretendi da me? / Mamma mia che deve sapere? / Mamma mia che deve appurare? Non ho il coraggio di baciarla!

(Traduzione di Carlo Bernari)

What Should My Mother Know?

I

When the night begins to fall
and it burns these tired eyes,
when I wake and start to miss you
my one yearning is to kiss you.

And I watch you and dawn rises;
other people enjoy this sunlight.

In my heart I hold the night
and cannot get rest at all.

Ah, don't you make me die.

What do you expect of me?

O dear mother come and tell me
why this longing's such a spell.

Ah, don't you make me die.

What do you expect of me?

What should my mother know?

I don't have the nerve to kiss you.

(Translated by Luigi Bonaffini)

'A mugliera 'e Masaniello

So' turnate li Spagnuole,
è fernuta 'a zezenella;
comme chiagneno 'e ffigliole
fora 'a via d' 'a Marenella!
'A Riggina 'e ll'otto juorne
s'è arredotta a ffa' 'a vaiassa;
so turnate li taluorne,
'ncopp' 'e frutte torna 'a tassa!
Chella vesta, tuttaquanta
d'oro e argento arricamata,
ll'ha cagnata sta Rignanta
cu na vesta spetacciata.
'A curona 'e filigrana
mo ched'è? Curona 'e spine!
'E zecchine d' 'a cullana
mo nun songo cchiù zecchine!
Li Spagnuole so' turnate
chiù guappune e preputiente
e mo' a chiammano, 'e suldate,
a Riggina d' 'e pezziente!
E lle danno 'a vuttatella,
e lle dicen' a parola,

e lle tirano 'a vunnella...

Essa chiagne, sola sola.

La moglie del Masaniello — Sono tornati gli Spagnoli, / è
finita la pacchia; / come piangono le ragazze / lungo la via
della Marina! / La Regina degli otto giorni / s'è ridotta come
una serva; / son tornati i guai, / sulla frutta torna la tassa. /
Quella veste, tutta d'oro / e d'argento ricamata, / l'ha
cambiata questa Regnante / con una veste sbrindellata. / La
corona di filigrana / ora cos'è? Corona di spine! / Gli
zecchini della collana / ora non sono più zecchini! / Gli
Spagnoli son tornati / più spavaldi e prepotenti / e adesso
la chiamano, i soldati, / la Regina dei pezzenti! / E le danno
la spintarella / e le dicono la parolina, / e le tirano la
gonnella... / Essa piange, sola sola.

Masaniello's Wife

The Spaniards now are back in town,
the good times are finally through;
now the young girls walk forlorn
down Marinella avenue.

And the queen of the eight days
is reduced to being a maid
cares and worries are here to stay
a tax on fruits now must be paid.

That fine dress, all inlaid
with fine silver and with gold,
our good queen has had to trade
for the tattered dress of old.

The splendid crown in gold-wrought lace,
what is now? a crown of thorns!

All the sequins of her necklace
are no longer being worn.

The Spaniards now are back in town
yet more scornful and arrogant,
among the soldiers she is known
as the queen of mendicants.

And they give her a light hit,
and they let a word go by,

and they pull her skirt a bit ...
All alone, she starts to cry.

Pane niro e chianto amaro,
chianto amaro e pane niro
vanno a ccocchia e fanno 'o paro
comm' 'e muonece a Retiro.
Da Palazzo essa è passata
dint' 'o Bbuorgo e venne ammore;
tene 'a mala annummenata,
ma nu schianto mmiez' 'o core!
Dint' 'o vascio d' 'a scasata
mo nce passa o riggimento;
'a furtuna ll'ha lassata
e le scioscia malu viento.
Se facette accussì lota,
morta 'e famma e de fraggiello,
chella llà ch'era na vota
'a mugliera 'e Masaniello!
da Le poesie, 1984

/ Pane nero e pianto amaro, / pianto amaro e pane nero
/ vanno a coppia pari passo / come i monaci del Ricovero. /
Da Palazzo essa è passata / dietro il Borgo e vende amore, /
gode d'una cattiva fama, / ma ha uno schianto in mezzo al
cuore! / Dentro il "basso" della disgraziata / ora ci passa il

reggimento; / la fortuna l'ha lascaita / e le soffia cattivo
vento. / Si infangò a tal punto, / morta di fame e rovinata,
/ quella che una volta era [stata] / la moglie di Masaniello.

(Traduzione di V. Pratolini e P. Ricci)

(Cont.d)

Darkened bread and bitter tears,
bitter tears and darkened bread
walk in step and go in pairs
like monks marching in their stead.
From the Palace then she came
behind Borgo and now sells love;
she's acquired a bad name
but it's pain she's thinking of!
In the slum of the poor woman
now the regiment is moving;
her good luck is finally gone,
and an evil wind is blowing.
She became so wholly mired
in a hungry and wretched life,
she who once was so admired
as Masaniello's wife.

(Translated by Luigi Bonaffini)

RAFFAELE VIVIANI

Raffaele Viviani's father ran a very humble theater in Naples, frequented by camorristi, harbor people, smugglers. Viviani was a regular presence at that theater since boyhood, and maybe from this contact was born his love for the stage which soon prompted him to do sketches in the theaters Perella and Arena Olimpia, with some degree of success. It was during this period that he began to write poems and plays like *Circo equestre Squeglia* [Squeglia Circus], in 1922, *Il fatto di cronaca* [News Item], in the same year, *La figliata* [The Brood], in 1924, *Napoli in frack* [Naples in Black Tie], in 1926. Not very notable plays, as were those that were to follow, *Morte di carnevale* [Carnival Death] and *Nullatenenti* [Penniless], in 1928,

and *Guappo 'e cartone* [Paper Wiseguy] and *L'ultimo scugnizzo* [The Last Street Urchin], in 1932, but to a large extent they tempered him and allowed him to reach that “very special language,” as Vittorio Viviani defines it, which passed from his dialogues into his verses with great expressiveness and strong connotations.

In 1932 he also had a film experience with Alessandro Blasetti, acting in the movie *La tavola dei poveri* [The Table of the Poor], from a script he himself wrote.

During his life he only published two collections of his poems: *Tavolozza* [Palette], in 1931, and *E c'è vita* [And There Is Life], in 1940. His unpublished poems, the poems scattered in journals and previous editions were later collected by Vasco Pratolini and Paolo Ricci, in 1956, with the title *Poesie*,

published by Vallecchi in Florence. Subsequently the scholar Vittorio Viviani, his heir, has published with Guida in Naples a volume (1972) that subdivides the Poesie into *Canti della Strada* [Street Songs], *Canti della malavita* [Underworld Songs], *Canti di festa* [Holiday Songs], *Canti zingareschi* [Gypsy Songs], *Canti del lavoro* [Work Songs], *Canti morali* [Moral Songs], *Canti d'amore* [Love Songs], *Canti familiari* [Family Songs], *Canti di guerra e di pace* [Songs of War and Peace].

The critical bibliography includes the names of di A. Spaini, *Scritti vari*, Turin, 1926; L. Postiglione, *Disegni a carbone*, Naples 1932; A. Cecchi, *La parete di cristallo*, Milan 1943; R. Minervini, *Un uomo e una città*: Naples, 1950; G. Artieri, *Napoli nobilissima*, Milan 1955; E. Possenti, in *Il Corriere della*

sera, 3 agosto 1956; A. Palermo, *Da Mastriani a Viviani*, Naples 1972.

He was born in Castellammare di Stabia in 1988 and at the age of ten he was already performing in the baracconi of Largo Castello and Via Foria. It was there that he lost an eye from a shoe hurled by a sailor unhappy with the show.

His poetry presents many interesting aspects which should be examined in greater depth critically, first of all to verify his contribution to the evolutionary line of Neapolitan literature, but also to find that new sense, all imbued with images, which belongs to the sensibility of one who has understood changing times perfectly, and not only does he cope, but he creates his own pristine viewpoint in order to delve into reality and emotions. We are dealing with a writing that, while using the meter of

minstrel songs and traditional forms of Italian poetry, succeeds at the same time, without falling into the obvious, in attaining the rhythm of speech, that sense of liveliness and assonance with living experience that seems to me the most salient and specific trait of a poetry that had also been conceived to be set to music. The text included is one of the many compositions that are both within and outside tradition, a poem that does not try to avoid the local color and sketches Naples has to offer, yet is not bound to viscous mawkishness. Instead, it avoids it through a strong voice that can ravel subtly and fill the words, which become simultaneously high pietas and calm indignation, participation and understanding, but also reality of a human and social condition that seems to have stayed identical (and yet always new!) to the

times in which Tommaso Campanella was describing Naples and the Neapolitans (in the City of the Sun).

He died in Naples in 1950.

O tammurraro

I
Se struje 'a pelle e 'o dito se cunzuma,
sunanno d' 'a matina 'a nfino 'a sera.
Te siente 'e dí: Staje sempe 'e na manera!
se vede ca nun tiene a che penza' !
Ma jate a farve friere,
si chesta è ll'arta mia!
Sunanno, 'mmiez' 'a via,
traspare ll'allegria:
ma, quando è 'a 'Vummaria
nun accocchio pe' magna'!
Che allerezza! Sta cosa s'è fatta assai seria!
E 'ttammorre nn' 'e vvonno, pecché c'è 'a miseria
e muglierema 'a casa se spassa 'a jurnata
cu sette guagliune e 'a cucina stutata!
Si po' se 'mbruscina, lle dico: Va llà!
Sto tanto sunato, che vuo' cchiù sunà!

Suonatore di tamburo — I — Si logora la pelle e il dito si consuma, / suono dalla mattina sino alla sera. / Ti senti dire: non sei affatto cambiato! / si vede che non hai pensieri per la testa! / Ma andate a farvi friggere, / se questa l'arte mia! / Suonando in mezzo alla via / traspare l'allegria: /

quando è l'avemaria, / non metto insieme tanto da
mangiare! Che allegria! Questa faccenda s'è fatta seria! / E
tamburi non ne vogliono, perché, c'è la miseria / e mia
moglie a casa trascorre la giornata / con sette ragazzi e la
cucina spenta! / Se si dà da fare, le dico: Va là! / Son tanto
suonato, che vuoi più suonare!

(Traduzione di G. Spagnoletti e C. Viviani)

The Drummer

I

Skin pounded thin and fingers worn away.

beating from morning till the shadows fall.

You say: It's got no variety at all!

it's plain to see there's nothing in his head!

Well, you can go to hell!

it's my art: on my feet

in the middle of the street,

bringing joy with every beat:

I've not earned enough to eat,

by the evening Ave Maria!

Some joy! My situation's really getting sad!

People don't need drummers when the times are bad,

and my wife stays at home, and all day she must sit

with seven little children and the stove unlit!

Whatever she may try, I have to say: What for?

I feel so beaten down, I don't want to beat any more!

Apprimma for' 'e vascie li guaglione
facevano parla' li tammurrelle!

Che stròppole e che belli canzuncelle
llà 'ncoppo te sapevano accucchia'!

E 'e ggente ca passavano
restavano 'ncantate

'e sti tammurriate

'e nenne ammartenate;

ca, po', cu na ballata

quase sempe jeva a ferni'!

Mo 'a guagliona n'abballa, nun sona, nun canta:

se sciupa p' 'o vizzio, va ascianno a ll'amante;

s'alliscia, se pitta, t'avvista e se lanza,

po', doppo, 'o tammurro t' 'o forma cu 'a panza!

E quando è attesato se torna 'ammuscia':

se abboffa e se smoscia p' 'o troppo suna'!

— II — Prima fuori dei bassi i ragazzi / facevano parlare i
tamburelli! / Che fandonie e che belle canzoncine / ti
sapevano mettere insieme! / E quelli che

passavano / restavano incantati / a questi
tambureggiamenti / di ragazze ben abbigliate; / ché poi
quasi sempre / andaua a finire con una ballata! / Adesso la

ragazza non balla, non suona, non canta: / si sciupa per il
vizio, va in cerca dell'amante; / si liscia, si dipinge, ti avvista
e si lancia, / dopo così il tamburo te lo forma con la pancia!
/ Quando è teso torna a rilassarsi: / si gonfia e si sgonfia
per il troppo suonare!

II

In times gone by, outside the tenements,
the young folks played the drums until they spoke!
How well their knowing fingers would evoke
such vaunting tales and haunting melodies!
Enchanted by the sounds
the passersby would stay
to listen to them play,
especially (on her way
to dance till break of day)
one smartly dressed young girl!
But now she sings no more, her dancing days are over:
wasted by her sins, she searches for her lover;
face painted, she'll approach and proposition you,
and afterwards her belly may grow drumlike too!
First the drum's stretched taut, and then it eases back:
puffs up from too much play, then finally grows slack.

III

E m'aggio fatto 'e ddiece d' 'e ssunate!
n'aggio scassato pelle 'e tammurelle!
Ma tanno me pugnevano 'e granelle;
'ngasavo e ascevo sulo 'int' 'a ll'està!
Ma mo aggia ascì cu 'o cchiovere!
Se 'nfonne la pellecchia,
se spogna e s'arrepecchia;
se forma na guallecchia:
comme a na panza 'e vecchia
ca n'é bbona cchiù a suna' !
Si: cagno arte, e che faccio? po' rideno 'a ggente?
vint'anne 'e carriera mm' 'e sciupo 'int' 'a nniente?
Si 'a zuppa nun ghiesce ca 'o popolo è pirchio,
m'agguazzo cu 'a pelle, m'arrangio cu 'o chirchio:
Cu sette guagliune che vvuo' cchiù suna' ?
Sunanno, 'a famiglia, cchiù larga se fa'!
da Le poesie, 1956

— III — E me ne son fatte suonate! / ne ho scassato pelle
di tamburi! / Ma a tanto mi spronavano i quattrini: /
spingevo e uscivo solo durante l'estate! / Ora invece debbo
uscire con la pioggia! / Si bagna la pellecchia, / si spugna e
si aggrinzisce, / si affloscia come una borsa: / come la

pancia di una vecchia / che non è più capace di suonare! /
Così, cambio mestiere, e che faccio? non ride la gente? /
Venti anni di carriera me li sciupo in un niente? / Se non si
rimedia la zuppa perché il popolo è turchio, / mi sguazzo
con la pelle, m'arrangio col cerchio: / con sette ragazzi che
vuoi più suonare? Sonando, la famiglia, più larga si fa!

III

How many thump thump thumps my hands have played!

How many drums and drumskins I've gone through!

It was cash that spurred me into the avenue,
to comings and goings on sunny summer days!

But now I go out in the rain!

The drumskin gets a drenching,
swells up, then loses tension,
like an empty purse's dimensions.

like the belly of an ancient
crone who can play no more!

Time for a change: to what? Can't people show some cheer?

Must it waste away in nothing, my twenty year career?

If I can't solve this mess, if people are so ungriving,

I'll save my skin as I must, somehow I'll make a living:

With seven children, I don't want to play, God knows!

The more I play it seems, the more my family grows!

(Translated by Michael Palma)

ACHILLE SERRAO

He belongs to that small but important group of neodialect poets who look to Pier Paolo Pasolini, Andrea Zanzotto, Albino Pierro, Sandro Zanotto, Angiuli, Riviello, Mancino, Nigro, Marè, Pandini, and crosses our Twentieth century without worrying about the linguistic instrument employed, aiming exclusively at producing a poetic text keenly aware of its own means, but above all of its own legitimacy. Croce's distinction between spontaneous dialect literature and reflected dialect literature does not enter for a moment into Serrao's choice of dialect: its history is the almost automatic affirmation of an affirmation by Mario Sansone, who in *Relazioni fra letteratura italiana e le letterature dialettali* wrote, in the distant 1948: "On the

other hand, as it is absurd to conceive dialects as derivation, degradation or corruption of literary language, it is just as absurd to conceive literary language as the sum or result of dialects, through various and more or less explicit refinements, as literary language, as is common knowledge, is always a dialect elevated to national dignity and unitary function through complex historical reasons."

Zanzotto, Pasolini, Zanotto, Marè, Pierro have carried out an intense activity in Italian, and when they came to dialect it was not because their language had become corrupted or blemished or degraded, but because an inner need pushed them into the tangles of those phonemes, without hesitation, because "dialect literatures have a range of expressive possibilities as extensive as that of national literatures, and like the

latter, for instance, they go from the highest, most consciously lofty and elaborate tones, to those we call spontaneous, popular, immediate, so that even in the sphere of dialect literatures it is possible to distinguish..." Serrao, in fact, after his experiences in Italian, at any rate all positive and well received critically, with *Coordinata polare* [Polar Coordinate], in 1968, *Honeste vivere*, in 1970, *Destinato alla giostra* [Destined for the Merry-Go-Round], in 1974, *Lista d'attesa* [Waiting List], in 1979 and *L'altrove e il senso* [Elsewhere and Sense], in 1987 (without of course mentioning his narrative and literary essays), devotes himself totally to dialect poetry, immediately garnering enthusiastic approval from critics and poets of note. This meant that Serrao had been able to capture the magical moment of

passage of his inner self that pursued the gesture, the sigh, the scent of words ancient and new that had remained on the sideline (or, if you like, in ambush), but ready to release their energy if pushed into the struggle by a feeling that melted into song through means known only to the miraculous unions that take place in the “occasions” of poetry. Franco Loi first, in the preface to *Mal’aria* [Evil Air], in 1990, and Franco Brevini later have underlined the innovative elements Serrao introduced in the Campania tradition. And Cesare Vivaldi stressed the “hard and closed dialect... and yet very sweet, whispered, full of diminutives” to point out how the poet has been able to employ the linguistic instruments, forcing them to clash and then wresting from them that knelling sound which is the imponderable component of

poetry.

'A *canniaturo*, published by Editori Associati di Roma in 1993, crowns Serrao's dialect journey (the preface is by Giacinto Spagnoletti). The book shows expressive suppleness while remaining on the course charted by Di Giacomo, Capurro, Russo. Moreover, there is in Serrao a feeling of irritation towards all that has become sad and trite; his poems are like crystals in which Venetian glassmakers have put more lead with respect to previous products, so that if on the one hand there is a loss of sparkle, on the other there is a gain in poetic-expressive substance. Serrao does not abandon his regional tradition, but wants to add to it that touch of inexactness or too much exactness that comes from the tradition of the province, so that language may be validated by it and become better organized. On the

other hand, if he had not brought about that enrichment, he would have remained entangled in the seductiveness of the ariette which, while seemingly scorned by everyone, in fact are still capable of exacting extraordinary loyalty.

Serrao's critical bibliography is already considerable and one can add to the names of Loi, Brevini, Spagnoletti and Vivaldi at least those of Angelo Mundula, Francesco Piga, Dante Maffia, Maria Lenti, Giammario Villalta, Luigi Fontanella, Lucio Zinna, Cosma Siani, Idolina Landolfi, Eugenio Lucrezi, Roberto Giannoni.

Achille Serrao was born in Rome, where he lives, in 1936.

Mal'aria

C'è rummasa 'a scumma d''a culàta mo'
na chiorma 'e mucille che s'aggarba
pezzulle 'e pane sereticcio quacche
"silòca" 'nfacc'è pporte arruzzuta
e 'o viento nu viento ahi na mal'aria
'a quando se ne só

fujute tutte quante secutanno 'o ciuccio 'nnante, 'e notte
cu' 'a rrobba 'a rrobba lloro ('o ppoco pucurillo ca serve e
tene)

e 'a pòvere s'aiza 'int'a stu votafaccia
pe' ll'aria che se tegne d''o janco d''a petrèra.
Pe' tutt'a sscesa ruciulèa 'a ggente p''a sscesa
scarrupata 'e ccarrettelle d''a ggente
ruciulèano pure d''a ggente chiòchiara
'nzevata 'e suonno ca nun sente
chell'ate ruciulià e parla a schiòvere
stanotte parla 'e pressa a una voce
essa ch'è sulamente voce.

Se ne só jute muro muro da
'o maciello 'a vetrera 'a dint'è ccase
appuccenute sott'è cieuze senza
vummeçarìe e mmanco na menàta

'e chiave, ll'ucchie asciutte se nn'è ghiuta
'a ggente parlanno addò va va
viate a lloro e a chillu Ddio ch''e ffa campà.
da 'A canniatura, 1993

Mal'aria = C'è rimasta la schiuma del bucato ora / una
marmaglia di gatti che assapora / pezzi di pane muffo
qualche / "affittasi" sulle porte arrugginito / e il vento un
vento ahi una mal'aria / da quando se ne sono / fuggiti tutti
seguendo l'asino avanti, di notte / con la roba di casa (il
poco poco che serve e si mantiene) / e la polvere si solleva in
questo voltafaccia / nell'aria che si colora del bianco della
pietraia // Lungo tutta la discesa ruzzola la gente, lungo la
discesa / dirupata i carretti della gente / ruzzolano anche
della gente zotica / fatta di sonno che non sente / le altre
ruzzolare e parla a vanvera / stanotte parla in fretta a una
voce / lei che è soltanto voce. // Se ne sono andati muro
muro / dalle fornaci dal macello dalle case / rannicchiate
sotto i gelsi, senza / smancerie e neanche una mandata / di
chiave, gli occhi asciutti se n'è andata / la gente parlando
dove va va / beati loro e quel Dio che li fa campare.

(Traduzione dell'Autore)

Evil Air

Now only the laundry's foam is left
a swarm of cats devouring
pieces of dry bread a few
rusted "for rent" upon the doors
and the wind a wind ah a cruel air
since everyone ran away
behind the donkey at night,
with the stuff their stuff from the house (the little
that is useful and is kept)
and the dust lifts in this upheaval as the air
takes on the whiteness of a stoneheap.
Down the whole slope people tumble
along the crumbling slope people's carts
tumble even those belonging to louts
grimy with sleep who don't hear
others tumbling and talk nonsense
tonight they talk hurriedly to a voice
that is only a voice.
They have left sidling along the walls from
the glassworks the slaughterhouse
from the houses huddled under mulberry trees without
mush or even a turn of the key,

dry-eyed people have left
people talking wherever they're going
bless them and the god that gives them life.
(Translated by Luigi Bonaffini)

'O cunto d''e ccose piccerelle

Chiù assaje 'e ll'at'anno s'arrepecchia 'a fronna
azzelisce s'abbocca comme vó

Ddio ('o Ddio 'e tutte 'e ffronne) stu ddièce 'e pateterno
nu poco 'nzallanuto 'a cunnulèa
speresce 'a fronna jetteca - e isso c''a cuffèa.

Aria pe' naca, è overo, chisto è 'o cunto
d''e ccose piccerelle piccerelle

pure si scasualmente chella fronna
fosse d''e ffronne ll'urdema: che va
truvanno a Cristo 'int'è lupine mo'
cu' ll'aria 'nfuscatella che 'ntorza

('a tene 'a forza) 'ncuoll'è ffraveche na nuvola

ddoje nuvole zurfegne quanta nuvole pò (nce prode 'o
naso)

e appiccia 'o nniro 'e ll'uocchie
'ncielo?

da 'A canniatura, 1993

Racconto delle piccole cose — Più dell'altr'anno
aggrinzisce la foglia / rabbrividisce s'inclina come vuole /
dio (il dio di ogni foglia), questo dio smisurato / un poco
scimunito la dondola / si strugge la foglia tisica- e lui che la
canzona.// Aria per culla, è vero, questo è il racconto /

delle cose piccole piccole / anche se per caso quella foglia /
fosse l'ultima delle foglie: che va / cercando Cristo fra i
lupini ora / con l'aria un pò ubriaca che gonfia / (ce l'ha la
forza) sopra le case una nuvola / due nuvole di zolfo quante
nuvole può (le prude il naso) / e accende iridi / in cielo?

(Traduzione dell'Autore)

The Tale of Small Things

More than last year the leaf furls
it shudders it sags as god wills
(the god of all leaves) this thundering
almighty a little foolish cradles it
the stunted leaf wastes away — and he mocks it.
Cradle of air, it's true, this is the tale
of very small things
even if that leaf
happened to be the very last: why is it dancing
on that razor's edge
now that the tipsy air begins to swell a cloud
two clouds of sulphur (it has strength enough)
as many clouds it can above the houses
(its nose itches) and kindles the pupil
of the sky?
(Translated by Luigi Bonaffini)

Nu tiempo c'è stato...

Nu tiempo c'è stato ch''e pparole
nun cagnavano ll'aria, addu nuje
frièvano cu' ll'uoglio
d''a iacuvella aréto 'a vocca attenùte
pe' ppaura, cummenienza che ssaccio
nu chiuovo stu silenzio...Abbastava
na guardata, 'a strenta d''e mmane e ttècchete
n'ata manèra 'e parlà. Sulo vicino
ô letto d''o muorto succedeva
n'appicceco 'e voce nu votta
votta comme d'aucielle annude
pe' qqacche presa 'e pane.
da 'A canniatura, 1993

C'è stato un tempo...= C'è stato un tempo in cui le parole
/ non cambiavano l'aria, dalle nostre parti / friggevano
nell'olio / della furbizia trattenute dietro la bocca / per
paura, convenienza, che so, / un chiodo fisso questo
silenzio...Bastava / un'occhiata, una stretta di mani ed ecco
/ un altro modo di parlare. Solo vicino / al letto del morto si
accendeva / una baruffa di voci un pigia / pigia come
d'uccelli nudi / per qualche presa di pane.

(Traduzione dell'Autore)

There Was a Time

There was a time when words
didn't change the air, around these parts
they fried in the oil
of cunning, held in the mouth
by fear, expedience maybe,
this silence is a curse... A glance,
a handshake were enough to change the way you spoke.
Only around the dead man's bed
a brawl of voices, a jostling
like naked birds after a piece of bread.
(Translated by Luigi Bonaffini)

'O vide 'e venì...

'O vide 'e venì, ll'ora
è sempe 'a stessa appésa
â primma tatanella d''e pputéche, ê jastemme
'e nu trainante che 'nzorfa 'o ciuccio Arrià
p''a marina e struje ll'aria. Vene
pàtemo a st'ora 'e luce stracqua 'e sàgliere
na faccia 'ngialluta e 'a pecundria
d''e vive sott'a ll'uocchie quanno 'e vive
nun sanno pe' ccampà comme se spàterere
e Siénteme, oh m'hê 'a sèntere ventèa
'e pparole 'mmiez'ê diente addò
n'importa, jammo...accussì pede
catapède p''a campagna (na vranca 'e terra, schiara
'ncopp'â felìnia 'e ll'arbere) tantillo
abbasca 'o pate scianchenèa
tantillo, 'o vide 'e venì
pare ca mo' mo' se smammulèa
'o ninno 'e latte. 'Nfratanto
murmulèa doce e me canta 'int'ê mmane
a connola 'a diasilla
da 'A canniatura, 1993
Sta arrivando...= Sta arrivando, l'ora / è sempre la stessa

sospesa / al primo brusio delle botteghe, alle bestemmie / di
un carrettiere che aizza l'asino Avanti / per la madonna e
frusta l'aria. Giunge / mio padre a quest'ora di luce stanca
di salire / con la faccia ingiallita e la malinconia / dei vivi
sotto gli occhi quando i vivi / non sanno come spartirsi per
sopravvivere / e Ascoltami, oh mi devi ascoltare soffia / le
parole fra i denti dove / non importa, andiamo... così adagio
/ adagio attraverso la campagna (un pugno di terra, fa
giorno / sopra la ragnatela degli alberi) un poco / ansima il
padre barcolla / un poco, ecco arriva / sembra che proprio
ora cominci a camminare / da solo come un bambino da
latte. Intanto / mormora dolcemente e mi canta nelle mani /
a culla la cantilena

You See Him Come...

You see him come, always
at that same hour suspended
on the shops' early drone, on the curses
of a carter driving the donkey Get up there,
damn you and flailing the air. My father
comes at this hour of light tired of rising,
with his sallow face and the melancholy
of the living under his eyes, when the living
don't know what else to do to stay alive,
and Listen, ehi, you've got to listen he breathes
the words between his teeth no matter
where, let's go ...and so he trudges slowly
through the fields (a handful of earth, daylight
breaking over the cobweb of the trees) my father
pants a little, he staggers
a little, you see him come
with a child's first
weaning steps. Meanwhile
he murmurs softly, and sings
into my cradled hands that slow,

lenta e appecundruta 'e tanno...

...aggio 'a mettere llòco a picciunara

...nun te ne ji n'ata vota...

suspira 'o pate me summèglia sulo

'mpont'â vocca sulamente, po'

'a rusàta d''o suonno torna a frémmere

vicino ê llamparelle d''a campagna una ne stuta una

se mantène 'mpilo 'mpilo e vene

juorno lassa fa Ddio lucente.

/ intristita e lenta di allora / ...devo mettere lì la
colombaia / ...non te ne andare un'altra volta.../ sospira il
padre mi somiglia solo / sulla bocca soltanto, poi / la
rugiada del sogno torna a fremere / accanto ai focherelli di
campagna, uno ne spegne uno / a malapena resiste e si fa /
giorno grazie a Dio luminoso.

(Traduzione dell'Autore)

(Cont.d)

melancholy chant of long ago...
...over there I'll put the pigeon-house
...don't go away again...
my father sighs, he resembles me only
around the edges of the mouth,
then the dew of dream begins to quiver
around the small fires in the fields,
it puts one out, another barely hangs on
and a bright day God willing starts to rise.
(Translated by Luigi Bonaffini)

Chill'anno

Per Ferdinando Falco
che con me condivise
Chi 'o ssape quant'èremo chill'anno:
Cazzillo, Ferdinando 'e Malacarne c'astipa suonne
e rasùle 'nammurato
d''a Cummedia i' pure grilliàno
'mmiez'a sta peccenaglia
che se scerà 'int'â lota e vó puntià
stelle cu' mmane scuiète...ma nce stevo
l'anno c'all'intrasatta se stutaje
'a lucenza d''a luna
e po' cadette viento a nu cumanno?
(parette a nu cumanno, tremmaje
na ròcchia 'e mièrute patute...
pecché cantammo?..)
- Cazzì, che ffaje,
acconcia è 'a notte pe' na serenata?
- Nun scioscia manco nu puntillo 'e viento,
'o calascione sona, mena me'...

Quell'anno — Chi sa quanti eravamo quell'anno: /
Cazzillo, Ferdinando dei Malacarne che raccoglie sogni / e
rasoi innamorato / della Commedia anch'io saltando come

un grillo / in mezzo a questa teppa / che si bea nel fango e
rammenda / stelle con mani inquiete...ma c'ero / l'anno in
cui all'improvviso si spense / lo splendore della luna / e poi
cadde il vento ad un comando? / (sembrò ad un comando,
rabbrividi / uno stormo di merli innamorati.../ perché
cantiamo?) -Cazzì che fai, / buona è la notte per una
serenata?// - Non soffia neanche un fiato di vento / il
calascione suona, coraggio...

That Year

For Ferdinando Falco
who shared with me
Who knows that year how many of us there were:
Cazzillo, Ferdinando Malacarne who collects dreams
and razors I too in love
with the Comedy leaping with joy
amid this swarm
that wallows in the mud and wants to mend
the stars with restless hands...
but where was I the year
that the moon's brightness suddenly died out
and the wind fell at a command?
(it seemed at a command, a band
of pining blackbirds shuddered...
why do we sing...?)
- Cazzì, what do you say,
is this a fit night for a serenade?
- Not a wisp of wind is blowing,
the calascione* is playing, well come on...
*A musical instrument with three or six strings

- Pe' cchi cantammo?
e tu d''e Malacarne vaje ancora
ascianno scàuzo dint'ê fuosse 'mmiezo
ô ggrano?... ma chi nce sta chiammano...
S''e cchiamma 'e piccerille quanno scenne
'o scuro 'a mamma
e vvoce 'a copp'a vvoce è tutto nu chiammà
da 'e llogge, 'a vascio...
chi 'o ppò sapè quant'èremo chill'anno...
Pure mo' cade viento:
notte sulagna luna senza niente
munnata è na cepolla 'a luna,
chi 'o ssape quant'èremo...tu va
nun è cchiù ccosa, nun ll'addimannà
nun è cchiù tempo, t'hai da fa capace
c''e rrappe attuorno all'uocchie e artéteca
e griscio, nun è cchiù ccosa.

Va...

da 'A canniatura, 1993

//- Per chi cantiamo? / e tu dei Malacarne vai ancora /
a caccia scalzo nei fossi in mezzo / al grano?...ma chi ci sta
chiamando.../ Se li chiama i piccoli quando scende / il buio

una mamma / e voce su voce è tutto un chiamare / dai
balconi da basso... / chi può sapere quanti eravamo
quell'anno... // Anche ora cade il vento: / notte deserta
luna senza niente / sbucciata è una cipolla la luna / chi può
sapere quanti eravamo...tu va / non vale la pena, non
domandarlo / non è più tempo devi rassegnarti / con le
grinze attorno agli occhi e il tremito / e grigio, non vale la
pena. / Va...

(Traduzione dell'Autore)

(Cont.d)

- Who do we sing for?
and you Malacarne still hunt
barefoot down the ditches
in the wheat?... but who is calling us?
When it gets dark the mothers all begin
to call their children in
and voice upon voice it's all a calling
from the balconies, from below...
who'll ever know that year how many of us there were..
Even now the wind's falling:
deserted night moon without a thing
peeled onion of a moon,
who knows how many of us there were...you go
it isn't worth it, don't ask
it's not the time, you must accept it
with lines around your eyes and then the tremor
and the gray, it isn't worth it.
Go...
(Translated by Luigi Bonaffini)

The poets who employ Latin are increasingly rarer, even if recent and less recent tradition is filled with important names like Pasolini, Vitrioli, Mazza, Morabito. Some ascribe this loss to the schools that have slackened the reins (where are the great Calabrian Latinists who taught Boccaccio and Petrarch?), others think that writing in a dead language is obsolete and anachronistic, but if they were to meditate on what Pascoli said every time he dealt with his competitions in Amsterdam ("The language of poetry is always a dead language"), perhaps they would understand the scope of a cultural and poetic operation, and would not dismiss the phenomenon so quickly.

On the other hand, there is nothing

mysterious about poets like Fernando Baldini and Sandro Zanotto who have been insisting for years on the parallel between those poets who write in the various dialects and those who employ Latin. There are some distinctions to be made, no doubt, for instance the patrimony of works the Latin language has behind it and the nothing, often, or the almost nothing dialects have behind them, but as far as the results are concerned the analysis does not change nor can the approach. Michele Sovente, already author of *L'uomo al naturale* [Natural Man], published in 1978 by Nuove Edizioni Enrico Vallecchi and *Contropar(ab)ola*, put in print in 1981 by the same publisher, after an assiduous contribution to journals such as *Alfabeto*, *Poesia*, *Linea d'ombra*, *Il Belli* and *Il Mattino*, has published *Per specula-aenigmatis*:

Milan, Garzanti, 1990, which collects his Latin poems written from 1980 and 1982. Poems that attempt, in a harmonically contemporary way, to follow unusual linguistic paths and test the extent to which the language of the Romans can find (not find) an extraordinary poetic possibility; poems that add to the sound waves of the past (the past filled with exceptional results) the waves of a present ready to accept, to deflagrate and fall in love, those suggestions that have become an indispensable patrimony. Sovente succeeds, I would say miraculously, in taking a journey within paths saturated with meaning and consent, and yet what he translates into his world is never a remnant or residue, but something luminous and original which is grafted onto life and enriches it with new meanings. It would suffice to pause on the poems XVV

and XLVI (“that the sea — even the sea — told him / the ruins and treasures in which his life passed”), to realize this is a poet who has been able to bring poetic Latin to a dimension of great existential tension. He has done the same with his poetry written in the dialect of Cappella, in the province of Naples. The poet has stated (Cf. *Via terra — Antologia di poesia neodialettale*) edited by Achille Serrao): “to write in dialect...means more and more... bringing to light my voice, my imagination, my anthropological-expressive identity that is rooted in an archaic territory called Campi Flegrei. Dialect, then, not as flight toward the past, nor as negation of the hic and nunc, or not merely this, but as undeferrable necessity to discover my roots to the end, opening my cultural patrimony to original and primal elements.”

If there was still need for it, another demonstration of how a scholar also committed to literary criticism (Sovente, among other things, teaches Contemporary Literature at the Academy of Fine Arts of Naples) and a poet who has written both in Italian and Latin can find the ways of the "earth," not to lower his expressive tone or linguistic quality, but to reiterate what is by now a sacrosanct truth: the important thing is for the vital energy underlying creation to enter the verse and then, maybe in very poor translations, the poetry will remain; badly attired or even disguised if you like, but ready to undress as soon as it is stimulated or invited.

Sovente was born in Cappella (Naples) in 1948.

I ffemmene prene

Ogna 'ncoppa ogna
cuorpo spierzo s' aggroгна
pe 'u funno r' 'i vvene
se conta a ccentinara
pe' 'u funno r' 'a cavurara
tutte se conta 'i ppéne
'a ggente r' ri rruttéle
mane e pieri 'ncatenata
'i ffemmene prene
cu ffune longhe attaccano
'i figli malasciurtati
Ogna roppo ogna
l'arbero a vierno se scogna
rareche e scorze arrezzute
nu nureco
na longa longa cuperta 'i cuttone
pe' quatt'ossa trasute
rinto a quatt' ossa
'i ffemmene prene
pe' tterra struscinano 'u culo e 'i ccosce
ogna arreto ogna
accocchiano 'i notte mullicule 'i pane

ca 'mmana s' aggrognano

da *Poesie inedite*

Le femmine incinte — Unghia su unghia / spaurito corpo
in malora / nell' intrico delle vene / si racconta a centinaia
/ nell' incavo della caldaia / si racconta infinite le pene / il
popolo dei sottoscala / mani e piedi incatenato / le femmine
incinte / con funi lunghe legano // i figli sciagurati //
Unghia dopo unghia / l'albero d' inverno si spoglia / radici
e cortecce rugginose / un nodo / una sterminata coperta
cotonata / su quattr' ossa incassate / dentro a quattr' ossa /
le femmine incinte / culo e cosce carponi trascinano /
unghia dietro unghia / le molliche di pane di notte
trascinano / e al tatto vanno esse in malora

(Traduzione dell'Autore)

The Pregnant Women

Fingernail upon fingernail
dispersed grimacing body
in the depths of the veins
by the hundreds their tales
in the depths of the cauldron
they tell all of their pains
people under the staircase
their hands and feet in chains
pregnant women
use long ropes to tie
their wretched children.
Fingernail after fingernail
in winter the trees scale
rusty roots and barks
a knot
an endless cotton blanket
on a heap of bones caving in
into a heap of bones
pregnant women
drag their asses and thighs on the ground
fingernail after fingernail
they glean breadcrumbs at night

they grimace to the touch.
(Translated by Luigi Bonaffini)

Vruoccoli femmena famma

Vruoccoli vracchi cassarola
chiena r' acqua salata,
saglie 'a fiamma viola saglie
russulella lengua moppeta
ra nu viento riavulillo 'nguttato,
'a cassarola 'ncuollo sbatte 'u ciato.
Vò e vene 'a femmena
r' 'a casa strettulella
cu na finistella 'mbronte 'u mare
e l'addore r' 'u mare se 'mbriaca
cu chillo scummuso r' 'i vruoccoli,
sperduti navicanti 'ncastrati
rinto 'a cassarola affummata.
Saglie 'a famma 'nzieme 'a fiamma,
chella janca chesta gialla.
Strutta 'a panza nun s'arrenne,
strutta 'a vista vò fujenno.
'A femmena votta ll' ata acqua,
'i vruoccoli cchiù vracchi se fanno.
'U tempo à dda passò
si nu picco 'a famma s' à dda mmaccò.
Broccoli femmina fame — Broccoli gravidi tegame /

zeppo d' acqua salata, / sale la fiamma viola sale / rossiccia
lingua sbattuta / da un vento fracassone inzavorrato, / sul
collo il tegame agita il fiat. // Va e viene la femmina / dell'
angusta casa / con una finestrella sul mare / l'odore del
quale si rimescola / con quello schiumoso dei broccoli,
smarriti naviganti rinserrati / nel tegame affumicato. //
Sale la fame con la fiamma / quella bianca questa gialla. /
Assediata la pancia non s'arrende, / insidiata la vista cerca
altre tende. / Altra acqua la femmina aggiunge, / si fanno
più grandi i broccoli. // Deve il tempo passare / per la fame
un filino placare. //

Broccoli Woman Hunger

Thick broccoli saucepan
filled with salted water,
the violet flame rises rises
reddish tongue stirred
by a mischievous wind,
the saucepan sputters around the neck.
The woman comes and goes
in the cramped house,
with a small window facing the sea
and the scent of the sea mixing
with the frothy smell of broccoli,
lost adrift trapped
in the smoke-blackened saucepan.
Hunger rises with the flame,
the one white the other yellow.
Spent, the belly won't give up,
spent, the eyes dart here and there.
The woman throws more water in,
the broccoli get thicker and thicker.
Time has to go by
for the hunger to subside.

Che viento s' è mmiso 'u furnello
spanteca 'u ffucariello
e quanno arriva 'u maritiello
'ncoppa 'a tavula sulo
'i vruoccoli ponno abbastò?
penza sturduta 'a femmena
penza cu 'a finistella
'mpronte 'u mare.

“Puozzi schiattò, te puozzi
affucò comme 'int' a ll' acqua
'i vruoccoli vracchi, pure
'i ccoglie ce puozzi appuzò
a sta famma canaglia scummosa!”,
allucca 'a femmena tutta 'ngrifata.
S'ammoscia 'ntruliosa se stuta
'a fiamma. Vruoccoli squagliati,
fjuti. 'U marito addò se n'è ghiuto?
da *Poesie inedite*

Che vento intorno al fornello / ansima il fuocherello / e
all'arrivo del maritino bello / possono in tavola solo /
broccoli bastare? / pensa tramortita la femmina / pensa con
la finestrella / sul mare. // “Possa crepare, tu possa /

affogare come nell' acqua / i broccoli gravidi, anche / i
coglioni possa versare / alla canaglia fame schiumosa!”, / la
femmina urla furiosa. // S' abbassa torbida muore / la
fiamma. Broccoli / liquefatti, / svaniti. Dov'è finito il
marito?

(Traduzione dell'Autore)

(Cont.d)

What a draft around the burner
the small flame gasps
and when the darling husband arrives
can the broccoli alone
be enough on the table?
the woman thinks in her daze
she thinks with the small window
facing the sea.

“May you drop stone dead, may you
drown like thick broccoli
in water, may you pour out
your balls even
to this foul foaming hunger!”,
the woman shouts in a rage.

The flame droops murkily,
it dies out. The broccoli have melted,
vanished. Where did the husband go?
(Translated by Luigi Bonaffini)

Dicembre

Cora caruta ammiezo
'i ffoglie 'i dicembre
quanno addisegna 'u cielo
vie storte senza na ràreca.
Chello ca nun se rice
s' 'u pporta nu camje
ca 'ncoppa 'i pprete s' appenne.
Acqua moppeta rinto
'i ssajttelle, cu ttanta streppuni
e rrote carute, 'a faccia
'i ll' acqua nisciuno 'a sape.
'I ffoglie a dicembre addiventano
serpienti e liuni.

da *Poesie inedite*

Dicembre — Coda caduta tra / le foglie di dicembre /
quando disegna il cielo / vie che non portano a nulla. /
Quello che non si dice / se lo porta via un camion / che
sulle pietre s'inerpica. / Acqua nelle sentine / sconvolta, con
tanti torsoli / e ruote affondate; nessuno / conosce i
lineamenti dell'acqua. / Le foglie a dicembre diventano /
serpenti e leoni.

(Traduzione dell'Autore)

December

A tail fallen among
December leaves
when the sky draws
crooked roads leading nowhere.
What isn't said
is taken away by a truck
scrambling up stony paths.
Water swirling
in the cesspits, with so many cores
and tires fallen in, no one
knows the face of the water.
The leaves in December become
snakes and lions.
(Translated by Luigi Bonaffini)

TOMMASO PIGNATELLI

“Tommaso Pignatelli is the pseudonym of one of the most eminent figures of the Italian Parliament,” reads the inside cover of a book entitled *Pe cupia’ ‘o chiarfo* [To Imitate the Rainstorm], published in Rome by AIDE in 1994. This fact makes one curious, also because the book is accompanied by a note by Natalino Sapegno, a critic notoriously not well disposed towards dialect poets, and by a preface by Tullio di Mauro, an eminent scholar esteemed the world over. Sapegno writes: “It’s been a very long time since we have read a poet so rich, full-blooded and light. Within tradition, but beyond the line of Di Giacomo and Russo, he knows how to use the humors of the Neapolitan spirit without exploiting them, and transforms the

Neapolitan language into a high instrument of poetry by infusing it with new freshness and renewing its expressive felicity.”

And De Mauro concludes his impeccable introductory essay this way: “With the innovations mentioned and the precious archaisms, the rhythm opens the way to a renewed vitality of Neapolitan. Perhaps, like so many other great dialect poets of the Twentieth Century, the Anonymous has written in dialect from afar, moving from a condition of estrangement. At any rate, the Anony-mous himself says: it’s the words we have to smash / to go back to living, / they have to make the fourth of May.

It seems to me that De Mauro underlines a problem of great importance, the “renewed importance of Neapolitan,” an inexhaustible language, always nourished by the warm breath that comes from the sea

and the slums, from the Vomero and San Martino, from a play of the imagination that belongs to men, to the landscape, to things, but for this very reason (like Venetian) balanced on the edge of a usura waiting to make it flat and stale, a stereotype. This is why Pignatelli is greeted with elation, because, utilizing the whole Seventeenth, Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century tradition he can imbue it with a new vigor, an inflection that comes from afar and follows an ambiguous, multivalent path, which is characteristic of the most recent European poetry. De Mauro, in fact, makes no bones about inserting Pignatelli among the "great dialect poets of the Twentieth Century"; he understands the full scope of his importance, and the invitation is not ignored by a poet and critic as observant as Franco Loi who expresses his full agreement

in *Sole 24 ore* (August 7, 1994).

Many conjectures have been made on Pignatelli's identity: Luigi Amendola suggests the Name of Giorgio Napolitano; Luigi Reina tends toward a known poet who likes to "experiment" in different styles. Whoever he may be, there is the reality of his poetic writing, forged over a flame capable of consuming cultural and even erudite dross in order to produce verses of rare transparency and intensity. One perceives in many poems of *Pe cupia' 'o chiarfo* an expressive energy that, as Valery used to say, involves "all the resources of experience and intellect" to obtain results that seem "great metaphysical anguish...reduced to small domestic cares" (Laforgue).

I find that the group of new Neapolitan poets (Achille Serrao, Michele Sovente,

Salvatore di Natale — unfortunately not included here for reasons of space — and Tommaso Pignatelli is, without any doubt, the most seasoned and substantial in quality. It is as if these poets were being pushed by an anxious storm that sweeps clouds and rubble and washes the most beautiful and famous Gulf in the world to restore that sense of music that belongs to it almost fatally, but each of these figures inhabits his space with a self-awareness that has gone through the fire of controversy, not only poetic, but also philosophical, of the intellect, as is in the best Neapolitan tradition. And of course, without the support — shattered, tormented, interiorized and even vanified — of the intellect there can be no great poetry, but only sketches, vignettes, impressions.

Perhaps this is the starting point of the

third part of the Italian Twentieth Century
or of the first century of the third
millennium. Pignatelli is certainly not out of
place here, on the contrary...

U niro è casadiàvulo, è scuro,
è lontananza, cecarìa. Tu mo vulisse
ca fute verità ntu teraturo
subissero n'eccrisse.

Sì propio, bella mia, na bonapezza,
ch'abbada sulo a 'o sentimento suoio.

"Suspirano, spremmient' a felià o piétto,
tieneno core e cularino, tieneno
uòcchie ch'allegestran 'a luce
comm' a tte, ca... ma
so parole 'e na viacruce...

- e ne parlo co sciato ca me manca -
so 'e parole ca s'ann' a scassà
pe turnà a vivere
ch'anna fà 'o quatto 'e maggio.

Nun è tarde p'arreducere
a 'o silenzio tutte, tutt 'e parole".
da *Pe cupia' 'o chiarfo*, 1994

Mormorio inesistente — Il nero è inferno, è buio, \ è
assenza, cecità. Tu ora vorresti \ che verità profonde nel
tiretto \ subissero una eclisse. \ Sei proprio, bella mia, una
traditrice, \ che bada soltanto al suo sentimento. \

“Sospirano, prova a spaccargli il petto, \ hanno cuore e intestino, hanno \ occhi che registrano la luce \ come te, che... ma \ sono parole di una via crucis... \ - e ne parlo col fiato che mi manca - \ sono le parole che bisogna cancellare \ per tornare a vivere \ che devono sgombrare. \ Non è tardi per ridurre \ al silenzio tutte, tutte le parole”.

(Traduzione dell’Autore)

Drone

Black is hell, darkness,
it's absence, blindness. Now you would like
deep truths inside the drawer
to be eclipsed.

You're really something else, sweetheart,
your feelings are the only thing you know.

"They sigh, try to split them open,
they have a heart and guts, they have
eyes that take in light

like you, that...but

they are words of a via crucis...

— and I talk about them with failing breath —

they're words you have to smash

to live again,

they have to disappear.

It's not too late to turn

every word, every word to silence.

(Translated by Luigi Bonaffini)

'A morte

'O ssaccio chillo ca s'adda fa'
certe vvote: appiccià o munno,
o 'nzerrasse a tutto, dicere è fennuta,
non azzetto cchiù manc' o sole,
nun m'allicuordo d'esse nato.
Ma non aggio 'o curaggio
e aspetto ca spercia 'a zella da bufera
e 'o sango mio retuorna a friccecà
comm'a nu sciummo 'mbessicchiato
ca se stupetìa nto cielo da vita.
Vurria sbesicchiarla chilla zucculona,
songo stato anni a veglià
'e manfròn' e i scurdamenti soie
p'allanzanne quacche leccatiello
e, 'o momento accapato,
pennularlo nto màfaro. Cìfero!
pròpeto quando tiene 'o spanto
'e 'ntènnerla o d'azzettarla sor' e l'ammòre
issa jètta zaffiat' e niro, pare
na seccia appaurata e 'nchiude ll'uòcchie.
Aggio situato tagliole addovònca
pe l'accirrà all'intrasatta, ammacaro

pe le pupà nu pil' e silenzio.

Sì, 'ncopp' a quacch'arvaro 'e vvote
s'ascia nu 'nchiacchietello ca fa penzà
'o pede soie; abbascio, 'nzi lo mare

La morte — Lo so quello che bisogna fare \ in certi
momenti: incendiare il mondo, \ o chiudersi a tutto, dire è
finita, \ non riconosco più neppure il sole, \ non mi ricordo
d'essere nato. \ Ma non ho il coraggio \ e aspetto che passi
la tigna della bufera \ e il mio sangue ritorni a scorrere \
come un fiume sonnolento \ che si perde nel cielo della vita.
\ Vorrei aprirle le palpebre a quella puttana, \ sono stato
anni a vegliare \ gli scarti e le sue dimenticanze \ per trarne
qualche peccato, \ e, al momento opportuno, \ metterglielo
nel sedere. Diavolo! \ proprio quando hai la sensazione \ di
comprenderla e di riconoscerla sorella dell'amore \ lei butta
zaffate di nero, sembra \ una seppia impaurita e chiude gli
occhi. \ Ho messo tagliole dappertutto \ per coglierla di
sorpresa, almeno \ per rubarle un pò di silenzio. \ Sì, su
qualche albero a volte \ si trova una macchia che fa pensare
\ al suo piede; giù, fino al mare \

Death

I know what I must do
from time to time: ignite the world,
or shut everything out, say it's over,
I don't even know the sun,
I don't remember being born.
But I don't have the courage
and wait for the storm's ringworm to go by
and for my blood to run
like a drowsy river once again
getting lost in life's sky.
The bitch, I'd like to open her eyelids,
for years I've waited
for her to slip or forget
to catch her in a misstep
and, at the right time,
put it up hers. Hell!
just when you feel
you understand her and know her as love's sister
she spurts out blackness, seems
a frightened cuttlefish and shuts her eyes.
I have set traps everywhere
to catch her unprepared, at least

to snatch a bit of silence from her.
Yes, on some trees at times
you find a blotch
that reminds you of her foot;
below, towards the shore,
at other times I see

aute vote m'adduno ca nta ll'acqua
c'è na resàta cetruògna ca sbafa,
ma niente cchiù. Forze ci' appizza,
in quacche ammàtteto, quacch'eco
ch'a attumàto 'a misura;
ma po', overamènte è mai campata
s'ancòra se nne parla comme malòmbra
e manco l'Arcivescovo ha potuto
vattiarla o cresimmarla? Sapìte che vve dico?
Nun è ca morte sulo chella faglia
ca schizzechea sparpètuo e scaiènza nta ll'ossa
ch'all'appuntà da vecchiaia
se fa cchiù velinia e tuòsta?
da Pe cupia' 'o chiarfo, 1994

\ altre volte m'accorgo che nell'acqua \ c'è un verde
sorriso che svampa, \ ma niente di più. Forse perde, \ in
certe occasioni, qualche eco \ che ha colmato la misura; \
ma poi, veramente è mai esistita \ se ancora se ne parla
come fantasma \ e neppure l'Arcivescovo ha potuto \
battezzarla o cresimarla? Sapete che vi dico? \ Non è che la
morte è solo quella mancanza \ che fa piovigginare dolore e
squallore nelle ossa \ che all'approssimarsi della vecchiaia

\ si fa più visibile e durevole?
(Traduzione dell'Autore)

(Cont.d)

a green smile dimming in the water,
but nothing else. Maybe
now and then she loses
an echo that has filled the measure;
but has she ever really lived
if they still talk about her as a ghost
if not even the Archbishop could
baptize and confirm her? I say
that maybe death is just the gap
that rains sorrow and misery on your bones
and as old age gets near
becomes more visible and firm.
(Translated by Luigi Bonaffini)

Pur' 'o vecchio Sceccospirro

Commo puozzo vutà arreto, fégnere
che nun è 'ntravenuto niente, ca tutt' 'e chèllete
songhe rimaste accunciate? Pur' 'o vecchio
Sceccospirro s'addimmannava e deva
l'annummenata 'o iuorno e 'a notte
pe falli cecà e tuzzulià. 'O vero
campa tutto dint' 'o sciato toie
ca mo spallia 'o regno scuro
da morte e addesìa 'o strarègno
de iuorni soie e da l'oscurità.
Ma tu 'o ssaie ch'è meglio addiventà
scuro dint' 'e vrazze toie
ca luce scapizzata ca pe venelle se ne va'.
da *Pe cupia' 'o chiarfo*, 1994

Anche il vecchio Shakespeare — Come posso tornare indietro, fingere \ che non sia accaduto nulla, che tutte le cose \ sono tornate al loro posto? Anche il vecchio \ Shakespeare se lo domandava e incolpava \ il giorno e la notte \ per farli accecare e litigarsi. La verità \ vive tutta intera nel tuo fiato \ che adesso protegge il regno oscuro \ della morte e desidera l'esilio \ dai suoi giorni e dall'oscurità. \ Ma tu lo sai ch'è meglio diventare \ buio nelle tue braccia

\ anzichè luce che deborda per le vie e se ne va.
(Traduzione dell'Autore)

Even Old Shakespeare

How can I go back, pretend
that nothing happened, that everything
is in place? Even old
Shakespeare wondered
and he blamed day and night
to make them blind and watch them brawl.
Truth lives entirely in your breath
that now protects the dark realm of death
and yearns to be exiled
from its own days, the dark.
But you know it's better to become
darkness in your arms
than light spilling in the streets.
(Translated by Luigi Bonaffini)

Piscegràzia

'A vacànzia è fernuta e me garbizza
sto chïarfo ca 'ncarma
l'appecundria. E' meglio stracquà,
'e campìglie arreventano scaiènze
'e l'autunno ca 'nzarda into culore
do vignale e s'aggranfeca zumpanno
'nzi' lo core. Ca mmùmmèra aggubbata
selluzzo pe sbariamiento, forse
pe cupia' 'o chiarfo, po piglià pe fesso.
da *Pe cupia' 'o chiarfo*, 1994

Strascico — La vacanza è finita e mi piace \ questa
pioggia violenta che benedice \ la malinconia. E' meglio
desistere, \ le promesse diventano bisogni \ dell'autunno
che preme nel colore \ della vigna e s'arrampica a sussulti \
fino al cuore. Col capo piegato \ singhiozzo per distrazione,
forse \ per imitare l'acquazzone, per prenderlo in giro.

(Traduzione dell'Autore)

Aftermath

The vacation is over and I like
this violent rainstorm that blesses
melancholy. It's better to stop,
promises become the needs
of Autumn pressing down
on the color of the vineyard,
clambering up your heart.
With my head down
I sob absentmindedly, maybe
to imitate the rainstorm, to make fun of it.
(Translated by Luigi Bonaffini)

Nu pil' 'e pastiggio

Napule tene nu sènzo duciazzo
ca trase 'nte nasche e sbèrgena
'a tennerùmmecca de sere 'o vierno
ca cadeno 'ncopp' 'a ripa do mare
'n chiéie 'e durcezza
e s'arredecano 'o Maschio Angioino
comme fussero avertimènti
d'ùrdema alleverènzia.

Me 'mpertuso, in chelli ammàtteti,
into misciòscio ca campa dint' 'a mme
e sfessecchia i passi miei
i penzamiènti 'o trivulo afflito
pe tutto chello ch'aggia lassà comm'è.
da *Pe cupia' 'o chiarfo*

Un pò d'amarezza — Napoli ha un sapore dolciastro \
ch'entra nelle narici e violenta \ la tenerezza delle sere
invernali \ che cadono sulla riva del mare \ in curve di
dolcezza \ e si posano sul Maschio Angioino \ come fossero
avvisi \ di estremo saluto. \ Mi rintano, in quelle occasioni,
\ nell'estraneo che esiste in me \ e spia i passi miei \ i
pensieri il pianto afflito \ per tutto quello che dovrò lasciare
com'è.

(Traduzione dell'Autore)

Some Bitterness

Naples has a sweet taste
that enters your nostrils and violates
the tenderness of winter evenings
as they fall upon the seashore
in coils of softness
and settle on the Maschio Angioino
like omens
of a last farewell.

At those times I hide
in the stranger that lives in me
and spies my steps
my thoughts my forlorn weeping
for all I'll have to leave behind.

(Translated by Luigi Bonaffini)

Aggio veduto mamma mia
scenne a còppa 'a Vesuviana
cu na prejézza 'nta ll'uòcchie,
ammagliat' e na suttana
comme nu bracalasso
c' u viénto addà 'mpararse
addò adda jettà.

'Na paréglija e cerasa 'ncopp' e zìrule,
steva appuiata a nu sciurill' e sole.

Era viérno 'nzerrato,
na matenàta tòsta 'mbroscenava
l'onne do mare.

Nun m'ha guardato. Aggio allucato:
"Mammà, so' i', o carnente tujo".

Nibba! Nun m'ha accumenito,
chi o ssape pecché.

