

# Cesare Barbieri Courier

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*Cover:* GREGORIO DE FERRARI: "Flying Angel"  
*Lent by Robert and Bertina Suida Manning, New York*

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*Editor:* MICHAEL R. CAMPO

# Italy 1962:

## Literary Trends and Books

by Sergio Pacifici

I am writing these pages in my study, located atop a small building housing a variety of classrooms and administrative offices. It is the same quiet, secluded place where for the past several years I have worked and studied. A forbidding sign on the door reads "Fire Exit," thus discouraging wandering students from disturbing the occupant.

It is still quite difficult for me to realize that just a few weeks ago I was not here but in Rome, browsing in the bookshops, talking with writers and colleagues, discussing the latest books, American culture and politics with the habitués of the friendly salotto of the Bellonci, where the faithful "amici della domenica" were discussing the merits of the eventual candidates of the annual Strega award. Yet, it is precisely in virtue of my being *here*, in the remoteness and detachment of my own *officina segreta*, that I can look back to my recent experiences and readings, search my memory for those events and works that reveal, as accurately and as impartially as circumstances permit, the temper of contemporary Italian writing.

A discussion of recent Italian books can hardly be meaningful unless preceded by a few general comments about a climate that in due time should affect, thematically and stylistically, all literary endeavors in that country. As anyone who has visited Italy in more than a casual manner, or who is willing to make comparisons between yesterday's and today's conditions, I was struck by – and not always delighted with – the extent to which all aspects of life have become industrialized. The real impact of the revolutionary changes that have been taking place in Italy over the past ten or fifteen years is one that cannot be adequately measured or assessed at this time. But some of the initial consequences of such changes are beginning to alter the socio-economic structure of Italian society, whose rhythm and *mentalità* are no longer the same as some of us knew them to be just a few years ago. Possibly, by way of illustrating the magnitude of such a sudden metamorphosis (for which, I hasten to add, most Italians were neither culturally nor emotionally ready) we might turn briefly to consider what has happened to the publishing industry.

The times when an Italian publisher could afford to devote his full energies and resources to bringing out a few worthy "new" writers each season, while consolidating the positions of the established ones, are gone forever. The tempo of editorial activity no longer permits such an inefficient, casual and ineffectual treatment. The postwar economic boom, which has raised the standard of living of all social classes, has been instrumental in creating, among other things, a twin headed hunger for material things and *books*. A new mass audience, with vast, untapped resources and an eagerness to become cultivated, or at least better informed, has come into being.

The lure of an open future, full of challenges and promises, tempered by the awareness of the risks posed by mounting costs and a fiercely competitive market, has quickly persuaded the Italian publishers that it is impossible to stay in business today by merely clinging to old-fashioned techniques, or to archaic concepts of what constitutes their domain or their function in today's world. In order to develop a greater understanding of what is happening to the reading audience, they have eagerly turned to the most perfected market analyses, to various polls, and to other barometers of public taste (such as the bestsellers lists), hoping to discover the ultimate secret, or recipe for a commercially successful book. Simultaneously, they have also improved their production and distribution organization, their staff and their promotion department. A shrewd diversification into the magazine field, coupled with an imaginative program of inexpensive paperbacks, has enabled them to resolve their most immediate problems, helping them to make the inevitable transition a smooth and painless affair. Unfortunately, their search for a reading audience that circumstances dictate must be infinitely vaster than ever before has frequently led several publishers to cater unduly to public taste. One of the most regrettable consequences of their posture has resulted in the appearance of a spate of books exploiting social, political and sexual themes previously shunned or tabooed with unmerciful coarseness (rationalised as being an expression of frankness and realism). By so doing, Italy has invited, despite the

warning of some intellectuals who brood over the consequences of such a policy, a commercialization and a vulgarization of culture that has already reached frightening proportions.