Me l'addimanno, ma tutt' e chèllete
arrentano musdée e l'arièlla
rummàne arrasso, chella...

A Vesuviana se nne va'
eternamente senz'essa,
va a ssapé pecché.

da *Pe cupia' 'o chiarfo*, 1994

Invano — Ho visto mia madre \ scendere dalla Vesuviana
\ con un'allegria negli occhi, \ cinta da una sottana \ come
un fantasma \ che il vento deve imparare \ dove buttare. \
Una coppia di ciliege nei capelli, \ stava appoggiata a una
fioritura di sole. \ Era inverno chiuso, \ una mattinata dura
striava \ le onde del mare. \ Non mi ha guardato. Ho
gridato: \ "Mamma, sono io, tuo figlio". \ Niente! Non mi
ha riconosciuto, \ chi lo sa perchè. \ Me lo domando, ma
tutte le cose \ diventano donnole e l'aria \ resta lontana,
quella... \ La Vesuviana se ne va \ eternamente senza di lei,
\ vai a sapere perchè.

(Traduzione dell'Autore)

In Vain

I saw my mother
step off the Vesuviana
with happy eyes,
girded by a petticoat
like a ghost
that the wind is trying to figure
where to drop.
A pair of cherries in her hair,
she leaned against a bud of sunlight.
It was a closed winter,
a hard morning was streaking
the waves of the sea.
She did not look at me. I shouted:
"Mom, it's me, your son."
Nothing! She didn't recognize me,
I can't understand it.
I keep on wondering, but every object
is weasel-like, and the air
remains far, the air...
The Vesuviana leaves
eternally without her,
but don't ask me why.

(Translated by Luigi Bonaffini)

BASILICATA

Basilicata, a region bordering with Campania (West), with Puglia (North-East) and with Calabria (South), with a population of about 610.000 people scattered in one hundred and thirty towns, until 1950 had a type of life modeled on an archaic agricultural system, only in the last twenty years updated with well-watered cultivation areas, service sector jobs and pockets of industrialization. The isolation of the small communities has perpetuated archaic customs and beliefs, linked to forms of psychological impoverishment and illiteracy.

Italo Talia has written: "The same Basilicata dialects distinguish themselves from those of Campania and Puglia by a more accentuated conservation of archaic residues: in the Potenza territory the long

Norman, Swabian and Angevin dominations, have barely grazed the Latin lexical patrimony, and in the Matera territory the Greek-classical heritage is more evident than the Byzantine (Talia, 1976, p. 146). Anna M. Compagna attests that the passage from the use of Latin to the vernacular is to be dated from the first decades of the Fifteenth Century and, in fact, it can be surmised that the "lack of an intense communal life in the Kingdom during the Fourteenth Century explains the absence of local vernacular documentary texts, found in such abundance elsewhere" (Compagna, 1983, p.280). Raffaele Nigro has documented a widespread usage, beginning with the Seventeenth Century, of poetic and political texts, but also religious and scientific, written in vernacular (Nigro, 1981). In the Nineteenth Century it is the

historian Giacomo Racioppi who collects, starting in 1948, the songs of Moliterno, Saponara, Spinoso and Latronico, which would later become part of the collection edited by Casetti and Imbriani (Casetti-Imbriani, 1871).

In the Positivistic Age there was a keener interest in the recording of dialect, resulting in the publication of the collections in the dialect of Matera edited by Francesco Festa (1872 and 1883) and by Molinaro del Chiaro (1882) and the one in the dialect of Potenza by the poet Pietro La Guardia.

In 1932 there is the isolated case of the drama in the dialect of Senise: *A muggghiera ru miricane* [The American's Wife], Naples, Unione, by Paolo De Grazia. Homologous to dialect, to its syntactical constructions and symbolic density, is the entire poetic and narrative form of Rocco Scotellaro from

Tricarico (1923-1953), one of the most significant Italian poets of the Neorealistic period, whose popular elements have been underlined (cf. Grassi, 1965), but not totally charted nor reconstructed through lemmas and concordances.

Even the refined Hermetic poet Leonardo Sinisgalli from Montemurro (1908-1981) toyed with dialect, going as far as collecting a few “poems from Basilicata selected and transcribed from the indigenous dialects.” See with what keenness and stylistic force he presents those texts: “Basilicata is a land of passage: we poor natives are the only travelers who throw out their bags and knapsacks under the overhangs of these desolate stations.[...] The people don't walk, they trudge, they drag themselves here and there. The great clamor is made by roosters and jackasses.

The great event is the hen clucking. It is not a mystery for anyone that down here a religion was born from the silence and from an egg science. It is not surprising that Pythagoras was able to discover the laws of music and the cruel Zeno made men suspicious of the play of the senses. [...] I present to you a variety of indigenous verses. Many of these songs are familiar to my ears. Some are shouted, some are accompanied by the wail of the bagpipe or the cupo-cupo, others still are whispered sottovoce like prayers. The words I have transcribed into my language are rustic words, they are common words. They have not been dressed with lime by the Academy, they have not been milked and then boiled. Our indigenous poetry has a simple, straightforward structure. It is a comment, a summing-up. It is never empty talk. [...] I

have preserved all that I could of so much adorable “idiocy” and I have naturally sought in the forms a syntactic stability rather than an easy symmetry of tones. Lately there has been a great deal of talk about the necessity of widening the bounds of culture by searching beyond traditional stylistic patterns in the broader field of spontaneous art. It is a certain symptom of a more comprehensive, more affectionate inclination towards the monuments and the neglected fragments of a humanity relegated outside of history. I too, with a new spirit and more enjoyment, have made a journey towards the origins” (Sinisgalli, *Poesie lucane*, 1955, 2nd ed. 1992, *passim*). Also in that text, Sinisgalli wrote: I still remember by heart the song that children shout at the moon:

Moon, new Moon,

I haven't seen you yet.

But now I have seen you!

I kiss Jesus Christ's foot (ib., p.9)

From the Spinoza versions (n. LXIX) we can recover the dialect test of this area:

a) Luna, Luna nova,

Nunt'avia vista ancora;

E mo' ca t'aggio visto,

E salutami a Gesù Cristo.

b) Luna, Luna nova,

Mename quat'ova.

Menamella 'nzino

Ca mme faccio 'i tagliolini. (Lotierzo, 1983)

For Sinisgalli one should at least see the Mondadori collection *L'ellisse* (1932-1972) (Milan, 1974), which summarizes the evolution of a poetry that started out from a Hermeticism of the Ungaretti tradition, capable of traversing archaic myths and southern primitivism, and reached, after a transfiguring relationship with dialect, more

relaxed rhythms, laden with wit and epigrammatic terseness, in which Sinisgalli renders the tension between existential restlessness and the cautious trust in inquiring reason. Nevertheless, in translating dialect into Italian for Italian readers, Sinisgalli was attesting that dichotomy between oral usage and the rarity of written material. In the Sixties it was Pierro who constructed a personal language in the Tursi dialect, while the folklorists (E. Cervellino, G.B. Bronzini and then N. Tommasini and E. Spera) produced collections of songs, proverbs, customs, prayers, preparing the climate that will lead to Francesco Galasso and, lastly, to Rocco Brindisi's creative outburst. Let's proceed in rapid succession.

Michele Cariati's (Melfi, born in the late Nineteenth Century) few poems appeared

posthumously in 1967 in Melfi, bearing the title *A calata del sole*. "The themes are the most common in dialect poetry, memory, folklore, sketches" (Nigro, in Lotierzo-Nigro, 1981). In the dialect of Rionero in Vulture were published, in 1977, the realistic poems of Michele Granata, edited by Enzo Cervellino (Nigro, 1981). A similar reprint of the poems of Antonio Cautela of Melfi, with the title *La sarcinedda mia* [My Bundle of Wood], came out in 1977 (Civitavecchia, Tipografia Lucana) (Nigro, 1981). From Carmine Cassese's (born in Rionero in 1915, self-taught, blacksmith) unpublished poems Nigro presented some of *I cunt r mammagrann* [Grandmother's tales]. Nigro indicates the various myths that accompanied Cassese in his creativity: M. Granata's dialect poetry, the epic-fabulous

poetry of Dantean derivation, the Communist party, the rural world. "Cassese's poetry, especially the one in Italian, is obviously full of stops and starts... But in the dialect verses, where he remembers a past filled with bitterness and misery, which is also Basilicata's past, the descriptions become concrete and pure in the simplicity of exposition..." (Nigro, 1981). Rolando Muscio (Lavello, 1939, tailor, self-taught, also a playwright) in 1955 published *La fere d Lavidd* [Lavello's Fair] and in 1960 (*Lavidd d semp* [Forever Lavello]). Nigro said of him: "Muscio is motivated by the rhetorical ideals dear to the agricultural society and Fascism, the fatherland, the war dead, the family, at times outdone by the penchant for local color and melodrama. Missing is an ideological vision of the world, and the emigrants themselves are in turn

derided (when they are depicted in a reality other than the original) and pitied" (Nigro, 1981). In the Lavello dialect are also written the poems of Carmine D'Antonio published in 1982, *Lavidd' iè semb' Lavidd'* [Lavello Is Always Lavello] where, in a descriptive tone, he reflects on the human types and the town's situation, both with ample borrowings from folklore and with a measure of detached irony. In 1981 Andrea Mancusi presented, in the Avigliano dialect, *La matrèia* [The Stepmother]. To the mournful conditions following an earthquake are dedicated the poems of *Cos' e fatte d'la terra mia* [Things and Events of My Land] (Potenza, Olita) by Filippo Langone. In 1984 Enza Scutari published with Volonnino her poems in the dialect of the Albanians, for centuries present in groups across our region. In the dialect of

Montescaglioso (Matera) Giuseppe Matarazzo published in 1984 *U pais' mi* [My Town] (Libreria Incontri). Still in 1984 one should mention the best collection of material for Carnevale, edited by Enzo Spera *Licenzia vo', Signora* (Magistero di Bari). In 1985 Domiziano Viola published *Ascenne ra 'u festine* [Coming Out of the Party], prefaced by F. Galasso. In 1982 had appeared the volume *Canti e nenie popolari arberesche*, edited by A. Bellusci, V. Piccirillo, P. Rosati, R. Cardone, E. Scutari, D. Mazzeo, L. Pandolfo, A. Pescuma, N. Scaldaferrì, E. Corbo. In the Viggiano dialect Pietro Varalla, retired railwayman, published his poems, among which we note *Radici delle mie radici* [Roots of My Roots] (Villa d'Agri, Ars grafica, 1984), in which he depicts customs, proverbs and rituals of Viggiano. After a few acrostics, Varalla

traces the cycle of life, the events after the 1980 earthquake, loneliness but also the Carnival and the crowded feast of the Black Madonna.

The review *Nodi*, promoted by Antonio Lo Tierzo, in the nine issues published between 1979 and 1985 published and reviewed dialect poets. In Matera, edited by Raffaele La Macchia, is published the *Bollettino della Biblioteca Provinciale di Matera*, which often reports on research or bibliographical references dealing with dialect literature.

Franco Noviello, a high-school principal, edited a large collection of *Canti popolari della Basilicata* (Bella, 1976), and for five years has been directing the review *Rassegna delle tradizioni popolari* (Schena, Fasano), in which one can find both essays on dialects

and poems with southern themes, in addition to the compendium of the 1988 dialect poetry award. With Andrea Mancusi and Angelo Vito Stolfi, it is mainly the physician Francesco Galasso, who died in 1992, who has honored the dialect of Avigliano, gathering in *'Nda lu bèllevere* [In the Belvedere] (Lavello, Finiguerra) sonnets, poems, songs and prayers, that succeed in attenuating the sentimentality with which the provincial world is often looked upon with a vision that can capture the drama and the tensions of the people of Avigliano. In this idiom, showing extensive Latin roots, are evident both Appenine and Neapolitan forms, with slight traces of the Puglia type. Domenico Chieffo, published *L'acqua d' la funtanedd* [The Water of the Little Fountain] (Appia 2 and then Osanna Ed., 1980) in the

dialect of Venosa, a collection filled with suggestive historical memory and existential longings, whose Italian translation was edited by Rosa Miglione. In an elegiac aura, Chieffo depicted people and places of Venosa, with a poignant sense of the death of traditions and the regret for a long-lost ethics. The world of childhood resurfaces, from Maria the school custodian to the various Christams Eves, the Befana, the carnival and the bonfires of St. Joseph, with a subtle melancholy accompanied by the real harshness of living. Having noted that Chieffo's poetry has roots both in popular poetry and middle-class culture, and that it harks back to the poetry of Horace, Nigro writes that Chieffo keeps on "delving into what we have called the problems of common life, the gnawing of existence. The discovery of a changing world and the

natural attachment to the past. The discovery of a consumer society in the very simplicity of children, the awareness that the rural world is about to disappear and the discovery of the selfishness and individualism characteristic of a technological civilization (Nigro, 1981).

On June 29, 1986, the mayor of Ruoti promoted a "Prize for dialect poetry from Basilicata," which went to Antonio Santangelo, Gaetano Genovese, Pasquale Colucci, Lucia Sileo and Rina Bernardi (reported in Matera's *Bollettino*). For a concise and informed literary synthesis, Albanian poetry included, one should consult *Basilicata* (Brescia, La Scuola, 1987) by Tito Spinelli who, with anthological passages, places the history and geography of regional literature in an elegant and informative framework.

Michele Dilillo (Irsina, 1929), didactic director, published *U p'zzcantò* (Mt, Liantonio, 1987), *Le belle cose quaselle* (Mt, Liantonio, 1986), *U' capasidd d'u ret p'a paggh'* (Mt, Liantonio, 1989). Giovanni Caserta has written that "he freely adapts folktales from his town, immersing himself in a primitive culture, laden with sexual appetites, as they were being lived in a society without ideals, made brutish by poverty and ignorance. In Irsina's world, which for Dilillo becomes the symbol of human life itself, there is no love as sentimental abandon, but only bewilderment in the senses and in sex. This, in fact, is a fondness for transgression and it is transgression, that is, sin and fondness for sin, which in old age can become contrition and anguish" (Caserta, in Bollettino, 1991). Raffaele Nigro (Melfi, 1947), presently

director of RAI in Bari, an established novelist, prolific essayist, many-faceted poet, has bent Melfi's dialect to markedly experimental results in *Giocodoca* (Skena, Fasano, 1981). The severed tongue of dialect remains a collective instrument of identity and recognition, although irony and skillful wordplay overwhelm the subject at hand. In *Giocodoca* Nigro employs his idiolect polemically, in order to sing how for all of us who tempt our luck is "a snake and ladders game this passing day," how "these words are like a gunshot," capable of raising philosophical questions, even with the political use of analogy. The twenty poems of *Giocodoca*, always graphically (un)composed, with six dialect texts of various texture, place Nigro, a keen student of popular traditions and the southern mindset, in the groove of the experimental

neoavantgarde, which he has subsequently left behind, most decidedly in his narrative. Here Nigro varies and dismantles idioms, trying his hand at a variegated historical material. Both the way words are written down and the use of dialect in Nigro take on the task of signifying a damaged and almost indefensible reality, assaulted first by the ethnocide of emigration and then by corrosive consumerism. Therefore Nigro's dialect is neither memorial nor regressive, it is not a descent into a protohistorical or mythical-childlike world, but it is a living fragment, residual cry, a uniting language in the struggle for the new development of the South. In the preface, Leonardo Mancino defined these poems: "fresh, readable and passionate letters on the condition and agony of words." Protesting against the overbearance of the languages of mass-

media, Nigro traverses dialect as well, experiencing a constant communication problem, the uneasiness that blocks projects and relationships, forcing the poet into the precarious role of the chance-taker (Catalano, 1986, p.72).

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ALBINO PIERRO

Albino Pierro's (Tursi, 1916-1995) poetic experience began in September 23, 1959, and he has been able to place his "fresh idiom" at the center of international interest, attaining the nomination for the Nobel Prize. Pierro knows that dialects are losing ground as habitual means of communication, and for this very reason they can become privileged means of expression. From Rome, his city of exile, this professor of philosophy has turned inward to the inner voice of the "paise" (hometown), whose words, found again in memory and lacking any kind of literary tradition, are transformed into an instrument of a polyphonic poetry, of a dramatic expressionism based on percussive rhythms and very dense contradictions. Prevalent is the myth of the village, of his

mother, the mirror, the dream, the beloved dead, the ancestral home, the streets, the loss of love, the town characters, the birds, the toponyms and ravines, the superstitions, the sorrows expressed in a “very harsh tongue” and in “Orphic sweetness” (as A. Pizzuto noted), in variously rhymed hendecasyllables or in shorter, faster cadences, that show an experimental approach to the poetic language adopted.

In 1982 Franco Manescalchi noted that “If Pierro’s dialect poetry has had an effect on the poets of the younger generations, this has happened more in the sense of the liberation of language rather than in a dialect production, which is in fact not very substantial and relevant. On the other hand, even for Pierro dialect poetry is a late discovery, in syntony and synchrony with the reassessment of dialect culture carried

out by P.P. Pasolini. Indeed, Pierro began to publish his dialect poems in the Sixties, when the post-war generation with Scotellaro, M. Parrella, G. Stolfi etc. had already confirmed its significance — for Basilicata as well; when the previous season, the one of the exodus, had expressed, besides Sinisgalli, pure lyrical-Hermetic voices, such as Antonio Rinaldi. Nor should one forget realistic poets of catholic extraction such as Mario Trufelli, or eclectics like Raffaele Spera and Gian Domenico Giagni [...]” (in *Collettivo* 1, n.26-28). Pierro, a great master of style, has been translated into French, English, Greek, Arabic, Persian and Swedish (a country that since 1982 has devoted dramatic presentations to him).

The poetry of the diaspora or of exile is capable of recreating an archetypal land in the construction of words, transforming the

real Basilicata into a hallucinatory metaphor of any maternal world, of the place of origins in which all readers can find gestures, people, phrases and images of their own birthplace. With full universal validity and philosophical thoughtfulness Pierro, evoking his conversion to a dialect steeped in archaic Latin, confessed: "it was a question of recovering an absent language, since it also belonged to my personal past as well as to the more remote and ancestral past of my people." In the dialect of Tursi he filters a prayer, the word in which what is finite is linked to the arcanelly infinite. And in Pierro is at work the lesson of St. Augustine and Kant. A meditative personality, Pierro considers dialect the "language of poetry," a lyrical instrument, capable of bringing into the light of consciousness the concluded and perfect

world of childhood, that can be evoked through poetry but is unrepeatable. The aversion to naive folklorism and idyllic landscapes is unconditional in a poet who pours into the Tursi dialect his need to escape the simple language of communication. Even when he is epic, Pierro places himself at the center of the song, he filters the subject through personal memory, with moods which are embarrassing for the ambiguity between sleep and wakefulness, with the recognition of someone who knows that reality is no longer modifiable and goes on living with a cult of the lost past, expressed in a chtonian, mournful voice, inconsolable in the love poems. In this fashion his poetry follows the wake of the "crepuscolari" and of Pascoli, Biagio Marin and P. P. Pasolini, adding his own unmistakable new signs, of very high

poetic caliber.

Bibliography: Pierro has published: *Liriche*, Rome 1946; *Nuove Liriche*, Rome 1949; *Mia madre passava*, Rome 1955; *Il paese sincero*, Rome 1956; *Il transito del vento*, Rome 1957; *Poesie*, 1958; *Il mio villaggio*, Bologna 1960; *A terra d'u ricorde*, Rome: *Il Nuovo Belli*, 1960; *Agavi e sassi*, 1960; *L'nnammurète*, Rome 1963; *Metaponto*, Rome: *Nuovo Cracas*, 1963 (2nd ed. Laterza 1966; 3d and 4th ed. Scheiwiller 1972 and Garzanti 1982); *Nd'u piccicarelle di Turse*, Bari 1967; *Eccò a morte*, Bari: Laterza, 1969; *Famme dorme*, Milan: Scheiwiller, 1971; *Curtelle a lu sòue*, Bari 1973; *Nu belle fatte*, Milan: Mondadori, 1975; *Com agghi'a fê*, Milan 1977; *Sti mascre*, Rome 1980; *Dieci poesie inedite*, Lucca: Pacini, 1981; *Tante ca pàrete notte*,

Lecce: Manni, 1986; *Un pianto nascosto*, Turin: Einaudi, 1986; *Nun c'è pizze di munne*, Milan: Mondadori, 1992.

Criticism: on Pierro there is a vast, highly qualified body of criticism, and we therefore refer the reader to *Omaggio a Pierro*, edited by Antonio Motta, (Manduria: Lacaita, 1982) and to Giorgio Delia, *La parlèta frisca di A. Pierro*, (Cosenza: Periferia, 1988), containing the contributions of Umberto Bosco, Gianfranco Contini, Tullio De Mauro, Ernesto De Martino, Tommaso Fiore (translator of the early collections), Gianfranco Folena, Mario Marti, Emerico Giachery, Pier V. Mengaldo, Ettore Paratore, Giorgio Petrocchi, Giuseppe Petronio, Carlo Salinari, Franco Brevini, Mario Chiesa, Mario Dell'Arco, Antonio Piromalli (who has published an essay with a large

bibliography, (Cassino: Carigliano 1979),
Vincenzo Tisano (author of the *Concordanze
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1985, 2 vols.)

Mbàreche accusì

Su' tante e tante i fóche
supr''a terre,
ma quille ca cchiù mi piàcete
scàttete nd'i sarmente
e si fè gghianche e russe
nu mumente:
mbàreche accusì
stu core méj' ca sònnete
di si ni ì da u munne
nda nu 'ampe.

da Un pianto nascosto, 1986

Forse così. Sono tanti e tanti i fuochi / sopra la terra, /
ma quello che più mi piace / scoppia fra i sarmenti / e si fa
bianco e rosso / un momento: // forse così / questo mio
cuore che sogna / di andarsene dal mondo / in un lampo.

Maybe So Does

There are so many fires
upon this earth
but the one I like the most
breaks out among the vines
and turns red and white for a moment:
maybe so does this heart of mine
that dreams
of leaving this world
in a burst of light.

(Translated by Luigi Bonaffini)

I 'nammurète

Si guardàine citte
e senza fiète
i 'nammurète.
Avìne ll'occhie ferme
e brillante,
ma u tempe ca passàite vacante
ci ammunzillàite u scure
e i trimuìzze d'u chiante
E t'ècchete na vòte, come ll'èrve
ca tròvese ncastrète nda nu mure,
nascìvite 'a paróua,
pó' n'ate, pó' cchiù assèie:
schitte ca tutt'i vòte
assimmigghiàite 'a voce
a na cosa sunnète
ca le sintìse 'a notte e ca pó' tòrnete
cchiù dèbbue nd' 'a jurnète.
Sempe ca si lassàine
parìne come ll'ombre
ca ièssenc allunghète nd'i mascìje;
si sintìne nu frusce, appizzutàine
'a ricchia, e si virìne;

e si 'ampijàite 'a 'uce si truvàine
faccia a faccia nd'u russe d'i matine.

Gli innamorati — Si guardavano zitti / e senza fiato / gli
innamorati. / Avevano gli occhi fermi e brillanti, / ma il
tempo che passava vuoto / ci ammucchiava il buio / e i
tremiti del pianto. / Ed eccoti, una volta, come l'erba / che
trovi incastrata in un muro, / nacque la parola / poi
un'altra, poi tante e tante: / solo che tutte le volte /
somigliava la voce / a una cosa sognata / che la sentivi di
notte e che poi torna / piú debole nella giornata. // Sempre
che si lasciassero / parevano come le ombre / che escono
allungate nelle stregonerie; / se sentivano un rumore,
aguzzavano / l'orecchio, e si vedevano; e se lampeggiava la
luce si trovavano / faccia a faccia nel rosso dei mattini. //

The Lovers

They looked at one other breathlessly
and in silence,
the two lovers.

Their eyes were steady
and clear,
but hollow time in passing
heaped darkness in them
and shuddering of tears.

And once, like grass
wedged tightly in a wall,
a word was born,
and then another, then many more:
but every time the voice
resembled a thing dreamed
and heard at night
then surfacing again fainter in daylight.

When not together,
they were like shadows
lengthened by a spell;
They pricked their ears at every sound
and saw each other;
and stood in daylight's grace

against the red of morning face to face.

Nu jurne

— nun vi sapéra dice si nd' u munne
facì fridde o chiuvite —
'ssivite nda na botte
'a 'uce di menzejurne.
Senze ca le sapìne
i 'nnammurète si tinìne 'a mène
e aunite ci natàine nd' 'a rise
ca spànnene i campène d' u paìse.
Nun c'èrene cchiù i scannìje;
si sintìne cchiù llègge di nu sante,
facìn' i sonne d' i vacantije
cucchète supre ll'èrve e ca lle virene
u céhe e na paùmme
ca ci pàsete nnante.
Avìne arrivète a lu punte juste:
mó si putìna stringe
si putìna vasè
si putìna ntriccè come nd' u foche
i vampe e com' i pacce
putìna chiange rìre e suspìrè,
ma nun fècere nente:
stavìne appapagghiète com' 'a nive

rusèta d'i muntagne,
quanne càlete u sóue e a tutt'i cose
ni scìppete nu lagne.

Un giorno / — non vi saprei dire se nel mondo / facesse
freddo o piovesse / uscì di colpo / la luce di mezzogiorno. /
Senza che lo sapessero / gli innamorati si tenevano per
mano / e insieme ci nuotavano nel sorriso / che spandono le
campane del paese. / Non c'erano più le angosce; / si
sentivano più leggeri di un santo, / facevano i sogni delle
vergini / coricate sull'erba e che li vedono / il cielo e una
colomba / che gli passa davanti. // Erano arnvati al punto
giusto: / ora si potevano stringere / si potevano baciare / si
potevano intrecciare come nel fuoco / le vampe e come i
pazzi / potevano piangere ridere e sospirare, / ma non
fecero niente: / stavano imhambolati come la neve / rosata
delle montagne, /

One day,

— I could not tell you whether it was cold
or raining in the world —
the midday light
suddenly broke out.

Without realizing,
the lovers walked hand in hand
and swam across the smile
spread by the town bells.

There was no anguish now;
they felt lighter than saints,
they dreamed the dreams of
virgins stretched upon the grass,
who see the sky and a dove
passing before them.

They came to the right spot:
now they could embrace
and kiss
they could entwine like flames
within a fire, and cry
and laugh and sigh like madmen,
but they did nothing:
they stood bewildered

like roseate snow upon the mountains,
when the sun sets and wrenches out a moan
from all creation.

Chi le sàpete.

Certe si mpauràine
di si scrijè tuccànnese cc' u fiète;
ì'èrene une cchi ll'ate
'a mbulla di sapone culurète,
e mbàreche le sapìne
ca dopp' u foche ièssene i lavine
d' 'a cinnere e ca i pacce
si grìrene tropp' assèie
lle nghiùrene cchi ssèmpe addù nisciune
ci trasèrete mèie.

Mó nun le sacce addù su',
si su' vive o su' morte,
i 'nammurète;
nun sacce si camìnene aunìte
o si u diàue ll'hè voste separète.
Nun mbògghi'a Die
ca si fècere zanghe mmenz' 'a vie.
da Un pianto nascosto, 1986

quando il sole tramonta e a tutte le cose / strappa un
lamento. // Chi lo sa! / Certo s'impaurivano / di sparire
toccandosi col fiato, / erano l'uno per l'altro / la bolla di
sapone colorata, / e forse lo sapevano / che dopo il fuoco

escono torrenti / di cenere e che i pazzi / se gridano troppo
/ li chiudono per sempre dove nessuno / vi entrerebbe mai.
// Ora non lo so dove sono / se sono vivi o sono morti, / gli
innamorati / non so se camminano insieme / o se il diavolo
li ha voluti separati. / Dio non voglia / che si fecero fango in
mezzo alla via.

(Traduzione dell'Autore)

Who knows.

No doubt they were afraid
to disappear should their breaths touch;
they were a colored
soap bubble to each other,
and knew perhaps a stream
of ashes flows after a fire
and that if madmen scream
too much
they're locked forever
where no one ever goes.
I don't know where they are now,
whether alive or dead,
the lovers;
whether they walk together still
or if the devil willed them far apart.
I hope to God
they have not turned to mud
along the road.
(Translated by Luigi Bonaffini)

Nd' 'a gente ca ririte

Nd' 'a gente ca ririte
quanne ti ni scrijàste
í'ère ammuccète com'u fihicèlle
di pàgghie nda na rote atturccigghiète
di nu traîne vruscète
nd'u funne di na drupe.
Dasupre, com'a na nùue
a u poste d'i cristiène,
ci s'arraiàite u fume
nd'i scaffittone d'u vente
e u fiète tussicose di nu foche
già ll'óore ni squagghiàite a lu sóue
nda chille 'ampe fridde di cristalle
d' 'a rise ca scattàite cuntente
com'a na battarie di maschète
e sone di campène.
Hann' 'a í'esse cchiù di mill'anne
ca ie mi sente accusì:
come nd'u terramote di nu trene
ca nun arrivete mèie
ma ca nnatèrne pàssete fiscanne
dasupr'a mmi

da Un pianto nascosto, 1986

Fra la gente che rideva — Fra la gente che rideva, / il
giorno che sparisti / ero nascosto come il filino / di paglia in
una ruota contorta / di un carro bruciato / nel fondo di un
dirupo. // Al di sopra, come una nuvola, / al posto dei
cristiani, / ci rissava il fumo / fra gli schiaffoni del vento, / e
il fiato velenoso di un fuoco / già glielo scioglieva l'oro al
sole / in quei lampi freddi di cristallo / del ridere che
scoppiava contento / come una batteria di mortaretti / e
suoni di campane. // Debbono essere più di mille anni / che
io mi sento così / come nel terremoto di un treno / che non
arriva mai / ma che in eterno passa fischiando / sopra a
me.

(Traduzione dell'Autore)

Among People Laughing

Among people laughing,
the day you disappeared,
I was hiding like a blade of straw
in the twisted wheel
of a charred wagon
at the bottom of a cliff.
Above, instead of people,
it was the the smoke that brawled
like a cloud
amid the blows of the wind;
and the poisonous breath of a fire
was already melting the gold
of the sun in those cold
flashes of crystal,
of happy laughter snapping
like a battery of firecrackers
and peelings of bells.
It must be a thousand years
I've felt this way:
in the earthquake of a train
that never nears
but eternally hurtles over me

roaring.

(Translated by Luigi Bonaffini)

U mort

a Ernesto de Martino
Apprime, a lu paise,
si cièrete nu mort,
ll'accumpagnàite 'a banda
e Dumìniche u Cumme cch'i rastre11e.
M'è rumèse nd' 'a 'ricchie
u sòne d'u bumbardine
tagghiète ntrunc come da n'accètte
da "u nzùmmete" d'i piattine
ca s'allungaite trimuàgne a chiange
nd'i vocicèlle ianchc d'i clarine.
Mó tutt cose è cangète,
nun mporte si duce duce,
ma ci su' sempe i prèvete
e u sacristène cc' 'a cruce
appresse a na fihéra di uagnune
ca le rèjene mbrazze 'a cronicelle
di ferre ngiallanute com' 'a lune.
Le pòrtene u taùte supr'i muscke
e arruzzuuine i pére d'i zaccuèe,
cchi ttacce e suprattacce, com'a cchiumme
ti pàrete ca pàssene i vitture

ca vène fóre, 'a notte, quanne chiòvete
e ca scìppene, com'a piscunète,
da u sonne, chille pòure signure.

Il funerale — Prima, al paese, / se c'era un morto, /
l'accompagnava la banda / e Domenieo il Nano coi rastrelli.
/ Mi è rimasto all'orecchio / il suono del bombardino /
tagliato netto come da una scure / da "u nzùmmete" dei
piatti / che si allargava tremolando a piangere / nelle
vocine bianche dei clarini. / Adesso tutto è cambiato, / non
importa se piano piano, / ma ci son sempre i preti / il
sacrestano e la croce / dietro a una lunga fila di ragazzi /
che reggon fra le braccia coroncine / di ferro e del giallore
della luna. // Portano la bara sulle spalle / e rotolano i piedi
dei bifolchi, / tempestati di chiodi, come piombo: / e
tisembra chee passin le vetture / dirette ai campi, a notte,
quando piove / e che strappano, come a gran sassate, / dal
sonno, quei poveri signori. /

The Funeral

to Ernesto de Martino
Before, if there was
a funeral in town,
the band would follow,
and so did with his rakes
Domenico the Dwarf.
I can still hear the deep
sound of the saxhorn
cut clean as with an ax
by the crash of cymbals
that lengthened quivering to weep
in the white thin voices of the clarinets.
Now everything has changed
even if the change's been slow,
but the priests are still around
and the sextons with the cross
walking behind young boys in a long row
holding small moon-yellow
iron crowns.
They carry the casket on their shoulders
and the peasants' feet trundle like lead
in their heavy shoes and hobnailed heels:

they make the sound that country wagons make,
when they come out at night, in the light rain,
and like pelted stones violently wrench
the luckless rich people from their sleep.

E quanne su' nd' u strittue d' u Barone,
le girene u taùte chiène chiène;
su' cchiù vicine ancora chille greire
scattète nda nu mère di suspire:
"Oh scasce méja granne; oh bene d' 'a mamma".
'A cruce quèse tòcchete i finestre
e chille ca ci chiàngene arranzète;
l'inghiete 'a strète 'a folla com' u mère
ca nghianete annivrichète.
Pó, quanne su' nd' 'a chiazza, cchiù affuchète
le sèntese, e a la logne, n'atu greire:
"Bene d' u tètta sue, bene d' u tètta",
tante ca mó le càngene u culore,
nda chille facce "a bumme", ianche e russe,
prèvete e previticchie ca pó càntene
cchiù sincire e cchiù forte di nu trone.
Ti scàntese ca i vitre d' i balcune
nd' u "grèpe e chiure" trèmene e lampijene;
ca pur' i pétre chiàngene nd' i strète
cchi tutte ll'ate cose, e ci cannijene
cristiène senza vrazze e senza iamme
ca uèrena scappè e s' arruzzuuine

mmischète com'a ghiòmmere di pice

a pulle senza pére e senza scille.

Pó come nd'i muntagne ti rispònnene

tante voce si ièttese nu grire,

E quando son nel vico del Barone vi girano la bara piano piano; / son piú vicine ancora quelle grida / scoppiate dentro a un mare di sospiri: / "Oh sventura mia grande, oh bene della mamma". // La croce quasi tocca le finestre / e quelli che vi piangono affacciatl; / rlempie la via la folla come il mare / che sale annerito. / Poi, quando sono in piazza, piú affogato, / lo senti, e a la lunga, un altro grido: / "Bene del padre suo, bene del padre", / tanto che ora cambiano colore, / in quelle facce gonfie, bianche e rosse, / preti e chierichetti che ricantano / piú sinceri e piú forte poi di un tuono. / Ti spaventi che i vetri dei balconi / nell'"apri e chiudi" tremano e lampeggiano; / che pure i sassi piangon nelle strade / con tutte le altre cose, e vi boccheggiano / cristiani senza braccia e senza gambe / ansiosi di fuggir ma che si rotolano / mescolati — gomitoli di pece — / a uccelli senza zampe e senza ali. // Poi come tra i monti rispondono / tante voci se tu vi getti un grido, / ti pare che un rintocco di campana /

And when they reach the Baron's alleyway,
they're forced to turn the casket very slowly;
closer than ever are those piercing cries
bursting within an endless sea of sighs:
"Oh great misfortune; oh mother's dearest love."
The cross now almost grazes the high windows
and those who weep there as they lean outside;
the crowd pours out into the narrow street
and swells like the sea surging in black waves.
Then, when they reach the square, you hear
another cry, more strangled, longer still:
"Father's love, father's dearest love,"
so that now the red-and-white, puffed faces
of priests and altar boys begin to lose
their color, as their song resounds more clear,
and louder than the sudden crack of thunder.
You're frightened by the glasspanes of the balconies
that flash and quiver as they close and open;
that even stones are weeping in the street
in oneness with all things, and then the sudden
gasp of armless, legless men anxious to flee
who roll and tumble mixed like skeins of pitch

with birds stripped bare of any wings or feet.
Then, as between two mountains, myriad voices
answer if you let out a cry, the toll

ti pàrete ca u tuocche d''a campene
i'è martelle di forge nd'i iaramme
lle nfuète nda ll'arie tante spìrite
ca si iùnnene e spìngene cchi gghi'èsse,
dasupre ll'ate, u prime ca l'accìrete
quille rumore cupe di chi trùzzete
cc'a chèpe a lu taùte, e pó si ràschete
'a facce, e pó si stràzzene i capille.

Ah scannìje, scannìje;
mó vìrese tutte ianche,
e nun ci frùscete u vente
o nu suspire
di Die.

da Un pianto nascosto, 1986

sia martello di forgia fra scintille, / e che all'intorno il
nero dei burroni / catapulti nell'aria tanti spiriti / che
s'avventano e spingono per essere, / di sopra agli altri, il
primo che uccide / quel rintonare cupo di chi picchia / con
la testa alla bara, e poi si graffia / la faccia, e poi si làcera i
capelli. // Ah l'angoscia, l'angoscia; / ora vedi tutto bianco,
/ e non vi fruscia il vento / né un sospiro / di Dio.

(Traduzione dell'Autore)

(cont.d)

of churchbells seems a forger's hammer
amidst the sparks of fire, and everywhere
the blackness of ravines appears to sling
a multitude of ghosts into the air
who lunge and push and press to be the first,
above all others there, to kill the mournful
thump of those who crash their heads against
the casket, and then claw at their faces,
and then tear out their hair.

Ah, anguish, anguish;
now you see everything white,
and no wind whispers
nor the sigh
of God.

(Translated by Luigi Bonaffini)

Quanne?

E cuntente m' aiute e nun mi stanche
di sciabbuè cch' i dicitte, nda ll' arie,
a tarantelle.

I mène,

ll'hène 'a forze di na pétre
ca nfuète fischete arraggète

e tròzzete a nu mure,

ma su' nvéce martelle

c'appizzutète uèrena scafè

cchi ci truvè na voce o na scintille

nd'u scure.

Ah, sti pacce, sti pacce,

ca rusichìne i pétre com'a zùccre;

a vrazzète,

ll'avèren' 'a ittè nda na iaramme,

lle sacce,

fiscanne fiscanne;

ma ié cchiù toSte mbàreche d'u ciucce

ca manche si ll'accìrese vè nnante,

nchiuvète ci rumagne nd' ' a spiranze

di nni fe 'ustre ll'occhie

cchi na 'uce

c'assincirè lle uèrete nd'u zanghe
u nivre di na cruce.

Quanne, quanne
m'i uése dice quanne
mi putéra sente cchiù sùue
di mó ca iètte u bbànnè?
da Un pianto nascosto, 1986

Quando — E contento mi aiuto e non mi stanco/ di
sciabolare nell'aria con le dita, / a tarantella. / Le mani /
hanno la forza di un sasso / che scagliato fischia rabbioso /
e urta in un muro, / ma sono invece martelli / che appuntiti
vorrebbero scavare / per trovarci / una voce o una scintilla
/ nel buio. // Ah, questi pazzi, questi pazzi / che
rosicchiano i sassi come zucchero; / a bracciate, /
dovrebbero gettarli in un burrone, / lo so, / fischiando
fischiano; / ma io più duro, forse, di un asino / che non va
avanti nemmeno se l'uccidi, / inchiodato ci resto alla
speranza / di farglieli lucenti gli occhi / con una luce / che
nel fango vorrebbe illimpidire / il nero di una croce. //
Quando, quando, / me lo volete dire quando, / potrei
sentirmi più solo / di ora che getto il bando?

(Traduzione dell'Autore)

When?

And yet I feel content and don't get tired
of slashing with my fingers through the air,
tarantella-like.

The hands
have the power of a stone
that hisses in a fury once it's thrown
and crashes into a wall,
but they instead are sharply pointed hammers
that want to dig
to find a voice or spark
within the dark.

Ah, these madmen, these madmen
that gnaw
on stones like sugar;
By the armful,
I know,
they should be flung into ravines,
hissing, hissing;
but maybe more stubborn than an ass
that will not budge, even if you kill him,
I still remain here nailed within the hope
of making their eyes glimmer

with a light yearning to undim
the blackness of a cross
there in the mud.

When, will you tell me when
I could feel more alone
than now that I am my own
tireless town crier?

(Translated by Luigi Bonaffini)

Mi tàgghiate

Mi tàgghiate cc' u fridde
u fihe di nu pinzére
ma nun si virete u sagne:
mbàreche accussì na 'uce
nd' u rasùue d' u vente si fè gghianche
senza manche nu lagne.

da Un pianto nascosto, 1986

Mi taglia – Mi taglia con il freddo / il filo di un pensiero
/ ma non si vede il sangue: // forse così una luce / nel
rasoio del vento si fa bianca / senza nemmeno un lamento.

(Traduzione dell'Autore)

The Edge of a Thought

The edge of a thought
cuts me with the cold
but you can't see the blood:
maybe that's how a light
turns white in the wind's blade
without even a wail.

(Translated by Luigi Bonaffini)

VITO RIVIELLO

Vito Riviello was born in Potenza in 1933, and has been living in Frascati since 1972, working in radio broadcasting and art criticism. He has published *Città fra paesi* [City Among Towns], Milan: Schwarz, 1955; *L'astuzia della realtà* [Reality's Cunning], Firenze: Vallecchi, 1975; *Dagherrotipo* [Daguerro-type], Milan: Scheiwiller, 1978; *Sindrome dei ritratti austeri* [Syndrome of the Austere Portraits], Bergamo: *Il Bagatto*, 1980; *Tabarin*, Rome: Rossi e Spera, 1985; *Assurdo e familiare* [Absurd and familiar], Rome 1986; *Apparizioni* [Apparitions], Rome 1989.

In prose he has written: *Premaman* [Maternity], Potenza 1968; *La neve all'occhiello* [Snow at the Buttonhole], Francavilla sul Sinni 1987; *Qui abitava Pitagora* [Pythagoras

Lived Here], Rome: Mancosu, 1993 (a refined as well as painful and lucid testimonial on the difficult life of an intellectual in the South).

A bourgeois who challenges his own class, Riviello exalts Utopia as a charge, not an ideology. His poetry deals with global satire, demythification of idols, authoritarian schemes, social rituals, one-upmanship in mass society.

The Tuscan Franco Manescalchi wrote in 1982: "Riviello is, after Scotellaro, the greatest poet of the fourth generation. The one who in the Sixties animated the literary scene with his Nuova Libreria, without succeeding, however, in turning it into a nation-wide project. The arrival in Rome, in a moment in which Basilicata was discovering progressive impulses, determined in Riviello an ideological and

stylistic enrichment, an intersecting of metaphoric-linguistic fragments [...] What at first stands out in Riviello is the appeal to Sinisgalli's modernism in paratactic structures with very complex patterns that range from the real to the surreal, in a sort of compact sleight-of-hand of the verb (Manescalchi, from *Dopo Scotellaro*, supplement to *Collettivo r*, FI, 1982.

Riviello, "meek dadaist," mixes parody and self-irony, providing texts in which amusement becomes more and more bitter, and behind the irreverent forms or lapsus that create a risible level for the reader, there looms the obsessive outline of a deep anguish and a biting sarcasm that envelops and mixes everything.

Upon sending me this group of dialect poems (rare and going back a few decades), Riviello enclosed this explanatory preface

that I cite in its entirety:

My dialect. It was the great philologist Rohlfs who enlightened me on the Gallic-Italian origins of the Potenza dialect, my native city. In the years of my youth I was guided in my linguistic journey solely by my love for writing. I understood very early the “uneasiness” of the Potenza dialect, its being marginalized, “extraneous” to the progressive historical consummation of that language. In time, Potenza’s dialect has changed, impoverishing the ancient semiotic structures. It was spoken by farmers and artisans, now it is spoken by very few people. Pasquale Stoppelli wrote: “The fact that the Potenza dialect has Gallic-Italic origins has caused it to be influenced by the dialects in the surrounding areas, rather than spreading in the surrounding areas, gradually losing its original northern

characteristics and acquiring southern ones." The dialect of the poems presented here, is that of my youth, in the late Forties, the dialect that I, of lower-middle extraction, spoke somewhat "loosely" with my friends from the lower classes. I wanted to preserve the "semantic spirit" of a generation. Instead the historical and philological "culture" of the Potenza dialect has become a part of the "materials" of my Italian poetry.

Criticism: in addition to the critical contributions of G. Raboni, F. Piemontese, T. Di Francesco, C.A. Augieri, S. Folliero, R. Roversi, C. Toscani, P. Volponi, G. Manacorda, A. Asor Rosa, F. Vitelli, M. Lunetta, W. Pedullà, A. Lotierzo, G. Finzi, S. Lanuzza, there have been comprehensive essays by Sebastiano Martelli, Pompea Cafarelli (V. Riviello, Bari: C.E., 1980) and Antonio Piromalli (V. R., Capuano, 1987). He

has been translated into French, Icelandic and Czech.

Simme sagliù sova' la luna
pè truvà prete e ciniglia
senza cchiù na meraviglia
gne ne giamme inta li stelle
come fossimo pè strare.

Gira qui e gira là
iesece e trase trase e iesce
quest'è mode de campà?
Senza mai sapè a cchi punte
s'acumencia o se fernisce.

(Inedita)

Cosmo — Siamo andati sulla luna / per trovare pietre e
cenere, / senza più sorprese / ce ne andiamo fra le stelle /
come andassimo per strada. / Gira di qui e gira di là / esci
ed entra ed esci / questo è il modo di vivere? / Senza sapere
mai dove / s'inizia e ci si ferma.

(Traduzione dell'Autore)

Cosmos

Now we've gone up to the moon
for no other gems than just
some old rocks and piles of dust
soon we'll go among the stars
just like driving in our cars.
Turning here and turning there
in and out and down and up
is this how we want to live?
Always going never knowing
where we started or we'll stop.
(Translated by Michael Palma)

L'età dei saggi

Era lu tempe sagge de li mastre,
chi de mana e chi de piera
fascìa gi 'nnanze lu munasterio,
vulavane rondini e rundinone
la figliola si fascìa rubbeglia
sola c'ascìa all'aria.

Se murìa giovane de malaria,
vaiuole, tisa, canchere...
pure de vecchiaa, e n'pò de cchiù
de miseria: quedda nera!

Ma era lu tempe de li mastre
bastava na parola lora
e se sentìa venì la neva.

(Inedita)

L'età dei saggi — Era il tempo dei saggi / chi con le mani
chi con i piedi / faceva andar avanti la baracca, / volavano
uccellini e uccelloni / la ragazza arrossiva / appena usciva
all'aperto; / Si moriva giovani di malaria, / vaiolo, tisi,
tumore... / anche di vecchiaia, e di più / di miseria: quella
nera! / Ma era il tempo dei saggi / bastava una parola detta
da loro / e si sentiva arrivare la neve.

(L'età dei saggi)

The Time of Sages

It was a time of sages,
some with their hands and some with their feet
kept body and soul together,
swifts and swallows flew overhead
the tender maiden's cheek turned red
as soon as she came out in the open air.
Young people died of malaria,
cancer, tuberculosis, plague...
even old age, and most of all
the deepest darkest poverty.
And yet it was a time of sages
a single word from them sufficed
and one could sense the coming of the snow.
(Translated by Michael Palma)

Rigoro

Gn'era Pestrigne ca giucava pesante
e Ndriscina ca s'ncazzava,
vulia sempe rigoro
com'a nu diavle ca vole farina.

E Pestrigne carcava la mana,
mò na spenta a cataspenta
e mò lu sgambette disisgraziare,
cuanne l'arbetre perdette
all'uteme la pacienza
e decretò: Rigoro!

Se fece 'nnanz senza esse chiamate
Ndriscina, mezza smorfia mezza surrise
com'a Zorro mascarate,
mettese la palla al punto
e teràse scauze e de punta na saette
ca Pestrigne, mporta
nu verèse niente.

(Inedita)

Rigore — C'era Pestrigne (soprannome) che giocava duro / Ndriscina (soprannome) che s'arrabbiava, / voleva sempre rigore / come un diavolo che cerca farina. / E Pestrigne vieppiù esagerava nel gioco pesante; / ora una

spinta a ruzzoloni / ora uno sgambetto maligno, /
allorquando l'arbitro perduta / alla fine la pazienza /
decretò: Rigore! / Si fece avanti allora senza essere chiamato
da nessuno / Ndriscina con la smorfia e il sorriso / come
Zorro mascherato, / mise la palla al punto (giusto) / e tirò
scalzo e di punta (con l'alluce) / una saetta che Pestrigne in
porta / non vide per niente.

(Traduzione dell'Autore)

Penalty Kick

It was Pestrigne who played hard
and Ndriscina who got mad,
wanting a penalty kick
the way a devil wants his spoils.
And Pestrigne got more out of hand,
now a shove to flip him over
and now a wicked trip,
till at last the referee
came to the end of his rope
and called for a penalty.
Without waiting to be called
Ndriscina, half grimace and half smile
like the face of the masked Zorro,
set the ball in place
and with his bare big toe let fly an arrow
that Pestrigne at the goal
never saw at all.

(Translated by Michael Palma)

Migrante

Era ranne lu monte
quante na mana,
te ne si ggiù luntane
mana pè mana
fin'all'utema mana:
La mana de die
o di chissacc'ie.

(Inedita)

Emigrante \neg Era grande il mondo / quanto una mano, /
te ne sei andato lontano, / mano dopo mano / fino
all'ultima mano: / La mano di dio / o di chissà chi.

(Traduzione dell'Autore)

Migrant

Once the world spanned
the width of a hand,
now you've gone beyond
hand after hand
to the ultimate hand:
the hand of God, his
or whoever there is.
(Translated by Michael Palma)

Fiamma d'amore

Si stata ammore ardente
fiamma cà bruscia
la raggion vivente.
Uocchie, bocca, parole
che trasane int'u sanghe,
revuoglie stentine
quanne te scummuoglie,
eppure assente o n'tabarrata
vacanta comm'a na nicchia
scarrupata.

(Inedita)

Fiamma d'amore — Sei stata l'amore ardente / fiamma
bruciante / la ragion vivente. / Occhi, bocca, parole / che
entrano nel sangue, / rivolti gli intestini / quando ti spogli /
anche se sei assente o chiusa / vuota come una nicchia /
scassinata.

(Traduzione dell'Autore)

Flame of Love

Love you are still a flame
a fire that burns
the living brain.

Eyes and lips and words
that get into the blood,
revolting the bowels
when you undress,
even gone away or hooded
empty as a crumbling
recess.

(Translated by Michael Palma)

MARIO ROMEO

Born in Picerno (Potenza) about fifty years ago, a professor active in politics, Romeo has published *Lu monne scappa* [The world flees], Potenza: Il salice, 1989. The book is the translation of seventy-two Greek poems (from Mimner-mus, Theognides, Anacreon, Stesicorus, Alcman, Sappho, Alceus, Semonides) in the dialect of Picerno and the presentation of five original poems. In the preface, Franco Fanciullo offers a linguistic comment, placing the dialect of Picerno in the "small group of towns in Basilicata of so-called Gallic-Italic origin." They are "hybrid dialects," as for Avigliano, balanced between north and south, a hybridism based as well on a compromise with the cultures (French, Spanish, Italian) that have succeeded each other in the

Kingdom of Naples. In a note, de Blasi underlines that the dialect used is that of conversation and oral and social communication, with the pedagogical-exhortative intent to find again in the Greek lyric poets a model of life "not far and unrecoverable, but still near and possible." While the community is swept by the whirlwind of consumerism and by the chaos of disgregation, Romeo invites the citizens to take back the customs of amicable conviviality and reconstitute those values, that morality filled with wisdom that consented a more serene and amused social life.

In 1990 Maria T. Greco published *Dizionario dei dialetti di Picerno e Tito* (Napoli, ESI) that offers an enormous lexical material, variants and linguistic structures, useful for those who want or can draw from

them suggestions and indications for their own dialect creativity.

Criticism: A. Lotierzo and R. Nigro, *La poesia in Basilicata*, Forlì: Forum, 1993; F. Fanciullo, "Sulla posizione dialettale di Picerno," preface to *Lu monne scappa*, cit..

Cantara

Te só mmenù a ccantà,
figliola riccia,
pe te fa sènte
la mia vòcia amata
ca te canta l'amore
e li bbellezze
ca purte
quanne vai a ppasseggià.

Da Lu monne scappa, 1989

Cantata — Sono venuro a cantarti, ragazza riccia / per
farti sentire / la mia voce amata / che ti canta l'amore / e le
bellezze / che porti / quando vai a passeggiare.

(Traduzione dell'Autore)

Song

I came to sing to you,
curly girl,
to let you hear
my loving voice
that sings you the love
and the beauties
you bring
when you go for a walk.
(Translated by Novella Bonaffini)

Nun bbuje muri

Pure si si bbècchie assaje
nun bbuie muri.

Te sinte attaccarre strètte strètte
a sta terra, a li ccòse re stu munne
ca t'hanne ratte ggìoja e gguremente
e ppinze ca pò èsse
ca ddimane
forse te puje guré
n'ata giurnara.

Da Lu monne scappa, 1989

Non vuoi morire — Anche se sei vecchio assai / non vuoi
morire. / Ti senti legato stretto stretto / a questa terra, / alle
cose di questo mondo / che t'hanno dato gioia e godimento
/ e pensi che può essere / che domani / forse ti puoi godere
/ un'altra giornata.

(Traduzione dell'Autore)

You Don't Want to Die

Even if you're old enough
you don't want to die.
You feel yourself bound tightly
to this earth, to the things of this world
that have brought you joy and pleasure
and you think that it may be
that tomorrow
it just may be you'll enjoy
another day.

(Translated by Michael Palma)

Esaggerazzione

Agge tenù paciéncia
tutt'a góje
pe te sentì parlà
sèmpe r'amore
pe na vucecchia
ca pare r'argiente,
pe l'uócchie
ca me pàrene ddòje perle.

Si, pò, t'aggia senti
pure stanòtte,
me pare ca tu esàggere nu poche.

Da Lu monne scappa, 1989

Esagerazione — Ho avuto pazienza / tutto oggi / a
sentirti parlare / sempre d'amore / con una voce
tintinnante / che sembra d'argento, / con gli occhi / che mi
sembrano due perle. / Se, poi, ti debbo sentire / anche
questa notte, / mi sembra che tu esageri un poco.

(Traduzione dell'Autore)

Exaggeration

I've patiently waited
all day long
listening to you
speak of love
in a tinkling voice
that seems like silver,
with eyes
that seem to me like pearls.
So if I should hear you
this very night
you'd seem to exaggerate a bit.
(Translated by Michael Palma)

ANTONIO LO TIERZO

Lotierzo, born in Marsiconuovo (Potenza) the 28th of June 1950, did his classical studies in the Salesian School of Taranto and in Sala Consilina and then graduated in Naples, first in philosophy and history in 1972 and then in sociology in 1977. After fifteen years of teaching in secondary schools, he became a principal in Naples, where he has been living since 1981. He edited the review *Nodi* (1979-85), contributes to *Basilicata* (1972-93); *Quinta Generazione* (1978-81); *Quaderni Vesuviani* (1992-93); *Salvo imprevisti* and *Pensionante de' Saraceni* (1983). In verse he has published: *Il rovescio della pelle* [The Reverse of the Skin], *Forum*: Forlì, 1977 and *Moritoio marginale* [Marginal Dying] (ib., 1979). In 1981 he

edited, with Raffaele Nigro, *Poeti di Basilicata* [Poets of Basilicata] (enlarged edition 1993) and the literary essay *La parola e i frantumi* [The Word and the Fragments], Forlì: Forum, 1982.

From 1980 to 1993 he published ten historical and anthropological essays, devoted to folkloric positivism and to community studies (Spinosa, Marsicovetere, S. Martino d'Agri, Marsiconuovo, S. Cipriano d'Aversa).

Besides Russell, psychoanalysis and Marx, he has studied Ernesto De Martino, Gabriele de Rosa and Giuseppe Galasso. Among his favorite poets are Baudelaire, Eliot, Pavese, Giudici, Zanzotto, Sinisgalli and Pierro.

Maniscalchi has written about him: "He is one of the upcoming figures of the new generation for the precision of his writing

and methodological awareness... (His) statements on poetics, that also include a series of contradictions (the social and/or the formal), contain the model of a generation that, in the South, has tried to mediate Sinisgalli's graphemes with Scotellaro's incarnated syntagms..." (1982, op. cit.).

Catalano has noted: "Significant in him is the refusal of mythical reparation and the relative acceptance of a conflictual wave that overruns the towns, the cultures, the dreams and signs tied to Basilicata, and plunges them in a bold linguistic and expressive research that avoids the usual expectations, reinventing iconic codes of painful and confident modernity. They celebrate, according to Giancarlo Mazza-curati happy insight in the afterword, the related deaths of the old protective certainties: of the town,

of the city, of the subject himself, of the poetic self that comes apart and disintegrates under the pressing of words..." (Catalano, 1986).

His work appears in the anthologies of G. Ramella Bagneri (Forum) and Domenico Cara (Laboratorio delle Arti).

The collection in the dialect of Marsiconuovo, *Revuòte* [Inversions], published in 1993 in the renewed anthology *Poeti di Basilicata*, represents the poetic rendition of social situations, re-read in the light of human sciences. Dialect fascinates him for its town-square witticisms (the varied theater in which, with complicity and collusion, power plays its role, but at the same time it is scorned and jeered), the concise definitions of an action, the evocative force of a toponym or nickname. The winding of the Agri river, those wide

deserted bends full of stones, crumbling embankments and slender alders, express in the pure symbol all the fragility of the human condition, whose existence is always tied to a praxis that mediates between Nature and History.

Feminine cunning and deception, sexuality that is practiced but not spoken interest him for the particular kind of social cohesion they favor. After decades of shame for the use of dialect (shame taught by elementary school teachers with their red pencils), these texts, always experimental and a bit deranged and ironic, never redundant or nostalgic, wink at a rural world that survives only in those words, sayings, witticisms, fragments taken from the idioms of the peoples that have stratified our lives through the centuries, even in a cultural sense. We are like the rings of a tree.

No doubt it is also memory, besides reason, that carries out the selection, but it is a great joy to find again, for instance, the wavering of the “elementary” in Sinisgalli, the “poor soul of a codfish.” Then one takes a popular term and inserts it in a formal structure that gives a new, complete sense to the actions-lives-experiences being evoked. Besides Pierro, Malerba and Bufalino are important to Lotierzo. But he recommends the reading of dialect dictionaries, whose aligned terms from time to time cause a mental short circuit and give rise to the inspiration that allows us to take up the pen and write in verse the emerging associations, in keeping with an unknown psychological law and the intensity of the experience offered by the evocation.

Criticism: E. Catalano, *Le rose e terremoti*, Venosa, Osanna, 1986; F. Manescalchi, in

Punto d'incontro, a.V, n.14, 1983; G. Settembrino, in *Nodi*, n.1, 1981.

Ogne botta na ndàcca.

— Vai colpe colpe,
cumm'a nu cardille —.

Se rice re chi figlia ogn'anne.

E, pure se nun se résce all'erta,
rire, u fesse, re na forza fatata
ca passa pe pndo cuorpe sue
a scura raggione ra Storia,
e chissà addò fernisce.

da Poeti di Basilicata, 1993

Intacchi — Ogni botta un intacco. / — Non perdi un colpo, / vai come un cardillo —. / Si dice di chi figlia ogni anno. / Ed, anche se non si regge in piedi, / ride, il fesso, d'una forza fatata / che passa per dentro il suo essere, / l'oscura raggione della Storia, / e chi sa dove finisce.

Traduzioni dell'autore

Notches

Every shot another notch

– Bang, bang you never miss,
you're as frisky as a finch –

So they say when someone sires one every year
and even though he can't even stand on his own feet,
he laughs. the fool, full of an enchanted force
flowing through his being.

History's murky purpoe
that'll end up God knows where.

(Translated by Michael Palma)

Na faccia re cuorne

Na furèse busciàrda, na pentita venìhe
ddò mamma mia tutta resentita.

“Vui nun c’avita crére a i malalénghe
ca ve vènine a rice ca iye e u sinneche
àmme ratte kàzze e kucchiàra”

(e s’infucava e muvìya nu riscete
nnanze e arréte nda l’aria).

Mamma, ca ngiavìa fatte u calle,
facìa a ciota pe nun z’appezzecà
cu na cevèttula ca puzzava re latté munte
ma teniya rùye casecavàdde tuosté assàye.

da Poeti di Basilicata, 1993

Una sfrontata — Una campagnola bugiarda,
un’addoloratella venne / da mia madre tutta risentita. /
“Non dovete crederci alle malelingue / che vi vengono a
dire che io e il sindaco /

abbiamo fatto cazzo e schiumarola” / (e s’infuocava e
agitava un dito / davanti e di dietro nell’aria). / Mia madre,
che vi era abituata, / si fece stupida per non litigarsi / con
una civetta che puzzava di latte munto / ma aveva due seni
assai duri.

(Traduzione dell’Autore)

Brass

A crafty peasant, a little dolorosa,
she came to my mother brimming with resentment.
“You mustn’t listen to those dirty liars
whose wicked tongues’ll tell you me and the mayor
have churned the butter and whipped it to a froth”
(the whole time she was getting hotter and hotter,
thrusting a finger back and forth in the air).
And Mama, who knew the lay of the land all right,
decided to play the fool so as not to fight
with a strumpet who stank of spent milk but still had
two breasts that stood up pretty firm and hard.
(Translated by Michael Palma)

Ròi so' i facce ra ggente.

Ra nnanze

so chine re llavij,

sé préscené cchiù lore ca tu

pé na furtuna ca t'é capétata,

sepure pe scànge.

S'allárgane e tu cu lu core

t'abbuotte cumm'a nu ruospe.

Ra ddurètete nun puoie sapé cchi dicene,

te tagliane c'a forbece r'ammìria,

ca pertosa sette mura.

E a nonna repetìa:

"Nun te fa veré nemméne addò cache,

ca pote cchiù ammìria

r'i skuppettate."

E avòglia a rice, pòccke,

i pigliataruòcchie cu a Croce

'nfronte. Nun cäe fai niente

contra a forza r'i parole,

ca mo' te àuzene nda na néglia r'ore

e mo' te smerdèiene nda li zànghe.

da Poeti di Basilicata, 1993

Elogi ipocriti — La gente ha due facce. / Davanti: / sono pieni d'elogi, / si mostrano contenti / più loro di te / d'una fortuna che t'è capitata, / seppure per caso. / Sono di parole larghe e tu con loro / t'inorgoglicisci come un rospo. / Da dietro: non puoi sapere cosa dicono, / ti tagliano con la forbice dell'invidia, / che buca sette mura. / E la nonna ripeteva: / "Non farti vedere neppure dove cachi, / perchè ha più maleficio l'invidia / che non le schioppettate". / E, dopo, hai voglia a recitare / gli scongiuri con la Croce / in fronte. Non ci fai niente / contro la forza delle parole, / che ora t'innalzano in una nuvola d'oro / ed ora t'immerdano nel fango.

(Traduzione dell'Autore)

Praises

People have two faces.

Up front

they sing your praises,

they act even happier than you

when some good thing comes your way,

even by chance.

They spread it wide, and you

start to swell up like a toad.

Behind your back

you don't know what they're saying,

they cut you up with envy's scissors

that can pierce through seven walls.

And grandma used to say:

"Don't show anybody even where you shit,

for envy has more power

than bullets out of guns."

Later it's no use repeating incantations,

you can exorcise with the Cross held out in front

all that you want. There's nothing you can do

against the force of words,

that lift you one day on a cloud of gold

and then the next day plunge you in the mud.

(Translated by Michael Palma)

Nce esanne fa li fémmene.

Sùle tànnè aprihe i kòsce
a giuvanuttèlla attruttàta,
ca u conquistatòre
(ca pe' dritte se tenìa)
nge carihe inda
e s'affucàhe ndo mastrille.
da Poeti di Basilicata, 1993

Le donne ci sanno fare — Solo allora aprì le gambe / la
signorina bene istruita, / che il conquistatore / (che si
riteneva furbo) / le cadde dentro e s'affogò / nella trappola.
(Traduzione dell'Autore)

Women Know How

The well-taught young woman
opened her legs only then
so that her seducer
(who thought he was cunning)
fell right in
and was swallowed up in the snare.
(Translated by Michael Palma)

ROCCO BRINDISI

Rocco Brindisi, born in Potenza in 1944 to a family of farmers, is an office-worker and has been writing poetry since 1973. He is the best dialect poet of his generation for his distinctive and original style, for the his semantic density and the forms of his creativity. Emblematically, in 1974 he was accused of insult against religion, for some verses for which he was later absolved. A further indication of his cultural choices is his adaptation of Büchner's *Woyzech* for the southern theater. After many years of secret and careful work, Brindisi's poetry was published by Einaudi in 1984, in *Nuovi poeti italiani* (n. 3), where he had two long and complex poems: "Lucia che non ama il mare" [Lucia Who Doesn't Love the Sea] (with 29 *laissez*, written between 1976 and

1979) and "Mia madre, Miskin e la neve" (1980). With the morbid attention with which J. Swift treated the poetry of the body and G. Testori the anxious search for God among the outcasts, R. Brindisi sang the fading world of urban lower middle class, the dressing gown, the belly, the tongue of greasy, sick women, the poor furniture and the crumbling houses, the bright dreams and the cheerfully raw sex.

The harsh poverty is mitigated by an angelic, toothless smile, the obscene penchant for licking is mixed with the archetypes of the mother, the train, the hostile law, the curse, the deviance in a "poisonous, childish town." Politics, God, sex, death, the sentimental ambivalences of a generation that wanted to transform the world are the intermixed themes of a formal crucible that utilizes a low tone, a prosastic

lyricism to give form to a fragment of undone society. With Genet-like testimonial power, Brindisi charges his lyric self with the dense materiality of truth and asks for mercy or compassion only through the crudest display of pain. In the preface, Walter Siti notes: "Brindisi's texts are those more nearly approaching the level of symptom: to penetrate the body of a woman as a revenge for being victims. Mortal connection between sex and terrorism, in a south that gives no respite. Can the anguished relationship with his mother be the seed of a civil "courtesy"? (1984)

Winner of the Edoardo Firpo Award with the 1986 collection *Rosa du Pruatorie* [Rose of Purgatory], Genoa: S. Marco dei Giustiniani, 1986, containing thirty-six poems, he continues to confirm and enrich the poetic vein which from bilingual

becomes strictly dialectal. It is the dialect of S. Cataldo and Potenza that here takes on a very strong inner urgency and necessity, because it aims to describe a key poetic structure of imagination: his mother Rose, who passed away and yet lives again in the dense dialog with her son. In the preface, Antonio Porta wrote that the mouth becomes a uterus and the dialect is the "violent reaffirmation of a definitive gesture of possession." But besides the descent into the mouth/tongue of his mother, as he used to do in a childhood game, Brindisi is capable of giving dialect "the necessity of a form, where his mother can be transfigured and interpreted." That form is the dialog which, in poetry, gives us back the living voice of his mother as in a medieval dramatic laude, at once gentle and thorny. In that dialog Brindisi displays a host of

symbols: angels, children, sleep, snow, Christ, the stairs in the alleys. Brindisi's main characters are back: Lucia, Rosa and Elena, with an absolute sincerity, where even popular Christianity has its place, as it did in the collective life of rituals and feasts.

In 1990 Brindisi has produced a splendid confirmation with the fifty-three texts of *Carienn' li nir' da lli ccaggie* [The Nests Were Falling from the Acacias], Genoa: S. Marco dei Giustiniani, in which his dialect expands to go beyond the preceding phase of "dirty lyricism," widening its context through the epic of individual stories, popular ballads, love songs, lullabies. Ferdinando Giordano notes in the preface that Brindisi, harking back to Potenza's popular tradition, carries out "definitive choice of life, (because dialect here is) the dominant language, freed from any kind of mannered, aesthetic lyricism,

(aimed at) the search for pure sonority (with which to give rise on the white page) to the flavor of the seasons, the morning awakenings, the thickening shadows, the sobs of the evening, the night orators, the reflections of the sun, the merry sorties of the birds, the pulvino of the alleys [...], the individual and collective stories that infuse (the poetic tongue) with a vague musicality.”

In the linguistic contamination of a dialect that blends the dialect of Potenza with phonemes from the hinterland and the surrounding regions, Brindisi brings the themes of Basilicata's outcasts (not the bourgeois Potenza of Riviello and L. Tufano, nor the oleographic folklorism of Scotellaro's followers) to a formal brilliance of high poetic caliber and open to further developments, even in prose (as witnessed

by the *Racconti liturgici* that appeared in 1993 in the anthology *Narratori delle riserve*, edited by Gianni Celati for Feltrinelli Publishing.

Criticism: W. Siti, *Nuovi poeti italiani*, Turin: Einaudi, 1984; A. Lotierzo, in *Basilicata Regione-Notiziario*, 1994.

Rosa du pruatorie

Carna miia annammaruta
Crist' t' ggela cu nu basc'
e ìe ca t' so mamma
avess' sccuorn a basciarti
figlia miia abbandunata
chiù scusulata d'ti, manche Ddie
t' vèn'n a vuardà cum' a na morta
nzulféan lu temp' bell'
p' fart' scettà a gli càn r' la eternitate
figlia r'or', billezza
t'annòmena lu Sol'
senza prima nettàs' la dengua
nun tién faccia manche a vuardàrt inda nu specchie
t' pòzz' sol' amà
figlia miia bella
àt' nun faccie
chi bèn' amàr' è quest'
figlia, nun faccie àt!

Da Rosa du Pruatorie, 1986

Rosa del Purgatorio Carne mia fatta amara / Cristo ti
gela con un bacio / e io che ti sono madre / avrei vergogna
di baciarti / figlia mia abbandonata / più infelice di te,

neanche Dio / ti vengono a guardare come una morta /
dicono male di te al tempo bello / per farti gettare ai cani
dell'eternità / figlia d'oro, bellezza / ti nomina il Sole /
senza prima pulirsi la lingua / hai soggezione pure a
guardarti in uno specchio / ti posso solo amare, figlia mia
bella / non faccio altro / che triste amore il mio / non faccio
altro che amarti.

(Traduzione dell'Autore)

Rose of Purgatory

My embittered flesh
Christ chills you with a kiss
and I who am your mother
should feel ashamed to kiss you
my abandoned child
not even God unhappier than you
they come to look at you as at a corpse
they defame you in fair days
to hurl you to the hounds of eternity
beautiful golden child
I call you the Sun
before I rinse my tongue
you're ashamed to even look into the mirror
I can only love you
my lovely child
I do nothing else
what bitter love is this
my child, I do nothing else
(Translated by Michael Palma)

La rasta d' la pr'iera

la téng'h' a mménd,
la voscia soia
e cum' già la naca
la casa era na bammascia
na fasciéd'da d' r'cotta era mi suora
mmocca m' la m'nàva
ah! fasciator' d' sonn'!
suora mìa, quann' t' l'aggia rènn'?
m' d'vava da mbaccia li mmosch'
e pur' la luna

Da Rosa du Pruatorie, 1986

Il vaso della preghiera — Me la ricordo ancora la sua voce
/ e come andava la cuna // la casa era leggera leggera //
un cestino di ricotta, mia sorella / e piano piano me la
mangiavo // ah! fasce bianche del sonno! / sorella mia,
quand'è che ti sazierò pure io? // mi cacciava le mosche
dalla fronte / e pure la luna

(Traduzione dell'Autore)

The Prayer Jar

I can still recall her voice
and the way the cradle moved
the house was light as air
a milkwhite wrapper was my sister
bit by bit I would put it in my mouth
swaddling clothes of sleep--
my sister, when will I be able to repay you?
she brushed the flies from my forehead
and even the moon

(Translated by Michael Palma)

Ulie

s'era anzà a la f'nestra, cu nu stozz' d' pan' e murtatella
ca l'ang'l' s' lu sonn'n' d' nott'
ah! man' bbell' a scartà mìccul',
a scuzzulà fasul', p'sill',
a piglià queddi chiù tèn'r' e m'nars'l' mmocca
man' ca spannienn' d'nzuol' dop' li basc
man' ca fascienn' cundènd' nu libbr' cu li dir'
la murtatella era spasa e p'nnìa da nu lat'
la figliola avìa m'nà nu mozz'ch',
quann' s' truvàs a ppassà nu
criatùr' p' l'al'mds'na
— m' n' daie na nzenga?
quedda t'ràs' nu fil' d' murtatella e gn' lu spingès'
mmocca
lu uagliungièdd' nu nfascès' a ttèmb' a ssènd' l'addor'
s'avvutàs', s'agg'ràs cum' si gn' l'avèss'ra arrubbàra da
n'ganna la figliola scattàs a rrir', staccàs na scorza, gn'
l'accustàs a li labbr'scèdd', e vist' ca nu l'arbìa, fascès'
li cumbarì n'atu pièzz' d' murtatella
e lu piccieninn', tann' s' chieàs'
mo paria sazzie, e la figliola alluccàs:
— e mo!, v'nèss' a chiangie pur' Crist'! —

Da Rosa du Pruatorie, 1986

Desideri — Si era affacciata aila finestra con un pezzo di
pane e mortadella, / che gli angeli se lo sognano di notte /
ah! mani belle a scartare lenticchie, ad aprire fagioli, piselli,
/ a mettersi in bocca quelli più teneri / mani che
spandevano lenzuola dopo averli baciati / mani che
tenevano contento un libro con le dita // la mortadella era
stesa nel suo letto di grano e pendeva da tutti e due i lati //
la ragazza aveva già dato un morso, quando si trovò a
passare un bambino per l'elemosina // mi fai assaggiare? —
// e quella tirò subito un filo di mortadella e glielo spinse in
bocca // ma il bambino non fece in tempo a sentirne l'odore
/ si guardò attorno come se qualcuno gliel'avesse rubata
dalla gola // lei scoppiò a ridere, staccò un altro po' di pane
e glielo / accostò alle labbra, e visto che non le apriva, fece

(Traduzione dell'Autore)

Desires

she was sitting in the window, with a hunk of bread and mortadella

that the angels dream of at night

lovely hands to unwrap lentils and open beans and peas

to lift those tender hands slowly to one's lips

hands that would spread sheets after being kissed

hands that in their fingers would happily hold a book

the mortadella was hanging sideways, leaning to one side

the girl had just cut a chunk when along came a little boy begging

--c'n I have a taste?--

and she pulled off a piece of the mortadella and stuffed it in his mouth

but the little boy wasn't fast enough to even sniff the aroma

he looked around as if someone had plucked it from his throat

she burst out laughing, tore off another bit of bread, and dangled it

before his lips, and seeing he wouldn't open them, she flashed

another little bit of mortadella

and finally the boy seemed
to be satisfied with that, and the girl exclaimed:
--and now even if Christ were to come here and weep!--
(Translated by Michael Palma)

Amor'

lu criatur' r'm'nava la cén'r' cu na man' e cu l'ata s'
rattava ndesta

la suora lu chiamàs a lu sol', gn' scravugliàs' li riccie,
pigliàs lu pètt'n' strett', d'oglie e gn' scazzàva li procchie
sova nu fogli' d' cuadèrn'

èr'n' chiù accusc'at' d' nu piezze d' pan' ca ha f'rnù
d'cuóse'

l'ang'l li t'nìa a mmènd, appuggiàr' a na spèra d' sol'

Da Rosa du Pruatorie, 1986

Amore — Il bambino rigirava la cenere con una mano e
con l'altra si grattava in testa / la sorella lo chiamò sul
davanzale, gli setacciò i capelli, / scese a prendere un
pettine stretto, l'olio e gli schiacciava i pidocchi su un foglio
di quaderno // stavano più acquietati di un pezzo di pane
che ha finito di cuocere // l'angelo li guardava, pogiato a
un raggio di sole.

(Traduzione dell'Autore)

Love

with one hand the baby played in the ashes, with the
other he scratched his head,

his sister called him into the sunlight, she sifted through
his hair

she climbed down to get the oil and a fine-tooth comb,
and she squashed

his lice on an exercise book

they were stiller than a piece of bread that's finished
cooking

the angel watched over them, leaning on a ray of sunlight
(Translated by Michael Palma)

Li latrin' d' Samm'chèl'

lu trasc'nàr'n' da li llatin', fatt' a vin' scurdàr' da Crist
avìa sbattù mbaccia a nu mur'
lu uardian' gn'av'zas' li cav'zun', gn'appundàs' la cinda
na femm'na pigliàs' na seggia e lu puggiàr'n' ddà ssova
m'nàva sangh' da na recchia e t'nia nu sonn' spaccàr'
cumbarès na figliola cu nu bacil' e mendr sa mamma
gn' sciacquava la faccia, s'avvutàs' p' nu t'né a mmènd'
a na porta s'aanzàs' na criatura scàv'za
la suora chiù ranna gn' già apprèss fascènn'gn' li nor'
a li caveglie
na treccia era già bbella
lu frastiér parìa ngiutùr d' sonn'
— nu gn'accupàr' l'aria —, alluccas' na femm'na
e pur' l'ang'l' ca gn' fascìa la uardia, s'allundanàs'
la seggia arr'fiatàs'
r'manès' solamènd' nu piccieninn',
ca lu susciàva cu nu giurnal' chieàr'
li f'nestr' èr'n' avèr' e s' s'ndiènn' vosc' d'ati cund'
lu piccieninn' susciàva la Mort'
Da Rosa du Pruatorie, 1986

Le latrine di San Michele — Lo trascinarono fuori dalle
latrine, fatto a vino dimenticato da Cristo / il guardiano gli

sollevò i pantaloni, gli strinse la fibbia / una donna portò fuori una sedia e lo poggiarono là sopra / cacciava sangue da un orecchio e teneva un tempia spaccata // comparve una ragazza con un bacile e mentre la madre gli puliva la faccia / si girò per non guardare // a un porta si affacciò una bambina scalza seguita dalla sorella più grande che continuava ad annodarle i capelli e una treccia era già bella // il giovane forestiero sembrava perso nel sonno // — non gli rubate l'aria —, gridò una donna / e pure l'angelo che gli faceva la guardia si allontanò / la sedia prese fiato / rimase soltanto un ragazzino che gli faceva vento con un giornale piegato // le finestre erano tutte aperte e si sentivano voci di altri racconti // il bambino faceva vento alla Morte.

(Traduzione dell'Autore)

The Bathrooms of San Michele

They pulled him from the men's room, drunk and forgotten by Christ

in falling his face had kissed the wall

the guard pulled up his pants and buckled his belt

a woman brought out a chair and they put him on it

blood spurted from his ear and stuck to his split temple

a young girl arrived with a basin and while her mother

washed his face, she turned away so as not to watch

a barefoot girl came out of a door

her taller sister walked behind her, still

doing up her hair

one lovely braid was done

the young foreigner seemed lost in sleep

--give him some air!-- a woman cried, and even

the angel that watched over him moved back

the chair took a breath

only a little boy remained, and fanned him with a folded newspaper

all the windows were open and voices sang of other stories

the little boy fanned Death

(Translated by Michael Palma)

CALABRIA

Before achieving truly original results, for a long time poetry in the Calabrian dialect followed the two lines inherited from the Nineteenth Century: the vernacular, even comical, aimed at giving a voice to uncultured speakers, which never posed the question of joining semantic instruments and grammatical systems, and has always remained anchored to the mimetic use of language; and the argumentative, bent on building ideologically a sort of artificial alternative to reality, not infrequently alert to the possibilities of a critical conjugation with the protest.

Quantitatively prevalent have always appeared to be the mimetic stances, leaning heavily on the side of the popular, with less frequent stylistic and thematic tensions in

the direction of an imitative recovery of the more wide-spread Italian tradition.

This is clearly exemplified by the texts of Michele Pane (1876-1953), who had made his debut with a satirical poem, "L'uòminu russu" [The Red Man] (1898). In the mimetic power of the language, kept alive also by a cultural tradition guarded in its primal authenticity, Pane found the instruments to express both the anxiety of uprootedness and the longing of the man thirsting for literature who looked to Pascoli as the poet who was closer, emotionally, to his own world. And the latter provided several correlations with his own verse, to the extent that he made a few translations in the vernacular that showed he was well-disposed towards lyric conventions. The influence of Pascoli on Michele Pane is, nevertheless, a non-reductive element in the

characterization of a poetics focusing on domestic and melancholy themes, which do not exhaust the poet's interests. He appears to aim at avoiding the psychologically idyllic posture typical of the poet from Romagna, in favor of a personal approach to social themes with a strong ethical element (Parini), but without utopic temptations. And often dialect is substituted by the common language, even if in somewhat conventional forms which betray various influences of "schools" (Carducci and Padula, above all, particularly consequential in the formal characterization of the texts).

Nevertheless, Pane does not go too far along this line. His emigrant's psychology induces him to dwell very frequently on the reasons behind his longing for the places, the sentiments, the objects he loved. Garibaldi, in the long run, becomes an ever popular

hero ("Rapsodia Garibaldina," 1949); and as such destined to become a myth, against profiteers, usurers, Bourbonists, followers of Crispi, braggarts, abettors, thieves, jackals. The controversy takes up a canonical theme of Calabrian literature, not unlike what happens in the passages where the poet breaks into patriotic song, evoking episodes of 1848 and 1860. Calabrian as well is no doubt the paramount source of the erotic tension that runs through one of the American collections (Peccati [Sins], 1916), played between popular motifs and ludic metaphors, whimsical and goliardic.

The political element prevails openly, instead, in the poetry of Pasquale Creazzo (1875-1963). As a consequence, an ideological reading of his work has always been favored. But when it is stripped of adversarial connotations, often resentful, shouted,

biased, it reveals an outdated and almost exploitative intent which certainly does not do poetry any good.

The dialect of Creazzo, often harsh, conservative and tendentiously archaic, almost petrified (so that it does not lend itself to the frequent practice of translating Latin odes into vernacular), depends entirely on slang, a consequence of his attempt to remain close to the static rural world, which does not allow other types of values, even when it is forced to deal with the need for integrative lexical loans.

Somewhat more successful are the political stances of Nicola Giunta (1895-1968). But they rarely reach the level of comprehensive meaningfulness, because the observation point, resentful and polemical, is generally urban Reggio Calabria. The definitive switch to dialect took place after

W.W.II, after an attempt at mixed languages ("Francesco da Paola," 1936), but it was not enough to free him from a certain late-naturalistic conditioning. Already discovered by Pasolini, Giunta can be considered little more than a provincial follower of D'Annunzio and the *crepuscolari*, who was nevertheless able to stay away from the widespread imitation of Pascoli in the region, alternating invectives and melancholy in tones at times descriptive and at times sententious.

Social aims can be also found in the dialect poetry of Napoleone Vitale di Bova (*Asprumunti, Calabria*), and above all in that (*Canzuni vecchi e canzuni novi*) [Old Songs and New Songs], 1931 of Giovanni De Nava (Reggio C., 1873-1941) who, allured by Mussolini's social program, from a vaguely romantic socialism he embraced Fascism. In

an attempt to look for answers to the many existential questions that concerned all humanity, De Nava gave a voice to the poor and derelict, with a rather pessimistic outlook (Who can these children be / without a house, mother, bread and God? / One day they'll be thieves and crooks / that the city itself has raised!) Michele de Marco (Ciardullo) di Perito (1884-1945) opted instead for the facetious and playful sketch, good-naturedly skeptical, and aimed at fanciful descriptions (Statte tranquille...nun cce pensare [Don't Worry...Don't Think About It], 1968) portraying types and domestic and provincial settings in a style which is never resentful, even when witnessing the poverty of his people, and frequently in a tender and idyllic vein. His son, Ciccio De Marco (Mio caro padre [My Dear Father, 1964), establishing a remote

contact with Antonio Chiappetta (Cosenza, 1876-1942), author of *Jugale* (a poem in sextets that gives life to a bizarre character, who feigns foolishness and credulity), created the figure of a southern farmer-soldier, Rosarbino, who, in a series of letters to his father, attests the disorientation of the southerner tackling personal problems in the big city. The point of view of the farmer is conveyed in a macaronic dialect, mixing Italian words and corroded slang, which expresses the corrosive ironic tension with which the poet judges the whole of contemporary society.

To document the wealth of poetry in Calabrian dialect one could mention many authors balanced, in general, between the impressionistic sketch, satirical bend and social engagement, that give voice to the rage or anxiety of the people in their

vernacular language, but rarely with any authenticity of expression: Rocco Ritorto (*Caulonia* 1924) is balanced between irony and feeling (*Spilazzi* [Threads], 1969; *Hjangazzi* [Gleams], 1974); Domenico Vitale (Soverato 1895), tends to bring to life a world of memory, suspended between reality and dream (*I zzippuli*); Emanuele di Bartolo (*Crucoli* 1901) turns to a type of meditative poetry (*Andannu... vidennu* [Going...Seeing], 1962; *Picatu* [Sin], 1971; **Siminta n'tu carrolu** [Seeds in the Road], 1973); and then the poet-farmers Micu Pelle (*Risbijamundi* [Waking the World], 1977) and Giuseppe Coniglio (*Calabria contadina*, 1973); the satirist Francesco Mazzè (S. Nicola da Crissa 1926); the most experimental, at the linguistic level, Peppino Valentini from Cosenza (*A mio figlio Rosarbino*); the scourge Francesco Besaldo

from Amantea; Attilio Romano from Paola, Domenico Teti from S. Nicola di Crissa, Paolo La Cava from Reggio Calabria, Mimmo Staltari from Locri, Teodoro Torchia from Castelsilano, Gino Bloise from Cassano Jonio, Pasquale Cavallaro from Caulonia...

The fable instead inspires the poetry of Vittorio Butera (1877-1955). His fables, however, are very particular, and have very little to do with those of Trilussa, for example, to whom he has been compared nevertheless. The poet from Calabria does not share the same skeptical vision of life. And when he takes aim against the baseness of the human spirit (hypocrisy, intrigues, vanity, ambition, deceits), he does not limit himself to denigrating it by turning it into corrosive, shouted satire, but represents it and clearly postulates his faith in the possibility of overcoming it.

Emblematic appears the poem “A staffetta” (*Prima cantu... e doppu cunttu*, 1949), dedicated to his friend Michele Pane, who “sings” the journey of the poet’s daughter from America to Calabria, “messenger of love and sorrow.” The sentimental and elegiac note that seems to prevail focuses on the lyric representation of the details of the journey and the town that the young woman (Libertà) discovers again, almost borrowing her father’s eyes so that she can better report her impressions to him. Acquavona’s fountain, the chestnut tree, the letters carved on the bark of the tree, the old mill, the river, the small house, the carnations in the window, welcome Libertà like a fairy and honor her, no less than relatives and friends, in the name of her distant father who has entrusted his identity to those signs, which have become symbols of a world living only

in memory, and in part already consigned for ever to the cemetery of Adami. What is at stake is Butera's conception of poetry, which is called to play a role of neoclassical value, as comfort and illusion, but also as testimonial. The serenity that through it can reach the world cannot be hampered by the sad observations on reality. Poetry must serve man as instrument of illusion, comfort him in the moments of melancholy and sadness, freeing him from negative thoughts even when these are induced by the analysis of events. Butera discovers in popular consciousness the tension of the anecdote that metaphorizes the message, and makes it analogically expressive of moral truths through associations which unleash the mental proliferation on which rests the culture of the early ages of peoples. In some ways it is as if through it the poet aimed at

representing the cognitive automatisms of ethnological culture that allegorizes reality into symbolic aggregates, and has no need for excessive rationalizations. Therefore the moral of his fables, when there is one, is almost never biting, but at times it even too predictable. An underlying empathy is always at the root of the representations of the various cases, which ultimately take on a social significance without showing it openly. Butera does not despair: the great Calabrian dream of justice is almost vindicated in the parables of the anecdotes entrusted to animals, though confidence in a palingenesis appears scarce, due to man's widespread tendency toward selfishness, always ready as he is to take advantage of his neighbor, especially when he is weaker.

The brief anecdote, the sketch, the aphorism, seem to provide Butera with the

possibility to communicate his moral messages in an immediate and direct manner, through the bitterness that stays with the reader, who is forced to reflect on the apparent paradox of the situation in which a truth is concealed or a doubt suggested.

On an intermediate plane between spontaneity of writing and commitment to structure, stands the more modern poetry of Achille CURSIO (born in 1930). His search follows two fundamental lines: the first concerns his posture with respect to the poetic tradition in dialect of his region, which places him on a line of continuity (and development) with Padula's Nineteenth-Century compositional models, and of the more modern ones, indebted to Pascoli and to Pane; the second derives from the need to reinvent dialect, which

postulates a direct relationship with traditional speech subjected to the pressure of lexical enrichment¹. It is an itinerary of progressive approximation to a personal lexicon, which nevertheless still does not become endophasic (according to Mengaldo's definition²), stopping at the threshold of that purity pursued by the most careful writers, who aspire at that finality of personal originality outside any literary tradition and even outside everyday exchanges. Because at the bottom of the operation is an effort to objectify individual experience, even when it appears to tend towards the fable.

Curcio almost bets not only on the forms, but also the lexicon of tradition, although there is an obvious effort to develop a broader *koinè*, which Brevini considers

almost "idealizing"³. In reality, Curcio's cultured background, which has nonetheless found in dialect a congenial and varied expressive agent, prompts the poet to experiment with a series of stanzaic and metrical combinations suited to the representation of a human world anthropologically fixed in a regional setting, but shaken by the dialogic forces of alternative models found in the cultural reality of the nation. With the consequent necessity to revise or enrich the linguistic code itself, but with the inevitable tensions to go beyond the typology of living dialect speech, which seems to reduce the ideological violence of the message, determining an apparent regression towards a descriptive or sentimental Pascoli, and therefore away from the popular and towards the subjective. In deciphering his

experience, like other recent ones, it is a question of redefining the whole scope of dialect literatures, which can no longer be considered exclusively in relation to the greater or lesser degree in which they reflect the culture of a people, nor be judged on the extraneous contents of the texts, whether of protest or anything else. In fact, the effort to adopt dialect as a language potentially capable of rising to the rank of instrument well suited to poetry is becoming increasingly evident. In order to achieve this end, it becomes almost indispensable, for the poet, to assume an attitude of extreme openness, even when this might entail a sort of refuge in individual lyricism or the recovery of models applied differently in Italian poetry.

Curcio never tries to describe the social or the political in ideological terms. Beyond

a participatory ethical and human tension, his philosophical credo can be summed up in the apparently conflictual “and I don’t care,” which reveals rather his all-important literary preoccupation. This can materialize in the numerous metaphors, in alliteration, onomatopoeia, metonymy, in the occurrence of varied stanzaic forms (with frequent use of the Sapphic), in the variety of meter, and in the complexity of the sound patterns. So that dialect itself ultimately tends towards a sort of “illustrious speech” of Dantean memory, language of poetry, in a way “reflected,”⁴ if one likes, but personal in the results.

Totally emancipated from any regional conditioning, characterized by linguistic experimentation and contemporary themes, is the poetry of Dante Maffia (born in 1946), who applies himself to it with the same

earnestness shown in his Italian poetry, raising it to very high levels. Versification is always subjected to a rhythmic and metrical control that entails precise stylistic and lexical choices, which give form to the substance of the images in the representation of a world which is private, but tends to unfold in the interpretive key of collective consciousness, regional or provincial as it may be, but aiming at becoming emblematic of a universal condition. In this sense the recovery or even the invention of an archaic language, which includes speech and at the same time goes beyond it, making possible the erasure of all the trite topoi recurring in the vernacular tradition, allows the poet to choose words capable of expressing a world of events and objects, of feelings and reflections which, going through the psyche, reaches the

intellect that organizes it in orderly and meaningful sequences.

In Maffia's poetry one finds none of the clichés typical of Calabrian dialect poetry. The poet lives the problems of contemporary intellectual life, confirming them on the personal plane, but without giving in to elegy. If language is the instrument, the book is the channel through which he can attest his presence in the world: being made of words and paper means the possibility of materializing the self in a medium capable of fixing even the moment indelibly, so that one can find it again in time and reexamine the formal premises in the light of new certainties and acquisitions absorbed through the book itself. This does not mean that the discourse becomes overly intellectualized in metaphorizing the experience of solitude always on the verge of

being unmasked: "Yes, I am / and I am not here / [...] I wait / in my hiding place for a sign / I hide to be caught." The hiding place is the cocoon in which solitude is cultivated. Outside it, but nowhere else, lives the other (nature, surroundings, people) to which the cocoon feel it must open. The inventory of relics runs through memory's archive, becomes symbol of a revised anthropology and the cause of an existential restlessness that leads to a vagabond destiny. For this reason the poet renounces the paper world of dreams and, along with it, the world typical of traditional vernacular poetry, in order to attest his different way of reclaiming private song in dialect, with the torment of contemporary life experienced in the closed space of his nest in contact with the things he loves, the secret pacts, and again the books: "I always take along / a

book of poems.”

Ancient words help the modern poet to find his secret hiding place. Dialect, that belonged to the fathers but not the children, cannot be employed to signify a world of paper, made of low houses, resigned farmers, abused poor people, deprivations, rebellions or fairy tales if it wishes to be an instrument that “conquers the silence of a thousand centuries.” It must become pliable, reinvent itself, adapt to the needs of contemporary expression, become “language of poetry” after having been “language of reality,” attempt even the haiku (“Long summer, / sounds and songs over the sea. / The cicadas dance”), in sum, make itself, as signifier to overcharge itself with meaning and aspire at least to a “life of paper.”

With *A vite i tutte i jurne*⁵ [Everyday Life]

and *U Ddije puvirille*⁶ [The Poor God] Maria crowns his inquiry. They attest an anthropomorphic idea of poetry, sought in the long dialogue with Baudelaire, pursued in the footsteps of returning Homer, investigated in the flesh and blood of his own and other people's everyday existence, stripped in memory, exalted in the word sparsely arranged in the text because of the ever present fear of misdecoding. The poet Maffia has turned many of his cards face up. The event appears as an instrument capable of setting off the new language in order to repossess autonomously archetypal signifiers deposited in vernacular speech, reinvent them as sounds and insert them in contexts capable of modernizing the old signs, expanding their expressive potential. An event that tends to signify itself almost as legend in history, through personal

utterance or oral enunciation that turns it into sound, verbal music, after having been steeped in a sort of personal myth: of the earth that has nourished it, of the people that have formed it, of the waters that have made it smooth, of the wind, the affections, the misfortunes, the sun (love), the shadow (death). And everything becomes narration, word spoken to himself but addressed to others through the years that flow ever identical yet apparently different over a human race reduced to insignificant accident.

The Attic flavor of the ancient tongue imbues a discourse capable of orchestrating the technical and rhetorical devices of versification, which can confer such new dignity to the vernacular register that the common language appears almost subordinate by comparison, especially with

respect to the persisting inventory of relics sifted by the memory of the poet.

It is no longer a question of changing the world, but to know it and accept it for what it's worth, certain that everything always starts from the beginning once again with every death or change. The agony is repeated, but so are the small joys of the day, the discoveries, the starts, sensual and wasteful love (Erotiche) like the kind that is a flame of the spirit and does not need to be consummated to be enjoyed, but lives in the beguiling power of longing: hope and desire, charm and consolation, beginning and waiting. Love that continually risks the contact, contamination with death, and is a sign of life, satisfying and comfortable, miraculous in the alternation of sensations and thoughts it generates ("You can kill me and I will be reborn, / you can give me life

and i will die"). The event tends to take on connotations of infinity in the cyclical recurrence of experience, which is individual, but always tends to be affected by the destiny of man sentenced to an endless journey of enrichment.

Maffia attests (maybe for a whole generation, and not only for Calabria) how poetry can renew starting from itself, from the point where transparency was still essential, and peculiar senses were entrusted to verbal signs. "Permanent education," then, according to the title of a collection of poetry, as an unstoppa-ble process of growth in history, but also as a maturation of critical faculty, of selection and judgment that allows one to approach with confidence the instrument (the utterable word) that appears more susceptible to expressiveness.

Closer to this type of linguistic and

thematic operation, among the younger poets, seems to be Stefano Marino from Reggio Calabria, who has provided too few samples to allow more than just a mention. But it is obvious that, through these means, even Calabrian dialect poetry has freed itself from the fetters of mimetism, of folklore and facile, party-oriented sociology, to join the most advanced experiments of national dialect poetry, in order to realize that discovery of identity that inspires every true poet.

Luigi Reina

NOTES

1 Cfr. E. Bonea, "Parlanti e poeti: il dialetto tra sopravvivenza e invenzione," in *Letteratura e storia meridionale. Studi offerti ad Aldo Vallone,***, Florence 1989, pps. 879 880.

2 P. V. Mengaldo, Introduction to *Poeti italiani del Novecento*, Milan 1984, p. LXXI.

3 *Le parole perdute. Dialetti e poesia nel nostro secolo*, Turin

1990, p. 313.

4 Cfr. G. B. Bronzini, *Teoria e problemi di poesia popolare*, Bari 1967, that takes up a well-known concept of B. Croce.

5 Roma, *Edizioni Carte Segrete*, 1987 (pref. by G. Spagnoletti).

6 Milano, *All'insegna del Pesce d'Oro*, 1990 (pref. by A. Stella).

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- C. Chiodo, *Poeti calabresi tra Otto e Novecento*, Rome 1992.
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MICHELE PANE

Michele Pane was born in Adami di Decollatura on March 11, 1876. He did his studies at Nicastro and Monteleone, two centers rich with humanistic culture. He no doubt became acquainted, through the texts of Vincenzo Ammirà, with the culture of popular naturalism that was being handed down orally in the territory. It complemented the Risorgimento and Garibaldian tradition that marked his national-popular development. He interrupted his studies for military service. Having emigrated to the U.S., he went back to Italy in 1901 to marry Concettina Bilotti di Sambiasi. In the U.S. he was involved in various activities: wine merchant, Italian teacher in a parochial church, bank clerk, notary... He contributed with various

literary writings to *Il progresso Italo-Americano*, *Corriere del Connecticut*, *Il lupo*. In 1924 he moved from Brooklyn to Omaha (Nebraska), and then to Chicago. He always kept close ties with Italy, where he returned in 1938 to attend the wedding of his daughter Libertà, and remained there for about a year. He died in Chicago on April 18, 1953.

His first poem, "The Red Man" (1898) caused him several disputes and even a trial. His marked interests for the legacy of the Risorgimento and Garibaldi, rooted in a humus genetically motivated by socio-anthropological stimuli, contributed to turn into protest the post-Risorgimento disappointments; which, however, were expressed in formulas oscillating between lyric elegy and almost naturalistic attitudes of protesting representation. Predominant,

therefore, even in the rest of his poetry collections (*Trilogia* [Trilogy], 1901; *Viole e ortiche* [Violets and Nettles], 1906; *Sorrisi* [Smiles], 1914; *Peccati* [Sins], 1916; *Lu Calavrise 'ngrisatu*, [The Anglized Calabrese] 1916; *Accuordi e sospiri* [Chords and Sighs], 1930; *Garibaldina*, 1949) is the fluctuation between romantic longing and need for judgment, sentimental abandon and a manly sermonizing attitude, emotional, nostalgic torpor and titanic shout, mythos and mimesis animated by an ethos, even firmly defined, in his contrast between a static image, still patriarchal, of regional life deposited in conscious memory and the image of the restless turmoil of American culture.

In Pane's poetry abound the small sketches, the vignettes, the scenes which

combine the objects that have become personal fetishes, figures, types, characters, places, symbols and signs of a subaltern condition of life even capable of an ideal vindication through a few historical myths embodied by strong personalities of the region (Agelisao Milano, Giosafatte Tallarico), or in the fanciful gratification of popular legends recounted on winter evenings by old people next to the fireplace. One seems to find in it — and this is the best part — the popular intonations of the storytellers of the time, which contributed to bring the region out of its isolation by drawing on a lymph with different manifestations in the South, especially between Naples and Palermo, and responsible for a healthy growth of dialect itself, which through that route found the impetus for an expressionistic

experimentation capable of achieving modern solutions even through contamination.

Essential Bibliography: for Pane's works, cf. the anthology *Le Poesie* edited by G. Falcone and A. Piromalli (Soveria Mannelli, 1987), who contribute two stimulating introductory essays (on which cf. L. Reina, in *Poetica*, 1990, 10-11). The following collections are represented: *L'uòmini russu*, *Trilogia*, *Viole e ortiche*, *Sorrisi*, *Peccati*, *Lu calavrise 'ngrisatu*, *Accuordi e sospiri*, *Rapsodia garibaldina*, along with songs with popular intonations and translations into dialect of texts by Carducci, Stecchetti, Pascoli, Padula, Marradi, Cordiferro. A Previous anthology of his poems, which marked the beginning of Pane's success in Calabria, was edited by G. Rocca (*Musa silvestre*, 1930; then reedited

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Criticism: . R. De Bella, *La poesia dialettale in Calabria*, Florence 1959; S. Gambino, *Antologia della poesia dialettale calabrese dalle origini ai giorni nostri*, Catanzaro 1967); *Calabria letteraria*, August-December 1973; U. Bosco, *Pagine calabresi*, R. Calabria 1975; R. Troiano, "Cultura popolare e letteratura dialettale in Calabria dall'unità ad oggi," in *La letteratura dialettale in Italia*, edited by P. Mazzamuto, Palermo 1984; F. Brevini, *Le parole perdute. Dialetti e poesia nel nostro secolo*. Turin 1990; L. Reina, *Poesia e regione. Un secolo di poesia in Calabria*, Salerno 1991; *Poesia dialettale dal Rinascimento a oggi*, edited by G. Spagnoletti and C. Vivaldi, Milan 1991; C. Chiodo, "Un poeta dialettale emigrato in America," in *Poeti calabresi tra Otto e Novecento*, Rome, 1992; R. M. Morano, "Eros,

satira sociale, ulissismo e nostos nella Musa
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L'ùominu russu

[...]

Rote de fuocu l'ucchi sgargellati
e luonghi e niuri i capilli lanuti
had'illu, cumu chilli dei dannati;
Fussiru 'mberu janchi, ma tingiuti
si l'ha ccu' 'na pumata, e dd' 'u muscune
sue li pili sù tutti 'ncatramati;
Èdi d'atizza quantu Napuleune
ma cchiù valente assai pue ppe' bravura...
ca nun ce stadi nullu a paragune
ccu' ll'uomu russu de Dicollatura.
È ffigliu de Dio Marte e dde' 'na fata
ed è natu 'ntra i faghi 'e Rivintinu
'stu cicropune, 'stu garibardinu
chi tutta la Calabria had'unurata;
De pìcciu lu mustrava gran curaggiu
e jìadi sulu a caccia di li lupi
dintra li vùoschi, supra li dirrùpi;
a dece anni struggiù ll'u brigantaggiu.
Le sannu i vecchi de lu Praticiu
tutte le sue prudizze de quattraru
ca si nde parri ccu' 'nu pecuraru

lestu lestu se caccia lu cappiellu.

L'uomo rosso — [...] Ruote di fuoco gli occhi spalancati /
e lunghi e neri i capelli lanosi / egli ha, come quelli dei
dannati; // Se fossero davvero bianchi, ma tinti / li ha con
una pomata, e del pizzetto / suo i peli sono tutti
incatramati; // È alto quanto Napoleone / ma più valido
assai può per bravura... / che non resiste niente al paragone
/ con l'uomo rosso di Decollatura. // È figlio di Dio Marte e
di una fata / ed è nato tra i faggi di Reventino / questo
bestione, questo garibaldino / che ha onorato tutta la
Calabria; // Da piccolo mostrava un gran coraggio / e
andava da solo a caccia di lupi / nei boschi, sopra i
precipizi; / e in dieci anni distrusse il brigantaggio. // Le
conoscono i vecchi del Praticello / tutte le sue prodezze di
ragazzo / e se ne parli con un pecoraio / rapido rapido si
toglie il cappello. //

The Red Man

[...]

His wooly hair is long, black as an inkwell,
the eyes are wheels of fires splayed wide
like the eyes of the damned in deepest hell.
His hair is really white, but he has dyed it
with some kind of cream, and his pointed beard
has been smoothed down and tarred on every side.
He is of the same height as was Napoleon
but much more skilled, more able to be sure...
nothing in the world can stand comparison
with the red man from Decollatura.
He's son to the god Mars and to a fairie
born among the beech trees of Riventino
this enormous brute, this garibaldino
who honored with his deeds all of Calabria.
He showed great courage when he was a boy
and went hunting for wolves all by himself
deep in the woods or over a high cliff
at ten he hunted brigands and destroyed them.
All the old timers of Praticello heard
of his exploits and feats when just a brat
and if you talk about it with a shepherd

he's very quick to take off his hat.

Comu quandu ca tuni ventumatu
cce hai l'Uorcu, o lu magaru cchiù putente,
pperchè, letturi mie', de ccà le gente
bona e mala lu cridedi 'n fatatu.

[...]

Già ppe' cuntare tutt' 'a groliusa
sua storia chi mo' affrigge e mo' cunsùla,
cce vòrradi la pinna de Padula
e lla sua fantasia meravigliusa;
Cà Cicciu Stuoocu nu valìa nu sordu,
e Nicotera nente 'n facce ad illu
e ferdinande Biancu 'nu rijillu
eradi, 'm paragune 'e ddo' Lipordu.
De la Francia, li miegliu Muschettieri
illu si l'attaccassi alli stivali,
e dde l'Italia tutti i Generali
nun sù buoni a lle fare de stallieri.
Cumù rumanza se puotu cuntare
le sue patùte e nun basta 'na notte;
e tutt''e valentie de ddon Chisciotte
ccu' lle sue, nun ce puotu mai appattare.

[...]

Ppe' lli strapazzi 'n guerra e mo' 'mbecchiatu,
camina coscinùtu ed ja lla tussa;
ma 'ncore porta lla cammisa russa
ccu' tuttu ch'èdi vecchiu e sguallaratu.

Come se tu nominassi / l'Orco, o lo stregone più potente,
/ perché, lettore mio, la gente di qua / buona o cattiva lo
crede un predestinato. // [...] Già per raccontare tutta la
gloriosa / sua storia che un po' affligge e un po' consola, / ci
vorrebbe la penna di Padula / e la sua meravigliosa fantasia;
// Qui Ciccio Stocco non varrebbe un soldo / e Nicotera
niente al suo cospetto / e Ferdinando Bianco uno scricciolo
/ sarebbe, a paragone di Don Leopoldo. // I più valenti
moschettieri di Francia / egli se li legherebbe agli stivali, / e
tutti i generali d'Italia / non sono buoni a fargli da stallieri.

Almost as if you had really mentioned
a powerful magician, or the Ogre,
because the people here, o my dear reader,
both good and bad see him as predestined.
[...]

To tell the whole of his glorious story
that brings you comfort but can also sadden
you would have had to enlist Padula's pen
and his celebrated fantasy.

Here Ciccio Stocco wouldn't be worth a cent
and Nicotera less than nothing then
and Ferdinando Bianco would be a wren
if with Don Leopoldo you compare each gent.
Even the best Musketeers from France
wouldn't be worthy of polishing his boots,
and all the generals of Italy in cahoots
wouldn't rate high enough to be his servants.
His adventures can be sung like a romance
and an entire night would not be enough
and all of Don Quixote's gallant stuff
could never be compared to his circumstance.
[...]

The experiences of war have made him old,
he walks hunched over and can't stop his cough;
but he still wears his shirt yet red and bold
an ancient man, a hernia his payoff.

[...]

Chist'è ll'u cuntu, mio lettore caru,
de l'Uomo Russu, chi allu Maciarrone
passàndi all'arte de tamburrinaru;
Capu-tamburru e spia sutta Borbone
'stu Cavaliere d' 'a trista figura,
— chi ppe' giganti pigliava lle cone —
Avia coraggiu assai... ma d' 'a pagura
a chill'accuntu 'un le trasìa 'na 'nzita...
e ppe' chilli cacacchi ch'eppe allora
se had'illu abbreviatu la sua vita.

da Le poesie, 1987

[...] Questo è il fatto, mio lettore caro, / dell'Uomo Rosso,
che al Maciarrone / passò all'arte di tamburrinare; //
Capo-tamburone e spia sotto il Borbone / questo cavaliere
dalla triste figura, / — che scambiava per giganti le icone
[dei tabernacoli]. // Aveva molto coraggio... ma per la para
/ nel deterano non gli entrava una setola di porco... / e per
quei terrori che ebbe allora / si è accorciata la sua vita. //

(Traduzione di Dante Maffia)

[...]

My dear reader, this is the story, in sum,
of the Red Man, who at the Maciarrone,
took up the art of rapping on the drum;
Head-drummer and a spy under the Bourbons
this melancholy figure of a knight -
who took for giants all the sacred icons.
He had a lot of courage... but got such a fright
you couldn't push a pig's bristle up his ass,
and all the scares he got back then, alas,
made his life very short and him uptight.
(Translated by Luigi Bonaffini)

Cuntrattu

Nun gàrru a fare 'nu grubu a 'na pitta
cà 'u core sbatte mo' ppe' 'na brunetta;
mi s'è 'mpizzàta 'mpiettu e mi l'abbrìtta
e mi lu scòtta cumu 'na coppèta,
e 'un gàrru a fare 'nu grubu a 'na pitta!
Oi frate, cchi fravetta ch'èdi! Yetta
vampe de l'uocchi, pièju de 'na gatta;
peccatu ch'è cattiva; ma 'na schetta
ppe' lli tratti e ll'u trùottu nu' ll'apatta;
oi frate, cchi garrietti ha 'sta muletta!
Hadi 'na capillèra nìura e fitta
e cchi pumètte belle e cchi pagnotte!
Io la vaju appostandu, ma me sbrìtta
cumu 'na vurpe, prima de le botte;
io la vaju appostandu, ma me sbrìtta!
Lu maritu, ppe' jìre a Serrastrìtta
troppu allu spissu, le moriudi spatту;
le lassàu 'nu mulinu e mo' 'st'affrìtta
l'ha chjusu, cà nun c'è n'ùominu adattu
mu lu 'ntrimòja e sbuga lla sajitta.

Contratto — Non riesco a fare un buco a una focaccia /
che il cuore adesso mi batte per una brunetta; / mi si è

conficcata nel petto e me lo avvampa / e me lo brucia come
un bicchiere a ventosa / e non riesco a fare un buco a una
focaccia! // Oh fratello, che beccafico che è! Getta /
vampate dagli occhi, peggio d'una gatta; / peccato che sia
vedova; ma una nubile / per i modi e per le movenze non
l'eguaglia; / oh fratello, che garretti ha questa muletta! //
Ha una capigliatura nera e fitta /e che gote belle e che seni
turgidi! / Io la inseguo e la spio, ma lei sguscia /come una
volpe prima dello sparo; / io la inseguo e la spio, ma lei
fugge rapida! // Il marito, per recarsi a Serrastretta /
troppo spesso, le è morto consumato; / le ha lasciato un
mulino e adesso quest'afflitta / lo ha chiuso, perché non c'è
un uomo adatto / a far funzionare la tramoggia e far
sgorgare l'acqua dalla doccia del mulino. //

Contract

I can't even make a hole in a flat cake
because my heart is wild for a dark lass
she's pierced my soul with a burning ache
and sings it like a cupping glass.

I can't even make a hole in a flat cake.

O brother, what a fig-pecker! She hurls
flames from her eyes, worst than a cat;
too bad she is a widow; but young girls
in looks and grace cannot hold her hat.

O brother, what hocks this mare unfurls.

Her hair is dark and thick, by all admired,
and she has graceful breasts and lovely cheeks.

I stalk and chase her, but she sneaks away.
like a fox before the shot is fired.

I stalk and chase her, but she sneaks away.

Her husband, having too often gone
to Serrastretta, wasted away his life;
he left her a mill, and his grieving wife
has had to close, because there is no one
to work the hopper and let the water run.

(Cont.d)

Brunette', lu facimu nue 'nu pattu?
dùname lu muline a mie 'n'affittu;
sù vecchiu mulinaru adattu e 'sattu
e ogni notte 'nu tùmminu de vittu
t'accièrtu curmu: vadi lu cuntrattu?
Haju cantatu a 'nu jurillu affrittu:
azzèta chistu pattu, o mia brunetta,
e àji voglia 'e viscuotti, s'hai pitittu!
da Le poesie, 1987

Brunettina, lo vogliamo fare un patto? / dammi il mulino
in affitto: / sono vecchio mugnaio adatto e onesto / e ogni
notte un tomolo di vitto / ti assicuro colmo: ti va il
contratto? // Ho cantato a un fiorellino intristito: / accetta
questo patto, o mia brunetta, / e ne avrai di biscotti, se hai
fame!

(Traduzione di Dante Maffia)

(Cont.d)

My little Brunette, should we make a pact?
why don't you let me rent the mill,
I am an old miller, capable and honest,
and every night I guarantee to fill
an antire measure; do you accept the contract?
I sang my song to a grieving flower;
o do accept this pact, o my brunette,
and you'll never lack cookies for your hunger.
(Translated by Luigi Bonaffini)

A mia figlia Libertà

Quand'arrivi alla colla d'Acquavona
quante fontane trovi: chilla' 'e Giallu,
de Surruscu e tant' altre... 'ntra la valla
l'acqua d'ille, calandu, ohi cumu sona!
vuoscuro 'ncutti, dilizia de friscuro,
pratura viridi... 'na tranquillità:
chilla è la conca de Dicollatura,
e tu salutamilla, o Libertà!
Sutta de Riventinu, lu paisiellu
primu chi trovi ha nume Tumaini
(parrocchia 'e S. Bernardu) ed ha vicini
lu Canciellu, 'u Passaggiu, 'u Praticciellu,
Rumanu, e doppu sù le Casenove,
li Cerrisi e l'Addame de papà:
(l'Addame, chi d'u core sue 'un se smove
ppe' tiempu e lontananza, o Libertà!)
Andandu, si tu passi pe' lu chianu
d' 'u Praticciellu, trovi 'u campusantu:
llà fermate a portare lu mio chijantu
alli cari chi sutta terra stanu...
Cà, ccu tuttu ca si' "furasterella"
e nullu d'illi te canusce e sa,

la tua visita, o figliama mia bella,
ad illi de rifriscu le sarà.

A mia figlia Libertà – Quando arrivi alla collina
d'Acquavona / quante fontane trovi: quella di Giallo, / di
Sorrisco e tante altre... nella vallata / la loro acqua,
scendendo, ohi come suona! / Boschi fitti, delizia di
frescura, / prati verdi... una serenità: / quella è la conca di
Decollatura, / e tu salutamela, o Libertà! // Sotto
Raventino, il borgo / che per prima trovi si chiama Tomaini
/ (parrocchia di S. Bernardo) ed ha vicini / il Cannello, il
Passaggio, il Praticello, / Romano, e dopo trovi Casenove, /
Cerrisi e l'Adami di papà: / (l'Adami, che dal suo cuore non
si cancella / per tempo e lontananza, o Libertà!) //
Proseguendo, se tu passi per il piano / del Praticello, trovi il
Camposanto: / là fermati e porta il mio pianto / ai cari che
riposano sotterra... / Qui, nonostante che tu sia "piccola
forestiera" / e nessuno di loro ti conosce e sa (della tua vita),
/ la tua visita, figlia mia bella, / a loro sarà di conforto. //

To My Daughter Libertà

When you get to Acquavona's hill
you'll find a lot of fountains: that of Giallo,
Sorrusco and many others... in the valley
their water rumbles as it runs downhill.
Thick forests, the most delightful verdure,
green meadows... a stillness anywhere you go:
that is the basin of Decollatura,
when you're there, Libertà, please say hello.
Below Raventino, the first small town
you'll find is called Tomaini
(a parish of St. Bernard) and has close by
Canello, Passaggio, Praticello, Romano,
and not too far Casenove stands,
Cerrisi and my father's town, Adami:
(Adami, that never leaves his memory
Libertà, through time or distance.)
As you go on, as soon as you have found
Praticello's plain, you'll see the cemetery:
stop there and bring my solitary
tears to the loved ones resting in the ground...
There, though you're a "little stranger"
and no one knows anything of you,

your visit, my own darling daughter,
no doubt will be a comfort to them too.

All'Adame tu truovi zu Luice
ccu' zâ Carrotta, zâ Maria e Marianna,
chi te cùntanu d' 'a tua santa Nanna
(e vene de l'Accària zâ Filice):
Te mustranu li luochi chi lassai
tantu amati, chi forse 'un viju cchiù,
ma me cumpuortu ppemmu tu le sai
c'a fràtitta ed a sùorta 'e 'mpari tu.
Vasa ppe' mie d' 'a vecchia casa 'e mura
lu "cippariellu" mio d''u focularu,
le ziarelle, zu Luice caru,
sira e matina, cientu vote l'ura.
Circa 'ntra 'e carte de la livreria
'ncunu ricuordu d' 'a mia giuventù,
e sentirai l'adduru e l'armunia
de 'sta mia vita, chi nun vale cchiù.
Quande senti sonare matutinu,
zumpa d''u liettu, spalanca 'u barcune,
saluta 'u sule chi d' 'u Carigliune
s'auza maestusu allu cielu turchinu.
Oh quante vote l'àdi salutatu,
quand'era virde... (ma...quant'anni fa?)

papà tuo ch'è mbecchiatu, no' cangiatu
e resta "calvrise", o Libertà.