Culture, a privilege for the few not so long ago, has suddenly become readily available to the masses which have been thrust, with little of the necessary sophistication, from a state of ignorance into one of pseudo-knowledge. Some publishing houses, controlled by big chemical or industrial interests, have been turned into downright money-making propositions and, as such, no longer committed to bring out belles lettres or works that may uplift or educate the human spirit, except in those cases where such a commitment coincides with an increase of their prestige or their market. How else could one explain why Uberto Paolo Quintavalle's *Tutti compromessi*, a mediocre account of bourgeois decadence, slated to be printed by Bompiani and subsequently turned down when the manuscript had reached the page-proof stage, was brought out by such a distinguished house as Feltrinelli of Milan?

It would indeed be comforting if one could report that the extraordinarily bright sales pictures of the printed word reflect a genuine growing interest in the arts, or a definite increase in the "literacy" of the Italian audience. Actually this is far from being the real case. Judging from personal observation, it is evident that even today, despite the large printings enjoyed by most books, novels and poetry are read by a relatively small percentage of the Italian population, possibly because they are overpriced (considering the earning power of the average working man) and more probably because the Italian reader has yet to be cured of a persistent addiction to the *fumetti*, the scandal sheets, the sports periodicals, and the more obviously pornographic confession magazines. The irony of this situation is that such trashy periodicals are invariably published by the same houses that bring out responsible and serious literature!

If the trend I have been describing has produced some disquieting developments, it is not without a definite positive side. First of all, the economic status of the writer has immeasurably improved, thanks to the increased sales of his work and of radio-television and movie rights. Secondly, there has been a miraculous change in the standard appearance of the printed product itself. Thirdly, and lastly, a wide range of classical and contemporary works of unquestionable worth have been made available at a modest price. With the proper program, staff and vision, educating the working class might not be an overwhelming

task, now that some of the important tools are beginning to be within its economic reach.

The variety of changes in the mode, style and rewards of publishing, have affected the occupation, interest and personality of the writer himself. While in the past the élite of writers was composed of people for whom art was not, and could not be, a source of sufficient income to meet their needs, the new generation has discovered that the large demand on the part of newspapers and magazines with large circulations for journalists and feature writers has transformed writing into a highly profitable vocation. Many poets and novelists of the older generation (from Carducci to Pascoli, Panzini, Ungaretti and Quasimodo) combined writing with teaching. Today, on the other hand, most creative writers are connected, in one way or another, with one of the mass communication media, or are employed by the large industrial and banking concerns in the North. A handful still retain posts closely connected with literature: Elio Vittorini heads the foreign literature division of Mondadori, whose general editor is Vittorio Sereni, an esteemed and well known poet; Giorgio Bassani directs the highly successful operations of Feltrinelli (publishers of Pasternak and Lampedusa, among others), while Italo Calvino is in charge of the brilliant Torinese house of Giulio Einaudi.

Confronted by a devastating "Americanization" that has radically transformed their country, several sensitive writers have chosen not to remain silent witnesses of the growing dehumanization of life everywhere. What could have well been dismissed as a fascinating, but inconsequential evidence of "modern progress" has been transformed into absorbing narrative material. A glance at recent Italian books reveals that the newest preoccupations, the haunting themes of the imagination of the new generation, have been suggested precisely by the industrial revolution that has been taking place lately.

The fiction of the immediate postwar period mirrored a deep concern with the tragedy of the last conflict, its dramatic consequences, the physical and emotional scars it had left everywhere, the urgency to work together toward peaceful goals that would permit man to live in harmony and dignity with all men. It was, in short, a fiction replete with political and human significance, engagé in the best sense of the word. Recent narrative, by contrast, shows an engrossing concern with depicting life in a society becoming technological: hence, life in the factories, in the scientific laboratories where intricate robots and com-

puters are being built, intended to take over a substantial share of man's functions, and perhaps participate actively in the decision-making processes, life in the suites of the publishing and advertising companies, where agile minds are methodically studying human behavior with the ultimate goal of shaping, and possibly controlling, public taste and public opinion.