Ad Adami troverai zio Luigi / con zia Carlotta, / zia
Maria e Marianna, / che ti racconteranno della tua santa
Nonna / (e viene da l'Accària zio Felice): // Ti mostreranno
i luoghi che ho lasciato / tanto amati, che forse non vedrò
più, / ma mi comporto affinché tu riconosca / qui tuo
fratello e tua sorella e impari. // Bacia per me le mura della
vecchia casa / il "piccolo ceppo" usato per sedile davanti al
caminetto, / le ziette, zio Luigi caro, / sera e mattina, cento
volte ogni ora. / cerca tra le carte della libreria / qualche
ricordo della mia gioventù, / e sentirai l'odore e l'armonia /
di questa mia vita, che non ha più senso. // Quando sentirai
suonare il mattutino, / salta dal letto, spalanca il balcone, /
saluta il sole che dal Cariglione / s'alza maestoso al cielo
turchino. / Oh quante volte l'ha salutato / quand'era
giovane... (ma.. quant'anni fa?) / tuo padre ch'è
invecchiato, non cambiato / e resta "calabrese", o Libertà.
//

(Cont.d)

At Adami you'll find uncle Luigi
with aunt Carlotta, aunt Maria and Marianna,
who'll tell you of your grandma, saintly woman,
(and from Accaria will come uncle Felice)
They'll show you all the places I left behind,
dear places, to which perhaps I won't return,
but I'll tell how to recognize, when you find them,
your brother and your sister, and learn.
Kiss the walls of the old house for me
the log used as a stool before the fire,
all the aunts, my dear uncle Luigi,
night and day, a hundred times an hour.
Among the papers lying in the library
look for some souvenir of my adolescence
and you will feel the harmony and essence
of my life, that has no meaning now for me.
When you hear the morning bell nearby,
jump out of bed, open wide the balcony,
greet the sun rising majestically
from Cariglione towards the blue sky
Oh, what a wonder was it to behold
when he was young (how many years ago?)

your father, still unchanged, but grown so old,
remains a Calabrese, Libertà.

Pue te lieju 'ntra l'ucchi, quandu tuorni
li signi de la luoro amurusanza,
e me torna a jurire la speranza
de finire ccud'illi li mie' juorni.

Tornanduce pue nue, tutti a 'na vota,
cchi gioia chi nun forra, o Libertà!

Speramu sempre: "'u mundu gira e vota",
chi sa si 'u suonnu nun s'avvererà!

da Le poesie, 1987

Poi ti leggerò negli occhi, quando tornerai / i segni della
loro amosità, / e mi tornerà a fiorire la speranza / di finire
con loro i miei giorni. // Tornandoci poi noi, tutti insieme, /
che gioia sarebbe, o Libertà! / Speriamo sempre: "il mondo
gira e muta", / chissà se il sogno non s'avvererà!

(Traduzione di Dante Maffia)

(Cont.d)

Then, when you return to me, in your eyes
I'll read the signs of their affection,
and a new hope will be born again
to end in their company my days.
If we were to go back all together,
Libertà, what a joy to look forward to.
Let's be hopeful: "the world turns with the weather,"
maybe the dream will finally come true.
(Translated by Luigi Bonaffini)

PASQUALE CREAZZO

Pasquale Creazzo was born in Cinquefondi on March 8, 1875 and was very much influenced by the feudal environment in which his personality was formed. Left an orphan at a very young age, he was forced very early to take care of the most elementary problems. He took part in the Resistance against the agrarian bloc and Fascism, organizing strikes and protests. He contributed to various papers and magazines (*Avanti, Corriere della Calabria, Calabria Avanti, Calabria Letteraria...*) revealing an anarchist bent. He felt the hostility of the regime and political imprisonment. He tried his hand at various occupations, but with little success: he ran a movie theater, a carbonated water factory, a sawmill, a

goldsmith shop... In 1906 he emigrated to America, where he became known as union agitator. Having returned to Italy (1911), he continued in his political engagement by organizing antiwar campaigns. On the occasion of the colonial war he wrote a poem, "La Zappa e la Sciabula" [The Hoe and the Saber] (1911). In 1921 he joined the Communist party. All his poems have a strong autobiographical and political connotation. He died on September 7, 1963.

Creazzo tends to balance, in general, autobiographical observations (So many woes in this life. / Since the painful gasp came out. / I was condemned like currency: / my day will never rest!) with the sociological empiricism of the sketch, always poised between naturalistic influences and bitter (at times playful) satire. Through this path he reaches a dual definition of society,

with cristiani [people] on one side and nimali [animals] on the other, in terms that corrode satirically Levi's distinction. The people are those official characters, corrupted, hypocritical, and profiteering, sharks, which represent conservative liberalism, rampant clericalism, oppressive Fascism, opportunism, "big shots," "spies," "priests," "politicians," eternal enemies of the people. Even if Creazzo ultimately displays a revolutionary attitude that is linked to the anarchist bent of his ideology, his credo remains nevertheless tied to a certain cultural tradition of the region which, as the only solution to its problems, turns to private or collective vengeance "with violence and with the knife." So that his ideological message ultimately appears almost dated. Not so, instead, his moral message centering on the allegories of the

insects, which constitute a diverse anthropomorphic bestiary aiming at metaphorizing a pressing discourse on inequalities that not even death seems capable of healing.

Essential Bibliography: For Creazzo's works, cf. P. Creazzo, *Antologia dialettale*, edited by A. Piromalli and D. Scafoglio (with the collaboration of G. Falcone, F. Creazzo, L. Carrera), Cosenza, 1981; another edition: P. Creazzo, *Poesie dialettali*, edited by C. Carlino and P. Bellono, Oppido Mamertina, 1979.

Criticism: besides the introductory essays in the volumes just mentioned: L. Reina, *op. cit.*, p. 181.

Li veri opportunisti

Nci sù l'opportunisti pé natura,
Cuntenti tutti senza vucch'amàra;
Tutti li leggi accettan'a bon'ura...
Di cinnari o farina, sù crisàra.
Tra la gnuranza e la vigliaccaria
Si mbàrdanu e nun sannu mai pecchè;
Di capizza tiràti a la campìa,
Abbàscianu la testa e dinnu: sì...
Ma poi nci sù l'opportunisti veri
Chi cangianu culuri pé dinàri:
Di chisti (malanova mu li peri)
Cui noi li ncàppa... s'havi di guardàri.
Pé cchisti, non c'è credu e nnò partitu,
Si jéttanu, undi ncé di profittàri:
Tràdinu a Cristu nchiesa e ad ogni sùtu
Jocandulu cù carti di pezzari!...
Di li difetti, ncé cù l'havi tutti,
E chisti sù li grandi farabutti!,
E se nsiamài sù menzi ntelligenti,
Sù li cchiù perneciùsi dilynquenti!...

I veri opportunisti — Ci sono opportunisti per natura, /
Contenti tutti senza bocc'amara; / Tutte le leggi accettano

senza fiatare... / Di cenere o farina, sono setaccio. // Tra
l'ignoranza e la vigliaccheria / Si assoggettano e non sanno
mai perché; / Tirati per la cavezza alla radura, / Abbassano
la testa e dicono, sì... / Ma poi ci sono gli opportunisti veri /
che mutano pelle per danaro: / Di questi (che la cattiva
notizia li faccia perire) / Chi di noi li incrocia è meglio se ne
guardi. // Per costoro non esiste né credo né partito, / Si
buttano, ovunque c'è da profittare: / Tradiscono Cristo in
chiesa e in ogni luogo, / Giocandoselo con carte da
cenciaiolo!... // Di difetti, c'è chi li ha tutti, / E questi sono i
grandi farabutti!, / E se nonsiamai sono per metà
intelligenti, / Sono i più perniciosi delinquenti!...

The True Opportunists

There are those who're opportunists by nature,
Everyone's happy and there is no rift;
They accept all the laws and never censure....
Whether ashes or flour, they will sift.
Between their ignorance and cringing
They put on the yoke and don't know why;
Pulled by the halter strap towards the clearing,
They yield with their heads down and say: okay
But then you have the true opportunists
Who slip out of their skin for love of money:
Of these (may the bad news shorten their list)
Anyone who meets them must be wary.
For them there is neither party or prayer,
They plunge wherever there is a reward:
They betray Christ in church and everywhere,
Betting on him with a ragman's cards.
There are those who have all the defects,
And these are by far the greatest rejects.
And if by chance they should be half intelligent,
They are the most dangerous delinquents.

(Cont.d)

Dio mu ndi scanza, di sti mulinari!...

Se Cristu ncruci tornaria appilàri,

Cù Juda accordarianu lu partìtu,

E cù la spònza nci darrianu acìtu...

da Antologia dialettale, 1981

// Dio ci guardi da questi cervi volanti (mugnai)!... / Se
Cristo in croce tornasse a lamentarsi, // Con Giuda si
metterebbero d'accordo, / E con la spugna gli darebbero
aceto...

(Traduzione di Dante Maffia)

(Cont.d)

God save us from this malignant bane.
If Christ himself came back down to complain,
They would plot with Judas and be eager
To give him first the sponge and then the vinegar.
(Translated by Luigi Bonaffini)

Arsura

E quantu, quantu guài ntra sta mè vita!
Di quand'escia la raku peniàta!
Fui condannàtu comu la munìta:
Posa no ndàppi mai, mija jornàta!
Jocata storta fu la mè partita,
Di chija ceca Sorti, disgraziata...
Orfanu, straniàtu, senza mìa,
Mbattìa sempri sdarrùpi a la mè strata!
Cumù chiji a lu limbu cundannàtu,
Non trovu jazzu mai ntra nnùiu sìtu...
Di paci o di riposu sù assitatu.
L'urtimi jorna, armènu, ndisturbàtu,
Vorrìa nu passu mpàci — di Rimitu —
Ntra nna tàna di voscu, disulàtu;
E jà, — Morti!... — vorrìa mu ti combitu,
mu ti sbruffiju: frù...l'urtimu kjàtu!...
da Antologia dialettale, 1981

Arsura — E quanti, quanti guai in questa mia vita! / Da quando sono nato la trascino piena di pene! / Fui condannato come la moneta: / Non ho mai posa, mia giornata! // Giocata sbagliata fu la mia partita, / Di quella cieca Sorte, disgraziata... / Orfano, straniato, senza meta, /

Mi sono imbattuto sempre in dirupi lungo il mio cammino!
// Come quelli condannati al limbo, / Non trovo mai
giaciglio in nessun posto!... / Di pace o di riposo sono
assetato. // Gli ultimi giorni, almeno, indisturbato, / Vorrei
trascorrerli in pace — da Eremita — / In una tana di bosco,
desolato; // E là, — Morte! ... — vorrei invitarti, / E
grugnirti: frrù...l'ultimo fiato!...

(Traduzione di Dante Maffia)

Thirst

There are so many troubles in my life!
Since I was born I drag it full of pain.
I was condemned like a useless coin
My day, I can't find a moment without strife.
The strategy of my game has not been right
Foiled by wretched Fate, blindfolded.
Orphaned, estranged, without a goal, in flight
I always found open chasms on the road.
Like those condemned to live in limbo,
There is no resting place where I can go.
I am thirsting for a little peace from sorrow.
I'd like to spend my last days at least,
undisturbed, - like a hermit - in peace,
inside a desolate cavern in the forest.
There I'd like to have you as my guest, o Death,
and grunt out to you — fruu... with my last breath.
(Translated by Luigi Bonaffini)

La cimicia

Féti, cchiù ca fetissi lu pitùsu...

vi mpésta mu stuppàti vùcca e nàsu: —

se mùzzeca vi fàci nu pertùsu,

se schiàtta, di nosìa veni lu scàsu!...

Màla vidùta ch'avi!... schiffiùsa: —

chiàtta, e cù testa vàscia, sta riprìsa

m'arricchia, e quandu poi — sta porcarùsa —

silenziu senti, cùrri tìsa tìsa,

e gira undi nc'é prùppa mu l'annàsa;

e non rispétta schiétta o frìsca spùsa!...

E arriva ntra l'aricchia mu fa càsa,

sta fàcci di rruffiàna scrianzùsa!

S'aggràppa ntra li càrni, e léggia sùca,

fin'a chi s'ùnchia quantu na vissica;

ma quandu cedi poi, nc'é la marùca: —

Pàri cà vi passàru cù l'ardica!...

E avòghia pemmu sòni la chitàrra,

m'azzìppi l'unghij finu ntra la sùrra;

la cardacia non pàssa, e sgàrra e sgàrra...

senti rfrìscu se lu sàngu sbùrra!

La cimicia — Puzza, più puzzolente della puzzola... / vi
impesta se non tappate bocca e naso: — / se morde vi fa un

buco, / se schiatta, per la nausea viene il vomito!... // Che brutto aspetto ha!... schifosa: — / grassa, con la testa piatta, quest'afflitta / mi allerta le orecchie, e quando poi — questa porcacciona — / avverte il silenzio corre dritta dritta, / e gira dove c'è polpa per annusare; / e non rispetta zitella o giovane sposa!... / Ed entra nell'orecchia e mette casa, / questa faccia di ruffiana scostumata! // Si aggrappa alle carni, e leggermente succhia, / fino a che si riempie quanto una vescica; / ma quando poi smette, resta la poltiglia: — Sembra vi sia passata l'ortica!... // E hai voglia di suonare la chitarra, / conficca le unghie in profondo nella carne; / il pizzicore non passa, e lacera e lacera... / sente refrigerio se il sangue sgorga! //

The Bedbug

You smell, you smell worst than a skunk...
if you don't shut nose and mouth it makes you sick: —
if it bites, it takes out a big chunk
if it bursts, the nausea makes you puke.
How ugly it is... disgusting is the word: —
fat, a flattened head, this wretch
tickles my ears, and then when the sluggard
senses the silence, it runs quickly to catch
some flesh to sniff; and it doesn't stop
either before young girls or a fresh bride.
And it enters the ear and sets up shop,
this brazen heel, ill-mannered and snide.
It latches on the flesh, and starts to suck
until it blows up like a bladder;
only a pulp is left once it has struck,
it looks like clumps of nettles passed it over.
You can play the guitar all you like,
dig your fingernails deep into the flesh,
the hitch doesn't go away, it's like a spike,
you only feel relief with the blood's gush.

Ed è civili pùre, la brignòla;...
jarrìa cercàndu li létti di gàla...
sénti lu kjàvru frìscu di lenzòla,
undi la mégghiu càrni dormi e sciàla.
Ntra Marzu ha mu si fa la medicina
di morti e non mu dàssa vità sana:
Acqua gugghiùta e potàss'alcalìna,
mu nci struggìti l'ova ntra la tana.
Facitincilla puru na passàta
d'oghiu petroglu mu mòri arraggiàta!
da Antologia dialettale, 1981

Ed è civile anche, la giovinetta (pomposa);... / si muove
cercando i letti di gala,... / gode dell'odore fresco delle
lenzuola, / dove la miglior carne dorme e sciala. // In
Marzo bisogna fare la medicina / di morte per non lasciare
vita sana: / Acqua bollita e potassio alcalino, / per
distrugerle le uova nella tana. // Fatele anche una passata
/ d'olio di petrolio per farla morire arrabbiata.

(Traduzione di Dante Maffia)

(Cont.d)

And it is even civil, the young gamin,
it moves around to look for fancy beds
it enjoys the fresh smell of new linen
where the best flesh fall asleep and spreads.
In March we have to prepare the medicine
of death, so our healthy life can last:
Boiled water and potassium alkaline
to destroy the eggs inside their nest.
Also pass on it a little petrol oil
to make it die of rage and in turmoil.
(Translated by Luigi Bonaffini)

NICOLA GIUNTA

Nicola Giunta was born in Reggio Calabria in 1895. He was a very prolific writer and poet, who was very fond of his city. An opera singer (baritone) trained in the musical conservatory of Naples, he was subjected to political persecution. As Director of the Civic Library of Reggio Calabria, he knew many intellectuals (Benedetto Croce, Guido Mazzoni, Raffaele Corso, Giuseppe Casalinuovo...).

He died in 1968.

Giunta had a strong popular bent, especially after going back to his native city, where he became a sort of interpreter of the critical conscience of the people which, however, is never elevated to the level of progressive humanity in his poetry. The poet's moralism assails his characters, who

satirizes the middle class and the qualunquisti, but is unable to repay even the disinherited. Everyone remains fixed in that static condition of dwarfism that in his eyes characterizes the People of Reggio ("They are dwarves, and want everybody to be a dwarf").

Essential Bibliography:, For the works cf. N. Giunta, *Poesie dialettali*, edited by A. Piromalli and D. Scafoglio, Reggio Calabria 1977.

Criticism: P.P. Pasolini, op. cit.; S. Gambino, *Antologia...*, cit.; R. Troiano, cited article; C. Sicari, in *Historica*, 1980, 2; *Nicola Giunta, l'uomo, l'opera*, edited by the Municipal Administration of Reggio, Reggio Calabria 1980; *Le parole di legno. Poesie in dialetto del Novecento italiano*, edited by M. Chiesa and G. Tesio, Milan 1958; F. Brevini,

op. cit., p.185; *Poesia dialettale dal Rinascimento ad oggi*, edited by G. Spagnoletti and C. Vivaldi.

'Nta 'stu paisi 'nc'esti sulu 'a piria

'Nta 'stu paisi 'nc'esti sulu 'a piria,
'a strufuttenza fissa, a 'grandi bboria;
'nta 'stu paisi cunta sulu a 'mbiria,
pirciò non sunnu tutti chi cicoria...
Erba nana ed amara, erba pirduta:
senza mâ provi, 'a ggiùrichi â viruta;
e cca, sarbu a carcunu di ll'affritti,
su' tutti storti ammanicati ddritti!
Nani su' iddi e vonnu a tutti nani;
nci vannu terra terra, peri e mmani;
e, pâ malignità bbrutta e superba,
cca non crisci chi erba, erba, erba...
Arburi?... Si ccarcunu 'ndi sciurisci,
'nci minunu petrati non mmi crisci...
Arburi, nenti!, comu all'âtri bandi,
ch'unu s'asciala chi mmì viri randi!...
Ambatula tu fai.. Rresti cu 'ngagghiu...
Si senti sempri chi 'nc'è fetu d'agghiu...
Cca 'a fortuna non varda a ccu' s'annaca,
ma passa ammenzu all'erba mi 'nci caca...

In questo paese c'è solo la presunzione — In questo paese
c'è solo la presunzione / la sciocca strafotenza, la gran

boria; / in questo paese conta soltanto l'invidia, / perciò
tutti non sono che cicoria... // Erba nana e amara, erba
perduta: / senza provarla la giudichi a guardarla; / e qua,
salvo qualcuno degli afflitti, / son tutti stolti ammanicati
dritti! // Loro son nani e voglion tutti nani; / vanno terra
terra, piedi e mani; / e, per malignità brutta e superba, / qui
non cresce che erba, erba, erba... / Alberi?... Se qualcuno ne
fiorisce, / gli tirano sassate per non farlo crescere... / Alberi,
niente!, diversamente da altri luoghi, / dove uno gode a
vederli grandi!... // Invano tu fai!... Resti frustrato... / Si
sente sempre che c'è puzzo d'aglio... / Qui la fortuna non
guarda chi s'agita, / ma passa fra l'erba per defecarci... //

In This Town There is Only Vanity

In this town there is nothing but vanity,
silly shamefacedness, great snobbery;
the only thing that counts in town is envy,
that's why they're all a bunch of chicory...
Stunted grass, bitter, scattered grass:
that's how you judge it when you see it;
and here, all but a few in this morass,
are boot-lickers, shifty, but dull-witted!
They're dwarves and wish the same for all their
neighbors;
they move close to the ground, upon all fours;
and due to nasty, to conceited wickedness
the only thing that grows here is grass, grass, grass...
Trees?...If ever one should bloom, they would throw
big stones at it so it will never grow...
No trees at all! not like in other places
where a tall tree is cause for happy faces.
You try and try in vain... you're left heartsick...
You always sense there is a smell of garlic...
Here luck doesn't shine on those who accomplish things,
but passes on the grass to leave its droppings.

Paisi d'erba i ventu' e non di pianti:
va facitila a 'n culu tutti quanti!
Si 'nc'esti 'nu cartellu aundi rici:
"Sti 'ggenti tra di iddi su' nnimici!"
Nimici i cui? Oh, frabbica di storti!
Sunn u sulu nimici da so' sorti!
Nimici d'iddi stessi pi ppuntiggiu,
e i cchiù fissa dû mundu sunnu a Rriggiu!
da Poesie dialettali, 1977.

Paese d'erba puzzolente e non di piante: / andate
affanculo tutti quanti! / Se c'è un cartello dove si dice: /
"Queste genti tra loro sono nemiche!" // nemiche di chi?
Oh, fabbrica di stolti! / Sono solo nemiche della propria
sorte! / Nemici di se stessi per puntiglio, / i più fessi del
mondo sono a Reggio!

(Traduzione di Stefano Lanuzza)

(Cont.d)

Town of grass and wind, but not of trees:
but all of you go ahead, go screw yourselves!
If there is anywhere a sign that says:
“The people of this town are enemies!”
Whose enemies are they? O factory of idiots
They’re only the enemies of their fate!
Enemies of themselves just out of spite,
and Reggio has the world’s greatest dimwits!
(Translated by Luigi Bonaffini)

Chistu è lu mundu

Chistu è lu mundu chi non havi paci,
chistu è lu mudu chi non atru fici
chi lu camminu di lu bbucalaci,
ittandu bava quandu sparra e dici...
Ma nta' stu' mundu abbampa na' furnaci,
e u' mali ill'omu è na'caddara i pici:
cu stuta u focu e ccu' l'addhuma ambeci,
pirciò sta' vita nostra va' a schipeci...
Nci vurrissi daveru lu ramaci
mi chiam'a ggenti e fforti mi nci rici:
disgraziati, non truvati paci
pirchè siti tra vvui sempri nimici.
Vi straziati a mmazzacani e straci
e ssiti sempri tutti pici pici...
vui v'abbuffati di palori e bbuci
e ppurtati cu' vvui sempri la cruci...
Sempri u' mundu accussì, chi ffaci faci,
sempri a nu' puntu, sempri; focu e ppici
cu va' circandu sordi perdi a' paci
e la ricchezza nu' manaru a' fici!...
Cu' campa i 'mbiria u' cori si lu sfaci
cu lu vilenu soi chi sparra e dici...

Chistu è lu mundu, si tu voi la paci,
chistu è lu mundu chi mai bbeni fici!...

da *Poesie dialettali*, 1977

Questo è il mondo – Questo è il mondo di chi non vi ha
pace, / questo è il mondo di chi non altro fece / che il
cammino della chiocciola, / intanto sbava quando parla e
dice... // Ma in questo mondo avvampa una fornace / e il
male dell'uomo è una caldaia di pece: / chi spegne il fuoco e
chi lo alimenta invece, /perciò questa vita nostra va a
scapece. / Ci vorrebbe davvero un maschio / che raduni la
gente e forte ci dica: / disgraziati, non trovate pace / perché
siete tra voi sempre nemici. // Vi straziate a pietrate e a
tegolate / e siete sempre tutti pappa e ciccia... / voi vi
abbuffate di parole e voci / e portate con voi sempre la
croce...

// Sempre il mondo così, che fai fai, / sempre allo stesso
punto, sempre: fuoco e pece / chi va cercando soldi perde la
pace / e la ricchezza la fece un mestatore!... // Chi vive
d'invidia il cuore se lo sgretola / con il suo veleno che parla
e dice... / Questo è il mondo, se tu vuoi la pace, / questo è il
mondo che mai ha fatto bene!...

(Traduzione di Dante Maffia)

This is the World

This is the world of those who have no peace
this is the world of those who only trail
along the footpath of the sluggish snail
and always dribbles when it says its piece.
But in this world there is a burning furnace,
cauldron of pitch and charcoal is man's evil,
some put it off, others stoke it full sail,
that's why our life is being torn to pieces.
What we really need is a goldfinch, male,
to assemble all the folk and tell them please,
you wretched people can't find any peace
because you're always hostile, so you fail.
You pick each other off with stones and tiles
and go around so full of pap and grease...
you like to stuff yourselves with words and wiles,
and always wear the cross as a showpiece.
No matter what you do the world won't cease,
always in one place, always: fire and coal
who looks for money will only lose his peace,
a meddler it was who came up with capital.
Who lives of envy will tear his heart to pieces,
with his poison that rambles on and rails,

This is the world, if you want any peace,
this is the world of evil and travails.
(Translated by Luigi Bonaffini)

VITTORIO BUTERA

Vittorio Butera was born in Conflenti on December 23, 1877. He began very early to compose verses in dialect (*Larve quindicenni*) [Larvas of a Fifteen-Year-Old], but his vein exploded as he returned from La Spezia where he had been sent to study, after meeting Michele Pane (1988). His first poems were of a sentimental nature. Certainly not culturally deprived (he had a degree in engineering), one might say that he almost invented a language suited to the moral fable, in keeping with the lessons he learned from Aesop, Phaedrus, La Fontaine, Trilussa. An official of the Civil Engineering Corps of Catanzaro, he died March 25, 1955.

For his collections Butera adopts titles that are almost fixed, emblemized in *ccanto e ccuntu* [to sing and to narrate]; that

is to say, to express and communicate, to talk of oneself almost to feel alive, but also to talk for others. *Tuornu e ccantu tuornu e ccuntu* [I'll Return and Sing, I'll Return and Tell My Tales], published posthumously by Giuseppe Isnardi and Guido Cimino (1960), totally confirms a poetics tending towards forms of lyricism, which concedes nothing to sentiment and looks instead to the power of narration, of an expression stylistically and thematically controlled, almost standing alone, through precise choices, among Calabrian dialect poets, and aspiring at forms of classicism which, in other respects, lead back to the spirituality typical of the region. To the extent that the choice of the fable as privileged instrument of the "story," in the wake of the most accredited literary models of the genre, can even appear dictated by a need to make popular again a

“story” still apparently tied to the high style.

Essential Bibliography: a reliable collection of poetry, *Inedite di Vittorio Butera*, was published by Luigi Volpicelli and Carlo Cimino (Soveria Mannelli, Rubbettino, 1978), after the volume *Poesie*, prefaced by U. Bosco (Rome 1949 and Cosenza 1969). Out of print is the collection *Prima cantu...e ddoppu cuntu...* [First I'll sing...and Then I'll Tell My Tales] (Conflenti 1978). However, the philological problem relative to the edition of these dialect poems, as for other dialect texts, remains unresolved.

Criticism: U. Bosco, *Pagine calabresi*, cit.; *Calabria Letteraria*, single volume dedicated to V. Butera, February-March 1956; P. Tuscano, *Calabria*, Brescia 1986; S. Gambino, *Antologia...*, op cit.; R. Troiano, article cited; F. Brevini, op. cit.; L. Reina, op. cit., p. 190;

Spagnoletti and Vivaldi, op cit..

'A staffetta

I

— Va! — le disse ru patre E 'nnu salutu
Porta a ra terra dduve sugnu natu,
Dìcele quantu bbene l'ha bbulutu
'Stu patre tue, ramingu e spurtunatu.
M'è de granne cumpuòrtu a ra spintura
Si va' vidi ppe' mmie Dicollatura.
Vàsame e bba'! Saluta Rivintinu,
De ticini ammantatu e dde castagne;
Saluta i campi simminati a llinu,
I cavùni saluta e re muntagne.
Saluta Carriciellu, 'a casa mia,
E dde l'Addame 'e petre d'ogni bbia!
Missaggera d'amure e de dulure,
vinne ra figliulella affizziunata;
Vasàu ra terra de Michele amata
E ppue vutàu re vele a ru papure
Ppe' ppurtare a ru patre 'na 'mmasciata
De richiamu, de supprica e dd'ammure.
— Abbràzzame, papà! Sugnu turnata!
Te puortu l'aria frisca 'e Rivintinu.
Chi bbiaggiu, papà! Quantu caminu!

E cchi ggente amurusa e affizziunata!

De viverse m'è parzu de vicinu

'A rumanza cchiù bbella de 'na fata! —

La staffetta — I — Va'! — le disse il padre — E un saluto /
Porta alla terra dove sono nato; / Dille quanto bene le ha
voluto / Questo padre tuo, ramingo e sfortunato. / Mi è di
grande conforto alla sventura / Se vai a vedere per me
Decollatura. // Baciarmi e va'! Saluta Reventino / Di ontàni
ammantato e di castagni; / Saluta i campi seminati a lino, /
I burroni saluta e le montagne. / Saluta Carriciello e casa
mia, / E di Adami le pietre di ogni via. // Messaggera
d'amore e di dolore, / Venne la figlioletta affezionata; /
Baciò la terra amata da Michele / E poi voltò le vele al
bastimento / Per portare al padre un messaggio / Di
richiamo, di supplica e d'amore. // Abracciami, papà! Sono
tornata! / Ti porto l'aria fresca di Reventino. / Che viaggio,
papà! Quanto cammino! / E che gente calorosa e
affezionata! / Mi è parso di vivere da vicino / La favola più
bella d'una fata. //

The Courier

I
— Go! — his father said to her — and say hello
To the faroff land where I was born;
Tell her that your father loves her so,
Ill-starred though he's been, wandering forlorn.
It's of great comfort to my unkind fortune
If you go see Decollatura.
Kiss me and go! Say hello to Reventino,
Covered with alders and with chestnut trees;
Say hello to the flax-sown fields,
Say hello to the mountains and ravines.
Say hello to Carricello, to my home,
And the stones of each road in Adami.
A messenger of love as well as sorrow
The devoted young daughter made the voyage;
She kissed Michele's cherished shore
And then set sail on her ship once more
To bring back to her father a message
Of beckoning, of entreaty and love.
— Embrace me tightly, father! I am back!
I bring you Reventino's bracing air.
What a journey, father! A long trek!

What caring, loving people I found there!
I felt like I was living in the thrall
Of the most beautiful fairy-tale of all!
[...]

VII

Ah! disse — Si putèremu turnare
Tutti a r'Addame, cchi ppiacire fôra !
Si putèramu sèntere scrusciare
Gargiglia 'n chjna 'n'autra vota ancora!
Si putèramu sèntere cuntare
Storie de fate, cumu prima, a Ttora!
A mmie me ride 'n core 'na spiranza
E pparca sempre cchiù mi cce abbicinu.
Me pare dde sintìre 'na fraganza
De campi a ggranu simminati e a llinu.
E cchi rrispigliu de mimorie care!
S'è 'nnu suonnu, lassàtime sunnare!...
da Prima cantu...e ddoppu cuntù, 1978

[...] — VII — Ah! — disse — Se potessimo tornare / Tutti ad
Adami, che piacere sarebbe! / Se potessimo sentire
scrosciare / Gargiglia in piena, un'altra volta ancora! / Se
potessimo sentire raccontare / Storie di fate, come prima da
Tora! // A me ride nel cuore una speranza / E pare che
sempre più mi avvicino. / Mi sembra di sentire una
fragranza / Di campi a grano seminati e a lino. / E che
risveglio di memorie care! / Se è un sogno, lasciatemi
sognare!

(Traduzione di Dante Maffia)

[...]

VII

— Ah! — he said — If only we could go
Back to Adami, how wonderful and good!
If only we could hear Gargiglia's flow
as it seethes and roars when in full flood!
If we could hear those fairy-tales again,
from Tora, just as we heard them then!
A hope within my heart is smiling still
And I seem to be getting close to it.
It seems to me I feel a fragrant smell
Of fields that have been sown with flax and wheat.
And what a reawakening of memories!
If it's a dream, don't rouse me from its reveries!...
(Translation by Luigi Bonaffini)

'A cuniglia e ra duonnula

Èramu quasi all'urtima simana
Quannu 'na panzallària de cuniglia
A 'nnu rimùote se scavàu 'nna tana
Adatta mu cce figlia.
'A fice 'nn'ariggientu ed a ru siettu,
I pili, a ffili a ffili,
Tirànnuse d' 'o piettu,
Si cce cunzau 'nnu liettu
Pugliu cumu 'nu màttulu 'e vammagia,
Ccu 'nn'arte chi a ffigliare te 'ncuraggia.
E mparu le 'ngravàru ri duluri
Nisciù ppe' ra mammana; àutru ca, quannu
Turnàu, trovàu ca tannu
'Na facci d'ammazzata
De dùonnola si cc'èradi 'ntanata.
— Ohè! — disse — Cchi fai
Ccad'intra vussurìa?
Vide mu ti nne vai
Cà chista è casa mia!
— Chine te l'ha lassata?
— Nullu; ma ccu ste manu,
Me l'hiau chianu chianu

Scavata e rrigistrata.

'I bbi', mmierzu 'ssu siettu,

Tutti quanti 'ssi fili

Pugli pugli di pili?

Su' ppili de 'stu piettu!

La coniglia e la donnola — Eravamo quasi all'ultima settimana / Quando una coniglia gravida / In un luogo solitario si scavò una tana / Adatta per figliarci. / La rese così lucida e pulita da sembrare d'argento e sul fondo / I peli, uno per uno, / Tirandosi dal petto / Ci si preparò un letto / Soffice come un gomitolo di bambagia, / Con un'arte che ti veniva voglia di figliare. / E appena le si aggravarono le doglie / Uscì per chiamare la mamma; altro che, quando / Tornò, trovò che proprio allora / Una faccia d'assassina / Di donnola ci s'era stabilita. / — Ohè! — disse — Che fai / Qua dentro signora? / Vedi ora d'andartene / che questa è casa mia! / — Chi te l'ha lasciata? / — Nessuno; ma con queste mani, / Me la sono piano piano / Scavata e ordinata. / Guardali, nel centro del sito / Tutti quanti questi fili / Morbidi morbidi di peli? / Sono peli di questo petto!

The Rabbit and the Weasel

It was already close to the last week
When a pregnant she-rabbit
Dug herself a lair along a creek
in order to give birth.
She made it so shiny it seemed silvery
and at the bottom, with the hair
pulled from her breast, thread by thread,
she prepared a bed
Soft as the softest cotton finery,
Skillfully made to stimulate delivery.
And as soon as she began to feel the pangs
She went out for a midwife; but when
she returned at last, found that in the den
a shameless, brazen-faced weasel
had made himself at ease.
— Ehi! — she said — If I may,
what do you think you're doing here?
You'd better be on your way
because this here's my lair!
— Has someone left it to you?
— No one, but with these hands
I have had a lot to do,

I dug it and I fixed it
Do you see all those strands
of the softest, softest hair
scattered in the lair?
That's hair from my own breast!

— E a mmie cchi mmi nne 'mporta?
'Na tana senza porta
E ppe' dde cchiù bbaccante,
È dd' 'o prim'accupante.
Pieju pp'e ttie si quannu si' nnisciuta
'U' ll'hai chiuduta!
Quantu a 'ssi quattru pili,
Si davèru cce tieni, pigliatìli!
— Ma guarda tu 'nu pùocu cchi ffitusa!
Pienzica sparte vo' ccircate scusa!
'Na povara cuniglia
Se fà 'nna tana apposta mu cce figlia,
E nn'àutra, cu rra scusa
Ca 'u' ll'ha ttruvata chiusa,
Trased'intra e ss' 'a piglia!
Vide mu ti nne vai
Ccu re bbone, o su' gguai!
— 'A legge me prutegge... — Quale legge?
Sicunnu chillà antica,
Chiamata legge Pica,
Chi mo nu' ss'usa cchiù,
Avìe raggiune tu;

Sicunnu chilla 'e mo,

/ — E a me che me ne importa? / Una tana senza porta /
e per di più vuota, / è del primo che l'occupa. / Peggio per
te se quando ne sei uscita / Non l'hai chiusa! / Quanto a
questi quattro peli, / Se davvero ci tieni, prenditeli! / — Ma
guarda tu un po' che fetente! / Quasi quasi vuole che le si
chieda scusa! / Una povera coniglia / Si fa una tana
apposta per figliarci, / E un'altra, con la scusa / Di non
trovarla chiusa, / Vi entra e se la piglia! / Vedi ora
d'andartene / Con le buone, o sono guai! / — La legge mi
protegge... — Quale legge? / — Secondo quella antica, /
Chiamata legge Pica, / Che adesso non si usa più, / Avresti
ragione tu; / Secondo quella di ora, /

— And what is that to me?

A lair without a door,
and unoccupied, moreover,
is for anyone to discover.

When you went out, it really is too bad,
you did not close it, or only thought you had!

As for those few threads of hair,
go ahead and take them, if you really care!

— Listen to this cockamamie story!

Maybe now I should be saying I'm sorry!

A poor rabbit

builds her lair so she can have her litter,

And here comes this hairsplitter,

and with the excuse that the door wasn't closed,
barges in and suddenly I'm foreclosed!

Look, you'd better go now,

or I'll make you sorry, and how!

— The law protects me... — What law?

According to the old one,

Called the Pica Law,

effective long ago,

You would be in the right;

According to the present one,

Me dispiace ppe' bbussignurìa,
Ma 'a raggiune è ra mia.
E nnun parrare cchiù dde 'ssa manèra,
Si nno te dugnu tanta 'na qualèra
E bba figli 'n galèra. —
E cchira spinturata de cuniglia,
Si voze 'n santa pace ppemmu figlia,
S'àppedi de scavare 'n'àutra tana,
A 'nna trempa luntana.

da Prima cantu...e ddoppu cuntù, 1978

Mi dispiace per vossignoria, / Ma la ragione è mia. / E
non parlare più in questo modo, / Se no ti do tanto di
querela / E vai a figliare in galera. — // E quella sventurata
di coniglia, / Se vuole in santa pace figliare, / Sa di dover
scavare un'altra tana / In un dirupo lontano.

(Traduzione di Dante Maffia)

(Cont.d)

I am very sorry for your ladyship
But I'm the one who's right.
And you should try to be less impolite,
I'll slap you with a lawsuit otherwise
And then you can deliver in a cellhouse. —
So the poor she-rabbit lost her lease,
And if she wants to have her brood in peace,
Has no choice but to go dig another den
In a faraway glen.
(Translated by Luigi Bonaffini)

ACHILLE CURCIO

Achille Curcio was born in Borgia (Catanzaro) in 1930. A very active poet in dialect, he has published several collections of poems. He lives in Catanzaro, where he taught in a prison for juveniles.

From *Lampari* (1971), through *Hiumara* (1974), until *Visioni del Sud* (1976), Curcio constructs his language and his system of poetics with an eye to the changes taking place and the modernization necessitated by social changes, attempting to bring them into a “grammatical,” prosodic and rhetorical matrix, capable of signifying the lyric content, heartfelt, at times even softly nostalgic, crepuscolari, though ranging over themes typical of Calabrian dialect poetry: town life, family bonds, love for the land,

the landscape, social engagement, emigration, poverty, ethical disposition, which exorcise any possible risk of autobiographical self-withdrawal. In Curcio's bibliography, fundamental is the volume *Chi canti, chi cunti?* [Who Do You Sing, Who Do You Tell] (1983), based on the tonalities of a melancholy chant conveying a koiné aimed at realizing a sort of Mythological landscape in which time appears almost as a still mystery and life a sum of invariables. In the satirical collections (*Tirituppiti, catta 'a lira*, 1976; *'A scola è na virgogna* [School Is a Disgrace], 1977; *'U populu* [People], 1979) Curcio even uses scurrilous plebeian language that is metaphorized in multiple images (his bestiary is very rich), while it tends, on the sociological level, to take on a series of

signifiers well-suited to the representation of the human landscape of the derelicts and outcasts of the underclasses, in contrast with the privileged classes of the powerful.

Essential Bibliography: fr the works, in addition to those already mentioned, all published by Fucina Jonica, cf. *Le satire*, Catanzaro, 1984; *Calabria Immagine*, *ibid.*, 1985; *Parole e segno* [Words and Sign], *ibid.*, 1985; *Segni della memoria* [Signs of Memory], *ibid.*, 1987; 'A vertula d'o poeta [The Poet's Burden], *Ibid.*, 1991 (with a large bibliography); *L'eremita di Sant'Anna. Racconti*, *ibid.*, 1984; *La Catanzaro degli altri* [The Catanzaro of Others], *ibid.*, 1989; and various books of proverbs.

Criticism: E. Bonea, "La poesia di Achille Curcio," in *Studi sulla poesia dialettale del Novecento*, edited by L. Tassoni, Catanzaro, 1981 (with essays by M. Cava, F. Del Pino, L.

Tassoni, C. A. Augieri, and "Discorso sulla poesia" [Discourse on Poetry] by A. Curcio). For more studies cf. S. Gambino, *Il giornale di Calabria*, February 16, 1975; G. P. Nisticò, in *Atti dell'Accademia Cosentina*, 1974-75, XXI; B. S. Scrivo, in *Studi Meridionali*, 1979, 1; G. Argentieri Piuma, *Calabria Letteraria*, April-June 1980, and November-December 1981; C. A. Augieri (ed.), *La poesia di Achille Curcio*, Catanzaro 1983; *Le parole di legno*, cit, F. Brevini, op. cit.; L. Reina, *Poesia e regione*, cit.; Spagnoletti and Vivaldi, op. cit..

Quandu voi mu mi vidi

Quandu voi mu mi vidi
comu peniju e campu a la giornata,
sutta sti ciaramidi
non venira.

'A casa è china 'e ragni,
chi mi tessiru comu na cuverta
e puru li cumpagni
mi dassaru.

Quandu hai na scarmeria
mu stringi 'a manu chi t'accarizzava
e voi mu stai cu mia,
cchiù non tornara.

Restau dee chiddhu focu
cinnara nira e cadda pe stu cora,
caddija ancora pocu,
ma caddija.

L'acqua arrivau 'e luntanu
e chiddhu chi portau chista hjumara
non po' cchiù pemmu nchiana
verzu susu;

Quando mi vuoi rivedere — Quando ti vorrai rendere
conto / di come soffro e vivo alla giornata, / non venire /

sotto il mio tetto. // La casa è piena di ragni / che hanno
tessuto per me una coperta / ed anche gli amici / mi hanno
abbandonato. // Quando sentirai il desiderio / di stringere
la mano che ti carezzava, / ed avrai desiderio di stare
ancora con me, / più non tornare. // È rimasta di quel
fuoco / la nera cenere ancora calda per questo cuore; /
riscalda ancora poco, / ma riscalda. // L'acqua è arrivata
da lontano / e ciò che ha portato questa fiamma / non può
più risalire / verso l'alto; //

When You Want to See Me Again

When you want to see
how I suffer and live day by day
don't come
under this roof.

The house is full of spiders
that have woven me a blanket
and even my friends
have forsaken me.

When you long
to hold the hand that caressed you
and want to be with me,
don't come back.

That fire has left
black, warm ashes for this heart,
they warm but a little,
but they warm.

The water has come from afar
and what this current has brought
can't go back
upstream;

ed io restu ncantatu,
quandu 'u silenziu cunda li nottati,
penzandu a Iu passatu
chi non torna.

Penzandu sulu a tia
chi pe st'anima fusti 'u megghiu focu,
focu ch'io mi sentia
vrusciara mpettu.

da Chi canti, chi cunti?, 1983

ed io resto incantato, / quando il silenzio condisce le
notti, / pensando al passato / che non ritorna. // Pensando
solamente a te / che per quest'anima fosti il fuoco migliore,
/ fuoco che sentivo / divampare nel petto.

(Traduzione dell'Autore)

(Cont.d)

and I stand enraptured
when silence seasons the night
thinking of the past
that won't return.
Thinking only of you
who were the best fire for this soul,
a fire I felt
raging inside.
(Translated by Luigi Bonaffini)

Cantu, ridu e ciangiu

Cu st'occhi senza lucia
vaja currendu scazu
nte nu silenziu
chi non ava pena.
Ammalappena
mi rischiara 'a strata
'a lampa de stu cora,
e cantu ogni suspiru
cu 'a chitarra ammucchiata
e senza cordi.
Sugnu na lampa
pe cui cerca lucia;
nu lettu puddhu
pe cui cerca pacia;
su' na funtana frisca
pe quanti hannu l'arzura 'e na vivuta.
Io cantu,
ridu e ciangiu
e si mi stancu
tornu a cantara.
Su' nu poeta,
chi amuri e patimenti a la jornata

meta e sospira.

da Chi canti, chi cunti?

Canto, rido e piango? — Con gli occhi senza luce / vado
scalzo correndo / in un silenzio / che non procura pena
alcuna. / La lampada del mio cuore / mi rischiara / appena
la strada, / e canto ogni sospiro / con la chitarra nascosta /
e senza corde. / Sono una fiaccola / per chi cerca luce; / un
morbido letto / per chi cerca pace; / sono una fresca
fontana / per quanti sentono l'arsura della sete. // Io canto,
/ rido e piango / e se mi stanco / torno a cantare. / Sono
un poeta, / che giornalmente miete amori / e dolori
sospirando.

(Traduzione dell'Autore)

I Sing, I Laugh and Weep

With these eyes without light

I run barefoot

in a silence

that gives no pain.

The lamp of my heart

barely

lights the way

and I sing every sigh

with the guitar hidden

and without strings.

I am a torch

for the seekers of light;

a soft bed

for those who seek peace;

I am a cool fountain

for the thirsty.

I sing,

I laugh I weep

when tired

I start singing again.

I am a poet,

who reaps love and pain

all day long.

(Translated by Luigi Bonaffini)

DANTE MAFFIA

Dante Maffia was born in Roseto Capo Spulico (Cosenza) in 1946. He teaches in a school in Rome where he has been living for many years. Editor of *Il Policordo* and *Poetica*, he conducts an intense activity as a militant critic. Having switched to dialect after a rich and noteworthy production in Italian, he has also authored short stories and novels.

His dialect challenge seems due to the conviction that words are only the obligatory instrument the poet is forced to use to symbolize in discourse a modality of being among other people and objects; sum of a craftsman's "tools." Therefore Maffia refuses the paradigmatic equivalence theorized by the neo-avanguardie (poetry=language), and rejects the low mimicry of slang in order to aim almost for a

reappropriation of the peculiar dignity of the instrument in poetry's effort to translate into expression. For this reason he reaches the conviction of the potential equal dignity of all languages. It is not so much for communicative reasons, in fact, that Maffia offers us the poems of *A vite i tutte i jurne* [Everyday Life] and *U Ddije poverille* [The Poor God] in a double form. Independently from their order in the printed edition, they are not dialect texts with Italian translation (or viceversa), but rather two functional modalities adopted to express the same poetic stimulus by someone who possesses two souls beating in unison, equally sensitive to poetry's reasons: an anthropological one grounded in dialect which constitutes the basic identity of the subject, and a more restless one, having gone through an acculturation process for

necessary growth in a larger context.

In his itinerary, the poet had symbiotically sullied himself in the poor and wild nature of rural Roseto, had distilled the foam of the waves, had abandoned himself to memories experienced without elegy; he had also lost himself, had become resentful, beguiled by the ruins of the metropolis without being really able to belong, and had tried to answer the numerous questions crowding his mind by turning to his beloved literature. The poets, first of all: the cherished Baudelaire, Quasimodo, Cardarelli, Saba, but also Jimenez, Lorca, and then Borges and all the best tradition, not only Western, combined with the classical influences mythically stirring Maffia's imagination, always longing for new experiences because never satisfied with his achievements. Hence his tension towards

the search for the event, his apparent yielding to the flow of thought (contemplation, meditation, memory) that strives to become images, feelings, passions, colors, signs of civilization or existential symbols. And he tries to capture a meaning in every object through a repeated process of personal dematerialization and refiguration within the magic of words, capable of transfiguring into myth even the smallest event, the elementary acquisition, the surprise or the discovery, the sudden jolt. A continuous process of interiorization of the world with its objects, which take on an existential, humanizing significance only through their potential for becoming symbols. A journey of self-questioning that leads to a progressive reduction of the substance of what is outside the self, but sublimating its relevance into subjective

areas of lyricism which, while postulating an immersion in matter to be able to assume a shape, tend to dematerialize in sound, to become music and color, to transmute into vivid essences in the apparent immateriality of a sigh.

Essential Bibliography: Maffia's bibliography is very extensive. Cf., besides the collections in dialect (*A vite i tutte i jurne*: Rome, Edizioni Carte Segrete, 1987, prefaced by G. Spagnoletti, and *U Ddìje poverille*: Milan, *All'insegna del Pesce d'Oro*, 1990, with a preface of A. Stella); *Il leone non mangia l'erba* (1974), pref. by A. Palazzeschi; *Le favole impudiche* (1977), pref. by D. Valli; *Passeggiate romane* (1979), pref. E. Mandruzzato and afterword by D. Bellezza; *L'eredità infranta* (1983), pref. by Mario Luzi; *Il ritorno di Omero* (1984), pref. by G. Ferroni;

L'educazione permanente (1992), pref. by G. Spagnoletti; *La castità del male* (1993), pref. by G. Pontiggia. His poetry has been translated into twelve languages. A literary critic and essayist, he has also published several short stories and two novels (*Corradino*, 1990; and, directly in Spanish, *La danza del adios*, 1991). Very recent is a new book of dialect poems, *I rùspe cannarùte* [The Gluttonous Toads], 1995.

Criticism: for a comprehensive study cf. L. Reina, "Itinerario poetico di Dante Maffia," in *Percorsi di poesia*, Naples 1993. Also cf. G. Mercogliano, *L'odissea del mistero. Itinerario poetico di Dante Maffia*, Acireale 1984; R. Salerno, *Antico e nuovo nella poesia di Dante Maffia*, Cavallino di Lecce 1988; V. Petrone, *Il dialetto rosetano nella poesia di Dante Maffia*, Rossano 1989; Spagnoletti and Vivaldi, op. cit..

I protagonisti

Cu jèrede? a vite se n'evì jùte
e li tinte sfucàvene affaccète
cu na ngrignatùre! Parìne
fenèstre senza luce, cadìne
i semènte e jèrene libbre vicchie,
nu picchie cechète e nu picchie
prùggu 'e sune...

Pe parlè a 'mparlàvene, tenìne
parùve ch'evìne stete citte
pe ganne e ganne. I travasème?
Se pò resuscetè cu è stete carte?
Gucìjje pò camenè, pò camenè Nausìche?
Nu sc cante doppe, i pàggene
frusciàvene
come carne i cristejène.

da U Ddije poverille, 1990

I protagonisti — Chi era? La vita se n'era andata / e le
tinte sfocavano affacciate / con una cera! / Sembravano /
finestre senza luce, cadevano / i semi ed erano libri vecchi, /
un po' ciechi e un po' / polvere e suono... / Per parlare non
parlavano, avevano / parole ch'erano state zitte / per anni
e anni. Le travasiamo? / Si può resuscitare chi è stato carta?

/ Lucia può camminare, può camminare Nausicaa? / Una
paura dopo, le pagine / frusciano / come carne di
cristiani.

(Traduzione dell'Autore)

The Protagonists

Who was it? life had left
and the hues were paling,
leaning out with such a look!
They seemed dim windows, seeds
fell and seemed old books,
a bit blind and a bit
dust and sound...
As for speaking, they didn't,
they had words that had been silent
for years and years. Shall we decant them?
Can you bring back to life who had been paper once?
Can Lucia walk, can Nausicaa?
A fright after that, the pages
rustled
like human flesh.
(Translated by Luigi Bonafini)

Sù trop'anne

Sù tropp'anne che non veghe
a lu truvè. Non sapère manche cchiù
canòsce a tombe. M'ene ditte
che n'ene fatte na quante vecine.

Ne dispiàcede? Jì però
non me sènghe du fè cuntènte
rumanènne citte nnante a sepultùre.

Forse jè... va bbù, i fiùre
a 'n dispiàcene manche a li vive,
me s'ammùscene, sìchene, perciò
gassète u jì senza i mije, forse
mo vo bbene a lu mure, tènede i
spìche juste, l'osse di vecine.

da U Ddije poverille, 1990

Sono troppi anni — Sono troppi anni che non vado / a
trovarlo. Non saprei neanche più / riconoscere la tomba. Mi
hanna detto / che ne hanno costruito parecchie vicino. / Gli
dispiacerà? Io però / non mi sento di farlo contento /
restando in silenzio davanti la sepoltura / Forse è... va bene,
i fiori / non dispiacciono neanche ai vivi, / ma muoiono,
seccano, perciò / lasciatelo stare senza di me, forse / adesso
vuole bene al muro, ha gli / spigoli giusti/ le ossa dei vicini.

(Traduzione dell'Autore)

It's Been Too Many Years

It's been too many years I haven't gone
to see him. I couldn't even
recognize his tomb. They told me
they've built several more nearby.
Will he mind? But I
don't feel like making him happy
standing silently before his grave.
Maybe... well, all right, not even
the living mind flowers,
but they wither, they die, so
leave him alone without me, maybe
now he loves the wall, it has
the right kind of corners, his neighbors' bones.
(Translated by Luigi Bonaffini)

Passejète nta città

Appechète alla porte a nge sune
a scope, i sette fasùve,
nu mazz' i capille
e la vranche i guigue beneditte.

Accis' u penzìre,
a voglie i cangè. Pi recòrde
manche nu pertùse.

Certe acchiànene supe l'archebalène;
eh, s'ammassèrene vinte com' Arnalde!
I fauzamìnte fede luce alli vije.

I prime libre stampète
ène fatte a ruzze nti stipe.

Nti merchète granne dùmene
sc càtegue e sc catuguille i rrobbe.

Vuglie mangè capesciòve i tante cugùre
e ciste cùmme i frutta fàuze.

Pèrghe na pàggene nu nzirte du clamòre,
cu sàpede

s'a trove na parògua vive.
da U Ddije poverille, 1990

Passeggiata in città - Dietro le porte non esistono / la
scopa, i sette fagioli, / la ciocca dei capelli / e il ramoscello

d'ulivo benedetto. / Uccisa la meditazione, / la voglia di
cambiare i ricordi / neanche un buco. // Alcuni salgono
sopra l'arcobaleno; / eh, se ammassassero vento come
Arnaldo! / L'ambiguità illumina i percorsi. / Le prime
edizioni / hanno fatto la ruggine negli scaffali. // Nei
supermercati dormono / scatole e scatolini di merce. /
Voglio mangiare nastri di tanti colori / e ceste colme di
frutta finta. / Perdo una pagina un inserto del clamore / chi
lo sa / se troverò una parola viva.

(Traduzione dell'Autore)

A Stroll in the City

Behind the doors there is no
broom, no seven beans,
no lock of hair
or the blessed olive branch.
Thought, desire for change
are dead. Not even a hole
for memories.

Some of them climb onto the rainbow;
ah, if they hoarded wind like Arnaldo!
Uncertainty illuminates the streets.

First editions
have turned to dust upon the shelves.
In supermarkets sleep
boxes of every size.

I want to eat many-colored bows
and baskets full of fake fruits.
I lose a page, an insert of the clamor,
who knows
if I'll find a living word.

(Translated by Luigi Bonaffini)

Passànnè nnànt' a chèsa tùje

No mm'ègge scurdète nènte;
gratta gratta ca gomme du timpe,
nente; scancèlla scancèlla,
mànche nu vèse ha pèrse nfànzie,
e pe ddice come sun' i cunte
tu sìn'allè addùve?
cchiù bbèll' i na granète.

Quanne è succèsse che jèreme vive?
Quanne ème murte? I curpe
se cercàvene, ce sun'ancòre,
me u prime e lu doppe
ène fujùte pe màcchi' e mucchie
jettànnè stàmpete finànche
a marròzz' e surìglie.

Sun'allè, dannète
nta nu purgatòrie i semènte,
nta na sc cànghe i cighe secchète.
Ma nùje, addùve sime?
Dajìnt' a llure o da fore? O 'me rumàste
u sùn' i quille ch'ène stète.
da U Ddije poverille, 1990

Passando davanti la tua casa — Non ho dimenticato

niente; / gratta gratta con la gomma del tempo, / niente;
cancella cancella, / neanche un bacio ha perduto aspetto, /
e per dire come sono i fatti / tu sei lì, dove? / più bella d'una
melagrana // Quando è accaduto ch'eravamo vivi? /
Quando siamo morti? I corpi / si cercavano, ci sono ancora,
/ ma il prima e il dopo / sono fuggiti per macchie e sterpi /
gettando calci perfino / a lumache e lucertole. // Sono là,
dannati / in un purgatorio di semi, / in una fetta di cielo
sterile. / Ma noi, dove siamo? / Dentro di loro o fuori? O
siamo rimasti / l'ombra di ciò che sono stati.

(Traduzione dell'Autore)

Going by your house

I have forgotten nothing;
rub, rub with time's eraser,
nothing; erase, erase,
not even a kiss has lost its looks,
and to say how things are,
you are there, where?
lovelier than a pomegranate.
When was it that we were alive?
When did we die? The bodies
sought each other, they are still there,
but the before and after
have fled through clearings and shrubs
kicking away even
snails and lizards.
They are there, damned
in a purgatory of seeds,
in a sliver of barren sky.
But we, where are we?
Inside or outside them? Or have we become
the shadow of what they used to be.
(Translated by Luigi Bonaffini)

I vicchie

I vicchie vone accise tutte;
sù revengiùse i Peràmede,
com' a Gioconde e la Travejète.
Vone jèsse accucciuguejète
none come i guagnùne
me come vine pprìnte
a pegnète du fasùve
nnànte a sc-carde appeccechète.
I vicchie sù ncòmede;
all' ammucciùne spijene
i giùvene, i nvìdiene; se pone,
frìchene mmìnze' u bastone
a tutt' i cunte, gh' ène raggione.
I vicchie sù cannarùte
i gàcene a mmìnn' i vacche;
gràpene e chiùdene a vucche,
mpallàcchene nta cite di recòrde,
sciullèrene u telefone e li trène.
I vicchie no ci fùttese a tene
u rubenette apìrte;
sù cumpàgne du sògue, sù ruspe
nta vammèce, sù capèce

de fè murì u munne

pu sagueguè.

Cu i vicchie jè meglie

a 'n ge tene a che ffè.

I vecchi – I vecchi dovrebbero essere uccisi tutti; / sono
ostinati come le Piramidi; / come la Gioconda e la Traviata.
/ Pretendono d'essere coccolati / non come i bambini / ma
come viene aggiunta acqua / alla pignata dei fagioli /
davanti al ramo acceso. // I vecchi sono un incomodo; / di
nascosto spiano / i giovani, li invidiano; se possono, /
frappongono in mezzo il bastone / a tutte le cose,
pretendono la ragione. // I vecchi sono golosi / di uva
pizzutella; / aprono e chiudono la bocca, / s'impantanano
nell'aceto dei ricordi, / frantumerebbero il telefono e i treni.
// I vecchi non ce li fregghi a tenere / il rubinetto aperto; /
sono compagni del sole, sono rospi / nel cotone, sono capaci
/ di far morire il mondo / per salvarlo // Con i vecchi è
meglio / non averci a che fare.

(Traduzione dell'Autore)

Old People

Old people should all be killed;
they're as hard as Pyramids,
as the Mona Lisa and the Traviata.
They want to be coddled
not like children,
but the way water is added to a pot of beans
before the burning branch.
Old people are a nuisance;
secretly spying
on the young, envying them; if they can,
they throw a wrench
in everything, claiming they're right.
Old people are gluttons
for grapes;
They open and close their mouths,
they get mired in the vinegar of memories,
they would break phones and trains to pieces.
You won't catch old people
leaving the faucet running;
they are friends to the sun, toads
in cotton, they are capable
of letting the world die

in order to save it.

It's better to stay away
from old people.

From *U Ddije poverille*, 1990

(Translated by Luigi Bonaffini)

SICILY

At the beginning of the century, Sicilian dialect could be considered the unofficial language of a people and territory. For the lower classes it represented virtually the only linguistic code in use, nor was the “Sicilian tongue” perceived as *diminutio*: the national language remained an expression of other realities, both geographic and social: it was the language of the rich (as diabetes was regarded a disease of the rich) and of the North: of people from the “continent.”

Illiteracy in Sicily reached extremes of 70.89% in the demographic census of 1901, of 56.97% the next decade, as compared to a national average that reached, respectively, 48.49% and 37.43%.¹ If after the draft a recruit tended to reproduce extraneous

intonations or lexemes, he might be asked not to speak *tischi toshi*: “talk as your mother made you.” In the island, the Italian language was *sermo curialis*, it circulated in the courtrooms, in parliament, in the schools; it was the idiom of books and newspapers: a linguistic reality of other milieux, with which it did not always like to interact. The middle class used dialect in the home and in the clubs; the aristocrats preferred to express themselves in a *mélange* of Sicilian, Italian, English and above all French; some spoke either in dialect or in French, skipping Italian altogether. A rapid (and flavorful) example of this kind of composite speech is offered by Fulco della Cerda, Duke of Verdura, who recounted his childhood in the Villa Niscemi of Palermo at the beginning of the century, in a work with the dialect title “Happy summers.” His

writing is studded with French expressions. Here is the description of the princess of Ganci, who came to visit the writer's grandmother, called Granmamà, her mother-in-law:

She was a delicate figure who called to mind the statuettes in blanc de Chine. She spoke, or rather stuttered, a strange mixture of Sicilian and French pronouncing the "R"s as if they were "S"s: "carissima" became "casissima" and "il parco della Favorita" "Il pascu d'a Favosita."²

The situation appears radically different after W.W. II; the impoverishment of the linguistic patrimony of dialect affects the whole peninsula and corrodes the solidity of the Sicilian dialect. The rapid erosion of dialects surprises P. P. Pasolini; regarding Buttitta's heartfelt lamentation in the poem "Lingua e dialettu" [Language and Dialect],

he writes about the language “stolen” from a people:

And in the whole world around me, dialect seemed destined to become extinguished in epochs so distant as to appear abstract. It seemed that the italianization of Italy had to be founded on a wide contribution from below, dialectal and popular in nature (and not on the substitution of the pilot literary language with the managerial pilot language, as later happened). Among the other tragedies we have experienced (...) in the last few years, there has also been the tragedy of the loss of dialect (...)³

And while the phenomenon of (functional) illiteracy continues to decrease in the island, with extremes of 24.56% in the 1951 census and 16.46% in 1961 (which leave the region in fourteenth place among the

rest of the regions), as compared with a national average of respectively 12.90% and 8.14%⁴, in letter-writing the Sicilian emigrant can express himself in the Italian language, although dialect is superimposed on it. Dated 1965-66 are the letters ad familiares from Kall by the Sicilian emigrant who represents the dramatis persona of *Entromondo* by Antonio Castelli, which Sciascia considered the only literary work on emigration based on "recreated documents," capable of portraying "the condition of emigrants as it was, as it is," followed by the poems of *Tutti dicono Germania Germania* [They All Say Germany Germany] by Stefano Vilardo.⁵ This is how Castelli reconstructs the epistolary style of the Sicilian emigrant:

Dear wife I'm writing you these lines to

give you my news that I'm all right so I hope this letter finds you and the children in good health. Dear Antonietta I have waited two other days thinking I would receive your letter and instead I didn't see anything and I was forced to put down these few lines; now I am letting you know that Sunday Santi. A. arrived (...) ⁶

The existence of "parallel schools," the mass media first of all, alongside institutional schools, has hastened the compression of dialects; today, with regard to dialect literatures, syntagms such as "lost words" ⁷ and "furtive languages" ⁸ are being used. Meanwhile, the predictable adoption of English as future official language of the European Community could make the Italian language, due to its limited diffusion, into a European dialect, while more and

more widespread becomes what is being called *angliano* (in France, *franglais*).

In 1988, Jana Vizmuller-Zocco from York University in Toronto, conducted a survey on the Sicilian dialect, from a sociolinguistic perspective, interviewing 60 poets residing in the island:

With the exception of only one poet, dialect was considered the mother tongue, and Italian became dominant once they entered the work force. Moreover, the authors either alternate dialect and Italian within the family circle or use Italian. Without exception, they do not use Sicilian with their children, with the result that, at least by the acknowledgment of a few of them, their children do not understand their poetry. Another person related that his daughter, now twenty-four, is showing great interest in all things Sicilian, including the

dialect. One of the most surprising facts to emerge from some of the interviews is the poets' selection of Italian as the language of the family and consequently the inability of their children to enjoy the poetry in Sicilian dialect written by their fathers. Clearly, the rivalry between Sicilian and Italian as mother tongues does not realize itself at the level of artistic, ethical, or other types of psychological need and appreciation. Job opportunities, better standards of living and technological and other advancements seem to be embodied in Italian, and hence this is chosen as mother tongue for children.⁹

Still open is the question of whether the over-production of poetic texts in Sicilian dialect, which characterizes the end of this century, is an expression of a literary renaissance or whether it is entirely on this that the survival of dialect depends, in

keeping with a radical formulation by Pascoli: "the language of poetry is always a dead language."¹⁰

Despite the difficulty of linkage, which the exponents of literary Sicilian life have always experienced, with the important centers of the publishing world, concentrated mainly in the North, in its Italian and dialect output the Sicilian Twenty-Century is rich with noteworthy personalities of international repute (Pirandello, Quasimodo, Vittorini, Lampedusa, Sciascia, Buttitta). Quite often, the possibility of entering the most exclusive literary circuits has meant leaving the island. The cases of Lampedusa, Piccolo, Bufalino, are exceptional and due to chance. The submerged, quality literature is considerable, full of important forgotten names: one has only to think of narrators such as Raffaele

Poidomani (Carrube e cavalieri [Horse Bread and Gentlemen], 1954) or Salvatore Spinelli (Il mondo giovine [The Young World], 1958).

If this can happen for narrative and poetry in Italian, one can easily assess the extent of the phenomenon with respect to the poetry in dialect, due to the limited circulation of the texts, more likely to be excluded from “the channels of national publishing and scattered among small publishers, if not local printers.”¹¹ In his *History of Sicily*, Ganci Battaglia¹² underlined the need to save the poetic works, which had remained unpublished, of Saru Cannavò, from Aci Platani, who died in 1960. Recently, Domenico Ferraro has edited the complete published texts of Francesco Paolo Polizzano, from Prizzi (1857-1935), with the addition of some unpublished ones.¹³ A poet

inspired by ideals of peace and justice, Polizzano kept in mind Mazzini's lesson on rights and duties; there is no common good if progress and morality "don't walk united."¹⁴ In his poetry there are echoes of Carducci, which the local speech dissolves into an everyday dimension, whose best results are to be found in the representation of the small Universe of Madonna.

Aside from the rediscoveries, the first decades of the century are dominated by the personalities of Martoglio, Di Giovanni, Mercadante, representative of the principal tendencies which characterize dialect poetry in the Twentieth century; they are, although no rigorous demarcations can be established, the three souls of realism: playful-popular (Martoglio); spiritualist and social (Di Giovanni); socialist and revolutionary (Mercadante).

Nino Martoglio, from Catania (1870-1921), famous playwright and comedy writer of the Sicilian theater (his works are the mainstay of dialect theater comedians), was the editor of the humorous newspaper *D'Artagnan* and gave life to the Compagnia del Teatro Mediterraneo. His poetic texts are collected in Centona, in which he was able to be both lyric and dramatic, excelling in lively compositions, no less than the others close to the popular spirit. Pirandello praised his spareness and maintained that Martoglio was for Sicily what Di Giacomo and Russo represent for Naples, Pascarella and Trilussa for Rome, Fucini for Tuscany, Selvatico and Barbarani for the Veneto region.¹⁵

Alessio di Giovanni (1872-1946) chose his native Valplatani as the backdrop of his poetic universe, almost to illustrate Tolstoy's

maxim: “describe your village and you will be universal”; with the master of Russian narrative he shared a vocation for realism and a tendency to develop symbiotically the poles of sociability and religiosity.

Figures such as St. Francis and St. Clara move in a rural scenery: from the island’s nature, with its Mediterranean elements (“air and green”), in a landscape made of vine runners, of “soft almonds,” of “sky and valleys”, emerges the figure of the “poor lover.”¹⁶

The world of the humble is represented with intimate participation, not with a middle-class perspective or fanatical primitivism. Di Giovanni’s work is popular with regard to themes — from *Lu fattu di Bissana* [The Bissana Incident], 1900) to *A lu passu di Giurgenti* [At Girgenti’s Pass], (1902)

and *Nni la dispensa di la surfara* [In the Storeroom of the Sulfur Mine], 1910 — but he is not naïf. A cultured poet, he appropriated the operation he had admired in Saru Platania, whose dialect poetry he had studied in his youth; he had credited him with being the first to have “elevated himself” from the humble popular inspiration: not to have abandoned that vein to elevate himself, but to have elevated the inspiration, by refining his expressive instruments and lending poignancy to the representation. That is to say: to make himself humble with the humble according to his specific nature, namely, as a poet.¹⁷ And Di Giovanni became the aedos of life in the feud and the mine. The feud, with its immobility, was alive from the end of the last century to the Fifties. Another poet,

Mario Gori (1926-1970) sings of the dissolution, with the feud, of the rural civilization, while poverty continues to afflict the population (whence the persistence, in those years, of the phenomenon of emigration). In a certain sense, Gori harks back to Di Giovanni's poetry, but not as an epigone.¹⁸

Di Giovanni's work will be dealt with more extensively in the anthological section.

Vito Mercadante, from Prizzi (1873-1936), was twenty-years old during the workers' revolt of the Sicilian Fasces. He had the opportunity to observe the dire conditions of the rural underclass, in a historical period in which the number of feuds was increasing in the island and that of small owners decreasing, while the dark power of the gabelloti was expanding, at the expense of the farmers. In such a climate, Mercadante, a

socialist, followed the revolutionary line of George Sorel. The poet's great-grandchild, Vito Mercadante Jr., looking through some of his great-uncle archive papers, found the following comment:

Against the evil arts of politicians.
Against the diabolical work of priests.
Against the indifference, or worst, of irresponsible comrades. Against weariness and defeats. Against public opinion and the press. Against regulations, customs and laws.¹⁹

The poet was in favor of the valorization of rural civilization (as it was emerging from the ethnic-anthropological studies of Vigo, Salomone-Marino, Pitrè), of popular literature and a concrete poetry, in the wake of verismo, some of whose canons were nevertheless considered misleading: the cold positivistic -scientific outlook and the

“dogma” of the impersonality of the writer.

In the language of his land he sang the epic deeds of garibaldi in *Lu Sissanta* (1910), as an expression of the deliverance of the Sicilian people; the poem runs from the landing at Marsala until Palermo, as if to signify the author's indifference to subsequent events, which saw the betrayal of that revolution. The work appeared in the same year as Mercadante's *L'omu e la terra* [Man and Land], inspired by the Messina earthquake of 1908 and the masterpiece, *Focu di Muncibeddu* [Mongibello's Fire]: a collection characterized by fluid, limpid writing and a wide range of themes: from the absorbed contemplation of nature to the lyric representation of moments of rural life, at times festive at times tragic; from delicate sentimental broadsides to magical

enchantments. Of course, there are also compositions with strong social contents, equally distributed. Mercadante can write intensely lyrical verses or become a fiery defender of derelicts. Or openly manifest his diffidence towards justice, conditioned by power and by camperi mafiosi and affirm his irreducible revulsion to any kind of abuse: "I may be killed, but will not bow my head."²⁰

His work concludes with the poem *La china*, a tender and desolate celebration of unhappy love.

A different direction will be taken by the poets from Etna Francesco Guglielmino, Vincenzo De Simone from Villarosa (Enna) and Vann'Antò (Giovanni Antonio Di Giacomo) from Ibla.

Francesco Guglielmino (1872-1956), rather than re-interpreting Verismo (and yet he had been a friend of Verga, De Roberto,

Brancati), went back to the romantic roots of Verismo, in a poetry aiming at inner analysis, to the consideration of man in the world, to the mystery of life and death. No ideology can redeem what Malraux called "la condition humaine": "Socialism or not, our life is a cloth weaved with pain."²¹

Guglielmino remains fundamentally anchored to Leopardi, with the same cosmic connotations: in the universe everything is suffering. It is not just human beings who are subject to this law; even in the fields, among stones and bushes, under the tender grass, are hidden a myriad flowers, that man tramples unawares or, if he picks them, throws them immediately away. Meanwhile, destroyer time corrodes everything: "it holds a file in its hands \ and never lets go of it."²² There are none of Foscolo's illusions or

Leopardi's "Ginestra": everything is resolved in the desolation of the sciara or in the barrenness of lava; the only comfort can come from living as much as possible according to nature, in a dignified, Epicurean resignation.

Guglielmino contributed, in a historic moment in which dialect poetry was still considered an immediate instrument to let the gintuzza²³ [little people] talk, in order to dispel the prejudice that it could not deal with great themes. Classical culture, which had informed his education, imbued his verses with elements of considerable formal refinement.

Vincenzo De Simone (1879-1942) emigrated very young to America; having returned to his homeland, he moved to Milan, publishing several well-received works of poetry. Mondadori published his

Saggi di canzoni siciliane [Samples of Sicilian Songs], 1925. His first attempts were translations into Italian from Heine and de Heredia. This exercise allowed him to acquire considerable technical skills and as a result his verses in dialect are polished and solid. In any case, de Heredia's influence can be felt in all his poetry. Above all, De Simone's attention focuses on form: harmony and rhythm, skillful scansion of the line, refinement of the hendecasyllable, make of him a master of style and a representative of the Parnassian school in Sicilian dialect poetry.

Vann'Antò (1891-1960) does not even try to use the Sicilian of the koinè: from his first dialect collection, *Voluntas tua* (1926), he adopts the dialect of Ragusa and — as professor of Literature in Popular Traditions at the University of Messina — he carries out

his research on folklore in the same area. He was a lover and philologist of the Ibla vernacular and prepared for his students, among other things, some phonetics — vocalism and consonantism — and morphology texts, treating the former in a diachronic dimension and providing a synchronic description of the latter; he also outlined a “Proposal for the Arrangement of Sicilian Orthography,” scientifically acceptable, but which he did not adopt in his own poetry.

This attitude may seem contradictory, but it is not: the relationship between koinè and vernacular language in him parallels that between language and dialect, both practiced by the Author, in a non-conflictual duplicity of expressive register. In a “note,” reported by Salvatore Pugliatti, G.A. Di Giacomo tried to clarify this relationship —

to himself most of all —:

To me poetry is born at times Italian at times Sicilian: and every time necessarily so, I think: Sicilian, when I speak and sing of the workers and farmers of my island (...); Italian, when I speak of myself or mostly of myself, and for myself, in a certain sense as a means of solace (...) ²⁴

But the “note” is not to be taken literally; after all, it is not true that he does not talk about himself, and for himself (if in a less obvious way), in the “Sicilian poetry,” as it is not true that workers and farmers are not present in his “Italian poetry.” Both of them are, moreover, equally “for solace.”

He does not approach the world of workers and farmers as an “intellectual,” nor does he distance himself from it when he adopts the Italian linguistic code. As he was not ashamed to consider himself a man of

letters, so his populism is not mannered. Michela Sacco Messineo writes:

The voice of the workers and farmers of Ragusa echoes in him in a fruitful emotional and cultural osmosis, in which the author's sentiments are represented as characters, as voices and points of view of his mother, his father, his fiancée, his friends, of the farmers and workers of his community. In this "patriarchal perspective," in feeling himself part of a civilization, lies the profound core of his inspiration (...) ²⁵

For further comments on Di Giacomo's work, see the introduction to his texts.

Giuseppe Ganci Battaglia (1901-1977) is like a bee that feeds on all the flowers, producing the dense, fragrant honey of Madonie, the native area of this poet, who lived mostly in Palermo. His poetry follows a solid (not archaic) tradition. He made his

debut in 1922 with *Sangu sicilianu* [Sicilian Blood], followed by *Amuri* [Love] (1923) and *La Santuzza* (1927). His first organic collection, *Surgiva* [Fountainhead], which appeared in 1940, is initially conceived as an autobiography in verse, but the poet's universe gradually widens: from insular themes to evening songs and lunar enchantments, from mystical impulses to local color, to the meditation on the vanity of things. Seriousness and lightheartedness also characterize *Il volto della vita* [The Face of Life] (1958), in which "serious" and "comic" poems are arranged in different sections, to underline the twofold reality of existence.

His masterpiece is *Pupu di lignu* [Wooden Puppet], written in 1927 but published in 1969: a reworking in 36 cantos with protasis,

in sestinas, of Collodi's *Pinocchio*. It is not a "translation": the poet made it his own, recreated from within in verses of admirable freshness: an insular *Pinocchio* who seems to have been born in Sicily, almost a homage of the "pupi" and the paladins to their Tuscan brother.

In 1927, while he was composing his *Pupu*, Ganci Battaglia was co-editing a periodical of dialect poetry, *La Trazzera* [Country Road], whose publication was allowed for merely a year by the Fascist regime, which did not look favorably on dialect literature. Decisive was the issue dedicated to the figure and work of Vito Mercadante. Ganci Battaglia's partner in running the review was Ignazio Buttitta, from Bagheria (1899), who had published his *Marabedda* (with Italian translation by Ganci

Battaglia) through *La Trazzera*. Buttitta first book, *Sintimentali* [Sentimental], had appeared in 1925: a collection still showing echoes of traditional poetry (Pascoli, on the one hand, Zola and Verga on the other), but in which one can find the premises for Buttitta's more mature poetry. His style is already outlined, based on spoken Sicilian, with a dry musicality.

After the experience of W.W. II and the partisan struggle, in the decade 1945-55, he makes the acquaintance in Milan, introduced by the painter Renato Guttuso, a fellow townsman, with Vittorini and Quasimodo. His poetry has long since abandoned traditional dress, the adoption of free verse is definitive, and he moves between sentiment and engagement.

Buttitta's entire poetic output develops substantially between these two poles, in a

period of time encompassing sixty years. To Mercadante's "school", but also Di Giovanni's (although, with respect to the latter, the poet from Bagheria has always avoided any reference) could not belong a better pupil. We will expand on it in the anthology.

His works (which are dealt with in the introduction of the anthological section) have become — from their first appearance, one might say — true "classics" of the island's vernacular muse.

The aftermath of the war had been characterized by a deep spirit of rebirth; in Sicily also, since 1943, when the war had virtually come to an end with the landing of the Allies. Dialect poets, in their own sphere, were not excluded from the fervor of initiatives in every area. In Palermo, they were led by Federico De Maria (1883-1954),

who in his youth had taken part in the Futurist movement. Author of novels and dramas (one of which performed by the great Ermete Zacconi), but also of *Barunissa di Carini* (The Baroness of Carini), in dialect, with an introductory essay on Sicilian poetry and *Félibrige*, De Maria had just founded a Society of Writers and Artists, organizing, starting in 1944, lively afternoons of dialect poetry and folklore once a week, in the Yellow Room of the Politeama Theater.

The city still displayed the deep wounds caused by the war: a large part of it had been destroyed by the bombardments of the first three months of 1943, during which hundreds of dead were buried under the ruins and in the shelters; the serious dearth of housing and food was complicated by a steep increase in crime, with extremes which would be equaled only in the present; in

politics, the separatism of Finocchiaro Aprile, Gallo, Canepa was taking root.

Around De Maria gathered the dialect poets Ugo Ammannato (1906-1959), Miano Conti (1905-1957), Nino Orsini (1908-1982), Pietro Tamburello (1910) and the very young Paolo Messina (1923).

At the end of 1945 the meetings stopped, as the Township decided to give the great hall back to the Gallery of Modern Art. Nonetheless, in that climate the groundwork was laid for a radical renewal of Sicilian dialect poetry, which would become more evident in subsequent years, characterized, according to Salvatore Di Marco's reconstruction, by the affirmation of the literary value of the best Sicilian linguistic tradition, discovering a project of koinè that would bestow the literary dignity of language to the Sicilian dialect.(...) In the

logic of that type of choice there was also the explicit refusal of an artificial, pedantic, academic dialect, separated from the authentic roots of Sicilian culture and deaf to the genuine voice of the people. And thus there was a rejection of the idea of a kind of poetry following the worn-out linguistic models of the imitators of Giovanni Meli.(26)

In 1946 the poets of Palermo gathered around the Gruppo Alessio di Giovanni, which functioned until 1954; Ammannato, Conti, Tamburello, Orsini, Messina were joined by Gianni Varvaro (1917-1973) and, occasionally, by Buttitta and the poets from Catania Aldo Grienti (1926-1986) and Carmelo Molino (1908-1984). Grienti and Molino, in turn, had started the poetry sheet *Torcia a ventu*, around which gathered the group from Catania, soon to be known as *Trinacrisimo*, whose leading spirit was

Salvatore Camilleri (1921), a poet of notable interest;²⁷ members were Salvatore Di Pietro, of Pachino (1906-1990),²⁸ Mario Gori, Enzo D'Agata and the older Angelo Alberti, Pietro Guido Cesareo, Adamo Leandri. The two groups, moved by the same innovative spirit, had different outlooks; Camilleri notes that those from Palermo were influenced by the Parnassus-De Simone tradition that, beyond the delight in the quality of words, constituted a more advanced stage in the field of formal renewal with respect to the Catania tradition, which meant mostly Martoglio, and therefore less forward-looking, more closely tied to prejudices.²⁹

In the Palermo area, a considerable impulse came from Paolo Messina, who linked Sicilian dialect poetry to Symbolism and Hermeticism, while others - from Catania or Palermo - were assimilating

Lorca's and Neruda's lesson.

In 1947, meanwhile, after the separatist movement began to fade, the Sicilian Region was born, autonomous, with a special statute; the same year also saw the massacre of Portella della Ginestra, still obscure in some respects, which was attributed entirely to Turiddu Giuliano, a character which has remained suspended at least in part between the figure of the gentleman bandit and the defeated patriot.

In Agrigento, in the years 1950-51, Antonino Cremona (1931), who was not connected to any group, writes his poems in the Girgenti dialect; much admired for their spareness and clarity, they were published by S. Sciascia with the title *Occhi antichi* [Ancient Eyes], and remain a precise reference point. In the same period, the poet Nino Pino was writing in the Messina

dialect.

On the whole, those years were harbingers of a singular experience, which united poets of diverse stature, culture and social condition who, as noted by Di Marco (who came in very young, bringing the voice of Neorealism) they tackled some questions which they considered decisive for dialect poetry in Sicily (the function of dialect poetry, its relationship with society, the question of dialect and its relationship with the national language and the vernaculars), and they were able to grow together, they made an all-encompassing cultural choice regarding all the questions (...) ³⁰

In 1954 Pietro Tamburello edited *Ariu di Sicilia*, a newsletter that came out as a supplement to the biweekly review of dialect poetry *Po' t''u cuntù*, edited by Giuseppe Denaro. In his "Greeting,"

Tamburello pointed out how the island, despite the dominations, had remained “above all Sicilian” and how its “secret soul” was living again, with “solar Mediterranean clarity,” in its poetry. With regard to the latter, the newsletter proposed to carry out “new exegesis and research,” “with the explicit aim to renew tradition in the light of the latest aesthetic exigencies.” valorizing the most talented poets and closing the door to scribblers.³¹

To that newsletter collaborated, among others, Grienti, Camilleri, Varvaro, Ammannato, Molino, Buttitta, Di Pietro. Very active was Paolo Messina, who also published a short story in dialect and an article on “Mediterranean Poetry.” His poetry, essential and fluid, intensely sentimental but not romantic, refined but not Parnassian, engagé but free from the

social rhetoric of the time, hermetic but communicable, extremely personal, remains one of the highest voices of the last decades.

Six issues of *Ariu di Sicily* came out as a supplement; a seventh one came out as a “one-time” issue on October 31, 1954, and it concluded this other interesting literary experience. During the Sixties other worthy poets followed that line: Gaetano Cannizzaro, Salvatore Consiglio, Nino Tesoriere, Santo Calì.

If Buttitta had inserted here and there dialectized morphemes of the Italian linguistic code, with the intention of making his texts more accessible *extra moenia*, Santo Calì (1918-1972), from *Linguaglossa* on the side of Mt. Etna, seems motivated by the intent of making, apparently at least, his language more cryptic: not for elitist reasons, but rather to bring it closer and closer to the

voice of the voiceless, of the excluded, of the last on earth, who people his poetic universe. As did Vann' Antò with the dialect of Ragusa, he adopts the speech of Linguaglossa - an island within the island's dialect - linking the epochal reality to the history of Sicily, through the ennobling thread of language, which represents its highest cultural testimony. It was, moreover, a way of developing on the literary level an aspect of the political engagement of Calì, who had been a separatist with the Canepa group before adhering to Marxism (in any case liberally interpreted); his Sicilian separatism constitutes a (subdued) leit-motiv in his poetry.

Calì carried out his commitment as a poet outside of the channels of the publishing industry (as instead had been the case with Buttitta), in a flaunted - almost

polemic — semi-clandestineness, which nevertheless earned him the admiration of those who had the opportunity to read his work (which will be dealt with in the introduction to his texts), nor does it prevent him from being considered one of the highest expressions of Twentieth-Century Sicilian poetry.

Presently, we are witnessing a real flowering: obviously, quality does not always correspond to quantity, but the phenomenon is significant, nor can one deem small the number of poets worthy of attention, among whom are certainly Santi Bonaccorsi, Corrado Di Pietro, Carmelo Assenza, Nino Salvatore, Mario Grasso, Maria Emanuele, Umberto Miglioristi, Denzina Genchi.

In concluding this rapid review, we would like only to point out a few cases,

with some of our comments (well aware that we will wrong many, for reasons of space): they are Turi Lima, in the Etna area; Salvatore Di Marco, Alfio Inserra, Giuseppe Giovanni Battaglia in the Palermo area, and Nino De Vita in the Trapani area.

Turi Lima, author of *Sicilia celu e terra* [Sicily Sky and Earth] (1925), a poet with a strong commitment to Sicilian culture, aims at unmasking, in verses which are very modern, fluid and vibrant, the mystifications that weigh upon the history of Sicily, and at raising his cry of love and sorrow for the island tormented and thirsting for justice, without rhetoric or victimization.

Salvatore Di Marco (1932), in his *Giornale di poesia siciliana* [Journal of Sicilian Poetry], discusses with dedication and competence the problems of dialect literature and, with

the aid of worthy collaborators, evokes its figures and characters, while he reaches out to young and older poets alike.

His *reentrée* onto the scene of dialect poetry takes place in 1986 with *Cantu d'amuri* [Love Song], a poem (whose first inspiration goes back to 1964), modeled after the line of "a *koinè* of noble literariness"³²: a hymn to love and its capacity to dissolve the vapors of habit; love leads the poet back onto the paths of memory, through which he reconstructs times and places, seasons and circumstances, of a personal *historia*, illuminates the present and transcends it. A poetic language of surprising freshness and vividness, in which the discursive cadence is enriched by a suffused lyricism and by a skillful play of metaphors. His subsequent works are, in 1988: **Quaranta** [Forty], a collection of poems composed between 1957 and 1969, which

attest to his personal contribution to the renewal of Sicilian dialect poetry in that period; *L'acchianata di l'aciddara* [The Climb of the Bird-Sellers], a moving celebration of an ancient road in Palermo's ravaged historic center, in essential and poignant verses; in 1989, with *Epigrafie Siciliane* [Sicilian Epigraphies], the poet follows the path, not often beaten in Sicilian dialect poetry (although examples are not lacking, from Veneziano to Calì), of epigraphy; but experimentally, and more than irony or sarcasm the poet embraces lyricism, in a language – as Antonino Cremona noted – “gamboling from one subject to another,” which does not undermine the unity of the text.³³

Singular is the poem *Li paroli dintra* [The Words Within] (1991), of “polished

lyricism," in the words of Turi Vasile³⁴, in which the poet deals with the mystery of words and their origin; words designated not as abyss (Ungaretti's "buried port"), but rather as "reality, as man containing all of man, as historical knowledge and creation."³⁵ For the first time a text of Sicilian dialect poetry ventures in the treatment of such a hard and absorbing theme, to demonstrate that Sicilian has all the requirements not only to deal with alleys and country roads, but also questions of philosophy of language. And what is more, in a manner not at all dry, in poetry. A kind of poetry which is not artificial.

Alfio Inserra (1935) achieves notable results in the actualization of myth, at times drawing, at times erasing the demarcation line between wisdom and madness, between

real and surreal, as in *Circannu Asturfu* (1986) and *Pilariu* (1988), but also phantasmagoric popular revivals, as in *U Fistinu* (1986); all in a poetic language which has absorbed the fervid humors of Twentieth-Century European poetry, expressed in a personal way in quatrains of classical perfection.

Giuseppe Giovanni Battaglia (1951) from Alimusa, is tied to the vein of social poetry, with poems that display the dryness of Montale's cuttlefish bones, in a totalizing dialect. in *La terra vasca* [The Lowland] (1969), *La piccola valle di Alì* [The Small Valley of Alì] (1972), *L'ordine di viaggio* [Travel Order] (1988), Battaglia is with Calì — but very different from him — the last representative of the line marked by Mercadante, but with the peculiarity of a driller of words. Moreover, his realism has

mythical tones and hues, so much so that Raffaele Nigro has said that if Buttitta could be illustrated by Guttuso, Battaglia can be illustrated by Bruno Caruso.³⁶

Nino De Vita (1950), from Marsala, has been working for several years on a long “novel” in Sicilian verse, of which he has published the first “chapters”: ‘U rui novèmbri r’u sessantarui [The Two of November ‘62] (1989) and *Binirittèdra* (Benedettina, 1991); a poet with a searching eye, he “narrates,” with measured lyricism, places and figures of his childhood and adolescence, pausing on minute details and great existential dramas (Benedettina is a fifteen-year-old girl who dies during an abortion) of the micro-universe of the Stagnone area, with a detachment one might attribute to a biologist or entomologist;

nevertheless the spare, quintessential words of his vocabulary betray a compassion which is as deep as it is contained, and are able to lend an epic greatness to small events, Fatticeddi [Small Events] (1992), of almost rural simplicity. An epic without the “marvelous,” unless one considers in this manner living “day after day,” as Quasimodo would have said. De Vita’s moon has no need of hippogryphs to be reached: children look at it, crouching in a circle in the garden, and listen to one of their friends talk about it: about the whiteness, the spots in the whiteness, the light it gives, the halfmoon. And the game played by the moon as it hides among the clouds. Among them there is also a small blind boy:

And suddenly Martino
stopped me.
“It’s beautiful”

he said "the moon!"³⁷

NOTES

1 cf. F. Vaccina, "L'analfabetismo in Sicilia," in: *Analfabetismo e scuole sussidiarie in Sicilia*, Palermo: Centro Studi Sociali I.S.A.S., 1970, pp.13-45.

2 Fulco, *Estati felici*, Milano: Feltrinelli, 1977, p.183.

3 P.P.Pasolini, *Scritti corsari*, Milano: Garzanti, 1975, pp.225-6.

4 cf. F. Vaccina, op.cit..

5 cf. L. Sciascia, Intr. to: S. Vilardo, *Tutti dicono Germania Germania*, Milano: Garzanti, 1975, pp.5-7.

6 A. Castelli, *Entromondo*, Firenze: Vallecchi, 1967, p.57.

7 cf. F. Brevini, *Le parole perdute — Dialetti e poesia del nostro secolo*, Torino: Einaudi, 1990.

8 cf. S. D'Amaro, "Furtive lingue — I poeti dialettali dell'ultima generazione in Puglia," in: *Rivista italiana di letteratura dialettale*, a.I, n.1, Palermo, April-June, 1991, pp.13-6.

9 J. Vizmuller-Zocco, "Sicilian dialect poetry: A sociolinguistic perspective," in: *Italiana 1988*, Monterey, Ca., pp. 295-6.

10 G. Pascoli, *Pensieri scolastici*, in: *Rassegna scolastica*, II fasc., VI, 16, 1896.

11 F. Brevini, *op.cit.*, p.9.

12 G. Ganci Battaglia, *Storia di Sicilia* (2), Palermo: Denaro, 1965, p.211.

13 F. P. Polizzano, *Ripatriata* (ed. D. Ferraro), Palermo: Kefagrafica, 1990.

14 *ib.*, p.144.

15 L. Pirandello, Preface to: N. Martoglio, *Centona*, (9), Catania: Giannotta, 1948, p.7. Pirandello's text, dated 1921, was written on the occasion of Martoglio's death.

16 cf. A. Di Giovanni, *Lu puviriddu amurusu*, 1st ed., Palermo: Sandron, 1907. Unpublished notes on St. Francis, dated 1923, have been published in: A. Di Giovanni e la poesia siciliana del Novecento (ed. S. Di Marco), Palermo: Centro di Cultura Siciliana "Pitrè", 1988, pp.125-129.

17 cf., S. Groi, *Alessio Di Giovanni*, Mazara: Società Editrice Siciliana, 1948, p.92.

18 cf., V. Arnone, *A. Di Giovanni e la lingua siciliana*, Palermo: ILA-Palma, 1987; S. Cinquerrui, *M. Gori e il mondo contadino mediterraneo*, Firenze Libri, 1986.

19 V. Mercadante Jr., Preface to: V. Mercadante, *Focu di Muncibeddu*, Palermo: Sigma, 1961, p.12.

20 "Preferisco morire ammazzato ma non piego la testa" (V. Mercadante, *op.cit.*, p.145).

21 F. Guglielmino, *Ciuri di strata*, Palermo, Sellerio, 1978.

Previous editions appeared in 1922 and 1949.

22 ib. ("in the world has a file / and never lets go of it").

23 cf., S. Scalia, "Francesco Guglielmino," in: *Operai di sogni* (Acts of the Symposium on Twentieth-Century Poetry in Sicily, Randazzo, 10-12 Nov. 1984), published by the Town of Randazzo, 1985, pp.133-9.

24 cf., S. Pugliatti, "Rileggere il Fante," in: *Vann'Antò: Il fante alto da terra*, Milan: Scheiwiller, 1975, p.VII.

25 M. Sacco Messineo, "La poetica di Vann'Antò," in: *Vann'Antò* (Acts of the Symposium, Ragusa, 23-24, Apr. 1987), Pub. Centro Studi "Rossitto", 1988, Ragusa, p.31.26S. Di Marco, "Cronache palermitane di poesia dialettale," in: *Arenaria*, Palermo, a. III, 1986, n.5-6, p.73. cf. also: S. Camilleri (ed.), *Manifesto della nuova poesia siciliana*, Catania: *Arte e Folklore di Sicilia*, 1989. Ammannato published *Ciumara* in 1936; *Conti Matri* (1945) and, posthumously, *Frutti di mare* (1958); Orsini: *Poesie* (1970) and *Altre poesie* (1976); Tamburello: *Li palori* (1984). Messina selected his "Poesie siciliane" [Sicilian Poems] (1945-55)" (scattered in newspapers and periodicals of the time) in 1986 chronologically.

27 Camilleri was the author of **Sangu pazzu** (1966), *Ritornu* (1966), *18 Jaròfuli* (1979), *Luna catanisa* (1979).

28 S. Di Pietro made his debut in 1936 with *Acqua di*

l'Anapu, followed by: *Alveare* (1947), *Muddichi di suli* (1957), *Tuta di villutu* (1962), *Diu si e fattu di ferru* (1974), *La tratta di li brunni* (1975), *Pueta e tempu* (1984), *Supra righi di zebra* (1988).

29 S. Camilleri, Intr. to: *Manifesto ...*, op.cit., pp.VI-VII.

30 S. Di Marco, "Cronache" ..., op.cit., p.75.

31 c.cf., P. Tamburello, "Salutu", in: *Ariu di Sicilia*, suppl. to n.6 of *Po' t'u cuntutu*, Palermo, 3-31-1954.

32 G. Santangelo, Preface to: S. Di Marco, *Cantu d'amuri*, Palermo: Edizioni del Pitrè, 1986, p.12.

33 A. Cremona, Preface to: S. Di Marco, *Epigrafie siciliane*, Palermo: ILA-Palma, 1989, p.12.

34 T. Vasile, Preface to: S. Di Marco, *Li palori dintra*, op. cit., p.13.

36 R. Nigro, Preface to: G. G. Battaglia, *L'ordine di viaggio*, Catania: Prova d'autore, 1988, p.9.

37 "And suddenly Martino interrupted me./ The moon / is beautifuil, he said!" N. De Vitta, *Fatticeddi*, Trapani, Arti Grafiche Corrao, 1992, p.38.

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A. Noce, *Sicilia, dialetto e poesia*, Catania, 1982.

F. Imbornone, *La Sicilia*, Brescia 1987.

J. Vizmuller Zocco, Sicilian Dialect Poetry: A sociolinguistic perspective, in: *Italiana* 1988, Monterey, CA., pp. 295-6.

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ALESSIO DI GIOVANNI

Alessio Di Giovanni was born in Cianciano, province of Agrigento, on 14 October 1872. His father, Gaetano, added to his profession as notary a careful study of local history and of the island's folklore (he was a valuable collaborator of Giuseppe Pitrè) and left highly regarded works. Such an environment had no little impact on the education of young Alessio, who made his debut in 1886 with the collection *Maju sicilianu*, followed, in 1900, by *Lu fattu di Bbissana* and *Fattuzzi razziusi* [Charming Episodes] and then: *A lu passu di Giurgenti* [Giurgenti's Pass], 1902; *Nni la dispenza di la surfara* [In the Sulfur Mine], 1910; *La campana di Muntisantu* [The Bell of Montesanto], 1917; *Il poema di padre Luca* [Father Luca's Poem],

1935. He collected part of his works in *Voci del feudo* [Voices of the Estate], 1938.

For the Sicilian dialect stage he wrote *Scunciuru* [Entreaty], 1908; *Gabrieli lu carusu*, [The Boy Gabriel], 1910; *Mora mora*, [Die Die] (published with the title *L'ultimi siciliani* [The Last Sicilian] in the vol. *Teatro siciliano*, 1932, which also includes the two preceding plays). His works of dialect narrative are: *La morti di lu Patriarca* [Death of the Patriarch], 1920; *La racina di Sant'Antoni* [St. Anthony's Root], 1939 and, posthumous, *Lu saracinu* [The Saracen].

He taught literature in the Istituto Tecnico "Scinà" in Palermo, where he spent much of his life; having a reserved nature, he avoided worldly and literary salons, preferring the bookstore Reber ai Quattro Canti and his retreats in Franciscan

convents. He contributed to numerous reviews and was a point of reference for the new poets. He died in Palermo December 6, 1946.

He is to be considered one of the greatest Sicilian poets of this century. His work is a blend of social issues and religious sentiment. He was an authentic spokesman for the "voices of the feud": alongside the sorrowful voice of the farmers, there is that of the derelicts of the surfara (sulfur mine), in which the characters of a new Dantean hell are damned when still alive: a "carnàla," "not of the dead but of the living,"¹ a "carcaruni" [large oven] that, at night, "smokes dejectedly," while "over the mountain / the starlit sky widens, / the countryside becomes more mournful."²

Life in the sulfur mine seems to be

located at the limits of reality, between harsh everyday existence and nightmarish hallucinations. Di Giovanni joins the many great Sicilian writers who have left, between the Nineteenth and Twentieth Century, unforgettable pages on the reality of the sulfur mines: from Verga to Pirandello and Rosso di San Secondo, from Navarro della Miraglia to Savarese and Sciascia.

Di Giovanni brought verismo to its extreme consequences with respect to language: it is a poetic language, a stylistic unicum. An extracanonical writing, violently against the grain of the fashion of the time: Luigi Russo considered it anti-lofty, anti-academic, anti-literary. Di Giovanni carried out a further *dérèglement*, displacing in toto Verga's line: from language to dialect. Which amounts to saying: from Verismo to Félibrige, the Provençal movement animated

by Federico Mistral, who waged his Kulturkampf against the centralizing tendency of the French language, which had compressed the patrimony of local culture: one can speak of Di Giovanni as of Sicilian félibre. Verga's revolution ends with Di Giovanni's immersion in dialect, even in prose: see *La morti di lu Patriarca* [The Death of the Patriarch] (1920) and *La racina di Sant'Antoni* [St. Anthony's Grapes] (1939); our Author is the first to have written a novel in the Sicilian dialect. We can't share his opinion that Verga would have achieved "supreme perfection" had he expressed himself in dialect;³ it is useful in understanding the spirit that moved Di Giovanni, it clarifies his conviction that the world of the humble could not be perfectly represented except in their language.

Moreover, in him there is the demand of an art that — in the wake of Impressionist painters — takes place en plein air, not so much for the setting (in this sense, countryside and sulfur mine are equivalent) as for the different way of approaching reality. The Impressionists' experiments on the multiple effects of light on objects, the countless decompositions and recompositions of light, filtered through the myriad aspects of nature, are equated by Di Giovanni with the radical choice of dialect. The rejection of an official language in favor of a "language" with high artistic achievements (at the origins of the former) but having become marginal, corresponds for the Author to the Impressionists' coming out of their ateliers towards the air and the light. It is precisely as a search for air that he justifies his adhesion to dialect. Vincenzo

Arnone relates an episode, reported by Guglielmo Lo Curzio, according to whom Di Giovanni "once stated that a simple couplet of a country tune sung by a humble farmer in a remote road among the fields, (...) was to decide his destiny and turn him into one of the most convinced and obstinate dialect writers, yearning for light and sun even in literature."⁴

Carmelo Sgroi tells of a letter to Lipparini, in which Di Giovanni states that, by choosing dialect, he needed "air air air."⁵ The "langage vernaculaire" that Henri Gobard considers the true "langue maternelle" and "noblesse des peuples," "le droit imprescriptible des ethnies, le droit de naissance linguistique, la marque indélébile de l'appartenance, le scibbloleth irréversible de l'identité fière d'elle même de toute

communauté linguistique..."⁶ it was air Di Giovanni was looking for, even when he was singing of the night in the sulfur mine, under a dark starry sky; limpid air for his poet's voice, even when around the sulfur mine the wind was "poisoned in the valley."⁷

Dialectality that in Di Giovanni is also an expression of spiritual life, which embodied in the myth of meekness (as antithesis to haughtiness), in a franciscan sense, and which takes form in unforgettable figures like fra' Matteo of *A lu passu di Girgenti* [At Girgenti's Pass] or fra' Mansueto from the story *La racina di Sant'Antoni*. Over everyone towers the figure of the Saint from Assisi, the alter Christus, sung ten years after the formidable ode to Christ (1900).

Criticism: G. A. Peritore, *La poesia di*

Alessio Di Giovanni, Palermo 1928; P. P. Pasolini, *Passione e ideologia*, Milan 1960; G. Santangelo, "Alessio Di Giovanni," in *La letteratura dialettale in Italia*, edited by P. Mazzamuto, Palermo 1984; L. Lorenzini, Interpretazione de "La racina di Sant'Antoni" di Alessio Di Giovanni, in *La letteratura dialettale in Italia*, cit..

Notes

1 A. Di Giovanni, *Voci del Feudo*, Palermo: Sandron, 1938, p.87.

2 *ibid.*, p.92.

3 cf. A. Di Giovanni, *L'arte del Verga*, Palermo: Sandron, 1927.

4 V. Arnone, *A. Di Giovanni e la lingua siciliana*, Palermo: ILA-Palma, 1987, p.26.

5 C. Sgroi, *A. Di Giovanni*, Mezzara: S.E.S., 1948, p.92.

6 H. Gobard, *L'alienation linguistique*, Paris: Flammarion, 1976, p.34.

7 A. Di Giovanni, *Voci...*, *op.cit.*, p.92.

Cristu

Misu a lu muru,
Tu mutu mi talii, sdignatu sempri,
Cu dd'occhiu apertu, funnu funnu e scuru.
Chi mi vo' diri?...

Iu, nni li notti longhi di lu 'nvernu,
Quannu stava a lu focu pi sintiri
Li cunti antichi,
Ti vidia jiri sulu pi lu munnu,
O stari a lu ridossu di li spichi,
Sempri cuntenti,
Cu li' capiddi biunni comu meli,
E cu la vucca duci e risulenti.
Appressu a tia.
Mannira spersa senza la campana,
La fudda 'nfuta 'nfuta ca curria.
Orvi e sciancati,
Paralitici, surdi e picciriddi,
Fimmini scausi, o muti o 'ncifarati.
E, piccatura,
La Maddalena, pazza e scapiddata:
O, 'n funnu all'orti, 'mmezzu a la viradura,
Cristo — Dalla parete, / Mi guardi muto e sempre

disdegnoso / Con l'occhio tuo sbarrato, misterioso e fondo.
// Che vuoi dirmi?... / Io nelle lunghe notti dell'inverno, /
Quando vicino al fuoco, stavo ad ascoltare // Antiche
storie, / Ti vedevo andartene solo per il mondo, / o sostare a
ridosso delle spighe, // Sempre lieto, / Con i capelli biondi
come il miele, / E con bocca soave e sorridente, // E dietro a
te, / Dispersa mandria e senza alcun campano, / La folla
assiebandosi accorreva. // Ciechi e storpi, / Paralitici, sordi
e bambini, / Donne scalze o mute o indemoniate. // E,
peccatrice, / La Maddalena pazza e scarmigliata: / O, in
fondo agli orti, tra il verde, //

Christ

From the wall
you stare at me in silence and disdain,
with dark and deep wide open eyes.
What's on your mind?
In past long winter nights,
when I would listen to the ancient tales
by the fire,
I used to see you walking alone in the world
or pausing behind a blade of wheat,
always cheerful
with your honey colored blond hair,
and a warm smile upon your face.
Behind you
like a lost flock without a bell,
the crowd just ran in mass confusion.
The blind and lame,
the crippled and the deaf, and children,
barefoot women, either unspeaking or possessed,
And, sinning
Magdalene, mad with hair unkempt
Or, in the orchard, amidst the greens.

All'umra frisca,
Lavannari e lagnusi, e po' san Petru
A fari cu dda so linia pazzisca,
Dumanni 'ncutti;
E tu, letu e filici, a firiarri
Passannu li nuttati 'nta li grutti
O a lu sirenu ...
Accussì iu di nicu ti sunnavi
Bonu e pacinziusu, o Nazzarenu ...
Vularu l'anni ...
Comu li santi pagini liggivi
Di san Luca. san Marcu e san Giovanni,
Sempri lu stissu
Ti videva passari pi lu munnu,
Sarvaturi di genti e crucifissu...
Ddoppu lu vitti.
'Nta quatri antichi e novi, appitturatu
Cu li vrazzudda stanchi e sdirilitti
Supra la cruci,
O, misu all'umra fitta di 'na ficu,
Jisari, cu li vrazza, la gran vuci,
Carma e putenti.

Mentri la vaddi, a picu di lu sulì,
Vugghia di li testi di li genti.

Alla fresca ombra, / Lavandaie e fannulloni, e poi San
Pietro, / A rivolgerti, con quel suo filo di follia, // Fitte
domande: / E tu, ben lieto, girovagare / Passando le notti
nelle grotte, // O all'aria aperta, / Così, da fanciullo, ti
sognai / Buono e paziente, o Nazareno...// Volarono gli
anni... / Quando le sante pagine io lessi / Di San Luca, San
Marco, e San Giovanni, // Sempre lo stesso / Ti vedevo
passare per il mondo, / Salvatore di genti e crocifisso... //
Dopo ti vidi / In quadri antichi e nuovi, a petto nudo, / Con
esili braccia, stanche e derelitte // Sulla croce, / O seduto
alla densa ombra d'un fico, / Alzare, con le braccia, la gran
voce // Calma e possente, / Mentre la valle, sotto il sole a
picco, / Brulicava di teste. //

(Cont.d)

In the cool shade,
washerwomen and good for nothings, and then St. Peter
asking you a string of questions
with a touch of madness:
and you, pleased and happy, going around
passing the night in caves
or in the open air..
that's the way I used to dream of you,
good natured and patient, O Nazarene...
The years flew by...
As I read the holy pages
of St. Luke, St. Mark and St. John,
always the same
I saw you passing through the world,
a savior of people and crucified...
Afterwards I saw him
in ancient paintings and in new ones, portrayed
with weary and forlorn arms
upon the cross,
or, in the deep shade of a fig tree,
raising his strong voice, with arms outstretched,
calm and powerful,

while the valley, when the sun's highest,
was swarming with people's heads,

O, arricampatu
Nni Marta, stancu, versu lu scurari,
Vidiri l'acqua nni lu siminatu
Càdiri lenta,
Ddà, davanzi a la porta sbarracata;
E unniàri, a lu friscu, li sarmenta,
N' funnu a la cava ...
Marta 'n facenni, Maria, addinucchiuni,
L'arma 'mpinta a li labbra, t'ascutava...
Oh, pi ogni cosa
Avia dd'occhiu amurusu 'na carizza,
Beddu comu 'na pampina di rosa,
Sutta li spini
Di la cruna puncenti, o nni lu mantu
Linnu e strazzatu di li pilligrini!...
'Na sula vota ...
Sempri sempri cci penzu... Nni la chiesa,
Nun si videva mancu 'na divota...
'Mmezzu li navi,
Tracuddava lu sulì, arrussicannu
Lu lignu arraccamatu di li travi.
Dintra lu coru,

Li guirrerri e li santi ca niscianu

Di l'umra, spicchiannu 'mmenzu l'oru.

O, al ritorno, A casa di Marta, stanco, all'imbrunire, /
Guardare la pioggia nel campo di grano, // Cadere lenta, /
Là, davanti la porta spalancata: / E i sarmenti ondeggiare
nella brezza, // Nella bassa valle e fonda... / Marta in
faccende; ma Maria in ginocchio, / T'ascoltava, con l'anima
sospesa tra le labbra. // Oh, per ogni cosa / Aveva lo
sguardo amoroso una carezza, / Bello come un petalo di
rosa, // Sotto le spine / Dell'ispida corona, o entro il manto
/ Sottile e lacero dei pellegrini... // Solo una volta... / Da
sempre lo ricordo... Nella chiesa, / Non si scorgeva neanche
una devota... // Tra le navate, / Il sole tramontava, di rosso
tingendo / Il legno ricamato del soffitto, // Dentro il coro, /
I guerrieri ed i santi sbucavano / Dall'ombra, luccicando in
mezzo all'oro. //

(Cont.d)

or on his return
to Martha's, exhausted, toward evening,
to watch the rain falling slowly
upon the seeded earth,
there, before the wide open door,
while wheat fields wavered in the wind,
Down in the grotto...
Martha doing chores, Mary on her knees,
her soul hanging on her lips, listening to you...
Oh for every thing
he had a loving glance, a caress,
beautiful like the petal of a rose
beneath the thorns
of the pricking crown, or on the robe
thin and torn by pilgrims...
Only once...
I always think of it, in church,
There were no women praying anywhere...
Right through the naves,
the sun was setting, tingeing
the wooden architraves with red.
Inside the chorus

the warriors and saints emerged
from the shadow, glowing through the gold,

'Na lampa 'n funnu.

L'oduri di lu 'ncenzu... ed iu mi 'ntisi
Luntanu, assai luntanu di stu munnu.

Dissi 'nta mia:

"Certu chistu è lu regnu di li 'ncanti!"

'Ntamenti mancu un'arma si sintia.

Quannu jisavi

L'occhi 'nta l'aria e vitti ddu sbennuri,

Cu lu po' diri chiddu ca pruvavi?!...

Tu eri ddà:

Mutu, sirenu, granni, maistusu:

Tu vera luci di l'umanità...

L'aria celesti,

Celesti l'occhju apertu ti lucia,

Mari cujetu e funnu, e li to' gesti

Carmi, sireni,

Dicevanu: "Iu sugnu lu Signuri

Ca 'mparadisu staju, e cu' mi teni

A lu so latu,

È lu Patri di tutti: ddu Diu sugnu

Ca di lu nenti un munnu haju furmatu!...

Ma di lu muru,

Ora cu l'occhju 'nfuscu mi tali:

Assaccaghìa la lampà, e, nni lu scuru,

Una lampada in fondo, / L'odore dell'incenso... e mi
sentii / Lontano, assai lontano da questo mondo. // Dissi
fra me: / "Questo è di certo il regno degl'incanti!" /
Nemmeno un'anima alitava, intanto. // E quando alzai /
gli occhi e vidi lo splendore del tuo volto, / Chi può mai dire
quello che provai?!... // Tu eri là: / Muto, sereno, grande,
maestoso: / Tu vera luce dell'umanità... // L'aria azzurra, /
Azzurro l'occhio aperto ti splendeva, / Mare quieto e
profondo, e i tuoi gesti // Calmi e sereni / Dicevano: "Io
sono il Signore / Che in paradiso sta, e chi mi tiene // Alla
sua destra, / È il padre di tutti: quel Dio sono / Che, dal
nulla, ha creato un mondo!..." // Ma, dalla parete / Ora
con l'occhio fosco tu mi guardi: / Agonizza la lampada, e,
nel buio, //

(Cont.d)

a lamp far down,
the smell of incense...and I felt
so distant, so far away from this world.
I said to myself:
"surely this is the realm of enchantments."
Meanwhile not a soul was stirring.
When I looked up
and saw that splendor on the walls,
who can express what I felt then?
You were there:
silent, serene, great and majestic.
You, the true light of humanity...
The blue air,
your open blue eyes were glowing,
a tranquil and deep sea, and your gestures
calm, serene,
were saying: "I am the Lord
who am in heaven and He who keeps me
by His side
is the Father of all: I am that God
who made a world out of nothing...
But from the wall,

now that you look at me with somber eyes,
the lamp is flickering, and in the dark

'Ntamentri fora,
Lu ventu, c'arrimazza la timpesta,
Grida a lu munnu persu: mora, mora!
Chinu di scantu,
Cu la vuci ca trema puru idda,
Cu lu pettu affannatu di lu chiantu,
Ti gridu e dicu:
— 'Chi è ca penzi? Puru tu, tu puru
Vo' abbannunari stu munnazzu anticu?!
O forsi senti
(Sdisertu e nivi e nivi... e a lu sdisertu,
Vuci d'armali o puru di viventi?)
A ddi mischini
Jittati muribunni a li pirreri,
Misi comu li cani 'a li catini,
E ogni minutu
Ca passa lentu un sèculu, ogni corpu
Di picuni cci conza lu tabbutu.
E, a la campia,
Sulu ca segui la to santa liggi
Un vecchiu granni com'è granni Elia,
Ca, riccu e conti,

Lassannu li ricchizzi: "O matri! o terra!

Iu tornu!" dissi, e li so' manu pronti,

Intanto, fuori, / Il vento che spazza la tempesta, / Urla al mondo smarrito: mora, mora! // Pieno di spavento / Con la voce anch'essa tremolante / Con il petto affannato dal mio pianto, // Ti grido e chiedo: / – Che pensi?!... Pure tu, tu pure / Vuoi mollare questo vecchio putrido mondo? // O forse odi / (Deserto e neve e neve, e, nel deserto, / Voci d'animali oppure di persone?) // Quei derelitti / Gettati moribondi nelle miniere, / Stretti, come cani, alle catene. // E ogni minuto, / Che passa lento è un secolo, ogni colpo, / Di piccone allestisce la loro bara. // E, per i campi, / Solo segue la tua santa legge / Un gran vegliardo com'è grande Elia, / Che, ricco e conte, / Abbandonando ricchezze: "O madre, o terra! / Io ritorno!" disse. E le sue mani pronte //

the wind outside
while sweeping the tempest away
screams at the lost world: let him die, let him die!
Full of terror,
with trembling voice and heaving chest,
breathless for the many sobs,
I say to you, yelling,
“What are you thinking of? You too
want to forsake this ancient ugly world?”
Or maybe you’re listening
(desert and snow, more snow and, in the desert,
voices of animals or living beings?)
to those poor souls
left dying in the sulphur mines,
bound tightly by chains, like dogs.
And every minute
that passes seems a century, each blow
of the pick axe a nail in their coffin.
And in the open fields,
alone following your holy law,
an old man, who’s as great as Elijah,
a wealthy man, — a count —

who says on leaving his wealth: "Oh mother, oh earth!
I am returning to you" and his ready hands,

Lesti e massari,
Su sempri a la picozza, a lu marteddu,
O puru a tavulinu a tramannari
Vuci d'amuri ...
O forsi ascuti vèniri di ddà,
Unni la terra china di lavuri,
'N funnu, luntanu,
Pari tocca lu celu, lu putenti
Cantu di lu pueta americanu,
Forti e piatusu:
"Iu sulu, o crucifissu, ti cumprennu,
Iu sulu sentu ddu jornu gluriusu,
Ca tu vidisti.
Forti e libiru vaju pi lu munnu:
Tutti li razzi viu ca tu chiancisti,
Libiri, aguali:
Cu l'arma, cu lu cori ti salutu
Prufeta di l'amuri universali...
Ma tu 'un rispunni ...
Lu mè pinzeri curri pi la terra
E senti e vidi: la rabbia di l'unni
Sutta un timuni

Biancu di scuma, botti di marteddu

Supra un tabbutu, corpi di picuni

Leste e laboriose, / Stan sempre alla piccozza, al martello,
/ Oppure al tavolo, a tramandare // Parole d'amore... / O
forse odi giungere di là, / Ove la terra, densa di biade, / In
fondo, in lontananza, / Pare che tocchi il cielo, il potente /
Canto del poeta americano, // Forte e pietoso: / "Io solo, o
crocifisso, ti comprendo, / Sento io solo quel glorioso giorno
// Che tu annunciasti, / Forte e libero vado per il mondo, /
Vedo tutte le razze sulle quali piangesti, // Libere, uguali: /
Con l'anima, col cuore io ti saluto, / Profeta dell'amore
universale." // Ma resti in silenzio... / Il mio pensiero vola
per la terra, / E ascolta e vede: la furia dei marosi // Sotto
un timone / bianco di spuma, colpi di martello / Su una
cassa da morto, colpi di piccone //

(Cont.d)

quick and adept,
are always holding an axe, a hammer
or buy on the table leaving sounds of love
for posterity...

Or maybe you are listening from there
where earth, full with protruding shoots
far back, distant

seems to touch the sky, the powerful
song of the American poet,
strong and moving:

"I alone, my crucifix, understand you,
I alone feel that glorious day
that you announced,
strong and free I go in the world;
I see all the races you wept for,
free, equal:

With my soul, with my heart I salute you
prophet of universal love..."

But you do not answer...