Contemporary novelists have not generally reached the stage where they can analyze with the precision of the social scientist the condition of the new society. But they are, in a sense, ahead of their times in understanding and depicting the chain of causes ultimately responsible for fostering the alienation of man from other men. Forced to produce something through which he can no longer "express" himself, and unable to identify himself with the fruit of his labor, man feels first rejected by, and then inimical toward his environment. In a society becoming mechanized so swiftly as to be unwilling to pause long enough to question the reason — and much less the morality — of its processes, it is almost unavoidable that man should ultimately be used as a means and not as an end. But an end to what? someone may ask. To success, prestige, power — political, economic, religious, it matters little — or ideological supremacy. Out of the tensions generated by contemporary stresses and pressures, as well as by a spiritually chaotic life, has sprung a pervasive cleavage between man and his universe (about which the Existentialist philosophers and novelists have had much to say), a loss of identity, a lack of urgency to identify himself with the surrounding world and, finally, a gradual loss of man's confidence in his own ability to shape the world into his image.

Enticed by the promises of a technological paradise, man has found himself enslaved by the very machines he invented and by a society that no longer believes in the worth of the individual. Living in the twentieth century has become either a nightmare or a downright bore. (Appropriately enough, Alberto Moravia has titled his latest novel *La noia*.)

The results yielded by recent efforts to depict fictionally such new aspects of the human condition have been examined in a fascinating issue of *Il Menabò* (IV, 1961), the Milanese magazine-anthology edited by Elio Vittorini and Italo Calvino. The editors have sought to study, through an appropriate selection of relevant and intelligent creative and critical texts, the climate in which the new literature is being written, hoping to shed some light upon the new themes (and certain problems they present

to the creative writer) suggested by the industrial revolution. In Vittorini's words, "The investigation we were trying to conduct in the life of our country through literature had to lead us, sooner or later, to the gathering of texts which might permit us to determine to what degree the new things we live among today, directly or indirectly, have their counterpart of *novità* in the human imagination."

Novels describing the complexities of a society in turmoil, numerous as they have been, have only seldom reached a level of artistic achievement. The failure to cope realistically and poetically with the new times is traceable, first of all, to the artist's self-confessed inability to become a living part of that industrial world he tries to understand. As Ottiero Ottieri has recently remarked, "the world of the factories is a closed one. One does neither enter nor leave it easily . . . How can the artist living outside the industrial world penetrate it?" In the majority of instances we have been given at least a "sense" of what it is like to live in a factory-oriented world, dominated by industrial decisions, by means of naturalistic structures and styles. The writer has seldom perceived that new themes demand new approaches and handlings. Only then can he adequately depict those commitments to life, or those values that are novel for most societies. Vittorini has given us another insight by stating: "The writer is identified with the factories and organizations about which he writes without having any interest in the new things that comprise that new reality which has emerged from the latest developments in the factories." (Vittorini's own inability to bring to a satisfactory completion his recent narrative work to the point of allowing it to appear in print seems to be rooted in the extreme manner in which the technical revolution, as he himself admitted, "has changed all values, man's nature, his desires, his needs, even his language." "The novelist," he added, "must have some stability, must be certain of some things, must have firm points of reference. Where can he find them, in today's fluctuating society?")

A partial dissatisfaction with those works of imaginative literature that have dealt with such themes as have been mentioned ought not to obscure those individual achievements that handsomely make up for the inevitable failures. We owe a large debt to that handful of poets and novelists for having painted for us the "brave new world" in which we live and which we shall have no trouble recognizing as our own special monstrous creation.