My thought races through the earth
and it hears and feels: the anger of the waves
Under a rudder

white with foam, hammer blows
on a coffin, pick axe's blows

Nni 'na pirrera,
Lamenti di carusi, ddi lamenti
Ca pàrinu suspira, e 'na prijera
Scura di morti,
(Su pazzi o carzarati?) e misiràbbili
Morti di fami e friddu, e po' la sorti
Di ddu 'nfilici
Ca lassannu, a la sira, lu travagghiu
Spinci la manu stanca e malidici
Macari a tia ...
Dunca pirchè ti misiru a la cruci
Si l'omu è sempri schiavu, e lu crucìa
Ancora Erodi,
Si Ponziu ancora vivu e, nni lu tempiu,
Scanciu di li mircanti, cc'è cu' godi
li tò 'nnurgenzii?!...
Dammi, o Signuri, un lampu di ssu sguardu,
Dammi vuci di focu e di sintènzii
Pi lu mè cantu ...
E si superbia fu la mè cà jsavi
La menti 'nzina a tia, tu, giustu e santu,
M'ha pirdunari,

Si la parola di ssu sguardu 'nfuscu
lu maluntisi, e tu nun ti sdegnari!...

In una zolfara, / Lamenti di carusi, quei lamenti / Che
paiono sospiri, e una preghiera // Cupa di morte, / (Son
pazzi o carcerati?) e miserabili / Morti di fame e freddo, e
poi la sorte // Dell'infelice / Che, la sera, compiuto il suo
lavoro, / Alza la stanca mano e maledice // Persino te... /
Dunque perché ti posero in croce, / Se l'uomo è sempre
schiavo, se lo affligge // Ancora Erode, / Se Ponzio ancora
vive, se nel tempio, / al posto dei mercanti, c'è chi
scialacqua / Le tue indulgenze?!... / Dammi, o Signore, un
lampeo del tuo sguardo, / Dammi voce di fuoco a maledire,
// Per il mio canto... / E se superbia fu la mia innalzando /
Infino a te il pensiero, tu, giusto e santo, // Perdonami, / Se
la parola del tuo sguardo fosco / Io mal compresi, e tu non ti
sdegnare!... //

(Cont.d)

in a sulphur mine,
children's lamentations, those lamentations
that seem sighs, and a prayer
dark with death,
(Are they mad or imprisoned?) and miserable
people starving and freezing and then the fate
of that unhappy soul
Who at evening time, his workday done,
raises his tired hand and curses
even you...
why then did they put you on a cross
if man is still a slave and he is crucified
still by Herod,
if Pontius is still alive and in the temple,
in place of merchants, men live it up?
Your indulgences?..
Give me, oh Lord, a flash of your glance,
give me voice of fire to damn
for my song...
And if by raising my mind to you
I sinned in pride, you, just and holy,
must forgive me,

if the word of your somber glance
I misunderstood, do not feel scorn...

E quannu l'ura
Di la mè morti veni e, a lu capizzu,
Chianci la figghia mia, cunurtatura
No, nun ni vogghiu,
Ma vogghiu a tia, Signuri, ma cuntenti,
No cu ss'occhi di sdegnu o misu 'n sogghiu,
Mutu e iratu,
Ma duci, comu quannu iu di nicu
Ti vidia stari all'ummira assittatu,
Ccà a ddà muvennu,
L'occhiu azzurru e sirenu ca s'apriva
Comu un'arba d'aprili, appressu jennu
Sempri a la manu
Bianca, ca tu jisavi a binidiciri
L'aria, la terra, lu mari luntanu...

(1900)

"Cristu", Palermo, Sandron, 1905

E quando verrà / L'ora della mia morte, al capezzale, /
Mia figlia piangerà, a consolarmi // Non voglio gente, /
Voglio te, Signore, ma lieto, / Non con occhi sdegnosi o
assiso in trono, // Muto e irato, / Ma soave come quando,
fanciullo, / Ti vedevo seduto al fresco, // Qua e là

volgendo, / L'occhio azzurro e sereno, che s'apriva /
Splendido come un'alba d'aprile, e che seguiva // Sempre la
mano / Bianca, che innalzavi a benedire / L'aria, la terra e
— lontano — il mare...

(Traduzione di Lucio Zinna)

(Cont.d)

and when the hour
of my death comes and my daughter weeps
for me by my pillow, I do not want
any consolation,
I want only you, Lord, now glad,
not with scornful eyes or on the throne,
silent and angry,
hut sweet, just as I used to see you, as a child,
when you sat in the shade of a tree,
moving to and fro
those blue and serene eyes of yours
that opened like a dawn in April, following
the white hand always
raised in benediction
earth and distant sea...

1905

(Translated by Gaetano Cipolla)

VANN'ANTO'

Vann'Antò (pseudonym of Giovanni Antonio Di Giacomo) was born in Ragusa in 1891 and died in Messina in 1960. After receiving a college degree in literature (with a thesis on free verse), in 1919 he began his teaching career, which would bring him, beginning in the academic year 1943-44, to the chair of literature of popular traditions, in the school of literature at the University of Messina. He took part in W.W.I fighting on the Isonzo; this experience inspired his first poems in Italian, later collected in *Il fante alto da terra* [The Infantryman High from the Ground], 1923, followed by the poems in the Sicilian dialect collected in the volume *Voluntas tua*, 1926. His best work in dialect appeared in the period 1955-56 with

the collections 'U vascidduzzu and A picci, alternating, in the same period, the publication in Italian of *La Madonna nera* [The Black Madonna] and *Fichidindia* [Prickly Pears]. He translated Mallarmé's "L'après midi d'un faune" and edited, with philological rigor, *La baronessa di Carini — "Storia" popolare del sec. XVI* [The Baroness of Carini — Popular "Story" of the Sixteenth Century], 1958. As a scholar of popular poetry he published *Indovinelli popolari siciliani* [Popular Sicilian Riddles], 1954; *Gioco e fantasia* [Play and Fantasy], 1956; *La primavera e i dodici mesi dell'anno* [Spring and the Twelve Months of the Year], 1959.

National language and dialect received, in the poetry of Vann'Antò (pseudonym of Giovanni Antonio Di Giacomo, 1891-1960) equal attention, but did not have equal

significance on the esthetic level, because the results of the poet are to be found in his work in dialect. Revealing, in this regard, can be his experience at the front during W.W.I, with which he dealt in two works, one of poetry, *Voluntas tua*, in dialect, the other in prose, *Il fante alto da terra* (1932), in Italian. If in the former Vann'Antò speaks as a man of the people and in the latter he appears as an officer and college graduate, he remains a soldier among the soldiers in the trenches: "High from the ground, this way, towards a little breathing, freedom, I won't hide, infantryman, I won't leave you, I remain an infantryman too."¹

This infantryman, measurable from below, has the same connotations as the farmer. In Sicily, once, the farmer was disparagingly called *pedi 'ncritati*: man with

his feet in the mud, which is a way to measure him in a way diametrically opposed to Vann'Antò's infantryman, even morally. Between the infantryman and the farmer there is a perfect correlation, as *Voluntas tua* and *Il fante* and even 'U *vascidduzzu* (1956) are part of the same project. We will find that infantryman again, after the tragedy of a war whose reasons escape him, in the fields, living his troubles and fantasies and raising the "Harvest Song." 2

In representing his (metahistorical) model of the farmer, Vann'Antò has no bourgeois causes to defend, nor does he share Mercadante's rebellious stance: his farmer does not aspire to any social vindication, because he is wise and is satisfied with little, enclosed as he is in the boundless horizon of his land (and here Di Giacomo anticipates the concept of

isolitudine — different from that of sicilitudine — which emerges in Sicilian poetry in Italian in the Eighties). A feeling of protest against the powerful rises in the poet when the nightmare of a war — of any war — reappears, as in “La cartullina” [The Postcard]: a 1945 poem later included in ‘U vascidduzzu³.

A section of *Voluntas tua* is dedicated to the “Life of the Mines,” to the bitter life of the “pirriaturi” [pick man], as in Di Giovanni.

Vann’Antò’s work shows echoes of the youthful Futurist experience (more evident in *Il Fante*), simmered in the great crucible of that popular wisdom in which are mixed the poet’s two souls: nature and culture, “high” and “low” literature, reality and myth, science and naïveté. Into that crucible flow

the experiences of the Futurists and *La Voce*, Hermeticism and Symbolism, the Vestru of Guastella (Ragusa, 1819-1899) and the Parisian Mallarmé's "L'après midi d'un faune" (which Vann'Antò translated).

His poetry made good use of rhythms and cadences of folksongs, which lend so many of his compositions an air both magical and disenchanted, between reflection and playfulness.

Criticism: R. Spongano, *Poesia di Sicilia*, in *Il Baretto*, November 1927; P. P. Pasolini, *Passione e ideologia*, cit.; A. M. Cirese in "Letteratura", July-August 1954; A. Piromalli, Vann'Antò, in *I contemporanei. Letteratura italiana*, IV, Milan 1974; *I poeti del Novecento*, edited by F. Fortini, Bari 1977; S. Orilia, in *Inchiesta sulla poesia. La poesia contemporanea nelle regioni d'Italia*, Foggia

1979.

1 Vann'Antò, *Il fante alto da terra*, Messina: Principato, 1932, p.10.

2 cf. Vann'Antò, *Voluntas tua*, Rome: De Alberti, 1926, p.88.

3 cf. Vann'Antò, *'U vascidduzzu*, Messina, Il Fondaco dell'OSPE, 1956. The poet was inspired by a revolt caused in Ragusa 1-6-1945 by the draft order for even those returning from the lager, to take part in the war against the Germans in Italy; the revolt was attributed at times to the separatists at times to the Fascists, but it was "only an outpouring of grief, a desperate cry against war itself." (p.16)

M'ama la bella mia

“ — M'ama la bella mia, sempri m'arriri:
quannu vuògghiu, rispunni a la ciamata. — ”

“ — A la mia bella ci manca la firi,
nun ci po' crirri, no, ri quantu è amata. — ”

“ — La mia bella è 'nu specciu, ca t'ammiri
e la to' fiura c'è sempri stampata... — ”

“ — La mia gioia si viri e nun si viri:
e primavera 'n mienzu a l'invernata. — ”

“ — Iu vincii ni la ddutta ri l'amuri
ccu 'n attu ri curaggiu, cuomu fa
(vitti e sparau) lu bravu cacciaturi. — ”

“ — L'anima mia tenaci aspetta: sa
ch'è cciú vivu l'affettu nel duluri
cuomu la fiamma ni l'oscurità! — ”

da: Voluntas tua, 1926

La mia bella mi ama — “ — La mia bella mi ama, sempre
mi sorride: / quando voglio, risponde al mio richiamo. — ” /
“ — In me non ha fede la mia bella, / non può credere, no,
quanto sia amata. — ” // “ — La mia bella è una specchio in
cui t'ammiri / e trovi sempre impressa la tua immagine. — ”
/ “ — La mia gioia si vede e non si vede: / è primavera
anche in pieno inverno. — ” // “ Io vinsi nella lotta

dell'amore / con un atto di coraggio, come fa / (vide e
sparò) il bravo cacciatore. — " // " — L'anima mia tenace
attende: sa / ch'è più vivo l'affetto nel dolore / come la
fiamma nell'oscurità!"

(Traduzione di Lucio Zinna)

My Beauty Loves Me

“My beauty loves me, always smiles at me;
she answers when I call her all the time.

“My beauty lacks one thing: belief in me;
she can't believe how much I truly love her.”

“My beauty is a mirror where you can
admire your image always present there.”

“My joy is visible and yet is hidden:
it's springtime in the the midst of winter.”

“I conquered in the struggle against love,
through a courageous deed, exactly like
the expert hunter who just saw and fired.

“My stalwart soul is waiting for it knows
that love is stronger when there's suffering,
just like a flame that's burning in the dark.”

(Translated by Gaetano Cipolla)

L'urtima guerra

Cu ntê càmmini ca cumànnanu
(cuomu rici lu muttu anticu)
e li puòpuli ca si scànnanu!
l'un all'àutru e pirchì? nnimicu,
basta rìciunu la patria:
basta sièmu piècuri stùpiti
tinti piècuri testa calata
Ca ci attocca fari li lupi,
ni pigghiàù la gran fuddia
ca cciù miegghiu a l'ucciria!
mmarditti puopuli e cu ni cuverna,
ca nun c'è cciù riliggioni:
nun cririèmu a la vita eterna
e curriemu a la distruzioni!
ni sduffammu ri la campata
ca finù giustizzia e amuri
e finissi testa tagghiata
lu stissu munnu lu stissu sulì,
fussi morti ri ntunnu nsumma
quantu spara l'urtima bumma!
quantu fussi l'urtima guerra
e addiu gioia la matina

ca ti susi e aruri la terra,
biniritti ri l'acquazzina
macci e sciuri e lu laùri

L'ultima guerra — I re in camera che comandano / (come dice il proverbio antico) / ed i popoli che si scannano! / l'uno all'altro e perchè? nemico, / basta dicano la patria: / basta siamo pecore stupide, / tristi pecore testa-piegata / che gli tocca fare da lupi, / presi dalla gran follia / che al macello meglio sia! // maledetti popoli e chi ci governa, / chè non v'è più religione: / non crediamo alla vita eterna / e corriamo alla distruzione! / siamo stufi della vita, / chè finì giustizia e amore, / e finisse "testa-mozzata", / lo stesso mondo, lo stesso sole, / fosse morte totale insomma / pur che scoppi l'ultima bomba! // purchè sia l'ultima guerra / e addio gioia la mattina / quando sorgi e adori la terra, / benedetti dalla rugiada / alberi e fiori e il grano /

The Last War

There are men in chambers who give orders
(as the old saying goes)
and people slaughter one another. Why?
Because they're enemies,
all that they need to say is "Motherland."
Enough! We're all a herd of stupid sheep,
who go about with heads low to the ground,
forced to behave like wolves.
We have been touched by a mad thought
that at the slaughterhouse we would be better off.
Curse on the people and on those who govern,
for we no longer have religion;
we don't believe in the eternal life
and we run after our destruction;
we are fed up with living
because justice and love have disappeared.
So let the world end, its head chopped off,
let the sun die too
so there will be death all around
provided the last bomb explodes,
provided that it be the last war...
and good bye to joy when in the mornings

you rise and admire the earth,
trees and flowers blessed by the dew
and wheat that grows aided by eager looks

crisci crisci misu n-caminu
ca l'uòcci ellu arrìrunu sulì
priparàmuni a lu fistinu,
addiu gioia, quantu mi piaci
se cci fussi giustizia e paci!
paci e pani ca nun ammanca,
ca fai lonca la iurnata
quannu scura e truovi ianca
la tuvàgghia bedda strâta,
ccu li figghi 'ranni e nichì
ca cci arrìrunu li rienti
la ricòita fu di spichi
beddi cini e si' cuntenti,
cciu cuntenti a lu nnumani
paci santa ri lu pani!
pani ri lu santu acquistu,
pani ca si cci travàgghia
pani cu fu Gesù Cristu
e nascìu m-mienzu la pagghia,
battutu, fracillatu:
pani ca quantu custàu,
ccu sururi ri sancu varagnatu

ccu sururi ri morti e risuscitau,
pani gloriusu r'amuri
pani ri vera paci e reranturi!

via cresce cresce messo in cammino / che gli occhi ecco
ridono soli, / prepariamoci al festino! / addio gioia... quanto
mi piaci / se ci fosse giustizia e pace! // pace e pane che
non manca, / che fai lunga la giornata, / quando è scuro e
trovi bianca / già la tavola apparecchiata (la tovaglia bell'e
distesa), / coi figliuoli grandi e piccoli / che gli ridono i
denti, / il raccolto è stato di spighe / belle piene e sei
contento, / più contento l'indomani: / con la pace santa del
pane! // pane del santo acquisto, / pane che ben ci
travaglia, / pane che fu Gesù Cristo / e nacque in mezzo
alla paglia, / fu battuto, sfracellato: / pane che quanto è
costato, / con sudore di sangue guadagnato, / con sudore di
morte e risuscitava, / pane glorioso d'amore, / pane di vera
pace e redentore! //

(Cont.d)

let us prepare ourselves for the feast.
Good bye joy. How happy I would be
if there were peace and justice.
Peace and bread who are sufficient,
who make our days grow long
when the day comes to an end and you find
the tablecloth gleaming white upon the table
with the children young and grown
with smiles showing through their teeth,
the harvest brought heavy sheaves
filled up with grain and you're glad,
even gladder the next day
for the peace of the bread.
Bread for the holy gain,
bread that kneads us,
bread that was Jesus Christ,
who was born in the hay,
beaten and flayed;
bread that cost so much,
earned with the sweating of blood,
the sweat of death and was reborn,
glorious bread of love,

bread of true peace and redeemer!

ca n'avissimu a ssittari
tutti a tàvula cumuni,
senza Làzzaru ncaddari
e so frati riccu Epuluni,
ca nun c'è nè to' nè miu:
nun si mància pani arrubbatu!
pani è di l'omu e Diu:
nè, ca cciuttuostu morri, nsancunatu!
pani ca siemu frati beddi unuti,
frati l'unu ccu l'autru ca s'aiùtinu.
Cusì fussi e cusì sia,
prima ca sona l'urtima ancunia!
da: 'U vascidduzzu, 1956

che dovremmo sedere / tutti a tavola comune, / senza
Lazzaro temere / e il fratello ricco Epulone, / chè non v'è nè
tuo nè mio, / non si mangia pane rubato! / pane è
dell'uomo e Dio: / nè, chè morir piuttosto, insanguinato! /
pane che siamo fratelli belli uniti, / fratelli che s'aiutano l'un
l'altro. // Così fosse e così sia, / prima che suoni l'ultima
agonia.

(Traduzione dell'Autore)

(Cont.d)

We should sit around
a single table all together,
without fear of Lazarus
and his wealthy brother, Epulon,
for there's neither mine nor yours.
We do not eat stolen bread,
bread belongs to man and God;
nor should it rather die stained with blood
bread because we are all brothers,
brothers helping one another.
That's how it should be, amen,
before the last agony is heard.
(Translated by Gaetano Cipolla)

La cartullina

Cci mmannarru e la cartullina
a n-surdatu muortu.

A n-surdatu muortu

cci mmannarru la cartullina!

La cartullina e di riciamu

quannu hâ-ssìri c'hâ-ssìri guerra:

quannu hâ-ssìri c'hâ-ssìri guerra:

tutti pronti a lu riciamu...

La matruzza e finìu ri ciànciri

ppi lu figghiu c'avìa muortu:

caru figghiu ch'è beddu muortu!

La matruzza finìu ri ciànciri.

da: 'U vascidduzzu, 1956

La cartolina — Hanno mandato la cartolina / a un
soldato morto. / A un soldato morto / hanno mandato la
cartolina! // La cartolina di richiamo / quando per forza
dev'essere guerra: / quando per forza dev'essere guerra, /
tutti pronti al richiamo... / La povera madre ha smesso di
piangere / per il figlio ch'era morto: il caro figlio ch'è bello e
morto! / La povera madre ha smesso di piangere.

(Traduzione di Lucio Zinna)

The Postcard

They sent the postcard
to a dead soldier.
To a dead soldier
they sent the postcard.
The postcard was a draft notice
when war is a must,
when war is a must
all able-bodies ready for the draft...
The poor mother ceased her weeping
for her child who has been killed,
a dear son who's dead and gone.
The poor mother ceased her weeping.
(Translated by Gaetano Cipolla)

L'arcunè

(Arrarrò)

Les enfants sont tout l'horizon

Oh cchi beddu arcu r'amuri,

oh cchi beddu tricculuri

ca sciu fora l'arcunè:

pani vinu e uògghiu cc'è!

Tricculuri ri la paci,

Pruvirezza ca si cumpiaci

e n'ammustra l'arcunè:

pani vinu e uògghiu cc'è.

Lu dillùviu ca finù,

torna e arriri sulì ri Diu

ca fa n cielu l'arcunè :

pani vinu e uògghiu cc'è!

Ca finù timpesta e guerra

e s'abbrazzanu cielu e terra,

si furmau e l'arcunè:

pani vinu e uògghiu cc'è.

Arcunè ri paci e d'amuri

lu cciù miegghiu tricculuri,

tricculuri ri l'arcunè:

pani vinu e uògghiu cc'è!

da: 'U vascidduzzu, Messina, Il Fondaco, 1956

L'arcobaleno (Girotondo) – Quant'è bello arco d'amore, /
quant'è bello tricolore! / fuori l'arco-di Noè: / pane vino ed
olio c'è. // Tricolore della pace, / Provvidenza che si
compiace / mostra l'arco-di Noè: / pane vino ed olio c'è. //
Ché il diluvio ecco finito / torna il sole di Dio e ride, / l'arco
è in cielo di Noè: /pane vino ed olio c'è. // Ché finì
tempesta e guerra / e s'abbracciano cielo e terra, / fanno
l'arco-di-Noè: / pane vino ed olio c'è. // Arco di pace arco
d'amore / ch'è il più bello tricolore, / dentro l'arca di Noè /
pane vino ed olio c'è.

(Traduzione dell'Autore)

The Rainbow

Les enfants sont tout l'horizon
What a beautiful rainbow of love;
What a beautiful tricolor
The rainbow has appeared,
now we've bread, and wine and oil.
Tricolor of peace,
Providence that's pleased
and shows us the rainbow:
now we've bread, wine and oil.
The deluge has all ended.
God's sun has begun to smile again,
drawing a rainbow now in the sky:
now we've bread, and wine and oil.
Storm and war are at an end,
earth and sky are now embracing
and the rainbow has appeared:
now we've bread, and wine and oil.
Rainbow of peace and love
the best tricolor of them all,
the tricolor of the rainbow:
now we've bread, and wine and oil.
(Translated by Gaetano Cipolla)

IGNAZIO BUTTITTA

Ignazio Buttitta was born on September 21, 1899 in Bagheria (Palermo). As a boy he helped his mother in the grocery shop. In 1916 he is drafted and fights on the Piave. Having returned home in 1920, he goes back to work in the store. In 1922 he founds in his town a club named after the socialist Filippo Turati; he takes part in a popular revolt against local taxes. In 1925 he publishes his first small volume of dialect poetry, *Sintimentali* [Sentimental] (with a preface by G. Pipitone Federico) and in 1928 the love song *Marabedda*. In this period, he edits with Ganci Battaglia the dialect poetry review *La Trazzera*, which will be shut down by the Fascist regime shortly after. The poet moves to Milan, where he starts a business activity:

his aim is to achieve a certain financial well-being that will allow him to devote himself exclusively to poetry. But the outbreak of W.W.II thwarts his plans. In 1944 he fight with the partisans; the following year he is arrested by the Fascists (he was later saved by the Allies). Back in Sicily again, he finds his storehouses looted and is forced to return to Milan, where he takes up his business again. Thanks to the interest of his fellow-townsman Renato Guttuso, he meets Vittorini and Quasimodo. In 1954 he publishes *Lu pani si chiama pani* [Bread Is Bread], which is followed by: *Lamentu pi Turiddu Carnivali* [Lament for the Carnival], 1956; *La peddi nova* [The New Skin], 1963; *La paglia bruciata* [Burnt Straw], 1968; *Io faccio il poeta* [I Am a Poet], 1972; *Poeta in piazza* [Poet in the Square], 1974; *Le pietre nere* [Black

Stones], 1983.

Having attained some financial security with his business, in 1970 the poet had moved back to Sicily for good, devoting himself only to poetry. He lives in Aspra, in a villa he owns, a stopover for scholars and admirers.

After his debut in 1925 with *Sintimintali* [Sentimental] and *Marabedda* in 1926, Ignazio Buttitta's (1899-) poetics is more clearly defined in the decade 1945-55; to this period, in fact, belong the texts that reveal the social commitment characteristic of much of the poet's work: *A la stragi di Purtedda* [The Massacre of Portella], 1947 and *Lamentu d'una matri* [A Mother's Lament], 1953, modeled on the rhythms of popular songs, which present moments of crude realism, whose function is to involve, ideologically

and emotionally, the people who — implicitly or explicitly — are always his privileged interlocutors; the poet soon takes to the piazzas, recovering an archaic orality, spurred by the very use of dialect. In 1954 he published *Lu pani si chiama pani* [Bread Is Bread], with Italian translation by Salvatore Quasimodo and drawings by Renato Guttuso.

In “*La Paci*” [Peace] he stigmatizes the immense tragedy of war, exalting socialism and Christian solidarity. The flag of his political faith is as red as Christ’s tunic¹, who one day will come down from the cross and will take with him “poor mothers” and “landless peasants” and will drive the merchants from the temple.²

This palingenetic impulse is totally absent from the work of poets — popular and

populist — who had freed themselves from the Arcadian sirens of old Meli. The poet, a man at the same time like other men and different from them, lives the life of everyone, but with a particular sensibility that makes him a thief — Buttitta had written in one of his poems — because he goes among his fellow men, sinks his hands in their hearts and opens everyone's brains / like a pomegranate / and sucks their thoughts."³

Buttitta rather assimilates the craft of the poet to that of the peasant, who writes in the earth as the poet writes in the minds. If *poeta nascitur*, the refinement of the *tèkne* lets him reach high summits: "one is born a poet but also becomes one."⁴ On the strength of these potentials and achievements, the poet can leave furrows in

human minds: if poetry means romantic mawkishness — “the dangling moon” — he does not consider himself a poet and isn’t; he is a poet if he can “call in basements and caves / people who are lost, abandoned and broken.”

In 1956 he published *Lamentu pi Turiddi Carnivali* [Lament for Turiddu Carnevale], in octaves, in which the death at the hand of the Mafia of the Sicilian union leader is sung with fiery, sorrowful tones, as in Lorca’s famous *Llanto for Ignacio Sanchez*, but on classical foundations: from the *chanson de geste*. And in it mingle the ballads of ballad singers and *Jacopone’s laude*.

1963 is the year of *Lu trenu di lu suli* [The Train of the Sun], on the drama of emigrants, and the collection *La peddi nova* [The New Skin], in which the poet, in the

face of the new conditioning caused by the nuclear threat, raises a song of hope, so that men will not give up: the day of liberation will come; in such a wait, the poet wants to wear "a new skin" and instill new life to his song, dispelling any disheartenment.

In *La paglia bruciata* (1968), in addition to recounting the story of the Cervi brothers, exemplum of his social and political commitment, the poet retraces the stages of his existence: he looks into himself and observes human passions. Here and there, he adopts the expressive patterns of narrative poetry, a bit like Pavese's *Lavorare stanca*, but in his own way. And he also goes from certain satirical tones of the previous works to the comical and grotesque, while his poetry becomes more elaborate and indulges in a few catchy plays on words; his poetry becomes more cultured and less spoken,

more allusive. His vision of life has not changed, but he senses the possibility of different viewpoints in observing it and interpreting it; whether or not consciously, Buttitta's poetry contains both Zeno's paradox and the relativism of Gorgias and Pirandello.

In *Io faccio il poeta* [I Am a Poet] (1972), one notes a particular attention to the drama of the Sicilian people, deprived of its potential for self-realization, oppressed by ancient and new dominations, frustrated in its ideals by a rigged Risorgimento (a tragic example of which is the occurrence at Bronte) and by corrupt politicians, who have surrendered it to the oppression of the Mafia. A history of robberies, the last of which, the most serious, is that of dialect: a people is not enslaved as long as it has a language, it becomes "poor and enslaved"

and loses all hope only when it is robbed of it. The poem “Lingua e dialettu” is the highest, most heartfelt expression of Buttitta’s art.

Il poeta in piazza [The Poet in the Piazza, 1974] betrays the rethinking which took place in the West after the news of Stalin’s purges and the pressure put by the Soviet regime on dissident writers. The poet reaffirms his faith in socialism: not in the one embodied by a regime or the dictatorship of the party, but in the one that can be born, one day, if men learn to change from within, if they will be able to bring out their inner selves: it is no use to have a new suit with old sentiments or to have money in the bank and no books in the house.

With *Le pietre nere* [Black Stones] (1983) Buttitta returns renewed to the roots of his

poetry, to his first collection, *Sintimentali*; stressing the lyrical-elegiac aspect, his poetry now becomes poetry of memory: black stones are the bitter memories that have become stratified. Buttitta is no longer the poet in the piazza: he is old and his villa in Aspra is visited y journalists and poets, he is considered a wise man. But he is sad: he does not fear death, but solitude saddens him; even his hope for a better world — always steadfast — seems to be waning: pursued by haste, men seem to him ghosts or talking machines, “puppets of fog”: they have lost their blood and voice. Now the poet can contemplate The Mystery and ask the great question asked by men of all epochs, the same as Leopardi’s shepherd: who am I and where do I come from. And conclude that mystery is life’s greatest, most beautiful dream: it is poetry.

Criticism: V. Pandolfi in *Teatro siciliano*, Palermo 1961; L. Sciascia, Preface to *La peddi nova*, Milan 1963; C. Salinari in "Vie nuove", July 11, 1963; W. Pedullà in *Avanti*, March 21, 1963; N. Tedesco, *Ignazio Buttitta e il mondo popolare siciliano*, Palermo 1965; P. P. Pasolini in *Scritti corsari*, Milan 1975; G. Contini, Pref. a *Pietre nere*, Milan 1983.

Notes

1 I. Buttitta, *Lu pani si chiama pani*, Roma: Edizioni di Cultura Sociale, 1954, p.26.

2 cf. I. Buttitta, *Lu pani...*, op.cit., p.101.

3 I. Buttitta, "Pueta e latru," in: *Ariu di Sicilia*, supplement to *Po't'u cuntù*, n.8, Palermo, 4-30-1954.

4 Dedication to L. Zinna, dated 2-12-1983, written on the title page of: I. Buttitta, *Prime e nuovissime*, Turin: Gruppo Editoriale Forma, 1983.

5 I. Buttitta, *Lu pani...*, op.cit., p.10.

Lu sceccu

Lu puvireddu porta la catina
Ed iddu picuruni la susteni.
'Mbardatu di la sira a la matina
Di lu mulinu fa lu vani e veni;
Lignati sempri scippa 'nta la schina
Di lu patruuni, ca di supra teni;
'Na ritinata avi quannu arragghia,
Un puncicuni s'iddu si gattigghia,
Porta li spichi e si mancia la pagghia,
Avi di lu furmentu la canigghia.
'Cussì è lu povireddu chi travagghia,
Trattatu cu lu lignu e cu la brigghia,
'Nte cannarozza ci àvi la tinagghia,
E 'nta lu saccu la brusca e la strigghia.
E 'nta li spaddi intera la quatrigghia
Di principi, di conti e di prilati,
Chi sucanu lu sangu di li gigghia
Macari a l'orbi e puru a li malati.
'Cussì è fatta sta tinta famigghia,
'Cussì li puvireddi su trattati.
(1922-24)

da: Prime e nuovissime, 1983.

L'asino — Il poveretto trascina la catena / e quello,
pecorone, la sostiene./ Bardato, dalla sera alla mattina, /
dal mulino fa avanti e indietro: / busca sempre legnate nella
schiena / dal padrone, che tiene in groppa. // Si prende un
colpo di redini se raglia, / una pungolata se si gratta, /
porta le spighe e si mangia la paglia, / del frumento, non ha
che la crusca. // Così è il poveretto, che lavora, / trattato
con il legno e con la briglia, / alla gola lo stringe una
tenaglia, / e nel sacco la brusca e la striglia. // E sulle spalle
intera la quadriglia / di principi, di conti e di prelati, / che
dagli occhi succhiano il sangue / persino ai ciechi, anche
agli ammalati. / Così è fatta questa malvagia famiglia, / così
sono trattati i poveretti.

(Traduzione di Lucio Zinna)

The Ass

The wretch drags the chain
and the dumb ass bears it,
harnessed from dusk till dawn
to the mill, back and forth —
a thrashing is the rule
as the boss strides the rump.
Bray, the bridle will slash,
paw, the spurs will grind,
tote wheat, but straw
and chaff is what you eat.
Such is the lot of the wretch
under the whip and rein,
his neck, under the yoke,
groomed with a curry comb
and trampled by the procession
of kings, nobles, prelates
drawing blood from the eyes
of the poor, blind and infirm.
Ecce “the family of man” —
evil’s the wretch’s lot.

(1922-24)

(Translated by by Justin Vitiello)

Epigrafi a "La Trazzera"

1

Ancòra, semu ancòra li Sicani,
Però nni scurri russu 'ntra li vini
l'anticu sangu di li Saracini,
c'adduma comu voschira e vurcani!

2

Ogni cori di Sicilia
è vurcanu quannu adduma,
e lu sangu di li vini
un marusu senza scuma!

3

Stirpi nostra, stirpi antica
di mill'anni e cchiù 'nnarreri;
si lassastivu li casi,
li campagni e li trazzeri
riturnastivu cantannu
comu fannu li guerrereri!

(1927-34)

da: Prime e nuovissime, 1983.

Epigrafi a "La trazzera" — 1 — Ancora, siamo ancora i
Sicani, / però ci scorre rosso nelle vene / l'antico sangue dei
Saraceni, / che svampa come boschi e vulcani.

2 – Ogni cuore di Sicilia / è vulcano quando s'accende, /
e il sangue nelle vene / è maroso senza spuma.

3 – Stirpe nostra, stirpe antica / di mille anni e ancor di
più: / se lasciaste le case, / i campi e le trazzere / ritornaste
cantando, / come fanno i guerrieri!

(Traduzione di Lucio Zinna)

Dirt Road Epigraphs

1.

Still, we're still Sicans
but there flows in our veins
ancient blood of Saracens
bursting like forests, volcanos.

2.

Every Siculo-heart's
a volcano when it ignites
and the blood in our veins
is breakers without foam.

3.

Our stock, ancient stock —
millennial — if not older —
perhaps you left your home,
your fields and dirt roads
but you came back singing
just like warriors do!

(1927-1934)

(Translated by Justin Vitiello)

Non sugnu pueta

Non pozzu chiànciri
ca l'occhi mei su sicchi
e lu me cori
comu un balatuni.
La vita m'arriddussi
asciuttu e mazziatu
comu na carrittata di pirciali.

Non sugnu pueta;
odiu lu rusignolu e li cicali,
lu venticeddu chi accarizza l'erbi
e li fogghi chi cadinu cu l'ali;
amu li furturati,
li venti chi strammianu li negghi
ed annèttanu l'aria e lu celu.

Non sugnu pueta;
e mancu un pisci greviu d'acqua duci;
sugnu un pisci mistinu
abituatu a li mari funnuti:

Non sono poeta — Non posso piangere, / ho gli occhi
secchi, / e il mio cuore / è una pietra pesante. // La vita
m'ha ridotto / arido e spezzato / come una carrettata di
brecciamme. // Non sono poeta; / odio l'usignolo e le cicale, /

il venticello che carezza l'erba / e le foglie che cadono con
l'ali; / amo le bufere, / i venti che disperdono le nuvole / e
puliscono l'aria e il cielo. // Non sono poeta, / ma
nemmeno un insipido pesce d'acqua dolce; / sono un pesce
selvatico / abituato ai mari profondi. //

I'm Not a Poet

I cannot weep
my eyes are dry
and my heart is one
heavy stone.
Life has ground me —
arid, broken —
I'm a cart of gravel.
I'm not a poet
hate warblers and crickets
zephyrs kissing grass
leaves wafting to earth —
no, I love squalls
winds routing clouds
to flush sky and air.
I'm not a poet
no fresh-water fish —
I'm gamey (not bland)
and schooled in deep seas.

Non sugnu pueta
si puisia significa
la luna a pinnuluni
c'aggiarnia li facci di li ziti;
a mia, la menzaluna,
mi piaci quannu luci
dintra lu biancu di l'occhi a lu voj.

Non sugnu pueta
ma siddu è puisia
affunnari li manu
ntra lu cori di l'omini patuti
pi spremiri lu chiantu e lu scunfortu;
ma siddu è puisia
sciògghiri u chiacciu e nfurcati,
gràpiri l'occhi a l'orbi,
dari la ntisa e surdi
rumpiri catini lazzi e gruppa:
(un mumentu ca scattu!)...

Non sono poeta / se poesia significa / la luna che pende
/ e impallidisce le facce / dei fidanzati; / la mezzaluna mi
piace / quando splende / dentro il bianco dell'occhio / del
bue. // Non sono poeta; / ma se è poesia / affondare le

mani / nel cuore degli uomini che soffrono / per spremere
il pianto e lo sconforto; / ma se è poesia / sciogliere il cappio
agli impiccati, / aprire gli occhi ai ciechi, / dare l'udito ai
sordi, / rompere catene e lacci e nodi: / (un momento che
scoppio)... //

I'm not a poet
if poetry means
the crescent that looms
to pale lovers' glances —
no, give me hooked blades
glinting in whites of eyes
of oxen on the block.
I'm not a poet —
but if poetry's
sinking hands to touch
hearts in agony
and ex-press their grief
and despair — then
if it's poetry to
undo their nooses
make the blind see
make the deaf hear
break chains, bonds, knots
(wait, I'm about to burst) . . .

Ma siddu è puisia
chiamari ntra li tani e nta li grutti
cu mancia picca e vilena agghiutti;
chiamari li zappatura
aggubbati supra la terra
chi suca sangua e suduri;
e scippari
du funnu di surfari
la carni cristiana
chi coci nto nfernu:
(un mumentu ca scattu!)...
Ma siddu è puisia
vuliri milli
centumila fazzuletti bianchi
p'asciucari occhi abbuttati di chiantu;
vuliri letti moddi
e cuscina di sita
pi l'ossa sturtigghiati
di cu travagghia;
e vuliri laterra
un tappitu di pampini e di ciuri
p'arifriscari nta lu sò caminu

li pedi nudi di li puvireddi:

(un mumentu ca scattu!)

Ma se è poesia / chiamare nelle tane e nelle grotte / chi
mangia poco e veleno inghiotte; / chiamare gli zappatori /
curvati sulla terra / che succhia sangue e sudore; / e
strappare / dal fondo / delle zolfare / la carne cristiana /
che cuoce nell'inferno: / (un momento che scoppio!) ...//
Ma se è poesia volere mille / centomila fazzoletti bianchi /
per asciugare occhi gonfi di pianto; / volere letti morbidi / e
cuscini di seta / per le ossa storciolate / di chi lavora; / e
volere la terra / un tappeto di foglie e fiori / che rinfreschi
lungo il cammino / i piedi nudi dei poveri: / (un momento
che scoppio!..) //

if it's poetry to summon
from holes and caves
those who swallow
little more than poison
to summon peasants bent
like hoes over furrows
that suck sweat and blood
to excavate from sulphur-
mines human flesh
condemned to cook in hell
(wait, I'm about to burst) . . .
if it's poetry to dream
one-thousand, one-hundred
thousand white kerchiefs
to daub swollen eyes
to dream soft beds
and silk pillows for
the wrenched bones of workers
and imagine the earth is carpet
of leaves and flowers
where naked soles of the poor
cool off on their journey

(wait, I'm about to burst) . . .

Ma siddu è puisia
fàrisi milli cori
e milli vrazza
ed abbrazzari matri puvireddi
sicchi du tempu e da malipatenza,
senza latti nte minni
e lu nutrìcu mbrazza:
quattr'ossa stritti
nta lu pettu assittatu d'amuri:
(un mumentu ca scattu!)...
datimi una vuci putenti
ca pueta mi sentu:
datimi un stinnardu di focu,
e appressu a mia li schiavi di la terra,
na ciumara di vuci e di canzuni:
li strazzi all'aria,
li strazzi all'aria,
assammarati di chiantu e di sangu.

1954

da: Io faccio il poeta, 1982.

Ma se è poesia / farsi mille cuori / e mille braccia / per
stringere povere madri / inaridite dal tempo e dalla

sofferenza / senza latte alle mammelle / e col bambino in
braccio: / quattro ossa strette / al petto assetato d'amore: /
(un momento che scoppio!)... /datemi una voce potente /
perché mi sento poeta: / datemi uno stendardo di fuoco /e
mi seguano gli schiavi della terra, / una fiumana di voci e di
canzoni: / gli stracci all'aria /gli stracci all'aria / inzuppati
di pianto e di sangue.

(Cont.d)

if it's poetry to sprout
a thousand hearts and arms
to squeeze wretched mothers
withered by time and suffering
denied milk in their teats
for their babes in arms —
their skin and bones taut
against a breast parched for love
(wait, I'm about to burst) —
then give me the power of words
so I'll know I'm a poet —
give me a firebrand —
the wretched of the earth's —
in floodtides of voices and songs
brandishing their rags
brandishing their rags
steeped in tears and blood . . .

(1954)

(Translated by Justin Vitiello)

Lingua e dialettu

Un populu
mittitilu a catina
spugghiatilu
attuppatici a vucca,
è ancora libiru.

Livatici u travagghiu
u passaportu
a tavula unni mancia
u letti unni dormi
è ancora riccu.

Un populu,
diventa poviru e servu
quannu ci arrobbanu 'a lingua
addutata di patri:
è persu pi sempri.

Diventa poviru e servu,
quannu i paroli nun figghianu paroli
e si mancianu tra d'iddi.

Mi nn'addugnu ora,
mentri accordu a chitarra du dialettu
ca perdi na corda lu jornu.

Mentri arripezzu

a tila camuluta
chi tisseru i nostri avi
cu lana di pecuri siciliani.

Lingua e dialetto — Un popolo, / mettetelo in catene /
spogliatelo / tappategli la bocca, / è ancora libero. //
Toglietegli il lavoro / il passaporto / la tavola in cui mangia
/ il letto in cui dorme / è ancora ricco. // Un popolo /
diventa povero e servo, / quando gli rubano la lingua /
ereditata dai padri: / è perduto per sempre. // Diventa
povero e servo, / quando le parole non generano più parole
/ e si mangiano fra di esse. / Me ne accorgo ora / mentre
accordo la chitarra del dialetto, / che perde una corda al
giorno. // Mentre rattoppo, / la tela parlata / che tesserono
i nostri avi / con lana di pecore siciliane. //

Language and Dialect

Take a people
put it in chains
strip it raw
bung its mouth —
it's still free.

Deny it work
a passport
a place to eat
a bed to sleep in —
it's still rich.

A people gets
poor and slavish
only if robbed of the tongue
issuing from its source.

It gets poor and slavish
when its words are sterile
and devour each other.

(I realize now, tuning
my dialect lute, that
it loses one string per day
as I patch up
the worm-eaten tapestry

our ancestors wove
with good Sicilian wool.)

E sugnu poviru:
haiu i dinari
e non li pozzu spènneri;
i giuelli
e non li pozzu rigalari;
u cantu,
nta gaggia
cu l'ali tagghiati.

Un poviru,
c'addatta nte minni strippi
da matri putativa,
chi u chiama figghiu
pi nciuria.

Nuàtri l'avevamu a matri,
nni l'arrubbaru;
aveva i minni a funtani di latti
e ci vèppiru tutti,
ora ci sputanu.

Nni ristò a vuci d'idda,
a cadenza,
a nota vascia
du sonu e du lamentu:

chissi non nni ponu rubari.

E sono povero: / Ho i denari / e non li posso spendere; /
i gioielli / e non li posso regalare; / il canto, / nella gabbia /
con le ali tagliate. // Un povero, / che poppa nel seno arido
/ della madre putativa, / che lo chiama figlio / per ingiuria.
// Noialtri l'avevamo la madre, / ce l'hanno rubata ; /
aveva le mammelle a fontane di latte / e ci bevvero tutti, /
ora ci sputano. // C'è rimasta la sua voce, / la cadenza, / la
nota bassa / del suono e del lamento: / questi non ce li
possono rubare. //

No doubt, I'm poor:
I do have cash
but cant spend it
do have jewels
but cant dump them
have a song —
in a cage —
with clipped wings —
like a poor man sucking
at the withered teat
of his putative mother
who calls him "son" —
as if it was a nickname.
Once we had a mother
but she's been kidnapped —
her breasts were milk fountains
where we all drank . . .
(Now, we just spit.)
And yet we still have
her voice, the cadence,
that deep low note
of the music, the wail —

no one can rob that.

Nni ristò a sumigghianza,
l'annatura,
i gesti,
i lampi nta l'occhi:
chissi non nni ponnu rubari.
Non nni ponnu rubari,
ma ristamu poviri
e orfani u stissu.

1970

da: Io faccio il poeta, 1982.

C'è rimasta la somiglianza, / l'andatura, / i gesti, / i
lampi negli occhi / questi non ce li possono rubare. // Non
ce li possono rubare, / ma restiamo poveri, e orfani lo stesso.

(Traduzione di Lucio Zinna)

And we still have the
resemblance and
the gestures,
the flash in the eyes —
no one can rob that.
No, they cannot but
we're still dirt poor —
orphans just the same.

(Translated by Justin Vitiello)

SANTO CALÌ

Santo Calì was born in Linguaglossa, on the slopes of Mt. Etna, November 18, 1918. He studied in Rome, where he received a degree in literature. Having joined the army during W.W.II, after returning from the Greek front he devoted himself to teaching (he taught classical literature in high school) and political struggles, siding with day laborers and farmers. He was a city councilman and was even put to trial for his political passion.

His poetic works are: *Mungibeddu*, 1947; *Fрати Gilormu*, 1966; *Canti Siciliani*, 1966; *Répitu d'amuri pi la Sicilia*, 1967; *Josephine*, 1969; they were later collected in the two volumes entitled *La notti longa* [The Long Night], published in 1972 by the Centro

Studi Santo Calì.

He was also a keen essayist, and has left a vast body of critical work, among which: *Folklore etneo* [Etnean Folklore] 1959; *La pazienza dei contadini* [The Patience of Farmers], 1959; *Cento lire al giorno per morire di fame* [One Hundred Lire a Day to Die of Hunger], 1962; *Frate Feliciano da Messina, il Raffaello dei Cappuccini*, 1968.

He was included in Mondadori's anthology *Le parole di legno. Poesia in dialetto del 900 italiano*, 1984, edited by Mario Chiesa and Gianni Tesio.

He died in his Linguaglossa the night between the 15th and 16th of December, 1972.

For Santo Calì (1918-1972), the Linguaglossa dialect — the language of his hometown — becomes his idiom and the

idiom of his land: ancient and new, its virginity constantly reborn, like the houri of Mohammed's paradise; he inserts jargon, current and obsolete expressions, digging deep to bring back to light linguistic vestiges of Sicilian history. A language of the underclass that, taken back to its roots, turns out to be more cultured than he had imagined. Rosario Contarino has spoken of the linguistic stance of Calì's poetry as "a memorial residue, almost a language of childhood, of the archaic, of the mother," at the same time definable "as a recovery of the living dialect (though the patrimony of a minority) on which can be brought to bear the shaping action of the cultured craftsman."¹

The dialectized insertions, derived more from foreign languages (brisci, slippinu, giubbòx, tenchiù, etc.) than from Italian,

have entered common usage and been assimilated into Sicilian, according to an ancient tradition of the Sicilian people, as it had happened with Greek, Latin, French, Spanish, Arabic.

In his search for a national Sicilian identity, Calì looks to Arabian civilization, more than the Magna Grecia, also in homage to the economic and cultural splendor the island experienced under Arabian domination. Saraceni di Sicilia [Saracens of Sicily] are the men of his land; this, writes Giuliano Manacorda, "is something more than a metaphor, it is a real link of history, blood, names, (...) it is the option for the marginalized part of his people."²

In Calì there is a true process of identification: "My name is, if memory serves, Abdùl Kaly'. I was born in Linguaglossa, on the sulphurous slopes of

Mongibello, October 21, 1918. Or 1128. Or maybe 1848. here in the Islamic island, devastated by the springs of the Prophet, the centuries don't count, time slides imperceptibly over the Mediterranean, without any sense. Here everything is Arabian. Even the cramps in an empty stomach..."³

To the typology of the "Saracen" belong the characters of Calì's poetic world. As for example Ciccio Bagongo, Frate Gilormo, the narrative voice of *Lu lamentu cubbu pi Rocca Ciravula* [The Solemn Lament for Rocca Ciravula] and all the "sgranci," [crabs] like Yossiph Scyrin of the omonymous posthumous ballad, written this time in an Italian that both assimilates and parodies the expressive patterns of the neo-formalism of the Sixties, with a strong undercurrent of irony. Master Giuseppe Cirino, from the

county of Màsqalah in Sicily, becomes — having emigrated to Kansas City, Detroit, Los Angeles — Mr. Yossiph Shyrin Abdùl Nàsseri Idrisi; his story affords the poet the opportunity to fire broadsides against neocolonialism (“you are free to choose the type of slavery you want”), but also against the exponents of Gruppo 63 in Sicily and the most celebrated Sicilian writers and poets of the time, accused of receiving honors and profit from the cultural establishment, target of the Antigruppo, which he had joined.

Calì's work is a great poem of love and death. The eros finds his most significant exempla in the splendid lyrics of the “corpus” devoted to Jajita Azzola (Blue Agate: the name given by the poet to a passionate love he had in his mature years), pervaded by a constant sentiment of death. Thanatos, present in many texts and

particularly in the famous *Lamentu cubbu pi Rocca Ciravula*, becomes heartrending (and even redeeming) in the *Jajita "corpus."*

It should be noted that Calì's work, with the exception of the youthful sonnets of *Mongibeddu*, in the late Forties, becomes dense and impetuous between 1966 and 1972, the year of his death. He published, in an incessant creative fervor: *Frati Gilormu* [Fra Gilormo], 1966, divided into 7 mysteries and final litany for St. Francis, in Sicilian hendecasyllables, in which are narrated the simple miracles of the Friar, in a tone suspended between the apocryphal Gospel and the *Fioretti*, with echoes of *Di Giovanni*; *E un dialu arreri a ogni zappinu* [A Devil Behind Every Pine Tree], 1966, the story of the woodsman *Ciccio Bagongo*, of his crazy wife and of Master *Venere* who gets 14 years for stealing some firewood plus two for

having made fun of justice, harsh with the poor (not with the private guards who lord it, while their crimes go unpunished): a theme that interested Verga and Vito Mercadante; *Canti Siciliani* [Sicilian Songs], 1969. a poem about emigration and distant love, in a France never really visited but realistically depicted; Yossiph Shyrin (1971).

Criticism: B. Piccitto, in *Corriere di Sicilia*, June 23, 1967; L. Sciascia – V. Di Maria, *Almanacco siciliano*, Catania 1971; L. Patanè, Preface to *La notti longa*, Linguaglossa 1972; M. Cavallaro, *Santo Calì un uomo scomodo*, Catania 1979; *Santo Calì*, Yossiph Shyrin, anthology edited by N. Scamacca, Trapani 1980; *Santo Calì, Acts of the Convegno Nazionale di Studi*, Linguaglossa, 16-19 December 1982.

Notes

1 R. Contarino, *Santo Calì*, in: *Novecento Siciliano*, Vol.I,

Catania: Tifeo, 1986, pp.250-51.

2 G. Manacorda, Intr. to: S. Calì, *Yossiph Scyrin*, Trapani-New York: Coop. Ed. Antigruppo Siciliano & Cross-Cultural Communications, 1980, p.19.

3 S. Calì, *Saraceno di Sicilia*, in: G. Manacorda, op.cit., p.19.

4 S. Calì, *Yossiph Scyrin*, op.cit., p.50.

Mi chiamastiru albiru di paci

Supra la sciara, ammenzu a li jinestri
fracchi di suli, alivu millinariu
sugnu stancu di cantu a lu sdisertu.
La me vuci evi filu di jirmana
ca nta la timpa giarna a marzu assuma
'n silenziu p''un svigghiari sgranci morti
a lu carruggiu stagghiatu.

Ogni ciura
di San Petru ca sboccia apri mimoria
di storia senza tempu,
e nta lu truncu
fràcitu e mascu accanzu chiantu leggiu
di cunigghia c''un volunu mangiari.
Mi chiamastiru albiru di paci
e a Pasqua mi scancastiru li rami
pi nzupparili d'acqua biniditta
e nta li mani di li vostri figghi
nnuccenti spampanai zagara bianca.
Scunurtanza di lampa allammicusa
supra l'artariu maggiuri civava
ùmmiri oscuri a risciugari lacrimi
nta l'occhi di la Matri Addulurata.

Mi chiamaste albero di pace — Sopra la sciara, in mezzo
alle ginestre / magre di sole, ulivo millenario / sono stanco
di canto nel deserto. // La mia voce è stelo di segale / che
sul poggio di creta a marzo sale / in silenzio per non
risvegliare granchi / morti nella secca forra. / Ogni fiore /
di San Pietro, che sbocci apre memoria / di storia senza
tempo, / e dentro il tronco / tarlato e cavo colgo un pianto
lieve / di conigli che disdegnano l'erba. // Mi chiamaste
albero di pace / e a Pasqua mi staccaste i ramoscelli / per
inzupparli d'acqua benedetta // e nelle mani dei vostri
bimbi / innocenti feci sbocciare zagara bianca. // Sconforto
di lucerna affievolita / sull'altare maggiore alimentava /
oscure ombre a rasciugare lacrime / negli occhi della Madre
addolorata. //

A Tree of Peace is What You Called Me Once
Above the lava rocks, amidst the broom
withered by sun, I, ancient olive tree,
am weary of the singing in the desert.
My voice is but a stalk of lowly rye
that grows in silence on the yellow hills
not to awaken crabs who've died inside
dried up canals.
And each Saint Peter's bud
that blossoms unfolds a memory

of timeless history,
and in the hollow,
worm eaten trunk I hear the soft lament
of rabbits who refuse to feed themselves.
A tree of peace is what you called me once.
At Easter time you came and broke my branches
to soak them in the water blessed by God.
And in the hands of your unblemished children
I let white orange blossoms come to bloom.
— Distressing sight of a poor lamp aflickering —
I fed dark shadows on the central altar
to dry the tears of our own Mournful Mother.

Mi chiamastiru albiru di paci,
cci cuncijastiru frunti a l'addevi
cu l'ogghiu santu di la sapijenza,
linfa di la me linfa, e ad ogni stizza
ca pirculava supra testa viva
d'angilu, mi sinteva sciaminari
frummiculi d'amuri nta lu civu
di la radica longa,
l'erba chiara
svampava svolu sirenu di quagghi
di la me frunna azzola.

A disidderiu
di celu si turcevanu li vrazza.
Accostu a lu me truncu sbarruatu
si nni vinni a prijari Gèsu Cristu
dda notti di sintenza.

Misu 'n trattu
prijava amaramenti, e la so frunti,
ahiahi, dda notti, ci sudava sangu
trùbbulu; nta li celi s'astutavanu
li stiddi ad una ad una...

A li me rami

ogni aliva na lacrima di sangu,
e la prijera brivisciu lamentu:
— O Patri, alluntanatimi stu calici!

Mi chiamaste albero di pace, / ne ungeste le fronti alle
creature / con l'olio santo della sapienza, / linfa della mia
linfa, e a ogni stilla / che percolava sopra testa viva /
d'angelo, mi sentivo brulicare / formiche d'amore nel
midollo / della lunga radice, / l'alba chiara / sereno
accendeva uno svolio di quaglie / dalla mia fronte azzurra.
/ A desiderio / di cielo si torcevano le braccia. // Accanto
al mio tronco sgomento / se ne venne a pregare Gesù Cristo,
/ in quella notte di sentenza. / Agonizzante / pregava
amaramente e la sua fronte / ahiahi, quella notte, trasudava
sangue / torbido; nei cieli si spegnevano / le stelle ad una ad
una... / Ai miei rami / ogni oliva una lacrima di sangue, / e
la preghiera si mutò in lamento: / — O Padre, allontanatemi
questo calice! //

(Cont.d)

A tree of peace is what you called me once.
You did anoint the foreheads of your children
with my own sacred oil of worthy wisdom,
lymph of my lymph, and then for every drop
that fell upon the living head of an angel
I felt inside the depths of my deep roots
an ant like stirring of love.

The clear dawn
out of my blue forehead kindled a serene
whirring of quails.

My arms were writhing
in longing for the sky.

Then Jesus Christ approached my frightened trunk
that night of sentence passing and he prayed.

In agony he prayed with bitterness
and on his forehead, wretched me, there flowed
the sweat of clouded blood. The stars were losing
their brightness one by one...

And on my limbs
each olive was a tear stained red with blood;
his prayer had become a lamentation:

— Oh Father, keep this cup away from me! —

Mi chiamastiru albiru di paci,
e l'ogghiu cci arrubastiru a la lampa
di la Crèsia di Cristu, cci asciugastiru
cu pizzàngulu cùviu di minnitta
e d'odiju mplacabili la frunti
sirena a li nutrigghi battijati,
passa la guera cu schigghia di lupo...
Supra la sciara, ammenzu a li jinestri
fracchi di suli, alivu millinariu
sugnu stancu di cantu a lu sdisertu,
li me fogghi d'argentu si varijanu
nta 'n suspiru ca mori a luci tènnira
di basciura,
palummi manzi sonanu
campani 'n sonnu pi la me 'unia.
Mi chiamastiru albiru di paci.

da: La notti longa, 1972

Mi chiamaste albero di pace, / e rubaste l'olio alla lucerna
/ della Chiesa di Cristo, e rasciugaste / con uno straccio
cupu di vendetta / e di odio implacabile la fronte / serena ai
lattanti battezzati, / passa la guerra con ululi di lupo... //
Sopra la sciara, in mezzo alle ginestre / magre di sole, ulivo

millenario, / sono stanco di cantare nel deserto, / le mie
foglie d'argento si corrompono / in un sospiro che muore in
luce tenera / di crepuscolo, / miti colombe suonano /
campane in sonno per la mia agonia. // Mi chiamaste
albero di pace!

(Traduzione di Lucio Zinna)

(Cont.d)

A tree of peace is what you called me once
and then you stole the oil out of the lamp
from Christ's own church, and then you dried,
— using a rag completely drenched in vengeance
and unforgiving hatred — the sinless forehead
of baptized children at the mother's breast.
War passes overhead with shrieks of wolves.
Above the lava rocks, amidst the broom
withered by sun, I, ancient olive tree,
am weary of the singing in the desert;
my silver leaves become all brittle
in sighs that die in the soft light of afternoon.
Tame doves peal bells asleep for my own agony.
A tree of peace is what you called me once.
(Translated by Gaetano Cipolla)

Cuntava stiddi e peni, peni e stiddi

Quannu jù moru vènicci a Schisò
nta na notti d'austu comu a chista,
ca li schigghi allimati di l'ojetra
a la luna cci perciunu lu cori.
Lu mari agghica di luntanu e sbroma
rèpiti longhi d'amanti ammucciati
sutta linzoli d'àlichì di sita
e mentri l'ascutamù, ahiahi, lu pedi
s'affunna nta la rina
e non putemu
cchiù fujiri e pir chistu n'abbrazzamu,
ni strincemu, mpazzuti, ni mplicamu,
stanchi ni pircantamu nta la rina
a 'scutari la storia di lu mari.
E lampari ca scociunu tunnina.
Quannu jù moru venicci a Schisò
nta na notti d'austu comu a chista,
jisa la canna e attizzacci la vita
nta l'occhìu a lu palàmitu firutu
ca sbattulìa supra la ribba giarna
e ribbugghi di sangu la scumazza.
E lampari ca scociunu tunnina.

Contava stelle e pene, pene e stelle — Quando io sarò
morto, torna a Schisò / una notte d'agosto come questa, /
quando gli stridi acuti del gabbiano / trafiggono la luna
fino al cuore. // Il mare viene da lontano, esala / gemiti
lunghi d'amanti nascosti / sotto lenzuola di seriche alghe /
e mentre li ascoltiamo, ahiahi, il piede / affonda nella rena /
e non possiamo / più fuggire e per questo ci abbracciamo, /
ci stringiamo impazziti, trasfusi, / stanchi ci incantiamo
sulla riva / ad ascoltare la storia del mare. // E lampare che
abbagliano tonnina. // Quando sarò morto, torna a Schisò
/ una notte d'agosto come questa / alza la canna e rinfocola
la vita / nell'occhio del palamito ferito / che si dibatte sulla
riva gialla / e la schiuma ribolle del suo sangue. // E
lampare che abbagliano tonnina. //

I Counted Stars and Woes, Woes and Stars

When I am dead, come see me in Schisò
and on a night like this, in August,
when the screeching of the seagulls
pierces even the heart of the Moon.
The sea comes to the shore from very far
and takes long sighs like those of lovers hiding
beneath some sheets of silken algae
and while we're listening, ahi, ahi, our foot
sinks in the sand
and we cannot escape
and for this reason we embrace, we hold
each other madly, and we fuse into one
exhausted we're transfixed upon the sand
listening to the history of the sea.
And lamps meanwhile uncover hiding tuna.
When I am dead, come see me in Schisò
on a night like this, in August,
raise your pole high and give life back
to the spent eye of the wounded fish,
thrashing about upon the yellow shore,
staining the boiling foam with blood.
And lamps meanwhile uncover hiding tuna.

Quannu jù moru venicci a Schisò
nta na notti d'austu comu a chista
a chianciri lu chiantu di li stiddi
ca tummanu nta l'acqua arrisagghiata
a nova spirlucenza,
allaricannusi,
macchia d'oggiu assajata di cardùbbuli.

E lampari ca scociunu tunnina.

Sulu nta la pupidda to gilestri
la Puddara è mimoria di lu celu!

Quannu jù moru venicci a Schisò
nta na notti d'austu comu a chista,
a sparmari la trizza sutta un ramu
di calìppisu,
a sentiri la vuci

nostra ca mpiducchiata nta li fogghi
tesci fulinia spana di silenziu
ca si sciogghi a riciatu di gricali.

E lampari ca scociunu tunnina.

Quando io sarò morto, torna a Schisò / una notte
d'agosto come questa / a piangere il pianto delle stelle / che
piombano nell'acqua abbrividita / di nuova rilucenza, /

spargendosi, / macchia d'olio assalita dalle vespe. // E
lampare che abbagliano tonnina. // Solo nella cilestrina tua
pupilla / sono le Pleiadi memoria di cielo! // Quando io
sarò morto, torna a Schisò / una notte d'agosto come
questa, / a sciogliere la treccia sotto un ramo / d'eucaliptus,
/ ad ascoltare la voce / nostra che impigliata tra le foglie /
tesse una ragnatela di silenzio / che si dissolve a fiato di
grecale. // E lampare ch abbagliano tonnina. //

(Cont.d)

When I am dead, come see me in Schisò
on a night like this, in August,
to cry the tears of stars that fall
upon the waters chilled by a new brightness,
an expanding oil slick attacked by bees.
And lamps meanwhile uncover hiding tuna.
Only inside your blueish pupil are
the Pleiades a memory of sky.

When I am dead, come see me in Schisò
and on a night like this, in August,
let down your tresses underneath a branch
of eucalyptus,
and listen to our voice
which weaves a web of silence, stuck on the leaves,
dissolving in a breath of North east wind.
And lamps meanwhile uncover hiding tuna.

Quannu jú moru vènicci a Schisò
nta na notti d'austu comu a chista
ca ntra lu scàttiu di lu manzijornu
a ntunari la brogna nta la vampa
di lu suli miriù.

Ricogghi tutti

li pisci di lu mari pi cuntaricci
tra na risata e n'otra la storia
di ddu pazzu d'amanti, c'ogni sira
a ribba di lu mari di Schisò,
abbrazzatu cu tia, o Jàjita Azzola,
cuntava stiddi e peni, peni e stiddi.
E lampari ca scociunu tonnina!

da: La notti longa, 1972

Quando io sarò morto, torna a Schisò / una notte
d'agosto come questa, / o quando arde il meriggio / a
sentire conchiglie nella vampa / del sole a picco. / Raduna
tutti / i pesci del mare per narrare / tra un riso e l'altro la
storia / di quell'amante folle che ogni sera / sulla riva del
mare di Schisò / abbracciato con te, Agata Azzurra, /
contava stelle e pene, pene e stelle. // E lampare che
abbagliano tonnina!

(Traduzione di Lucio Zinna)

(Cont.d)

When I am dead, come see me in Schisò
and on a night like this, in August,
or when the sun is highest in the sky
to listen to the sound of seashell
in the heat of noon.

And gather all the fish
swimming in the sea to tell them
between a laughter and another, the story
of that fool lover who each night upon the beach
in Schisò, embracing you, my blue Agatha,
counted stars and woes, woes and stars.
And lamps meanwhile uncover hiding tuna.
(Translated by Gaetano Cipolla)

Non riciata a la Chiana filu d'erba

Eri musica jazz, Azzola, swing
e rock,
assustu di la notti e rantulu
di lu jornu,
risata di surgiva
ca sgriccia supra coculi a la ribba
di San Marcu d'Alunziu,
pruvulazzu
di stiddri a zuttijata di libbici
dintra cannitu trivulusu,
nanfara
di bizzocca ca scudduria rusarii
di litanii davanti a la cappella
di lu Bamminu di Praga,
tracò
straddatu a picca a picca,
baju musciulu
di cagnola,
lamentu e schigghiatina
di pruvenza ca mmesti cerza,
e abbrami
di ramagghia ca sciodda sbarruannusi

d'ariu,

Non alita alla piana filo d'erba — Eri musica jazz,
Azzola, swing / e rock, / affanno della notte e anelito / del
giorno, / risata di sorgiva / zampillante sui ciotoli alla riva /
di San Marco d'Alunzio, / polvere / di stelle come sferza di
libeccio, / tra un canneto di triboli, / voce nasale / di
pinzocchera che sgrana rosari / e litanie davanti alla
cappella / del Bambino di Praga, / ruvido panno, /
stracciato a poco a poco, mugolio, / di cagnetta in foia, /
strisciante lamento / di maestrale contro la quercia, / e
schianto, / di ramaglia che si franga inebetita / d'aria, /

Not a Blade of Grass Is Stirring

You were jazz music, Azzola, swing
and rock,
breathlessness of night
and daylight longing,
laughter of the wellspring
gushing over pebbles to the shore
of San Marco d'Alunzio,
stardust
lashing like the southwest wind
through a canebrake of troubles,
the nasal twang
of a pious churchgoer saying rosaries
and litanies before the chapel
of the Child of Prague,
a rough cloth
torn bit by bit,
yelping
of pups,
slithering groan
of the mistral against the oak tree,
and the crash
of snapping brushwood, drunken

with air,

bisbigghiu di pispisa,
currula
cu cardarella di pirciali,
chiantu
duci d'addreva nta la naca,
antica
dolenza a giugnu di caranci...

Ed ora

non riciata a la Chiana filu d'erba !

da: La notti longa, 1972

bisbiglio di cutrettola, / carrucola / con cardarella di
pietrisco, / pianto, / dolce di bimba nella culla, / antica /
dolenza delle rane a giugno... / Ed ora / non alita alla Piana
filo d'erba!

(Traduzione di Lucio Zinna)

(Cont.d)

whispering of wagtails,
pulley
lifting a bucket of crushed stones,
sweet
weeping of a child inside her cradle,
ancient
suffering of the frogs in June...
And now
not a blade of grass is stirring in the Clearing.
(Translated by Luigi Bonaffini)

PAOLO MESSINA

Paolo Messina was born January 2, 1923 in Palermo, where he lives. During W.W.II he served as an officer pilot; having returned to Sicily at the end of 1943, he devoted himself to poetry and theater. He was an active member of the Group Alessio Di Giovanni, taking part in the renewal of dialect poetry in the decade 1945-55. He is the author of the following plays: *Il muro di silenzio* [The Wall of Silence], 1959; *Il progetto* [The Project], 1964; *Le ricamatrici* [The Weavers], 1968; *Ypocritès*, 1970; *Le isole* [The Islands], 1971; *Armonia delle sfere* [Harmony of the Spheres], 1985; of these, *Il muro di silenzio* and *Le ricamatrici* have been translated into various foreign languages and performed by first-rate companies. He

collected his dialect poetry from the period 1945-55 in a book entitled *Rosa fresca aulentissima*, 1985. He has published several essays, among which: *Puisia siciliana* [Sicilian Poetry], 1988, and *L'essere della poesia* [Poetry's Being], 1980.

In the volume *Rosa fresca aulentissima. Poesie siciliane* (1945-1955), published in 1985, Paolo Messina collected a selection of his "Sicilian poems" which had partly appeared in newspapers, reviews and anthologies in the decade indicated in titolo, with the aim of attesting his contribution to the "avant-garde" experience which in those years saw some of the Sicilian poets gather in Palermo around the Group "Alessio Di Giovanni," of which Messina himself, twenty-years-old at the time, had been an active member. The texts included in the collection avail

themselves of an enlightening, preface by the author, where he evokes moments and motivations of that period, in which a solid groundwork was laid for the renewal of poetry in Sicilian.

It was 1943, the year of Sicily's "liberation," when, Messina writes, " a few dialect poets began to meet almost daily in order to compare their human and artistic experiences, which until that moment (namely from Fascism to the war) had been impossible."¹

Harking back to the lines by Quasimodo's "And how could we ever sing \ with the foreigner's foot upon our heart...?", Messina observes that "foreigner or not, the foot upon the heart, in Sicily, was felt more heavily after 1860, when the ideals of the Risorgimento (...) were betrayed and in a language that descended from the same

branch as that of the Sicilians, whose poetic school had inaugurated our first literary civilization,"² and this was also due to the conservative political class that ruled the island.

Messina notes how the problem of the national language soon became an obsession for our literature historians, "as if the fate of the nation depended on a more widespread linguistic homogeneity,"³ with the resulting clear opposition of the official culture to the dissolving action of dialects; in this climate the resistance offered to Verga's writing becomes clear; Fascism will accentuate what can be called a "southern question" of literature, condemning the heresies of dialect.

When in 1943 that first nucleus of poets began to gather, the need for a process of

disalienation was virtually mature: "It was necessary to move — Messina notes — from a poetry, so to speak, that preyed on the people, the "humble," to one that was constructed and sung with the very voice of the people,"⁴ advancing toward a deeper understanding of the "measure of dialect" and breaking with the tradition of dialect poetics, in the direction indicated by Di Giovanni, but going beyond it.

Besides heeding the lesson that came from the aula of Frederick II, those poets prefer to look "elsewhere" for their masters: from Baudelaire and Valéry to the surrealists.

In October 1944 the society of writers and artists of Sicily, presided by Federico De Maria was founded in Palermo, with periodic meetings in the Yellow Hall of the Politeama. In 1946, the year of Di Giovanni's

death, that first nucleus of poets formed a group and took on the Master's name. There were no manifestos or apparatus criticus, although a few traces can be found in local publications. In 1955 the Group published an anthological volume *Poesia dialettale di Sicilia*, with an introductory comment by G. Vaccarella and texts by Ammannato, Buttitta, Conti, Varvaro, Grienti, Messina, Molino, Orsini, Tamburello. In 1957, in the Roman review *Il Belli* edited by Mario Dell'Arco, Vann'Antò defined *neòteroi* the new poets, Sicilian like himself.

Messina defines the Group's main points as follows: development and adoption of a Sicilian *koinè*; syntactic and metric freedom in favor of expressive power; unity of thought, language and reality, in a Sicilian perspective of life and art.⁵

Paolo Messina's poetry, as it emerges

from the texts collected in the aforementioned volume, constitutes a valuable exemplum of that historical climate. The engagement, not shouted or proclaimed, is rather to be found in the effort to make poetry “a song of the people” (and not a “popular song”), that is to say, living lyric expression of a land and its people, in a new language, capable of showing how the linguistic instrument adopted could be bend and molded, in an upward tension. A kind of poetry in which one can't find anything superfluous or any self-indulgence towards folklore. To be sure, the zabbàri or Sicilian carts are still there, but the way of treating them is new, just as certain views of the landscape never give in to an oleographic descriptivism, while pressing are the problems of the self, the passing of time, the thirst for freedom, the

search for infinity (and this is also new).

The text in *ouverture*: "Sicily," from 1945, is still structured in quatrains with alternate rhymes, but new are rhythm and assonance, with a concinnitas that indicates how the voice of the Hermetics and Symbolists has already been assimilated in a personal way. The same happens in the sonnet "Passaggi" [Passages], from 1947, characterized by metaphors which are fresh and unusual with respect to tradition: "mocking eyes, "white sleep." To the same year belongs "Ura ca passa" [Passing Hour], with which the poet leaves behind traditional metrics and turns to free verse, in full maturity. With "respiru d'un ciuri" [Breathing of a Flower] the choice is definitive.

Criticism: P. Mazzamuto, *La mafia nella letteratura*, Palermo 1970; P. Longo, in

L'Achenio, Palermo, n.7-10, 1985-86.

Notes

1 P. Messina, *Rosa fresca aulentissima. Poesie siciliane (1945-1955)*, Palermo: Officine Grafiche del Mediterraneo, pp.5-6.

2 *ibidem*, p.6

3 *ibidem*, pp.6-7.

4 *ibidem*, p.11.

5 *ibidem*, pp.15-16.

Ura ca passa

Si chiantu è st'ura
ca passa e mi punci
iu m'acquazzinu di tempu.

Si junci
vuci pi st'àspiri
praj senza ciuri
mi ridi la luna
e mi vesti di biancu.

E zichi zachi d'umbri
ariu di notti
cu passu d'erva
arrassu
portu li giomma
d'un abitu dimisu
'n contraluci.

1947

da: Rosa fresca aulentissima - Poesie siciliane, 1985

Passerà quest'ora — Se pianto è quest'ora / che scorre e
mi punge / io m'imbrino di tempo. / Se giunge / voce per
queste aspre / plaghe senza fiori / mi ride la luna / e mi
veste di bianco. / E zig-zag d'ombre / aria di notte / con
passo d'erba / lontano / porto i fiocchi / d'un abito

disinno / in controluce.

(Traduzione di Lucio Zinna)

An Hour Transpires

If this hour, transpiring
stings me — lachrymose —
I suffuse with time's dew.

If a voice crosses
these bitter
flower-barren spaces
my moon laughs
decks me white.

In zig-zags of shadows
night air
far off
ripples of grass
I bear the tufts of
some incongruent habit —
in silhouette.

(1947)

(Translated by by Justin Vitiello)

Rispiru d'un ciuri

Càlici biancu
silenziu
crisciutu supra un jiditu
sentu ca s'asciuca lu risinu
ca ti vagnò li manu.
Nun è lu ventu c'annaca
stu ciarmu tutt'aduri
ma un amuri ca passa
cchiù lentu
cchiù sulu
pi 'na vina di celu.
Accussí tutt'apertu
rispiri lustru e ciauru:
iu mi sentu
spuntari 'ntra lu pettu
un jardinu di stiddi.

1948

da: Rosa fresca aulentissima - Poesie siciliane, 1985

Respiro d'un fiore — Calice bianco, / silenzio / cresciuto
su un difo / sento asciugare la rugiada / che ti bagnò le
mani. / Non è il vento che dondola / questo fiato tutto
odore / ma un amore / che passa / più lento / più solo /

per una vena di cielo. / Così tutto aperto / respiri luce e profumo: / io mi sento / spuntare nel petto / un giardino di stelle.

(Traduzione di Lucio Zinna)

A Flower's Breath

Calyx
white
silence —
where you grow
pinch by pinch
I feel the dew
that bathed your finger tips
drying . . .
It is not the wind that pulses
this breath-all-scent
but a love that transpires
slower
more alone
through
a sky vein . . .
Open wide
you breathe
light and aroma
and I feel within
the birth of a garden
rife with stars.
(1948)

(Translated by Justin Vitiello)

Buchè

D'amuri urduti oh duci limpi zàgari
pi li cchiù bianchi manu di lu munnu
stu ciauru vi priu trattinitilu
tuttu com'è 'nzina a quannu stasira
idda trimannu vi strogghi lu nastru.
1952

da: Rosa fresca aulentissima - Poesie siciliane, 1985

Bouquet — D'amore ordite oh dolci limpide zagare / per
le più bianche mani del mondo / questo profumo vi prego
trattenetelo / tutto com'è fino a quando stasera / ella vi
scioglierà tremando dal nastro.

(Traduzione di Lucio Zinna)

Bouquet

May these pristine orange blossoms
interweave webs of love
amid the whitest of hands
only unleashing their fragrance
this evening when she
unravels the bouquet.

(1952)

(Translated by Justin Vitiello)

Carrettu sicilianu

Tuttu roti, spinciutu di la rua
s'adduma nni lu sulì
di cianciani e di giurma.
Scrusciu supra du' roti
arruzzòlu baggianu di culura
supra la munta dura
di 'na canzuna.

E d'appressu
occhi nivuri
ummiri di manu tradituri
friddi raccami
dintra petti addumati.
Abbrazzata di l'asti
la jumenta
attenta li cianciani e la canzuna
muta comu la terra
e ciara l'umbri.

1954

da: Rosa fresca aulentissima - Poesie siciliane, 1985

Carretto siciliano — Tutto ruote, alto sulla strada, /
s'illumina nel solco di fiocchi e di sonagli. // Scrocchio
sopra due ruote / ruzzolare baggiano di colori / sulla

rampa dura / di una canzone. // E d'appresso, / occhi neri
/ ombre di mani traditrici / freddi ricami / dentro i petti
accesi. // Abbracciata dalle aste / la giumenta / ascolta i
sonagli e la canzone / muta come la terra / e fiuta l'ombra.

(Traduzione di Lucio Zinna)

Sicilian Cart

All spokes whirring high on the road
and — with harness tassels and bells —
scintillating in the sun.

Dual rumble of wheels
swirling kaleidoscope
on the rugged mount
of a song.

And, close
black eyes
tactile treachery of shadows
cold embroidery
of breasts pricked with flame.

Embraced by shafts
the mare
harkens to bells and song
(mute like the earth)
and suspires the shadows.

(1954)

(Translated by Justin Vitiello)

Versi pi la libirtà

Ammanittati lu ventu
si criditi
ca vi scummina li capiddi
lu ventu ca trasi dintra li casi
pi cunurtari lu chiantu.
Ammanittati lu chiantu
si criditi
di cuitari lu munnu
lu chiantu ca matura 'ntra li petti
e sdirrubba li mura
e astuta li cannili.
Ammanittati la fami
si criditi
d'addifinnirivi li garruna
ma la fami nun havi vrazza
lu chiantu nun havi affruntu
lu ventu nun sapi sbarri.
Ammanittati l'ùmmiri
ca di notti vannu pi li jardina
a mèttiri banneri supra li petri
e chiamanu a vuci forti li matri
ca nun hannu cchiù sonnu

e viggianu darrerri li porti.

Ammanittati li morti

si criditi.

da: Rosa fresca aulentissima - Poesie siciliane, 1985

Versi per la libertà — Ammanettate il vento, / se credete
/ che vi scompiglia i capelli / il vento che penetra nelle case
/ a placare il pianto. // Ammanettate il pianto, / se credete
/ di quietare il mondo, / il pianto che matura nei petti / e fa
crollare i muri / e spegne le candele. // Ammanettate la
fame / se credete / di proteggervi i garretti / ma la fame
non ha braccia / il pianto non ha pudore / il vento non
conosce sbarre. // Ammanettate le ombre / che di notte
vanno per i giardini / a mettere bandiere sulle pietre / e a
gran voce chiamano le madri / che non hanno più sonno /
e vegliano dietro le porte. / Ammanettate i morti / se
credete.

(Traduzione di Lucio Zinna)

Song of Liberty

Shackle the wind
if you will
or it might tousle your hair
and sweep through your hearths
to release your pain.
Shackle the pain
if you will
somehow appease the world
its pain that ages in hearts
crumbles walls
and snuffs out candles.
Shackle hunger
if you will
somehow shield your haunches —
but hunger has no limits
pain no modesty
wind no barriers . . .
Shackle the shadows of night
flitting through the gardens
to hoist banners over the rocks
and, shouting, summon the mothers
who (wide awake)

lurk
just beyond the gate.
Shackle the dead
if you will . . .
(1955)
(Translated by Justin Vitiello)

ANTONINO CREMONA

Antonino Cremona was born December 6, 1931 in Agrigento, where he practices law. Books of poetry: *Occhi antichi* [Ancient Eyes], 1957; *Il gelsomino* [The Jasmine], 1958; *Inverno* [Winter], 1954; *Provvidenza* [Providence], 1977; *Samarcanda*, 1978; *L'odore della poesia* [The Scent of Poetry], 1980. Books of prose: *Agrigento*, 1962; *Passa un fatto* [Passing Occurrence], 1971. Theater: *Miraglia ucciso* [Miraglia Slain], 1985; *Sogno di Aldonza* [Aldonza's Dream], 1989.

It is in the wake of the Gruppo Alessio Di Giovanni that in 1957 Antonino Cremona (1931) published in the *Quaderni di Galleria* of the Caltanissetta editor Salvatore Sciascia, in a Girgenti patois, the chapbook of collected verse *Occhi antichi*, which in 1980 became

part, with a few variants, of the volume *L'odore della poesia*, issued by the same publisher.

This collection has remained one of the most revealing of the excitement running through Sicilian dialect poetry in those years. The poet's main themes of civil commitment and sentimental autobiography are further developed in Cremona's subsequent poetry in Italian, as he abandoned the vernacular muse after that first successful experiment.

G. Spagnoletti has noted how those two veins of Cremona's poetry "entwine in the dialect texts in a two-colored braid¹" and how, for example, the melic idly rises in verses of crystalline purity, whereas "in the Italian poetry it is constrained by an instinctive rejection of what is too easy, already known."²

F. Lanza considers the dialect experiment a way in which the poet tests his own expressive potential with an elementary, "virginal" vocabulary, at the same time bringing dialect closer to the "cultured spheres" of European poetry (Expressionism, Surrealism), in a "surprising fusion."³

Criticism: L. Sciascia, Introduction to *Occhi antichi*, Caltanissetta-Roma 1957; V. Clemente in *Il Belli*, June 1954; A. Corsaro in *Poesia siciliana d'oggi*, edited by A. Grienti and C. Molino, Catania 1958; I. Buttitta, in *La Sciara*, March 1965; A. Zaccaria, in *La Sicilia*, September 1968; G. Zagarrio, *Poesia tra editoria e anti*, Palermo 1971; G. Spagnoletti, Pref. to *L'odore della poesia*, Caltanissetta-Rome: Sciascia 1980; F. Lanza, *Poesia e teatro di Antonino Cremona*, Milan 1986.

1G. Spagnoletti, preface to: A. Cremona, *L'odore della*

poesia, Caltanissetta: Sciascia, 1980, p.13.

2**ibid.**

3F. Lanza (ed.) *Poesia e teatro di A. Cremona*, Milan: Miano, 1986, p.12.

4**ibid.**, p.11.

A la sagra di li ménnuli sciuruti

Suli ammatina supra di li mennuli
e cantanu l'oceddri a tutta l'ura.
Lu viddranu, curcatu nô carrettu,
s'annaculìa. Cangia la vintura
pi un sciuri di li mennuli all'oricchia?
Pinniculìa, tuttu stinnicchiatu
(la vampa di lu suli ca lu scorcìa);
senti li forti strepiti d'Orlannu
câmmazza i saracini — e ca Rinallu
suspira e chianci, biancu arrussittatu.
Cu la mula parata a festa granni,
lu carrettu lucenti cu li pinni,
a passu a passu mezzu u pruvulazzu.
E la mula nun senti chiù la via.
Ci penni la cuperta mmezzu i gammi.
Li mennuli e l'olivi, tornu tornu, .
ci fannu strata. Sbatti ni un pitruni,
isa la testa, curri; sata, abballa,
-“Stòccati u coddru” , a zotta a vastunìa.
Vittivitti, ca sona u mancarrùni.
da L'odore della poesia, 1980
Nella sagra dei mandorli fioriti — Sole di mattina sopra i

mandorli / e cantano gli uccelli a distesa. / Il villano,
coricato nel carretto, / dondola. Muta la ventura / per un
fiore di mandorlo all'orecchia? / Ondeggia, tutto sdraiato /
(la vampa del sole che lo scortica); / sente i forti strepiti di
Orlando / che ammazza i saraceni — e che Rinaldo /
sospira e piange, bianco e imbellettato. / Con la mula parata
a festa grande, / il carretto lucente coi pennacchi, / passo
passo nel polverone. / E la mula non sente più la via. / Le
pende la coperta tra le gambe. / I mandorli e gli olivi, torno
torno, / le fanno strada. Sbatte in un macigno, / alza la
testa, corre; salta, balla, / “-Rompiti il collo”, la frusta la
bastona. / Presto. che suona il marranzano.

(Traduzione dell'Autore)

At the feast of Flowering Almonds

Sun beating on almonds early in the morning
and the birds are chattering continuously.
The peasant, sleeping in his cart
is rocking back and forth. can Fate be changed
by wearing almond blossoms in your ear?
Stretched out, the peasant rocks away
(the scorching sun is beating down on him)
he hears the booming battle noises of Orlando
killing some Saracens, and hears the sighing
and crying of Rinaldo dolled up in red and white.
With his she-mule all decked out for the feast,
his cart all shiny and adorned with feathers,
step by step moving down a dusty road.
The droopy blanket hangs between her legs,
the almonds and the olives all around
show her the way. She runs into a boulder,
lifts her head, she runs, she jumps and dances.
“break your neck!” the whip comes down on her.
Hurry now, quick, I hear the jew’s harp starting.
(Translated by Gaetano Cipolla)

Cunciuzza

La morta cu la cruna mmanu
pari ca ti talia, cu ddr'occhi chiusi
(la morti ti piglia
quannu ti fermi u suspìru,
ca la to facci mpitràta ascuta
vidi li cosi ca nuddru ha sintutu):
sicca, lu coddru tortu di prighéra,
ni l'àbbitu biancu di vìrgina
li scarpini a punta — sciavurusa
mmezzu a li quattru cannili
ddra luci giarna ca ci lampia
nà vucca — c'était jadis,
e chiama ancora.

da L'odore della poesia, 1980

Cettina — La morta con il rosario in mano / pare che ti
guardi, con quegli occhi chiusi / (la morte ti piglia / quando
trattieni il respiro, / ché la tua faccia impietrata ascolta /
vede le cose che nessuno ha sentito): / magra, il collo storto
dalla preghiera, / nell'abito bianco di vergine/ le scarpine a
punta — odorosa / fra le quattro candele, / quella luce gialla
che le fa lampo sulla bocca — c'était jadis, e chiama ancora.

(Traduzione dell'Autore)

Cunciuzza (Little Connie)

The dead woman holding a rosary in her hands
seems to be watching you, with her shut eyes
(death takes you
when you hold your breath,
for your stony face listens
sees things no one has heard before):
thin, her neck twisted from her praying
in her white virginal dress
with pointy slippers – sweet smelling
among four candles
that yellow light that flashes
upon her mouth – c'etait jadis,
and she still calls.

(Translated by Gaetano Cipolla)

Occhi antichi

Resta nall'ortu l'ecu dê canzùna
(comu t'accùpa stu suli, st'arsura
ca conza li canti dê griddri)
li rami di l'àrbuli pénninu nterra.
Cca, fumannu li pinzéra,
sugnu na lampa ca s'astuta.
Cuntu li pidàti ni sta càmmara bianca,
cu i manu nsacchetta.
Ma ti viu libbira e nuda.

Muta

tinni isti. E ttu gattì
a cu ti teni mmrazza e 'un ti canusci.
Siddru arrìdi. Ca forsi ti spunta
la me facci nguttàta.
da: L'odore della poesia, 1980

Occhi antichi — Resta nell'orto l'eco delle canzoni /
(come ti soffoca questo sole, quest'arsura / che orchestra i
canti dei grilli) // i rami degli alberi pendono a terra. / Qui,
fumando i pensieri, / sono un lume che si spegne. / Conto i
passi in questa camera bianca, / con le mani in tasca. // Ma
ti vedo libera e nuda. / Muta / te ne sei andata. E tu fai la
gattina / a chi ti tiene in braccio e non ti conosce. / Se ridi.

Che forse ti spunta / la mia faccia che trattiene il pianto.
(Traduzione dell'Autore)

Ancient Eyes

The echo of the song remains
(how stifling this sun is, this thirst
accompanying the songs of crickets)
the branches of the trees are hanging low.
Here, while my thoughts are fuming
I am a lamp that's destined to go out.
I count my steps inside this white bedroom,
with hands in my pockets.
But I see you naked and free.
Silently
you went away. And you now purr
for one who holds you close and doesn't know you.
If you laugh. Because you see perhaps
my face that's holding back the tears.
(Translated by Gaetano Cipolla)

Godot

En attendant Godot — sta morti
ca 'un meni — ti dassi vampi di focu,
friddulina; ti calliassi nê manu
l'occhi di vitru. T'arriparassi
nô fazzulettu di sita.

O morti
e bita. Sti manu friddi
longhi, sti taliatùri d'ogliu
ca mi sciddricanu ncoddru
mentri avvampi, stu coddru tisu
cu la testa ô ventu. Tutta
t'arriparassi nê me iunti.
Ti quadiassi cû sciatu.
Tu 'un ci senti.

da: L'odore della poesia, 1980

Godot — En attendant Godot — questa morte / che non
viene — ti darei vampe di fuoco, / freddolosa; ti scalderei
nelle mie mani / gli occhi di vetro. Ti riparerei / nel
fazzoletto di seta.

O morte / e vita. Queste mani fredde / lunghe, questi
sguardi d'olio / che mi scivolano addosso / mentre
avvampi, questo collo dritto / con la testa al vento. Tutta / ti

riparerei nelle mie mani giunte. / Ti scalderei col fiato. / Tu
non ci senti.

(Traduzione dell'Autore)

En attendant Godot

Waiting for Godot — this death
that will not come — I'd give you flames,
you cold thing; I'd warm your glassy eyes
in my own hands. I'd shelter you
inside my silken handkerchief.

O death
and life. These frigid, long
hands, these oily stares
that slither over my body
as you burst into flames, this stiff neck
with head to the winds. I'd shelter you
completely inside my cupped hands.
I'd warm you with my breath.
But you can't hear a thing!
(Translated by Gaetano Cipolla)

SARDINIA

The Sardinian dialect muse sang for a long time in the catacombs before being heard. The religious linguistic references are not at all casual; on the contrary, they are intended to underscore, right from the start, the origin and strictly religious nature of the first literary manifestations in the island, subjected, as is well known, to recurrent foreign dominations for two thousand years, a considerable time span. Therefore, the image of a muse with her head cut off, mutilated almost up to our own days, seems to me at once the one that best represents the condition of Sardinian dialect poetry, precisely as being headless, unable to find itself, know itself, and, in brief, to exist outside of its servile condition of forced obeisance toward "external" cultures, that

were always or almost always endured, tolerated, but at times even resisted and contested. That explains why, then, the glue of all the various cultures of the island, of all the infinite gamut of dialects (but there are those who maintain that Sardinian is a true language, with the authority of people like Max L. Wagner, a true "archaic narrative with its own marked characteristics," (*La lingua sarda*, Berne, 1951) has been and still is today, for the most part, that variably religious sentiment, which one could say was born with the gosos, spiritual and religious songs that allowed the Sardinians to speak inter nos a language which was not hostile, even indifferent to the rulers, if not totally accepted by them and almost solicited, as in the case of Spanish rulers. There is no doubt that the Sardinian muse has retained until now a sensual, religious

nature, in the pagan or mystical sense (Pasolini wrote in *Passione e ideologia*, Garzanti), but I would add more markedly Christian and Catholic than in other parts of Italy, if one only considers that the first practitioners of Sardinian dialect poetry are often clergymen. No doubt, that religiosity at times concealed much more: a sentiment of revolt and at any rate of not belonging to the different species that had crossed the sea to reach the Sardinian shores and then further on inland, where the sense of the small fatherland lost has always been stronger and more alive.

Since then, that headless muse with scattered limbs has been searching for her lost head and her tortured limbs precisely in poetry, always so revealing of the human spirit, of one's true, conscious or unconscious identity, with a doggedness that has become

in time almost an obsession in both life and writing. Thus that also explains why the second great glue of so much output in verse, which I would not weigh in all together in a consideration of poetry, has been that sentiment of civil indignation, of protest and revolt that at the beginning of the Nineteenth Century found in the Arcadian Francesco Ignazio Mannu and in his hymn *The Sardinian Patriot to His Feudal Lords* (whose meaning is clear), what has been defined as the "Sardinian Marseillaise." But all has been said also explains why the Sardinian language, as I already stated elsewhere (*la Stampa-Tuttolibri*, July 15, 1978), "born in state of submission, is a tragic language (in the sense of a Greek tragedy) and has retained and keeps retaining a dramatic charge not only in the words of the female mourners and

their death song (s'attitudu), but even in the singsongs of children and for children (ninnios) which always contain a dark foreboding of death or menace or misfortune: almost the fear of the ancient rulers' or masters' return."

No doubt this state of submission has determined the loss of an immense poetic output that, above all at the beginning but to a considerable degree until today, has been an oral output, only a very small part of which has been handed down from generation to generation, almost as an act of survival, or clandestinely assembled, as in the case of F.I. Mannu's aforementioned hymn against the feudal lords. On the other hand, the awareness of speaking one's own autonomous language has certainly not favored that process of osmosis, of continual exchange between language and dialect and

between dialect and language which has taken place in many parts of Italy, to the mutual enrichment of both. Instead, there has been a history of continued rejection between the Italian language and Sardinian dialects (or Sardinian language). Maybe only in the poetry of Sebastiano Satta, until recently considered the greatest Sardinian poet in Italian, has dialect given off a few sparks. For the rest of them the firing pin has not worked. It might be however interesting to underline the tie (in certain cases inevitable, as for the Catalan poetry of Alghero) between Sardinian dialect poetry and above all Spanish poetry (especially Latin-American) to which ours is related through specific themes as well as through an affinity of rhythms and timbres. The very particular Sardinian versification, which had so struck Pasolini that he came to declare

that "the exceptional nature of the metrical forms and styles is even more surprising" than in his own Friuli (op. cit.,), if on the one hand goes back to medieval laudi no less, on the other hand it is imbued with the singing, very musical rhythm of certain Spanish poetry, especially from Latin-America. And at this point one can mention the name of the Spanish poet who more than any other has had a decisive, and no doubt preponderant, influence on all Sardinian dialect poetry, namely García Lorca, the lesser Lorca of "Lament for Ignacio" and Romancero gitano. Aside from the aedic nature of this poet (and Sardinian poetry is born as poetry meant to be recited, as at any rate has always happened in public squares and as still happens now and then during festivals and town feasts), in much of the Sardinian dialect poetry there is a

popular (at times populist) climate and sensibility, the thematic specificity (love, destiny, tragedy, death) characteristic of Lorca, not to mention the lexical loans and even certain marked linguistic calques often found in many past and present Sardinian poets. The only great difference is that, in contrast with Lorca's poetry, that feeds on great literary and cultural references, Sardinian dialect poetry is almost exclusively a kind of poetry that finds all its strength in being the immediate and direct expression of popular sentiment. They are, in short, two types of poetry differently popular, not at the ideological, but at the artistic level.

Indeed, the great wordplay of some of the major exponents of Sardinian dialectality (Lobina, Mastino, Ruju and others) consists in accentuating the friction between Italian and dialect, between cultured language and

popular language, playing ironically, sarcastically at times, on the grotesque and parodistic effects stemming from a use we might call "macaronic" of Italian itself or from the sense of estrangement that comes from the contact with dialect's diversity, as if it they were two non-communicating galaxies or monads. It must be said that Sardinian dialect writers have not opted for this linguistic choice out of literary saturation, as Montale would have said (*Sulla poesia*, Mondadori); if anything, in Sardinia the opposite has always been true. Our dialect writers are direct descendants of their maternal dialect, for the most part not even inventors of an idiolect of their own, that is, of their own language, specific, personal, outside the rules of natural linguistic orthodoxy, the way it has happened elsewhere, as in the great

examples of Marin in Grado, Loi in Lombardy, Pierro in Tursi or Pasolini in Friuli. In the Nineteenth Century in Sardinia they were still searching for a language, a linguistic habitat ubi consistere. Later only a few isolated cases (Salvatore Ruju, Pompeo Calvia, Cesarino Mastino, Benvenuto Lobina, Francesco Masala and Ignazio Delogu - in addition to the even more isolated examples, if one can call them that, of Sari and Pinna — have demonstrated the possibility of bending dialect to their own personal expressive need, with a few happy inventions at the level of verbal forms and of the still uncoded orthography.

Instead, in Sardinia it happened that a dialect poet, such as the logudorese Francesco Masala, has been able to be dialectal even when he was writing in Italian, borrowing from the maternal dialect

locutions, forms and lexicon of the purest dialectality, in short translating from his dialect without betraying it, the way it almost always happens in real translations. Can one then speak of a language for these Sardinian poets? Or must one speak of what Contini would have defined a minor language? Does it make sense to speak of a language when there is no linguistic koinè valid for the whole island and this presumed, fancied language is yet to be invented and structured and, in short, artificially recreated? A problem we leave to linguists. We can only remark that our own félibristes express themselves in an infinite variety of dialects, at times contiguous, at times very remote, not to mention that in Sardinia there is a group of poets who gravitate in the area of Alghero and write in a variety of true Catalan and who are

therefore the children of a truly separate linguistic civilization, although they consider themselves very much children of the great Sardinian mother, with which they retain very close ties. The question, in the end, is almost frivolous and idle since if one stops to consider it is not even relevant if a poet writes in dialect or in Italian, if it is true that he is such not on the basis of the linguistic instrument adopted, but exclusively on the strength of the results achieved. The dialectologic querelle that from time to time gains new momentum, from different angles and perspectives (whether dialect has already disappeared or is about to become extinct, so that it would be better to file away any question relative to it; whether it is legitimate to place on the same level dialect poetry and Italian poetry; whether one should reserve for dialect a

narrower operational field than the one accorded to Italian, etc.) frankly seems to me not to be taking into account the fact that the problem, in the final analysis, concerns only the method of a linguistic search that may lead to the heart of truth, increase man's knowledge and above all find, in today's levelling — even linguistic — in the rampant and pervasive conformism, in the more and more mortifying massification, the most suitable instrument for such achievements, which are both human and poetic.

The enemy to be defeated is conformism, linguistic as well, and linguistic consumerism, no less alarming and serious than consumerism tout court, and perhaps at least in part an effect of the latter. It is in the face of this verbal flooding of a language more and more mixed, of this mixtum compositum, of this mishmash of different

languages, sectorial, technological etc., it is in the face of this falseness of language that the poet must seek the best way to be able to say, once again, what ditta dentro, which amounts to saying the sentiment that he shares with other men. Just as one must try to save with all his strength a haven of greenness, of a living and real nature, threatened by the ever increasing flows of concrete, the same must be done in the realm of poetic language. Then it is of precise, maybe civil, moral and religious significance, even more so than poetic, that a great number of Twentieth-Century poets, after a period of limbo, have dived into the great sea of dialectality, as the place of authenticity and truth in contrast with the falseness of life and history that language was dispensing in the erosion of time, of modes and forms.

If this has a meaning for all the dialect poets of Italy, it certainly does so even more for the dialect poets from Sardinia. Their severed tongue, severed for centuries, for millennia, required and requires, with the attainment of an ever greater awareness, that very maternal tongue, that tongue that descended into the depths of time and space, of history and life, be recovered and made to sound like new: but where indeed, if not in the place designated for this, namely poetry?

In answer to a question from Renato Tucci (*Il lettore di provincia*, n. 79, Dec. 1990) Franco Brevini, author of *Le parole perdute* [Lost Words], Einaudi, said, as well as anyone ever could: "I felt in that dialect pronunciation something familiar, something that had passed through my existence. Much later I was to discover that that very inner resonance, that

unpredictable echo aroused that evening by Pasolini's poetry constitutes the profound reason for writing in dialect." I cite this impression and consideration textually to describe the condition of the Sardinian poet who swims upstream like a lost salmon in order to trace back and find that very "inner resonance" again, that "unpredictable echo" that for Brevini constitutes the profound reason for writing in dialect and, for the Sardinian, the profound reason for his finding himself again in his natural, maternal, ancient linguistic habitat, severed at the roots by the recurrent dominations,

The use of the dialectal linguistic instrument is for the Sardinian, therefore, not only a means to swim upstream, to recreate his history (if history, our history, is above all the search for our most intimate word, our most secret, most authentic and

true), but also a sort of revenge against those who have erased our lost words in the long voyage of the millennia. Twentieth Century dialect poetry is in Sardinia first of all a poetry, a poetic word that bears the weight of this immense tragedy, of this initial trauma, which has become, as I stated earlier, obsessive. More than anyone else, its spokesman has been, writing in Italian and Sardinian dialect, but at any rate always with a sort of inevitable dialectality, a poet such as Francesco Masala who, even when he writes prose, has told this "history of the vanquished" in an almost obsessive way, allowing himself to be somewhat overcome by it (with uneven, but at any rate never really important, results), with a violent and exasperated populism, not lacking a few happy notes, between the epic and the dramatic. Others, like Salvator Ruju, have

tried to reclaim a whole lost civilization, that zappadorina [peasant] civilization, indeed dialectal, with a type of poetry that perhaps also meant an extreme, desperate *rappel à l'ordre*, and successfully refining and modulating the dialect of Sassari with subtle grace and spirited intensity. His poetry is tinged with heartrending longing for something that the poet perceives as being irremediably lost or elusive, and his poetic word is the attempt to erect a small monument to a small rural world already infested with nettles and concrete. Everything with a sense of acute, restless morality.

But there are those who have used dialect has a true autonomous language, endowed with a force and dignity equal to that of the Italian language (like almost all Sardinian dialect poets), even having fun

ridiculing it, doing a parody and caricature of it, to make one feel the erosion caused by time and everyday linguistic usage; like ziu Gesaru (Cesarino Mastino), and those who, like Benvenuto Lobina, have felt this vernacular language of his as being an alternative to the Italian language, as the most suitable, most effective and natural instrument with which to shout his rage, his desperation, for this land of ours lost and abandoned, transforming the Salvator Ruju's song, between idyllic and elegiac, into an almost epic song of rebellion and protest.

But there is in all the Sardinian dialect poetry a sort of concordant (and at times monotonous, as in Masala) song of protest which is not only a call to arms against all that is responsible — be it men or accidents of life and history — for the loss of the small linguistic fatherland (or motherland), of this

severed tongue of ours, but a continuous, persistent search for a new identity, as well as for the one erased by time and men. Often there is something untidy and patched-up in this meticulous search, in this movement between the mimesis of what's happening in other parts of Italy and the world (and Sardinian poetry, in this respect, is lagging considerably behind) and true improvisation, somewhat in the wake of those Sardinian aedos who sang and in part still sing in the squares. An oral poetry in which improvisation is all too often a passionate withdrawing into oneself, a sort of interior monologue or endophasia. It is a fact that in every part of the island and in the great languages of the island (from Logudorese to Campidanese, from Gallurese to Sassarese) there has been from the start, and growing stronger with time, a

movement to reappropriate a dialect which is more and more local, provincial (but at times even diversified from town to town, from farm to farm), in sharp contradiction with those who instead maintain the necessity, which everybody is supposed to perceive, of a linguistic koinè and a single, true, great language for everyone. The history of Sardinian dialect poetry in this century stands really as proof of this proliferation of dialects, each with its own "voice," with its own spelling, unfortunately never codified, with its own original phonetics, and its own peculiar characteristics. And from the start it would have been absurd to conceive the great song, between epic and elegiac, between gnomic and naïf of the poet from Barbagia Antioco Casula being written, let's say, in Sassarese. Already the title of one of his books (Boghés

de Barbagia: Voices of Barbagia) immediately places a boundary to his poetry that is even physical, territorial. Not to mention the fact that the strength of almost all these poets rests precisely on their untranslatability, on their making themselves into very particular, even esoteric, linguistic islands (as happens with Lobina, but also with Casula and others). They themselves are perfectly aware that they are writing among the initiated and for the initiated, I would dare say among the faithful of the same religion of language, custom and life. In my opinion, this is the dialect poetry destined to endure, that is, the one that finds its strength in its natural, untranslatable, contrastive matrix, what the Germans call *Muttersprache*. Then dialect also becomes a kind of banner, a way of being oneself in the diversity of languages,

in order not to get lost again, not to lose one's way in the new Babel of languages. And the dialect of poetry regains its "primitive" function of naming objects, places, feelings, a whole civilization of manners, forms, behaviors: the most civilized and honest, the most authentic and freest way to bear witness to an oppositional presence with respect to that "civilization" that has turned even language into a place of widespread pollution.

Therefore, dialect today can, In Sardinia and elsewhere, be wedded even to ecology. At any rate, the ever-growing revival of dialect poetry at every level is not without significance. In short, for many people (even distinguished poets in Italian) dialect has become a siren. "And so" - Spagnoletti and Vivaldi write (Poesia dialettale dal Rinascimento a oggi, Garzanti) — what fate

will accompany the present success of dialect poetry?"

The question, left hanging, cannot find easy answers. It seems clear that in this world invaded by concrete it is difficult to hear the cricket ziu Gesaru talks about, or smell the scent of sage and mint mentioned by Ruju, or feel life flowing through a country road of times past. Everything seems to move in the direction of consumerism, even of the linguistic kind, of conformism, of massification, and the language best suited to say it seems indeed to be that *mixtum compositum*, that mixed language Italian has become. Making predictions is not easy. "We are a little among ghosts," the poet Andrea Zanzotto (*I dialetti e l'Italia*, ed. Walter della Monica, Pan Editrice) said just ten years ago. Today one can only say that those ghosts had a body and a soul. The future will tell us

how long they will resist this technological society advancing under the banner of the computer.

Angelo Mundula

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RAFAEL SARI

Born in 1934 in Alghero, an elementary school teacher and freelance journalist, Rafael Sari published his first poem in 1928 in the newspaper *L'isola*, edited at the time by the the Sassari poet Salvator Ruju. From 1947 he collaborated for many years with *La Nuova Sardegna*, published in Sassari, in which all his poems appeared, posthumously collected in the volumes *Ombra i sol — Poemes de l'Alquer* [Shadow and Sun — Poems of Alghero] and *Ciutat mia (pà de casa)* [My City], published by Edizioni della Torre in Cagliari respectively in 1980 and 1984. Rafael Sari, who has received wide recognition in Sardinia and Spain, died in Alghero in 1978.

Rafael Sari has been the Sardinian poet

who more than anyone else has felt dramatically the problem of language (of his poetic language), finding himself every time in a position of having to choose between that contaminated and updated variant of Catalan which is the dialect of Alghero and pure Catalan, and between the latter — if in a version, so to speak, italianized — and the former which was the product of a compromise between Italian and the local dialect.

It wasn't — it never is for a poet — a trivial question. All the more so since Sarti wanted to be exclusively the bard of his city, going so far as to make it not only his *petita pàtria*, his little fatherland, but, as it happened to the *petite capitale* of the poets from Parma, almost a capital of the world.

If for every Sardinian dialect poet the problem of identity (and therefore primarily

of language) has been the problem of all problems, for Rafael Sari it has been almost a problem of survival (as a poet), a problem that imposed on him a soul divided between an absolute Sardinian nature (or rather his absolute identification with Alghero) and that variant of Catalan that his people happened to speak as the ineluctable legacy of a Spanish domination they neither wanted nor sought.

At first he chose to speak "his" Alghero dialect, modulating it and modeling it for his own use, which in any case coincided with that of his people and of popular speech, but later accentuating its original Catalan purity, its wider range. It must have cost him more than a little effort if it is true, as he happened to write, that he has only and always wanted his words to reach above all "the good, humble people" of his city, "who

can't easily approach the high literary dialect forms of cultured individuals."

It was not a way of withdrawing into a limited linguistic habitat, but rather of finding in it the true soul of the people, which is the same as saying the soul of the world. No doubt in his "beautiful, strongly cadenced, limpid verses," as Alfonso Gatto defined them, the *ciutat mia* [my city] is not only a certain and unique place referent, but almost an obsessive presence, a ritual endlessly re/peated but never monotonous, through minimal and at times almost imperceptible variations that each time adjust that central image, almost like the fading of time, of hours and seasons, which Sari can always capture with great clarity and with the poignant tenderness of a creature for its creator, if not really that of a child for its parents. Even a certain

underlying religiosity, never absent in dialect poets from Sardinia, ends up being absorbed into the ritual of recognition and of the meticulous restoration of the true, intimate soul of the Alguer

Rafael Sari could be called a Sardinian-Catalan poet: if his words are no doubt of Catalan origin, Sardinian (and all inscribed in that tradition) is the content of his poetry. In a language that ends up being, as always happens with true poets, his idiolect, Rafael Sari, popular poet by choice even more than by vocation, beyond any possible linguistic identification, does not get tired of describing and deepening that landscape of the soul (like Machado) represented by his small fatherland of Alghero, living heart of the world.

Criticism: G. Dessì e N. Tanda, editors, in *Narratori di Sardegna*, Mursia 1965; Marina

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Placeta de Santa Clara

Tancada de palaus, de muralles
és sempre sola
com encantada
en el ressol que devalla
enfocat:
encantada a la vora
de la marina
que en el port mescla
murmura d'aigua
i veus de pescadors;
cada finestra té robes
esteses,
vels, banderetes,
vestits de criaturetes,
encerades de mariner.
Placeta de Santa Clara
no més gran de u corral!
Quan bufa lo gregal
a un ull de sol
se seu qualque doneta,
no cusi, no fila,
no fa res,

està així, assossegada
a una cadireta.

Els morros solament
tremolen rosariant.

Visti tota de negra,
mocador de cap i xal.

Una santeta antiga
a una vora olvidada:

la mir i me pareix

una monja de Santa Clara. (da *Ombra i sol*, 1980)

Piazzetta di Santa Chiara – Chiusa da palazzi, da
muraglie / è sempre sola / quasi incantata / nel riverbero
che scende / infocato: / incantata alla costa / del mare /
che nel porto mescola / mormorii d'acqua / e voci di
pescatori; / ogni finestra ha panni / stesi, / vele, piccole
bandiere, / vestiti di bimbi, incerate di marinai. / Piazzetta
di Santa Chiara / non più grande di un cortile! / Quando
soffia il grecale / a un occhio di sole / si siede qualche
donnetta, / non cuce, non fila / non fa nulla, / sta così,
tranquilla / a una sedietta. / Solo le labbra / tremano
pregando. / Veste tutta di nero, / in testa un fazzoletto e
scialle. / Una santa antica / dimenticata in un cantuccio: /
la guardo e mi pare / una monaca di Santa Chiara.

(Traduzione dell'Autore)

Santa Clara Square

Closed in by buildings and walls
it's always alone
almost spellbound
in the fiery reflection
descending
enchanted
on the seashore
that in the harbor mixes
water murmurings
and fishermen's voices;
every window has clothes
out to dry,
sails, small flags,
children's outfits,
sailors' oilskins.
Santa Clara Square
no larger than a courtyard
When the northeastern blows
a few women sit
under the eye of the sun,
they don't sew, they don't weave,
they don't do anything,

they just sit
very quietly.
Only their lips tremble
in prayer.
All dressed in black,
a handkerchief and shawl on their head.
An ancient saint
forgotten in a corner:
I look at her and she seems
one of Santa Clara's nuns.
(Translated by Luigi Bonaffini)

Iglesieta de Sant'Agostí

Horts entorn i la pedrera:
verd i or
com la gran bandera del gremit.
En fons blau de marina
i la platja de plata.
A mig tu, Sant'Agostí,
iglesieta de res
sola i blanca
a una vora de camí.
Una bandera de pau.
Passant te davant
a la tardeta suau
saluts i pregàries
te donava la gent.
A juliol la festa.
Alegria de campanyes,
plenes de sol,
arbres colorits de fruites
i meses aparellades
sota parres de raïm primerenc.
Vi a rius
entre esclats de risa.

I gran que fe
a l'hort de l'obrer:
foc rabent
a les calderes,
banyes al caliu
i crabits a l'ast
damunt a les brases.

Chiesetta di Sant'Agostino — Orti intorno e la petraia: /
verde e oro / come la grande bandiera del gremio. / In
fondo azzurro di mare / e la spiaggia d'argento. / In mezzo
tu, Sant'Agostino, / chiesetta da nulla / sola e bianca / al
margine della strada. / Una bandiera di pace. / Passandoti
davanti al tramonto soave / saluti e preghiere / t'offriva la
gente. / A luglio la festa. / Allegria di campagne / piene di
sole, / alberi coloriti di frutta / e tavole imbandite sotto
pergolati / d'uva primaticcia. / Vino a ruscelli / fra scoppi
di riso. / E gran da fare / nell'orto dell'obriere: fuoco
rovente / sotto le caldaie, / sughi al caldo / e capretti allo
spiedo / sopra le braci. /

St. Augustin's Church

Vegetable gardens all around and the stone pit:
green and gold
like the great gremio's* banner.
In the background the blue sea
and the silver beach.
You stand in the middle, St. Augustin,
insignificant church
solitary and white
by the roadway.
A peace banner.
Passing before you
at sunset
people offered you
greetings and prayers.
In July the feast.
Happy countryside
filled with sunlight,
trees blushing with fruits
and tables set
under pergolas of early grapes.
Rivers of wine
among bursts of laughter.

And a great bustle
in the workman's kitchen garden:
a scorching fire
under the cauldrons,
steaming sauces
and goatlings skewered
over charcoals.

*An association of artisans

Missa gran i processó
i cada hort beneït.
Fins a nit
beure i mengiar a tot arreu.
I l'iglesieta plena de llumera,
de cants i de paraules de Déu.
Temps passat, finit.
Horts ara estreinyts de cases;
prepotenta la ciutat és vinguda
a degollar en aquí
verd i pau.
Una pena, O Sant'Agostí!
A la tardeta encara
faixa el sol l'iglesieta
i abraça les pedres velles.
Passa encara la gent
no saluda però, no prega.
Va en pressa en pressa.
I la nit davalla
trista i obscura, així.
Les parets caigudes
ja plenes de herbes salvatges

pareix alhora que plorin,

o Sant'Agostí.

da Ombra i sol, 1980

Messa grande e processione / e ogni orto benedetto. /
Fino a notte / bere e mangiare in abbondanza. / E la
chiesetta piena di luci, / di canti e di parole di Dio. / Tempo
passato, finito. / Orti ora stretti dalle case; / prepotente la
città è venuta / a disperdere qui / verde e pace. / Una
pena, Sant'Agostino! / Al tramonto ancora / fascia il sole la
chiesetta / e abbraccia le pietre antiche. / Passa ancora la
gente, / non saluta però, però, non prega. / Va in fretta in
fretta. / E la notte scende / triste e oscura, così. I muri
caduti / già pieni di erbe selvagge / sembra allora che
piangano, / o Sant'Agostino.

(Traduzione dell'Autore)

Solemn mass and procession
and every kitchen garden blessed.
Plenty of food and drink
till nightfall.
And the small church filled with lights,
with songs and God's words.
A time past, gone forever.
The kitchen gardens are squeezed in by the houses now;
The overbearing city has come
here to disperse
green and peace.
A real sorrow, St. Augustin!
In the sunset still
the sun envelops the church
and embraces the ancient stones.
People still go by,
but without saying hello, without praying.
They're in a great hurry.
And so the night descends
sad and dark.
The crumbling walls
already overrun with weeds

seem to be weeping,
o St. Augustin.

Alguer

Sés beglia quant 'l sol ta basa tot
i ta carigna calma la marina,
quan la gliuna de nit ta dasgota
la prata més gliuenta i la més fina.

Sés beglia massa tu, suitat mia,
de muraglias i torras anghiriara
che ta miras nel golf a on sumia
antiga i branca una sirena ancara.

De Ca' de Cassa a Muntiroglia negra,
de Muntagnés a San Giuria frurit
és tota una canzó che la ralegra,
una canzó che dura ne la nit
quant a poc suspira la marina
basan l'ascol che tot ha cunsumit.

Da Ciutat mia, 1984

Alghero — Sei bella quando il sole ti bacia tutta / e ti
carezza calmo il mare, / quando la luna di notte ti veste / di
gocce d'argento risplendente e purissimo. / Sei troppo bella,
città mia, incoronata, / di bastioni e di torri, / che ti
rispecchi nel golfo dove ancora / sogna un'antica e bianca
sirena. / Da Capocaccia al cupo Monte Doglia, / da
Montagnese a San Giuliano in fiore / è tutto una musica che

ti rallegra, / una musica che continua nella notte / quando
dolcemente sospira il mare / baciando lo scoglio che tutto ha
levigato.

(Traduzioe ell'Autore)

Alghero

You are lovely when kissed by the sun's rays
and when the sea caresses you in its calm,
when at nightfall the moonlight inlays
your dress with a radiant silver gleam.
You are truly lovely, my city,
with your crown of tall towers and bastions
when your image is reflected in the sea
amidst the dreams of a white ancient siren.
From Capocaccia to Monte Doglia's rise,
from Montagnese to San Giuliano in bloom
it's all a music that can warm the heart
a music that lasts far into the night
when the ocean heaves its muted sighs
kissing the rock it has slowly consumed.
(Translated by Luigi Bonaffini)

Maitinara

L'anghiriara del golf és una gròria
de gliumera, de sol che ta cunsora,
i Cà de Cassa an fondu ne la boira
és una torra greva, folta i sora.
De núvuras un grof a Muntiroglia
sa tiran lentas lentas a una vora...
i tu, Aighé mia, sés branca, dolza, moglia
che núvia de l'altar iscint a fora.
Ara lu brau de la marina riu
pe 'l punentol che toto l'onda mou
tignina de valmel, de prata i or,
mentras lu sol muntant brusgia i riu
i per a tu suspira cara cor,
suitat mia, al nasciar del dia nou.
da Ombra i sol, 1980

Mattinata — L'arco del golfo appare in una gloria / di
luce, di sole che ristora / e Capo Caccia lontano tra vapori /
è una torre solenne, forte e sola. / Di nuvole un groviglio a
Monte Doglia / corre lentamente verso un lato.... / e tu, mia
Aighero, bianca, dolce, molle / assomigli a una sposa che
scende dall'altare. / Ora l'azzurro del tuo mare ride / per il
ponente che le onde muove / tingendole di rosso, argento ed

oro, / mentre il sole che sale brucia e ride / e sospira per te
ogni cuore, / o città mia, al sorgere del dì nuovo.