Discontent with the world, with hypocrisy and ambivalence marring man's relations with

his fellow men, may take various forms in literature. We have, on the one hand, the unrestrained, deep-seated resentment that makes of Carlo Castellaneta's novella, *La lunga rabbia*, a haunting and powerful indictment of modern society, or, on the other hand, the unresigned, sarcastic condemnation of a selfish, cruel world made by a poet like Umberto Pignotti, whose compositions appear with the title "L'uomo di qualità" in the issue of *Il Menabò* previously mentioned. Nowhere better than in his poem "Il presente passato" does Pignotti recapture the extent of his despair, partially redeemed by an intense, unexpressed, yearning to change the socio-moral structure of his society:

Il cielo è basso  
 il sole non prorompe  
 il vento non imperversa  
 il mondo è nascosto o indifferente  
 ad affacciarsi.  
 Uomini spenti e cose vuote.

Bisogna chiudere la finestra per non odiare  
 più.

Passi che non portano avanti,  
 realtà che si fa condurre dalla corrente:  
 è sempre andata così.  
 Quel che si stringe nelle mani non è vero.  
 Anche in questi sogni c'è poco di bello da  
 vedere.  
 La vita è in passivo,  
 dunque tutto può finire,  
 finire male.

The sky is low/ the sun doesn't break forth/  
 the wind doesn't howl/ the world is hidden or  
 indifferent/ about looking out./ Men are spent  
 and words empty./ It's necessary to shut the  
 window to stop hating./ Steps that do not advance/  
 reality carried by the current:/ it's always  
 been that way./ What we clasp is nothingness./  
 Even in these dreams there's not much to see./  
 Life is in arrears/ thus all can finish/ badly.

In another composition, titled "Mondi in-  
 comunicanti," there is actually a ray of hope in  
 his otherwise barren vision:

Ci sono altri mondi  
 ma ci fa fatica  
 viverci, identificarsi in altri uomini.

....

Basterebbe uscire per vedere cos'è amore,  
 per sapere che tutto parla di noi.  
 Ma ci fa fatica.  
 Tanto c'è chi vede e sa per noi.

There are other worlds/ but it pains us to live/  
 to live in them, to identify ourselves with other  
 men./ . . . . It would be enough to go forth/  
 see what love is all about/ to learn that every-  
 thing speaks of us./ But it pains us./ Anyway,  
 there's always someone who sees and knows  
 for us.

What sets Pignotti's poetry apart from the  
 work of his contemporaries is a pervasive feel-  
 ing of human death in the universe, of a world  
 gone sour, where it is impossible to have ten-  
 able allegiances, or believe strongly in some-  
 thing: love, honor, friendship or a spring  
 morning. Living has been conditioned by those  
 who, thanks to their power, control our des-  
 tiny: "Importante è trovare un posto, pareg-  
 giare./ Si prende quando si lascia./ Poco pos-  
 siamo essere uomini." Man has been robbed of  
 his dignity, of his freedom of choice by a so-  
 ciety that believes not in man's necessity to  
 realize himself, but in the power that molds  
 people into something other than free individ-  
 uals. "Ci occorre stomaco per vivere/ a si  
 vive non per noi/ si vive neanche con rabbia."

Giuseppe Giudici, whose poetic work is also  
 included in the same anthological section,  
 writes about a human quest for security that  
 has led man to surrender any and all intentions  
 to fight for a just cause. A secure job has be-  
 come important to the point of silencing all ex-  
 pressions of indignation and criticism:

Adesso molti hanno patate e carne  
 non chiedono né governo, né potere:  
 li tiene in pugno chi ha più da darne,  
 chi riceve impara a tacere.

("Dance, Meat & Vegetables")

Now many have meat and potatoes/ they don't  
 have government or power:/ he who has most  
 to give them holds them in his fist/ he who re-  
 ceives learns to be silent.

Elsewhere Giudici writes about alienation,  
 offering his own definition with these simple,  
 striking images:

Mi chiedi cosa vuol dire  
 la parola alienazione:  
 da quando nasci è morire  
 per vivere in un padrone

che ti vende – è consegnare  
 ciò che porti – forza, amore,  
 odio intero – per trovare  
 sesso, vino, crepacuore.