(Traduzione dell'Autore)

Morning

The arc of the gulf seems to be spellbound
by the sunlight, a balmy, invigorating sun,
and Capocaccia misty in the background
is a solemn tower, mighty and alone.

At Monte Doglia a tangle of clouds
move very slowly to one side, afar...

and you, my Alghero, are white, sweet, shrouded
in softness like a bride leaving the altar.

Now the blue of your sea begins to laugh
as the west wind unsettles the waves
tinging them with red, silver and gold hue,
while the rising sun starts to burn and laugh
and every heart begins to sigh for you,
my city, at the birth of the new day.

(Translation by Luigi Bonaffini)

Petita patria

Una mica de blau solament,
un ull de sol que llueix
a rinverdir els camps
i no hi ha més hivern
i no hi ha més sol leó.

Tot és dolç com la carícia
de la nena primera
que has vulgut bé
en l'adolescència,
com els ulls de la dona
que has somniat jovenet
en el tarde caure del sol
dins a un nimbe d'or.

Petita pàtria!

El meu món, el meu univers.
El meu present, el meu passat,
el meu morir
en un abraç
llarg de pau,
de felicitat.

Així cada dia reneix en tu
el meu cor amb el llum del sol,

amb el silencios cant de un'estrella,
amb un toc de campana,
una veu de salut,
una murmura de vent,
un sospirar de mar.

Tot el meu món!

Piccola patria — Un po' di azzurro soltanto, / un occhio
di sole che splende / per rinverdire i campi / e non c'è più
inverno / e non c'è più solleone. / Tutto è dolce come la
carezza / della prima fanciulla / alla quale hai voluto bene
/ nell'adolescenza, / come gli occhi della donna, / che hai
sognato da giovane / nel tardo tramonto del sole / dentro
un'aureola d'oro. / Piccola patria! / Il mio mondo, il mio
universo. / Il mio presente, il mio passato. / Il mio morire, /
in un abbraccio / lungo di pace, / di felicità. / Così ogni
giorno rinasce in te / il mio cuore, con la luce del sole, / con
il silenzioso canto di una stella, / con un tocco di campana,
/ una voce di saluto, / un mormorio di vento, / un sospiro
di mare. / Tutto il mio mondo! /

Little Homeland

Only a bit of blue,
the eye of the sun that shines
making the fields green again
and there is no more winter
no more stifling heat.
Everything is sweet as the caress
of the first girl
you loved
in your youth,
as the eyes of the woman
you dreamed of as a young man
in the late sunset
within a golden halo.
Little homeland!
My world, my universe.
My present, my past,
my dying
in a long
embrace of peace,
of happiness.
So everyday my heart
is born in you again with the first light,

with a silent starsong,
with the peal of a bell,
a voice that greets me,
the whisper of the wind,
the sigh of the sea.
All my world!

Petit petit. Però és la pàtria meva,
és la meva terra tancada
en l'infinit del cel,
en l'atzur gran de les ones.

Petit. No! Fins a que mirar
els meus ulls poden més enllà
dels monts que tanquen a orient
les meves platjes, més enllà
de ponent

on en fons a la mar
altres terres se lleven
verdes i dolces com la meva.

Altres terres! Oh no!
Terres de front al sol,
al meu sol:

terres sempre reneixentes
en el meu somni,
en el somni ancestral
del meu cor.

Terres de on és vinguda la gent
de la petita pàtria meva,
de on és vingut el so

harmonios de la parla que jo
en les paraules teves
o vella mare he entés,
nel cariciós sospir.
del teu, del meu
primer bes d'amor,
o dona.

Piccolo piccolo. Ma è la mia patria, / è la mia terra chiusa
/ nell'infinito del cielo, / nell'azzurro grande delle onde. /
Piccolo. No! fintanto che guardare / possono i miei occhi più
in là / dei monti, che chiudono a oriente / le mie spiagge,
più in là / di ponente / dove in fondo al mare / altre terre si
ergono / verdi e dolci come la mia. / Altre terre! Oh no! /
Terre di fronte al sole, / al mio sole: / terre sempre
rinascenti / nel mio sogno, / nel sogno ancestrale / del mio
cuore. / Terre da dove è venuta la gente / della mia piccola
patria, / da dove è venuto il suono / armonioso della
parlata che io / nelle tue parole, / o vecchia madre, ho
sentito, / nel carezzevole sospiro / del tuo, del mio primo
bacio d'amore, / o donna. /

(Cont.d)

Small, small. But it's my homeland,
it's my land hemmed in
by the boundless sky,
by the vast azure of the waves.

Only a bit of blue!

Small. No! Until my eyes
can gaze beyond the mountains
that enclose my shores
in the east, beyond
the west

where beneath the sea
other lands rise
as green and sweet as mine.

Other lands. Oh no!

Lands that face the sun,
my sun:

lands always reborn in my dreams,
in the ancestral dream
of my heart.

Lands from where came the people
of my little homeland,
from where came the harmonious

sound of the speech I heard
in your words, ancient mother,
in the gentle sigh of your, of my,
first kiss,
o woman.

Una mica de blau solament.

Tot el meu món,

tota una vida.

Tot. I després...

La mort. Sí.

Jo, tu, tots passarem.

La petita pàtria meva

resterà.

Una mica de blau solament!

Basta això

o terra, o cel, o mar,

per a te fer reneixer

sempre, eternament,

en el cor de cadù,

al cor de cada gent.

da Ombra i sol, 1980

Un po' di azzurro soltanto. / Tutto il mio mondo, / tutta una vita. / Tutto. E dopo.../ La morte. Sì. / Io, tu, tutti passeremo. / La mia piccola patria / resterà. / Un po' di azzurro soltanto! / Basta questo / o terra, o cielo, o mare, / per farti rinascere / sempre, eternamente / nel cuore di ciascuno, / nel cuore di tutti.

(Traduzione dell'Autore)

(Cont.d)

Only a bit of blue.

All my world,

a whole life.

All. And then...

Death. Yes,

I, you, we will all pass.

My little homeland

will remain.

Only a bit of blue!

That's enough

o land, o sky, o sea,

for you to be reborn always, eternally,

in everyone's heart,

in the heart of every person.

(Translated by Luigi Bonaffini)

BENVENUTO LOBINA

Born in Villanova Tulo (Cagliari) in 1914, at first a municipal and post office employee in Cagliari, later a post office clerk in Sassari, self-taught, Benvenuto Lobina spent his childhood among farmers and shepherds (as he himself has often acknowledged), but from 1933 contributing to several journals and in particular to the Sardinian review *S'Ischiglia*. He has published only one book of poetry: *Terra disisperada terra* [Land Desperate Land] with Jaca Books (Milan, 1974) and a novel — *Po Cantu Biddanoa* (Cagliari, 1987).

Author of a single book of verse, *Terra disperata terra* — due also to the difficulty of publishing texts of dialect poetry here and elsewhere — Benvenuto Lobina expresses

himself in the dialect of the Sarcidano region, almost untranslatable into another language, being so deeply rooted in that very ancient linguistic, oral and popular habitat typical of his land, which is increasingly an expression of the feeling of not belonging and of independence always resurgent in the island. It is a dialect that has something esoteric, initiatory about it, a language to be spoken *inter nos*, itself an instrument of that sentiment of opposition and revolt whose banner it becomes.

In Lobina, as at any rate in all Sardinian dialect poets, we find that underlying religious sentiment which is never an end to itself, but is itself an instrument of ethnic opposition, of belonging to a people that speaks "its" language and feels it must defend "its" ever-threatened identity from other peoples and other languages. In the

poems here presented, translated by Antonello Satta, we already find all the themes recurrent in the Author's poetry: the epic-ethnic feeling of being part of a proud, dignified and rebellious people and to express, like an ancient aedos, their collective memory and their traditionally strongest and most vivid sentiments, always singing in chorus, like Machado (there is a long history of influences from Latin-America and in particular from Spanish poetry in Sardinian poetry of all periods); the feeling of a loss (of happiness, life, of a sort of golden age) and at the same time the parallel feeling of a possible redemption, of a revenge against a dark enemy, unnameable and unnamed; the elegy of the most beloved affections, some of which irremediably lost under the "blows of the foreign ax"; the firm, dramatic *rappel à l'ordre*, expressed

with civil passion and strong human dignity, to the whole Sardinian people so that they may finally be allowed to participate in “the feast promised to us” and always denied: a collective feast, and such as to welcome the dead as well as the living (“the fathers, the grandfathers, our ancestors”), “a great feast, long dreamed, wished for, and never seen.”

Lobina, who nourishes his poetry with all the popular (but not populist) resentments typical of his land, happily wedded to private sentiment, is perhaps the Sardinian poet who has expressed with the greatest power and emotion the feeling of deprivation and loss experienced by a colonized people and a severed tongue, and at the same time his longing for deliverance with a Risorgimento spirit, availing himself of a language that adheres closely to those sentiments, born from the people and

continually enriched by the people with new vital lymph. In the preface to Lobina's book, Antonello Satta wrote: "Benvenuto Lobina lives fully his poetic experiences in this identity, conscious of the "ethnocide" threatening his 'desperate' land." In hindsight, it must be said that Lobina's song of "celebration" and revolt has been, to a degree, prophetic: he has been able to see, even among the mournful litanies of his time, the future awaiting his island.

His greatest merit has been always being able to strike the right balance between public and private sentiment, between orality and writing, between tradition and innovation, between collective memory and ethnic-epic sentiment.

Criticism: F. Loi, in *Il Sole/24 ore*, 5/17/1992; A. Mundula, in *La Stampa-*

Tuttolibri, 7/15/1978; A. Satta, introduction
to *Is Canzonis*, 1992.

Ohi, custa osgi

Ohi, custa osgi chi di aillàgtru
i mi zèrria' trista, a so sighìa.
No é sa osgi
de i' méndullasa 'n frori accanta' 'i òmu
e nimmanchu 'e s'arrurndilli chi torra'
donni annu a asuttu 'e crobetura.
No é sa osgi custa
de s'arrìu chi gioga' cun su solli.
Terra,
disisperada terra,
non prus cun i sa osg' 'e s'arregodu
de is annus pru' bellus,
oi mi zèrrias,
ma cun àtara osgi,
cun bosgi trista, siddàda 'e su prantu,
cun bosgi chi oi sceti — òmini — intendu.
Mi zèrrias,
terra, cun i sa osgi serregada,
so osg' 'e s'aradori verenau
chi ara' cun dua bàccasa stasias;
sa osgi 'e su pastori cun sa cara
segàda 'e sa straccìa

in is pranus tuus fridus;

Ahi, questa voce — Ahi, questa voce che da lontano / mi chiama, triste, continua. / Non è la voce / dei mandorli in fiore accanto alla mia casa / né della rondine che ritorna / tutti gli anni sotto il tetto. / Non è la voce, questa, / del fiume che scherza col sole. // Terra, / o disperata terra, / non più con la voce del ricordo / degli anni più belli, / oggi mi chiami, / ma con diversa voce, / con triste voce soffocata dal pianto, / con voce che oggi soltanto — uomo — posso intendere // Mi chiami, / tetra, con la voce roca, / la voce dell'aratore irato / che ara con due magre vacche; / la voce del pastore col volto / sferzato dai piovvaschi / dei tuoi freddi altipiani; /

Ah, that voice

Ah, that voice, sad, insistent,
calling me from afar.
It's not the voice
of the almond trees blooming by my house,
nor of the swallow returning
under the roof each year.
Nor is it the voice
of the river flashing in the sun.
Earth,
O desperate earth,
no longer voicing the memory
of better years,
today you call me,
but with a different voice,
a sad voice stifled by sobs,
a voice I can understand only today — as a man.
Earth, you call me,
with a hoarse voice,
the voice of the angry plowman
plowing with two scrawny cows;
the voice of the shepherd, his face
lashed by rain squalls

on your cold plateaus;

cun t sa osgi
de feminas tribulliàdast
totu sa vida estia' de nieddu;
cun sa osgi 'e su trenu
chi sighid' a ancora a ndi pigai
sa mellu' gioventudi.

E cun su prantu,
cun su prantu mi zerria'
de pioppus arrutus
arresginis a solli, sconzollaus,
cun i' folla' bianca, frima', fridas
che una car' 'e mortu.

Mi zérrias: i àntur' 'e su coru
m'intend' antigus cropu' de segùri,
is cropu' de securi furistera
in i' forestas tua' devastadas.

Terra, su entu
mindi etti' s'annìgrid' 'e cuaddus
carriau', mischinu', de craboni,
carriau, mischinu', di egrungia,
cauddus curridoris chi banderas
pigànta 'n dònna festa.

con la voce / di donne tribolate / per tutta la vita vestite
a lutto; / con la voce del treno / che continua a portar via /
la gioventù migliore. // E col pianto, / col pianto tu mi
chiami / di pioppi caduti / con le radici al sole, sconsolati, /
con le foglie bianche, ferme, fredde / come il volto di un
cadavere. // Mi chiami: e dentro il cuore / sento antichi
colpi di scure, / i colpi della scure straniera / nelle tue
foreste devastate. / Terra, il vento / mi porta il nitrito dei
cavalli / carichi, meschini, di carbone, / carichi, meschini, di
vergogna, / cavalli corridori che trofei / conquistavano in
tutte le sagre. //

with the voice
of suffering women
who wear mourning all their lives;
with the voice of the train
taking away as always
the best of our youth.
And you call me
with the cry,
the cry of fallen poplars,
despondent, their roots in the sun,
and their leaves as white and still and cold
as the face of a corpse.
You call me: and in my heart
I hear the age old sound of chopping,
the chopping of the foreign ax
in your devastated forests.
Earth, the wind
brings me the neighing of horses
laden, poor things, with coal,
laden, poor things, with shame,
swift horses that once won trophies
in all the village festivals.

Terra, t'intendu,
o fragellàda terra.
Ma osgi no mi éssi
po t'arrespundi,
nì passu pozzu movi po torrai.
E i mi ferì che punt' 'i orteddu
sa osgi tua chi di aillàguru
i mi zèrria' trista, a sa sighìa.
da *Terra disisperada terra*, 1974

Terra, ti sento, / o flagellata terra. / Ma voce non mi
viene / per risponderti, / né passo riesco a muovere per
ritornare. / E mi colpisce / come punta di coltello / la tua
voce che da lontano / mi chiama, triste, continua.

(Traduzione di Antonello Satta)

(Cont.d)

Earth, I hear you,
O flagellated earth.
But I have no voice
to answer you,
nor can I move a step to go back.
And your voice, sad, insistent,
calling me from afar,
wounds me like the point of a knife.
(Translated by John Shepley)

No e' su pass' 'e babbu

No, mamma, su ch'inténdisi
no é so pass' 'e s'égua niedda
intrendu 'n prazza,
no è su pass' 'e babbu 'ntrendu 'n domu
cun is ispronis ancora 'n is péisi.

Ddu bisi
cant'arruina 'n so vosilli,
e in so ferr' 'e sa cavuna,
e in i' ferru' de tundi,
e in i' ferru' de pudai,
cantu prùin'in sa sedda,
in su frenu, in sa soga,
in dònna cosa chi no ha torrau
prus a tocai.

No, mamma, no ddu scùrtisti
cuss'angioni chi béulla, chi béullada
spettendiddu debadas issu puru.

Debàdasa 'n beranu
dd'happu spettau.

"Bis' cant'é bellu
so trig'ocannu — mi narà' — ddu bisi,
ottu, desgi pillonis:

had'a parr'unu mari su Stupara
cust'istadi, chi Deus had'a bolli."

E castiàda

mellas, cerésgias. E in donni' alla
parià' chi po spantu sceti tandu
frorí' biancus éssinti spannau.

Non è il passo di babbo — No, mamma, ciò che senti /
non è il passo della cavalla nera / che entra' nel cortile, /
non è il passo di babbo che entra in casa / con gli speroni
ancora ai piedi. / Vedi / quanta ruggine sul fucile, / e sul
ferro della roncola, / e sulle forbici da tosare, / e sulle forbici
da potare, / quanta polvere sulla sella, / sulle briglie, sul
laccio, / su ogni cosa che lui / non ha più toccato. / No,
mamma, non ascoltare / quell'agnello che bela, che bela /
attendendolo invano anch'esso. // Invano a primavera /
l'ho atteso. / "Vedi quanto è bello / il grano, quest'anno —
mi diceva — vedi / otto, dieci germogli: / sembrerà un mare
la piana di Stupara / quest'estate, se Dio lo vorrà." / E
guardava / meli, ciliegi. E su ogni ramo / sembrava che per
miracolo soltanto allora / i fiori bianchi sbocciassero. //

It's not father's footstep

No, mother, what you hear
is not the hooves of the black mare
entering the courtyard,
it's not father's footstep entering the house,
his spurs still jingling on his feet.

Look

at all the rust on the rifle,
and on the point of the billhook,
and on the sheep shears,
and the pruning shears,
all the dust on the saddle,
the reins and the lasso,
on all the things he
hasn't touched in so long.

No, mother, don't listen to
that lamb that keeps bleating and bleating,
it too waiting for him in vain.

In vain I waited
for him in spring.

"Look at the grain, how nice
it is this year," he told me, "look,
eight, ten shoots:

the plain of Stupara
will be like a sea this summer, God willing.”
And he looked at
apples, cherries. And it seemed
that by a miracle the white flowers
bloomed only then on every branch.

Debadas

a prim'atòngiu.

Sa muìd' 'e s'arriu, sceti, in bingia,

sa muìd' 'e s'arri' e i su entu

tra giuall'e giuall'abbandonau.

E i sa osgi sua:

“Bi, muscadeddu, unu urdon' 'i oru

a primu fruttu.

Niedda carta, niedda che pisgi;

custu gallopu, càst', unu spantu;

e i custu girò: unu cadinu

ònnia fundu.”

No, mamma, no ddu spéttisti:

debadà' l'èssas s'enna scaringiada,

sa lusgi alluta, su fogu tudau.

Non torra', mamma. Ma non depis prangi.

Ascurta: sezzidì accanta mia,

accant'accanta, e contamì de candu

torraà' de cassa manna cun su pégu'

de sribon'a agroppa' de cuaddu

e intrendu 'n prazza dd'arrianta 's ògus.

da Terra disisperada terra, 1974

Invano / al primo autunno. / Il mormorare del fiume,
soltanto in vigna, / il mormorare del fiume ed il vento / tra
filare e filare abbandonato. / E la sua voce: / “Vedi,
moscatello, un grappolo d’oro / al primo frutto. / Uva nera,
nera come pece; / questo talopo, guarda, una meraviglia; /
e questo girò: un cesto / ogni ceppo.” // No, mamma, non
attenderlo: / invano lasci l’uscio socchiuso, / la luce accesa,
il fuoco coperto. / Non tornerà, mamma. Ma non devi
piangere. / Ascolta: siedì vicino a me, / vicino, vicino, e
raccontami di quando / ritornava da caccia grossa / col
cinghiale sulla groppa del cavallo / ed entrando nel cortile
gli ridevano gli occhi.

(Traduzione di Antonello Satta)

In vain
in early autumn.

The murmur of the river, only in the vineyard,
the murmur of the river and the wind
from one abandoned row to the next.

And his voice:

“Look, muscatel, a golden bunch,
the first fruits.

Black grapes, pitch black:
look at these, a wonder;
and these, a basketful
from every stock.”

No, mother, don't wait for him:
there's no point leaving the door half open,
the light on, the fire banked. Mother, he's not coming
back.

But you mustn't cry.

Listen: sit here beside me,
here, right here, and tell me how
he used to return from the hunt,
the wild boar slung across the croup of his horse,
and enter the courtyard with laughing eyes.

(Translated by John Shepley)

Passus

Poita

ònnia pram' 'e terra accantu pòngiu
is péisi, mi pari' chi no sia'
frimu, comentu frimu no é mai
so pament' 'e so ponti écciu?

Poita ònnia passu

(e is passu' de sa genti,
e is passu' mius e totu)

m'arrentrònada 'n conca e in su coru
che is passus chi arrentrònant'a asutta
de is arcada' de su ponti écciu?

I mi pàrid' 'e 'ntendi
dì e notti sceti passu'

de genti ferenada,
passu' de genti senz' 'i alligria,
de gent' a marron'a coddu,
passu' di éccius peis a sa fossa
annend'a tira tira

a si spacciai s'ùrtim'allientu
po s'ùrtimu mussi' 'e pani;
passu' de piccioccheddu'
mortu' de sonnu, passu'

de genti mallefattora

(gent' 'e càvuna, gent' 'e fosilli)

Passi — Perché / ogni palmo di terra dove metto / i piedi,
mi sembra che non sia / fermo, così come fermo non è mai /
l'assito del vecchio ponte? / Perché ogni passo / (e i passi
della gente, / e miei stessi passi) / mi rimbombano in testa e
nel cuore / come i passi che rimbombano sotto / le arcate
del vecchio ponte? // Mi sembra di udire / giorno e notte
soltanto passi / di gente furibonda, / passi di gente senza
allegria, / di gente con zappe in ispalla, / passi di vecchi
con i piedi nella fossa / che vanno, strasciconi, / a
consumare il loro ultimo respiro / per l'ultimo boccone di
pane; / passi di fanciulli / insonnoliti, passi / di malfattori /
(gente di roncola, gente di schioppo) /

Footsteps

Why

does every inch of soil where I put
my feet seem to me not
solid, just as the planks
of the old bridge are never solid?

Why does every step
(both the steps of other people
and my own)

echo in my head and heart
like the footsteps that echo under
the arches of the old bridge?

All I seem to hear
day and night are the footsteps
of furious people,
footsteps of joyless people,
people with hoes on their shoulders,
footsteps of old people with one foot in the grave
who go shuffling along,
to expend their last breath
for their last mouthful of bread;
footsteps of drowsy
children, footsteps

of wrongdoers
(people with billhooks, people with hunting rifles),

e pàssusu scruzu' de femina,
de i' femina' nostas chi làssanta
in domo unu pipiu 'n su brazollu
e marranta totu sa dî,
cità', disisperadas,
senz' 'e tastai nudda,
senz' 'e toccai manc'aqua,
spettendu sceti s'or' 'e iscapai,
s'or 'e torra' a domu
po si podi incrubai, iderrigadas
e timi timi anant' 'e su brazollu.
Ma no nd'happ'a intendi prusu
arrentronend'asutt' 'e unu ponti
passu' de genti presgiada,
passu' de gent'imbriaga,
de genti chi àndad'a còia
de genti chi àndad'a tundi,
de genti chi àndad'a fastigiai,
passu' de gent'annend'a missa manna,
de gent'annend'a festa
a cabudanni, in dominig'a chizzi?
Serru 's ògus e biu

Santa Ittori' art' i abrusgiau
coment'e un'artari malladittu;
frastimendi' a iscusi Frumindosa

ddi pàssad' a ananti in punt' e pei. (da Terra disisperada
terra, 1974)

e passi scalzi di donna, / delle nostre donne che lasciano
/ in casa un bimbo nella culla / e zappano tutto il giorno, /
zitte, disperate, / senza assaggiare cibo, / senza bere una
goccia d'acqua, / attendendo soltanto l'ora di smettere, /
l'ora di tornare a casa / per potersi chinare, con le ossa rotte
/ e piene di timore, sulla culla. // Ma non ne sentirò più /
rimbombare sotto un ponte / passi di gente contenta, / passi
di gente ubriaca, / di gente che va agli spozalizi, / di gente
che va alla tosatura, / di gente che va a far l'amore, / passi
di gente che va alla messa solenne, / di gente che va alle
sagre / in settembre, di domenica all'alba? // Chiudo gli
occhi e vedo / il monte di Santa Vittoria alto e bruciato /
come un altare maledetto; / bestemmiando sottovoce il
Flumendosa / gli passa davanti in punta di piedi.

(Traduzione di Antonello Satta)

(Cont.d)

and footsteps of barefooted women,
our women who leave behind
in the house a baby in the cradle
and spend the day hoeing,
silent, desperate,
without tasting food,
without drinking a drop of water,
waiting only for quitting time,
the time to return home,
so as to lean, their bones aching
and full of fear, over the cradle.
But will I ever hear again,
echoing under a bridge,
the footsteps of happy people,
footsteps of tipsy people,
of people going to weddings,
of people going to the sheep shearing,
of people going to make love,
footsteps of people going to the solemn mass,
of people going to the village festivals
in September, on Sunday at dawn?
I close my eyes and see

Monte Santa Vittoria, high and scorched
like a profaned altar;
cursing under its breath, the Flumendosa river
flows before it on tiptoe.
(Translated by John Shepley)

E cun cantu cuaddus

E cun cantu cuaddus eus curtu,
O nonnu, de' e tui!
Cuaddus a sa nua,
cuaddus senz' 'e ferrai,
annigrànta in i' notti' de lugori,
marrasceddant'asutt' 'e sa ventana,
sindi scidànta in punt' 'e mesunotti
ca no bìanta s'ora
de partiri cun nosu a totu fua.
I a totu fua coment'e unu entu
seus passau', nonnu, tu' e deu,
in Campidanu, in s'Ollasta,
in Cabetesu e in terra' di Abràsgia
e fuau' bandidus e furonis.
(Omini' di onori
narà' sa genti
furonis chi torro bànta
sceti predis arriccus).
Cantu campidanesas titta' mannas
a agroppa' de cuaddus curridoris,
nonnu, a sa mod'antiga, eu' furau!
Iau' fattu in pizz' 'e unu monti

cun àturu' bandidus una idda
tot' e nou. Mancànta scet' i' feminas
e i sa crésia...

E con quanti cavalli — 'E con quanti cavalli abbiamo galoppato, / o nonno, io e tu! / Cavalli senza sella, / cavalli senza ferri, nitrivano nelle notti di luna, / scalpitavano sotto la finestra, / ci svegliavano a mezzanotte in punto / ché non vedevano l'ora / di partire con noi a tutto galoppo. // E a tutto galoppo, come un vento, / siamo passati, nonno, tu ed io, / in Campidano, nell'Ogliastra, / nel Capo di Sopra e nelle terre di Barbagia / ed eravamo banditi e ladroni. / (Uomini d'onore / — diceva la gente — / ladroni che derubavano / soltanto ricchi preti.) // Quante campidanesi dal seno opulento / in groppa a cavalli corridori, / nonno, al modo degli antichi, abbiamo rapito! / Avevamo costruito in cima ad un monte, / con altri banditi, un paese / tutto nuovo. Mancavano solo le donne / e la chiesa... /

And with all those horses

And with all those horses, grandfather,
we galloped, you and I!
Unsaddled horsed,
unshod horsed,
they neighed on moonlit nights,
pawed the ground under the window,
awoke us on the stroke of midnight,
for they couldn't wait
to gallop away with us at full speed.
And galloping at full speed, grandfather,
we passed like a wind, you and I,
through Campidano, the Ogliastra,
Capo di Sopra and the lands of Barbagia,
and we were bandits and thieves.
(Men of honor
— people said —
thieves who robbed
only rich priests.)
All those Campidano women with ripe breasts
we carried off, grandfather,
just like the ancients on the croups of our swift horses!
With other bandits, we'd built

a brand new village on top of a mountain.
All that was missing
were women and the church...

Mi parí de ti biri, tandu, nonnu,
in pizz' 'e unu mur'abosginendu:
"Pinnigài is cuaddus!
Bisòngiad'a partiri
nottest' e totu facci a Campidanu.
Nottest' é nott' 'e lugori,
nott' 'e furai feminas, piccioccus!"
I a i' femina' furada' ddis prasgiada
sa idd' 'e perda bia: Biddanoa.
E po fai sa cresi' unu predi
de s'Ollasta sia' donau
tres crobí de marengus e iscùdusu.
De bon'amori, mi pàridi,
a anant' 'e unu tre'bin'avrigau...
Nottesta cun su ent' 'e tramuntana,
nonnu, mind' é benù
s'annìgrid' 'e totu cuaddus
de is istorias chi mi contasta
sézziusu 'n bigia a s'ùmbar' 'e sa figu.
da Terra disisperada terra, 1974

Mi sembra di vederti, allora, nonno, / dritto sopra un
muro urlando: / "Riunite i cavalli! / Bisogna partire /

stanotte stessa verso il Campidano. / Stanotte è notte di
luna, / notte di rubar donne, giovanotti! / E alle donne
rapite piaceva / il paese di pietra viva: Villanova. // E per
costruire la chiesa un prete / dell'Ogliastra ci diede / tre
corbule di marenghi e di scudi. / Di buon animo, mi sembra,
/ davanti ad un treppiede arroventato... // Stanotte col
vento di tramontana, / nonno, mi é giunto / il nitrito di tutti
i cavalli / delle storie che mi raccontavi / seduti in vigna,
all'ombra del fico.

(Traduzione di Antonello Satta)

(Cont.d)

So I seem to see you, grandfather,
standing on a wall and shouting:
"Round up the horses!
This is the night
we leave for Campidano.
The moon is out tonight, boys,
it's a night to steal women!"
And the kidnapped women liked
that village of living stone: Villanova.
And to build the church a priest
from the Ogliastra gave us
three baskets full of napoleons and scudi.
Willingly, I think,
standing by a red hot brazier...

.....

Last night, grandfather,
the north wind brought me
the neighing of all the horses
from the stories you told me as we sat
in the shade of the fig tree in the vineyard.
(Translated by John Shepley)

MARIO PINNA

Born in Oschiri (Sassari) in 1918, Pinna received a degree in literature from the University of Pisa, where he attended the Scuola Normale Superiore. He was a high school teacher and a lecturer on Spanish and Spanish-American language and literature at the University of Padua. In the academic years from 1962 to 1965 he also taught Italian Philology at the University of Madrid.

In specialized reviews and in books he has published essays on Spanish and Spanish-American literatures, contributing to some of the most important literary journals, such as *Belfagor*, *Il ponte*, *Quaderni Ibero-americaeni*, *Annali della Ca' Foscari*, *Annali dell'Istituto Orientale universitario di Napoli* (AIO), *L'Albero* and others.

As a narrator he contributed for some time to the review *Botteghe Oscure*, edited by Giorgio Bassani, and, immediately after W.W. II, to the Sardinian review *Riscossa*. His poems in the Sardinian dialect were regarded “stimulating reading” by Pier Paolo Pasolini, who considered a small masterpiece the poem “Ammentos de istiu” [Summer Memories], published by the writer Salvatore Cambosu in the Sardinian review *S’ischiglia*. His poetry attracted the interest of Giuseppe Dessì and Oreste Macrì, and later of Gianfranco Folena from the University of Padua, who is responsible for publishing some of them in the 2nd volume of the anthology of dialect poets *Le parole di legno* [Wooden Words] (Mondadori, Milan 1984). His poem “Chelos de attunzu” [Autumn Skies], received an award at a

Sardinian poetry contest dedicated to Giovanni Corona.

Always reluctant to collect his verse in volume, Pinna remains almost unpublished, having published so far only a few poems in reviews and in the aforementioned anthology.

Mario Pinna writes in the dialect of Logudoro, which the advocates of a true Sardinian language would like to see as the mother tongue of the island. But if there is a dialect poet who more than anyone else feels this condition of being dialectal, this necessity of dialect as the only possible instrument of expression and evocation of an archaic, peasant world (thus dialectal), it is Pinna himself. With these poems of his scattered only in journals and in some authoritative anthologies, he seems to prove right those scholars and critics (like Barberi

Squarotti: one should read his "Happy Homage to Walter Galli" that appeared in *Il lettore di provincia*, n.79, Dec. 90) who maintain (in Barberi Squarotti's words) that "poetry in dialect has meaning primarily when it occupies a space specifically its own, in which it does not compete with the genetically elevated forms of poetry in Italian: the place, that is, of life in the village, town and countryside..." No doubt it would be difficult to transpose into Italian (and the Author's faithful yet inadequate translation confirms it) these dialect poems in which Mario Pinna becomes the bard of a peasant, almost sub-rural culture, which would be unthinkable in Italian.

The proper place for this poetry is in fact always the countryside, and indeed something that stands at the margins of the countryside itself, and almost constitutes its

negation or at least its residue: a bad year, frequented by “the poor mendicant women who used to come as stealthily as quails to steal the wheat” from Ricordi d’estate [Summer Memories], or those men in search of some hidden cluster of grapes in Vigna vendemmiata [Harvested Vineyard], who nevertheless represent “a hidden treasure,” the one which indeed animates these pages of poetry in which, with an almost childlike awe, with great evocative and visionary power, with highly suggestive images rich with ancient charm, Mario Pinna is able to reclaim for us, “like love which is past”, a marginal and marginalized world, unrecoverable for history outside of the magical and symbolic dimension of poetry.

Iscongiuru

Andatiche, male betzu e tortu,
benzat a nois su bene sanu
pro chi podamus a donzi manu
bìdere s'inimigu mortu;
abbandonarenos a su sonnu
chena pensare a cosas malas,
che columba sutta s'ala
agattare su veru reposu;
drommire comente funtana
in sas umbras de su monte,
de pensamentos in su fronte
ischire ite est chi ti sanat;
iscultare paraulas noas
in su coro giovanu e antigu,
bìdere onz'annu ispuntende su trigu
inue aias atzesu sas doas.

(Inedita)

Scongiuro. Vattene, male vecchio e deforme / perché
possiamo ad ogni lato / vedere il nemico morto: //
abbandonarci al sonno / senza pensare a cose cattive, /
come colomba sotto l'ala /

trovare il vero riposo; // dormire come sorgente / tra le

ombre del monte, / di pensieri sulla fronte / sapere cos'è che
ti guarisce; / ascoltare parole nuove / nel cuore giovane e
antico, / vedere ogni anno spuntare il grano / dove avevi
bruciato le stoppie.

(Traduzione dell'Autore)

Exorcism

Go away, old misshapen evil,
come to us, healthy goodness,
so that on every side
we can see the dead enemy,
abandon ourselves to sleep
without thinking about bad things
and, like a dove under its wing
find true repose,
sleep like a fresh spring
among mountain shadows,
know what it is that cures you
of thoughts weighing your brow,
listen to new words
in the ancient young heart, and every year,
see the wheat sprout
where you burned the stubble.
(Translated by Ruth Feldman)

Sa inza binnennada

Andaiamus a iscaluzare
a sa inza binnennada.
Ite giogu fit agattare
so paga llua ismentigada!
Unu tesoro cuadu,
un'abba in su desertu,
una paristoria noa.
Fimus riccos de s'ignoradu.
Connoschiamus atteras dulcuras
de indeorados pupujones.
Sa inza no fit ancora
morta. Sos ojos nostros,
ojos de canes perdijeris,
puntaian, in mesu 'e sas fozas
de colores ingannadores,
s'iscaluza minoredda,
incantu de sos chircadores.

(Inedita)

La vigna vendemmiata — Andavamo a racimolare / alla
vigna vendemmiata. / Che gioco era trovare / la poca uva
dimenticata! / Un tesoro nascosto, / un'acqua nel deserto, /
una fiaba nuova! / Eravamo ricchi dell'ignorato. /

Conoscevamo altre dolcezze / di acini dorati. / La vigna
non era ancora / morta. Gli occhi nostri, / occhi di cani da
pernice, / puntavano in mezzo alle foglie / di colori
ingannevoli / il grappoletto piccino, / incanto dei cercatori.

(Traduzione dell'Autore)

The Harvested Vineyard

We used to go gleaning
in the harvested vineyard.
What sport it was to find
the few forgotten grapes!
A hidden treasure,
water in the desert,
a new fairytale!
We were rich in the unknown.
We knew other sweetnesses
of golden berries.
The vineyard was not yet
dead. Our eyes,
bird dog eyes,
pointed in the midst of
deceitfully colored leaves
at the tiny cluster,
enchantment for the searchers.
(Translated by Ruth Feldman)

Chelos de attunzu

Chelos de attunzu. Turdos inchietos,
chi a trumas bolaiàzis a sa rughe
de sa gùpula ruja 'e sa cheja,
rughe niedda 'e ferru marteddadu
dae unu frailarzu inzeniosu;
turdos nieddos comente sa rughe
fiorida, chi cun sos curtos volos
attiàzis isperanzia de abbas
a sa morte istajona, cumprendio
su segnale 'e su tempus e accheradu
a su balcone ispettaìo sos primos
vuttios chi faghian s'allegria
ostra e in bolos bonde pesaian.
Da ue beniàzis non ischio,
forsi dae sos oros de sos rios,
mandadarzos de unu tempus nou.
Rispondian a sos fruscios brigadores
sos pidiàghes pettorribiancas,
chi andaian pedende a sas aeris
abba subra sas fozas de sos ortos,
abba subra su sidis de sas tancas.
Fizis festa pro unu coro solu,

disizados che amore chi est passadu,
che in fogu de frebba unu rizolu,
turdos chi su segnale aiàzis dadu.

(Inedita)

Cieli d'autunno – Cieli d'autunno. Tordi irrequieti, / che
a stormi volavate sulla croce / della cupola rossa della
chiesa, / croce nera di ferro martellato / da un fabbro
ingegnoso, / tordi neri come la croce / fiorita, che con i
brevi voli / portavate speranze di pioggia / alla morta
stagione, comprendevo / il segnale del tempo e affacciato /
alla finestra aspettavo le prime / gocce che facevano
l'allegria / vostra e in voli vi levavano. / Di dove venivate
non sapevo, / forse dalle rive dei fiumi, / messaggeri di un
tempo nuovo. / Rispondeva ai fischi rissosi / il piare degli
uccelli migratori, / le pavoncelle che hanno il petto bianco, /
che andavano chiedendo ai cieli / acqua sulle foglie degli
orti, / acqua sulla sete delle tanche; / eravate festa per un
cuore solo, / desiderati come amore ch'è passato, / come in
fuoco di febbre un ruscello, / tordi che il segnale avevate
dato

(Traduzione dell'Autore)

Autumn Skies

Autumn skies. You restless thrushes,
that flew in swarms over the cross
on the church's red cupola,
the black iron cross hammered
by an ingenious blacksmith,
thrushes black as the flowering
cross, that with short flights
brought hope of rain
to the dead season, I understood
the weather sign and, stationed
at the window, waited for the first
drops that brought your happiness
and lifted you in flights.
Where you came from, I did not know;
perhaps from the riverbanks,
messengers of new weather.
The chirping of migratory birds
replied to the quarrelsome whistling,
the white breasted lapwings
that were begging the skies
for water on the leaves of the kitchen gardens,
water on the thirst of the tanche.*

You were a feast for a lonely heart,
desired like love long past,
like a small stream in the fire of fever,
you thrushes that had given the signal.
(Translated by Ruth Feldman)

* Animal pens

Ammentos de istiu

M'ammento chi sas turtures vidia
cuadas in su trigu già messadu
e chi su coro pro issas timiat
so ardianu accurzu infusiladu.
"Turture, naraia, " no t'assucones
si ti che fatto olare abboghinende,
mezus un'attreghentu chi olende
ti che gittat a rios chena persones"
Sos carros passaian pianu pianu,
gàrrigos de mannugios indeorados,
minnannu in s'arzola dae manzanu
chito chito sos boes reposados
prendiat a su giuale e de granitu
limbaresu una pedra cun sa sogha
lis faghìat trazare e in cussu impitu
issos parian cuntentos. Eo, in fora,
sèttidu in s'umbra de unu cubone
sos omnes vidia impiuerados
in unu furione 'e paza: armados
diàulos parian de furcone.
Isse, minnannu, a tottu s'ogiu pruntu,
cun sa berritta in conca troffiada,

pariat puddu in su puddarzu e contu
teniat de onzi passu in sa leada.

Ricordi d'estate — Ricordo che le tortore vedevo /
nascoste in mezzo al grano già mietuto / e che il cuore per
esse temeva / il guardiano vicino armato di fucile. //
Tortora, dicevo, non spaventarti / se ti faccio volar via
gridando, / meglio un soprassalto che a volo / ti porti a
fiumi senza gente. // I carri passavano lentamente /
carichi di covoni dorati; / il nonno nell'aia dalla mattina /
per tempo i buoi riposati // legava al giogo e un macigno /
di granito del Limbara con la soga / gli faceva trascinare e in
quell'impiego / essi parevano contenti. Io in disparte //
seduto all'ombra di una capanna / gli uomini vedevo
impolverati / in un vortice di paglia: sembravano / diavoli
armati di forcone. // Lui, il nonno, a tutto l'occhio, attento,
/ con la berretta in testa attorcigliata / sembrava gallo nel
pollaio e conto / teneva di ogni fatto all'intorno. //

Memories of Summer

I remember that I saw the turtle doves
hidden in the midst of the already reaped grain
and that the heart feared for them
the watchman nearby, armed with a rifle.
"Turtledove," I said, "don't be afraid
if I send you flying with my shouts.
Better a startled movement that carries you off
in flight to rivers free of people".
Carts were passing slowly
loaded with golden wheat sheaves;
the grandfather on the threshing floor
since early morning
tied the rested oxen to the yoke and a boulder
of Limbara granite with the leather strap,
made them drag it and they seemed
contented with that task. I, seated
a bit apart in the shade of a hut,
saw the dust covered men
in a vortex of straw; they looked like
devils armed with pitchforks.
He, the grandfather, watched attentively,
with his cap twisted on his head,

and seemed like a cock in a poultry yard,
keeping an eye on everything going on around him.

De sos puzones timiat piùs sa zente,
timiat sas poverittas pedidoras
chi a s'accucca accucca enìan comente
tùrtures a furare trigu. S'ora
de mesudie fit so piùs pasada:
benìan feminas dae sa idda allegras
cun s'ustu, de urusones e seadas
nde pienaian sas ischisioneras.
Tando eo mi seìa can minnannu,
mandigiamus dae unu piettu;
isse mi naraìat: "Fizu, occannu
pagu at a trabagliare su sedatu".
Onzi annu fit su matessi lamentu:
"S'annada mala Deus nos at dadu
pro nos mantènnere sempre in pensamentu".
Sn coro sòu fit troppu attaccadu;
no perdonèit mai né a puzones,
né a feminas chi enìan pro ispigare,
no s'ammentèit de su riccu Epulone
chi devèit a Lazzaru giamare.

Più degli uccelli temeva la gente, / temeva le poverette
mendicanti / che quatte quatte venivano come / tortore a

rubar grano. L'ora // di mezzogiorno era la più goduta, /
venivano donne dal paese allegre/ con il pranzo, di
urusones e seadas / riempivano le zuppiere. // Allora io mi
sedevo col nonno / mangiavamo dallo stesso piatto; / egli
mi diceva: figlio, quest'anno / poco ha da lavorare il
setaccio, // ogni anno era lo stesso lamento, / la mala
annata Dio ci ha dato / per tenerci sempre in pensiero. / Il
suo cuore era troppo avaro, // non perdonò mai né a uccelli
né a donne che venivano per spigolare, / non si ricordò del
ricco Epulone / che dovette invocare Lazzaro. //

(Cont.d)

He was more afraid of people than of the birds;
he feared the poor beggarwomen
who, slyly slyly came like turtledoves
to steal grain. The midday hour
was the most relished one.

That's when the lively women came from town
with dinner and filled the tureens
with urusones¹ and seadas².

Then I sat down with the old man
and we ate from the same plate,
He said to me: son, this year
the sieve has little work to do;
every year there was the same lament:
God has given us a bad year
to keep us on our toes.

His heart was too greedy.
He never forgave either the birds
or the women who came to glean;
he didn't remember the rich Dives
who had to invoke Lazarus.

1 A kind of ravioli

2 A sweet made of honey and cheese

Sos boes trazaian pedras mannas,
sa paza bolaìat in sa entu,
sa coro sòu no fit mai cuntentu
ca cheriat de trigu una muntagna;
una muntagna manna che su mundu
chi a sas nues ch'essèret alciada,
chi de sa terra idèret su profundu
comente cudda chi si fit bisada.

(Inedita)

I buoi trascinavano pietre grandi, / la paglia volava nel
vento, / il suo cuore non era mai contento, / perché voleva
una montagna di grano, // una montagna grande come il
mondo, / che fino alle nubi fosse salita, / che della terra
avesse visto il profondo / come quella che si era sognata.

(Traduzione dell'Autore)

(Cont.d)

The oxen went on dragging the great stones,
the straw whirled in the wind.
His heart was never content
because he wanted a mountain of grain,
a mountain big as the world
that would reach all the way to the clouds,
that would have seen the depths of the earth,
like the one he had dreamed of.
(Translated by Ruth Feldman)

Unu puntu de lughe

Mèrulas amigas,
chi in custu ierru anneuladu,
appenas una pago
de lughe apparit, comente fritzas
bascias passades
subra sas fozas
mortas, infustas,
dae un'àlvure a s'àtteru
de su viale abandonadu,
fattende no s'ischit cales
fainas o chirchende
segretas cumpanzias;
piùs amiga oe sento
sa ceddita,
chi dae un'àlvure ispozadu
ml mandat sa oghita
trizile de su presentzia sua.
La chirco alcende sos ojos
in altu, sempre piùs in altu,
e candu mi paret
de l'àere agattada
m'abbizzo chi una foza sicca,

minuda minuda,
m'àiàt ingannadu.

Ceddita,
penso chi ses unu puntu
de oghe, unu puntu de lughe,
unu biculeddu de istella,
pèrdidu in su die.

(Inedita)

Un punto di luce — Merli amici, / che in questo inverno
nebbioso, / appena un poco / di luce appare, come frecce /
basse passate / sopra le foglie / morte, intrise, / da un
albero all'altro / del viale abbandonato, / facendo non si sa
quali / faccende o cercando / segrete compagnie: / più
amico oggi sento / lo scricciolo, / che da un albero spoglio /
mi manda la vocina / esile della sua presenza. / Lo cerco
alzando gli occhi / in alto, sempre più in alto, / e quando mi
sembra / d'averlo trovato / mi accorgo che una foglia secca,
/ minuta minuta, / mi aveva ingannato. / Scricciolo, /
penso che sei un punto / di voce, un punto di luce, / una
scheggia di stella / smarrita nel giorno.

(Traduzione dell'Autore)

A Point of Light

Friend blackbirds
in this misty winter
when hardly a bit of light
is seen, like low
arrows that have passed
above the dead
soaked leaves,
from one tree to the other
in the deserted lane,
entangled in who knows what
activities or seeking
secret companionship;
today the wren
that sends me its thin sweet tones
from a leafless tree
sounds friendlier.
I search for it, raising my eyes
high, then higher still,
and when I think I've found it
I notice that a tiny
dry leaf
deceived me.

Wren,
I think you are a point
of voice, a point of light,
a star splinter
lost in day.
(Translated by Ruth Feldman)

CESARINO MASTINO

(Alias ZIU GESARU)

Cesarino Mastino was born in Sassari in 1984 and died in Rome in 1980. He worked as a land surveyor in Sassari, in La Maddalena and in Rome, but in his Roman “exile” he always maintained a vital and intense relationship with “his” Sassari, publishing there his poems in local papers and journals, later collected in a volume, for the first time, in 1966, with the title *Sassari mea* [My Sassari]. There followed: *Sassari ciunfraiora e risurana*, in the same year, and *Tutta Sassari* in 1968; *Veni chi ridi*, in 1971 and, posthumously, *Un poggu avveru e un poggu abbuffunendi*, in 1980, soon after he died (all with the publisher Chiarella, Sassari). Ziu Gesaru (this was his pen name)

also published a play, *Lu patiu*, in 1976.

Mastino, better known by his pseudonym Ziu Gesaru, uses the instrument of his vernacular, conscious of speaking a very ancient tongue (and the names, events, people, places, customs etc.. one reads in his verse are the signs of this keen awareness) fixing in a compassionate memory (and also inventing on a linguistic level) a dialect-speaking, popular society that in order to survive must indeed speak dialect, the dialect ziu Gerasu employs very adroitly, knowing it to be threatened by the other language or, more simply, by Italian. The Author's reaction before the offensive of Italian in the moment or moments of sharpest friction is to maximize the friction itself, accepting to the quick the encounter-clash of Italian-dialect, but above all intervening in several directions with

caricatural effects with respect to Italian (or inserting fragments, lexemes, autonomous phrases from it in the body of dialect, with parodic, ironic, and comical effects, or deforming Italian into a sort of *négligée* or even macaronic language; in brief, carrying out a linguistic operation very lively and invigorating for our Sassari dialect).

But what does this estrangement consist of? Giacinto Spagnoletti asked himself not too long ago, commenting on our introduction to this Author (*Poesia dialettale dal Rinascimento a oggi*) and adding at once: "On the one hand there comes into play the use of archaic dialect words, in contrast with an Italian devoid of lexical density, at times parodic; on the other hand it is precisely in the resources of dialect that he attains notable effects, adopting sharp and harsh tones with undeniable skill. He is an author

who is aware that language is a mirage to be reached, in the very measure that one's own dialect is a language." For ziu Gerasu the use of dialect is certainly a cogent, indispensable necessity: it is not only his maternal tongue, but the only possible tongue or rather the only tongue in which it is possible to situate, as if inside an eternal monument, a whole zap- podorina (peasant) civilization, in which the memory of places and sentiments merges splendidly with the very tradition of the language.

The survival of those places, of those affections of the small and apparently ephemereal things of that civilization, is essentially entrusted to the duration of the language that says them in the only way in which they can be said for ziu Gesaru, namely in the Sassari dialect, the only language delegated to say all the things of

the city (whence the title of his most important collection: All Sassari). As shown in the poem included as an example (My Streets), for Cesarino Mastino the famous saying: "all roads lead to Rome" will have to be rectified into "all roads lead to Sassari" and more precisely (as he will say in the very title of his other collection) to that high-spirited and riotous Sassari, the Sassari of alleyways and narrow streets, of working-class courtyards, where he spent his childhood and early youth. Res et verba are, in ziu Gesaru's poetry, so intimately fused that one dialect word is enough to recreate what for Mastino is the golden age of life and history, and all he needs is a trifle, just a cup of coffee, to bring to the surface, among the smells and vapors of the time, from a decidedly working-class neighborhood, the authentic voice of a warm and enfolding

sentiment.

As Alghero for Rafael Sari, so too Sassari for Cesarino Mastino is really the heart of the world, the only one where true life exists.

Criticism: A. Mundula, in *La Stampa-Tuttolibri*, 7/15/1992; N. Tanda, in *La provincia di Sassari*, Sassari 1983.

La muddina

Manzanìri. È muddinendi.
L'eba fara da lu zéru
Fitta fitta, suipirendi,
Si l'aischolthi, véru véru.
Fara sobr'a la rughitta,
Lu pansé e lu cicraminu...
Da li téuri di suffitta
Caggi drent'a la brucchitta,
Poi ni fazzi di caminu:
Curri sott'a lu pulthari
Finz'a Poltha Sant'Antoni,
Passa in Santu Purinari,
Entra i l'olthi, i l'aribari,
E s'affianca a l'isthradoni.
Mamma canta, dozi dozi,
Impasthendi la farina
Cu' la mèndura e la nozi:
Cant'è bedda la so'bozi,
Frescha che eba cristhallina,
Canta pazi pon'in cori!
La carrera s'è isciddendi
E un lampioni è lagrimendi

Cu' la luzi móri móri...

Fazzi freddu. É muddinendi!

da *Tutta Sassari*, 1968

La pioggerella – Mattino. Sta piovento. / L'acqua scende
dal cielo / fitta fitta, sospirando; / Pare proprio che parli, se
l'ascolti, vero vero. // Scende sopra la ruchetta, / la viola e
il ciclamino... / Dalle tegole del soffitto / cade dentro alla
brocchetta, / poi ne fa di strada... // Corre sotto la porta
fino a Porta S. Antonio, / passa per Sant'Apollinare, / entra
negli orti, negli oliveti, / e si affianca allo stradone. //
Mamma canta, dolce dolce, / impastando la farina / con la
mandorla e la noce: / quant'è bella la sua voce, / fresca
come acqua cristallina, // quanta pace mette in cuore! / la
strada si sta svegliando / e un lampione sta piangendo /
con la sua luce morente... / Fa freddu. Sta piovento!

(Traduzione di Angelo Mundula)

Drizzle

Morning. Now it's raining.
The water drops from the sky
In thick streams, and it sighs;
It seems really to be talking,
If you listen, really, really.
It falls down upon the rugola,
on the cyclamen and violet...
From the tiles there on the rooftop
In the pitcher falls the rivulet,
and keeps going, does not stop...
It runs under the big door
Up to Saint Anthony's gate,
And through St. Apollinaire,
Enters gardens, olive groves,
And it ends up by the roadside.
Very sweetly, mother sings
As she kneads and kneads the flour
With the walnuts and the almonds:
What a lovely voice she has,
Fresh as water from the spring.
How it brings peace to your heart!
Now the road begins to fill

And a streetlamp starts to weep
With its waning dying light...
It is cold. It's raining still.
(Translated by Luigi Bonaffini)

Polthutorra

Da Li Pidriazzi, in punt'a l'isthradoni,
Si vedi Polthutorra inghiriadda
Da vigni e da tanchitti, lu basthioni,
La géisgia antiga di La Cunsuradda,
Li casaréddi a occi a la marina,
Tappaddi da li rezzi profumaddi,
Chi s'ipìcciani i l'eba cristhallina.
Chissi carreri bianchi, assuriaddi,
Undì passaba candu éra minori,
So' li matessi di Santa Maria,
Cu' li robitti di tanti curori
Tési a lu sori sott'a lu balchoni,
E li mói di figga primmaddìa
I l'óru di la janna; li lampioni,
Li vecci i li pidrissi di cantoni
Aischulthendi li canti in puisia:
Propriu cument'e in Poltha Sant'Antoni...
da Tutta Sassari, 1968

Portotorres — Da Li Pidriazzi, in cima allo stradone, / si vede Porto Torres circondata / da vigne e da piccole tanche, il bastione, / la chiesa antica de La Consolata, // le piccole case davanti alla marina, / coperte dalle reti profumate, /

che si specchiano nell'acqua cristallina. / Quelle strade
bianche, assolate, // dove passavo quand'ero bambino, /
sono le stesse di Santa Maria, / con le robette di tanti colori
// stese al sole sotto il balcone / e i cestini di fichi primaticci
/ sulla soglia di casa; i lampioni, / i vecchi sui sedili di tufo /
che ascoltano i canti poetici / proprio come a Porta
Sant'Antonio...

(Traduzione di Angelo Mundula)

Porto Torres

From Li Pidriazzi, over the main boulevard,
You can see Porto Torres surrounded
By the fortress, small pastures and vineyards,
The ancient church of the Consoled,
The small houses facing the seaside,
Enshrouded by the fragrant fishing nets,
That are reflected by the crystal tide.
Those white roads, lightdrenched from dawn to sunset,
On which I walked when I was just a child,
Are the same as Santa Maria's,
With all the many-colored garments
Hanging out to dry under the balcony
And the baskets filled with early figs
Over the doorstep; and then the streetlamps,
The old men seated on the tufa benches
Listening to the words from epic songs:
Just as they did in St. Anthony's Gate.
(Translated by Luigi Bonaffini)

Lu caffè'

Mamma minn'isciddaba lu manzanu
Cu' un basgiu e una tazza di caffè;
Sinn'isthazzia un poggiu affacc'a me
Dabói sinn'andaba, pianu pianu,
E rimanìa in tuttu l'appusentu
Un profummu suabi e diricaddu.
I lu ciapittu meu cantaba un giaddu,
E la campana sobr'a lu cunventu
Sunaba pa' li monzi di crausura.
Abà lu foggu è sempri isthudaddu,
Sott'a la ziminèa oschura oschura;
E gandu pensu a la me' carrera,
E chiss'aroma fini e profumaddu
N'èsci fumendi da la caffittèra,
Veggu cument'e in sonniu la suffitta,
Mamma chi poni lu caffè duraddu
E ridendi m'appògli la tazzitta...
da Tutta Sassari, 1968

Il caffè' — Mamma mi svegliava il mattino / con un bacio
e una tazza di caffè; / se ne stava un poco accanto a me, /
poi se ne andava, piano piano, // e restava in tutta to
stanza / un profumo soave e delicato. / Nel mio cortiletto

cantava un gallo, / e la campana sopra il convento //
suonava per le suore di clausura. / Adesso il fuoco è sempre
spento / sotto la cappa scura scura; /

quando penso alla mia strada, / e quell'aroma fine e
profumato / esce fumando dalla caffettiera, // vedo come
in sogno la soffitta: / mamma che versa il caffè dorato / e
ridendo mi porge la tazzina...

(Traduzione di Angelo Mundula)

The Coffee

My mother would wake me early in the day
With a kiss and with a cup of coffee;
For a little while she kept me company
And then she very quietly slipped away.
And the whole room seemed to overflow
With a soft, a most delicate scent.
In my small courtyard a rooster would crow
And the bell overlooking the convent
Rang for the nuns who were enclosed below.
Nowadays the fire is always out
In the chimney under the dark cowl
And whenever I think about my street
And when that fragrant delicate aroma
Comes out steaming from the coffee-pot
I see the attic in a dream meanwhile:
My mother pouring out the golden coffee
And handing me the cup with a big smile.
(Translated by Luigi Bonaffini)

La isthrintaredda

No soggu si mi l'aggiu sunniadda
O s'e isisthidda avvéru... A Sant'Antoni
Paria azzesa da li fuggaroni;
E mi l'ammentu tutta inghiriadda
Da casi minoréddi e da balchoni
Infiuraddi di menta profumadda.
E dugna sera, a la ischurigadda,
Appena azzindiàni li lampioni
S'intindìa lu grigliuru cantendi,
I li gabbietti sobr'a la cimbrana,
E Santu Purinari ribicchendi.
M'ammentu chi l'inverru, i li dì mari,
Da li grundu caggìa l'eba piubana
Drent'a l'isthégli vécci e a l'isthagnàri...
da Tutta Sassari, 1968

La viuzza — Non so se l'ho sognata / O se c'è stata davvero.. A Sant'Antonio / sembrava accesa dai fuochi; / e la ricordo tutta inghirlandata // da piccole case e da balconi / infiorati di menta profumata. / E ogni sera, al tramonto, / appena accendevano i lampioni // si udiva il grillo che cantava, / in gabbie appese alla finestra, / e il rintoccare di Sant'Apollinare. // Mi ricordo che d'inverno, nelle brutte

giornate, / dalle gronde cadeva l'acqua piovana / dentro i
vecchi tegami e le secchie....

(Traduzione di Angelo Mundula)

The Small Street

I don't know if I saw it in my dreams
Or if it really existed... On St. Anthony's
It seemed aflame with all its fiery gleams;
And I recall its small houses and balconies
Encircling it wholly in a wreath,
In a bloom of sweet-smelling mint.
And every night, at sunset, in the street,
When you saw the streetlamps' first faint glint
You would begin to hear the crickets' fanfare,
Inside the cages hanging out the window,
And the tolling of St. Apollinaire.
In winter, I remember, on cold days,
Out of the gutters rainwater would flow
Into battered saucepans and old pails.
(Translated by Luigi Bonaffini)

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