You ask me what the word/ alienation  
 means:/ from birth it's dying/ to live for a

master/ who sells you –/ it's handing over/  
what you are – strength, love/ hate entire – to  
find/ sex, wine, heartache.

Estrangement, loneliness, discord with a world out of joint. We live in the expectation of a death that might free us from a dead life, a life in which we experience death every single day – the death of our instincts, our passions, our commitments, our dreams.

Parlo di me, dal cuore del miracolo:  
la mia colpa sociale è di non ridere,  
di non commuovermi al momento giusto.  
E intanto muoio, per aspettare a vivere.  
Il rancore è di chi non ha speranza:  
dunque è pietà di me che mi fa credere  
essere altrove una vita piú vera?  
Già piegato, presumo di non cedere.  
(“Dal cuore del miracolo”)

I'm speaking of myself, from the heart of the miracle:/ my social fault is not to laugh/ is not to be stirred at the proper moment./ Meanwhile I die, waiting to live./ Rancor belongs to him who has no hope:/ is it self pity which makes me believe/ that elsewhere there's a truer life?/ Already bent, I presume not to yield.

The poetry just quoted serves as a necessary prelude to understand the mood of the new generation of Italian novelists, comprised of artists who have been personally exposed to the industrial life of our days: they are frequently employed by the northern industrial colossuses as copywriters, industrial psychologists, public relations experts, advertising consultants. Indeed, one of the most impressive books to have been issued in Italy lately has been written precisely by a man who is an employee of Olivetti. His name is Paolo Volponi, and he was born in 1924. He first became prominent in the world of letters when his volume of poetry, *Le porte dell'Appennino*, published by Feltrinelli, was awarded the Viareggio Prize, *opera prima*, in 1960. His novel, titled *Memoriale*, was a resounding success during the past literary season. The title itself is an excellent clue to the nature of the novel. *Memoriale*, in fact, means a list of complaints, a record of grievances long repressed that have turned the protagonist into a rebel with a cause but without a future. The hero, Albino Saluggia, tells us the story of his life, particularly of certain events and experiences in which he became involved shortly after reaching maturity. When his narration begins, he is aware that his life has reached an impasse. “Today I have reached my thirty-sixth birthday and my sufferings have reached such a point that I cannot

help divulging them.” With these ominous words, Albino begins his long tale of woes. The very fact that he was born in Avignon – and not in Italy – makes him an outcast. During the second world war he is imprisoned by the Nazis. In the horrible prisoners' camp in which he is kept for several months he contracts tuberculosis, an illness from which he will never be cured and that will plague him for months on end. Soon after the end of the war he is discharged from the army and is given a job in a factory. A visit to his place of work before he is actually hired makes him conscious of the inimical, harsh character of the factory itself: “The factory was . . . motionless, like a church or a tribunal, and from the outside one felt that inside, just as in a church, in a deep empty interior, the functions of hundreds of workers were being carried on.” The description is a brilliant anticipation of the condition of the hero who (in a manner reminiscent of Kafka's *The Trial*) will be forced to behave as though he were in effect in a courtroom – accused and persecuted by his attending physicians – and will never be sympathetically received by his religious confessor.

Albino Saluggia is basically a simple person, endowed with little power to grasp his situation in philosophical terms. Yet, his introspectiveness succeeds in turning his personal dilemma into one having universal applications. Gradually, he assumes the symbolical role of contemporary man – the working man of our times – incapable of breaking down the wall of alienation that separates him from his fellow men and rid himself of the estrangement that surely is the symptomatic feature of our tormented age. Yearning to discover the “truth,” Albino's confessions, presented as a haunting monologue that reveals his inner torment and his craving for sympathy, become prime evidence of his physical and mental illness.

The factory, described as a hostile place perennially deaf to his cries of anguish, “a hostile and unnatural place” as Albino defines it, is also the frightening mirror of the very society that has built it and made its existence possible. It is in that society that Albino, veteran from the war, yearning to become part of the working class of the new industrial world, places his hopes for a secure, tranquil existence, and above everything else, for the instruments to resolve his profound loneliness. He will never achieve peace, for he will always be tormented by his illness, which forces him to spend long stretches of time away from the factory, in the sanatoria. Indeed, the time spent in bed prevents him from re-establishing the sus-

pendent contact with his fellow workers, aggravating therefore his loneliness and accentuating his paranoiac tendencies. Neither the factory (whose assembly line technique symbolizes the mechanical aspects of life itself) nor the technicians of human relations hired by the industry to give the workers a sense "of belonging" grant him the necessary strength he desperately needs to go on living. The system, cruel and efficient, never once takes into account his individuality and uniqueness. The drama of Albino Saluggia's experience is allowed to emerge little by little: the factory where he sought order, coherency and wholeness turns out to be a place that reflects the disorder, incoherency and fragmentary nature of life itself. And just as the factory is really chaos, so his illness, that might have been the redeeming factor of his miserable existence, is understood in terms of injustice. Moreover, the factory is but a different version of the hospital wards, and the working men but a different nucleus of those same sick individuals with whom the hero is forced to associate. In the unsteady (and yet terribly lucid) mind of the protagonist, two worlds, two experiences are superimposed to the point that they become undistinguishable. When his search for companionship, understanding and affection – as well as order – is frustrated, then we know, as he does, that we have reached the end of a long road, over which there may well be a signpost: "No exit."

Man and the industrial world constitute the big theme of Volponi's *Memoriale*, seen from the vantage point of a special individual whose mind and sensibility have been altered by an excruciating illness. A similar world – changed and made more desperate by the economic boom that has recently "blessed" Italy – is examined by another novelist, Lucio Mastronardi. His novel, *Il maestro di Vigevano*, tells of the modest events of an elementary school teacher, Antonio Mombelli. The author is no newcomer to fiction. He was first published with a curious novella, *Il calzolaio di Vigevano*, in the first issue of *Il Menabò* (1959). Written in a hybrid of Italian and local dialect, the work proved to be of considerable difficulty for the average reader. Even such a sophisticated critic as the poet Eugenio Montale remarked: "Le prime cento pagine del libro si leggono con fatica, perché non a tutti – è facile seguire nei suoi significati il particolare lessico degli scarpari di Vigevano." In the present book, however, Mastronardi has wisely restrained himself from making an insistent use of the dialect. He has concentrated his skill (which is considerable) to recreate a bureau-

cratic mentality, a way of life and a manner of speaking that are a delight to the mind and the ear. His characters – school administrators, principals, teachers, students – speak the language of fringe benefits, salary schedules, promotions, point systems, and of administrative policies, academic warnings and reprisals we know so well. Mastronardi has set his heroes in a city, Vigevano, that typifies the ideal place (in virtue of its new affluence) where the corruption and hopelessness of contemporary existence are everywhere evident. It is also an appropriate place where the author may readily find sufficient evidence of the extent to which the new prosperity has changed man's values.

Being a teacher himself, we may assume that several sections of Mastronardi's amusing, but highly disturbing tale, have been drawn from autobiographical experiences. Indeed, the novel makes a decisive impact upon the reader because, far from being idle fiction, it is the account of a lived experience. Antonio Mombelli is engaged in the difficult task of earning a decent livelihood for his little family. His wife's constant nagging, her insistence that she be allowed to work in a factory, his own awareness of the wretched life he must lead, heighten his feeling of inadequacy. Because he feels no longer able to cope with a disastrous economic situation, Antonio allows his wife Ada to take a job, and then he allows himself to be persuaded to abandon the teaching profession to join Ada and his brother-in-law in a shoe-manufacturing venture. The three will eventually regret the experience (despite the excellent start made by the new business) when the tax agents come upon them and fine them heavily for falsifying their business records. Disgusted by his first experience with the business world, Mombelli decides to return to teaching: thus he brings to completion another circle in which he has been both the accuser and the accused in the trial of his society. Attracted by the senseless merry-go-round in which all his friends participate with obvious delight (and pain), Mombelli is also repelled by the absurd, cowardly, material behavior of his friends and colleagues. And ultimately Antonio Mombelli reaches a position of metaphysical terror that recalls to mind a hero's own dramatically hopeless predicament.

What gives Mastronardi's fiction its own particular intensity is the relentless manner in which the author throws himself against his principal character, tears him to pieces, and denies him the power to survive the nightmarish life he is forced to live. Most impressive is the systematic attack against all traditional values – an attack frustrated by an inability



to create new values to replace the old. Thus, Mombelli prepares himself for the usual competitive examination, passes it, and is ironically reassigned (this time as a substitute) to the same school where he had taught not too long before. Antonio's attempts to strip life of its silly conventions, its empty rhetoric, its false assumptions, fail as he discovers that he has been a poor husband, a poor teacher, a poor father — in short, a human nonentity. He is betrayed by his wife (who had a son by another man), by his older child in whom he had placed so much faith (he ends up in reformatory school), by his students (who never desist from bribing him), and by his colleagues (who are content to conform and be secure). At the end of the book Ada dies, after confessing *in extremis* her betrayal, while Antonio returns to his old routine:

“Eleven-thirty sounded . . . I walk off toward home which will be cold and deserted and silent like the Square. I walk thinking that I'm here; that these houses which I see all make up Vigevano; that I'm alive, look, and am here, still here, still here . . . I think that even today is past, that night is passing, from Monday you go to Tuesday. And in a few days it will be Monday again and Tuesday again . . . I think that the future will be the same as the past: so many months of schools, so many months of vacation . . . What will happen to me tomorrow? I foresee that I'll get up around eight, that at eight-thirty I'll be at school, that I'll say “Good morning, Inspector,” with a fawning air, just to reciprocate for the flattering title by which he addresses me, and I shall repeat the things that I have repeated for twenty years, that I have been repeating over and over and over again.”

There is no salvation in the “world of pitch” of Lucio Mastronardi. What Mastronardi might be telling us in *Il Maestro di Vigevano* is that there can never be a truth, unless there is dignity; and there cannot be dignity so long as people cling to artificial or temporary or purely material values; and there cannot be a real life unless people have respect for the integrity of Man. Mastronardi presents these terrifying conditions but does not propose how man, in the midst of them, might find the strength of conviction and the inner stability *to want to live*.

Volponi and Mastronardi have been inspired by the peculiar problems facing a society becoming industrialized. Other writers are still haunted, despite the passing of time with certain crucial events in contemporary history that have revealed the true temper of our age. A fascination with certain questions of recent history has resulted in several studies, the most brilliant of which, from the angle of documentation and perspective, is Renzo De

Felice's *Storia degli ebrei italiana durante il fascismo* (Einaudi, 1961). It is salutary that a profound re-awakening to moral-historical problems should be taking place at a moment when neo-fascist groups, led by De Marsanich (old fools never die, they just go on living!), should be finding a disquieting sympathy for their aspirations in many quarters.

Against the background of such a climate, it is easier to understand the resounding popular and critical success scored by Giorgio Bassani's *Il giardino dei Finzi-Contini*, winner of the Viareggio Prize in 1962. Bassani hardly needs an elaborate introduction to enthusiasts of Italian fiction, for most are surely acquainted with his short stories, collected recently with the title, *Storie Ferraresi*, or with his penetrating novella about homosexuality and racial persecution, *Gli occhiali d'oro*. Only in his recently published novel has the author abandoned his customary reticence to describe openly his native city of Ferrara, the ever present locale of his fiction. His long, delicately composed saga of a Ferrarese family recreates out of a city, a cast of characters and a set of events only partially historically true, the amazing love of the protagonist-narrator for Micòl, the elusive daughter of professor Ermanno Contini. But, unlike a real love story, Bassani's tale has little development: one of its distinguishing features is its immobility. (We shall have to see how, in this sense, it resembles Cassola's recent novel, *Un cuore arido*.) The love of the unnamed narrator for Micòl is never reciprocated. It circulates throughout the novel, and helps us understand the strange nature of a closed world, defined by Malnate (the only non-Jewish friend of the Finzi-Continis) as “curious, absurd, of unexplainable contradictions.”

Bassani's originality, it might be said at once, rests not exclusively on his considerably mature expressive power, or his honest treatment of burning questions that could lend themselves to facile emotionalism and sentimentality. He impresses me for various reasons, the first of which is his unique knowledge of Jewish life and traditions, his penetrating awareness of what constitutes the “Jewishness” of the small Italian Jewish community. Too, Bassani, is one of the few contemporary novelists in Italy to have created believable characters who read, think, breathe, and live thoroughly the culture of their time.

*Il giardino dei Finzi-Contini* is, in its complexity, length, scope and depth, Bassani's first real novel. Its characters are: Professor Ermanno, an insatiable reader, a cultivated man with a devoted interest in many disciplines;

his wife Olga, and their two children, Alberto and Micòl. The family lives in a secluded sixteenth-century villa, set in a fabulous ten-acre garden, where wild flowers, plants and trees grow in rich profusion. Unlike other middle-class families of the Ferrarese Jewish community, the Finzi-Contini lead an autonomous, self-contained existence. Their two children (their first, Guido, died at a very tender age in 1914) neither play with other children nor attend public schools. Privately tutored, they make but a yearly trip to the liceo-ginnasio in Ferrara to take their examinations. In 1934 Professor Ermanno requests formal permission from the authorities to restore the old family synagogue that had remained closed for three centuries. Their retreat from life becomes at that time complete. The Finzi-Contini will thenceforth devote themselves to preparing for the inevitable death (in their case violent) that awaits them. As someone has perceptively suggested, the Finzi-Contini anticipate their fate and can therefore become involved in the project of "disassembling life," even if it means breaking some of its delicate mechanism: to take it apart, so to speak, with the ultimate purpose of understanding its innermost reason and futility, so that losing it, or parts of it, may prove philosophically easy to accept. Indeed, when death finally comes they shall regret nothing for they shall lose nothing, each part of life being relatively insignificant per se. Such a negative posture has its rewarding side. In their hands, a defeat is turned into a victory: persecutions on the part of the Nazis shall have little effect upon them, for they are ready for death. And die they will (all except the narrator) either of ill health or in the gas chambers.

It is regrettable that Bassani cuts this novel short, ending his tale in 1938. It seems indeed strange that such a faithful habitué of the Finzi-Contini household as the protagonist should stop seeing them, suddenly and without an explanation, almost three years before their formal death. And the reader might object to the novelist's implication that the fate of his family is in some ways symbolical with, or representative of, the fate of the Italian middle class during a particularly difficult era.

Bassani's novel covers a twenty-year span, concentrating on the years immediately preceding the first anti-semitic laws enacted in Italy. Carlo Cassola's work, *Un cuore arido*, is set in the thirties, in the provincial milieu of a Tuscan town. Like Bassani, Carlo Cassola belongs to what is commonly referred to as the *generazione di mezzo*, the generation of writers

who having grown up and matured during the fascist regime, (which they frequently did oppose) found themselves in a lonely position when fascism finally fell and a new, articulate and more engagé group of novelists came upon the literary scene. *Un cuore arido* seems to me to be exemplary of all the virtues and shortcomings, and of the impressive continuity of inspiration, of an undoubtedly gifted writer. The book heightens the author's tendency to charge his characters and events with a symbolism, or a universal meaning, they are not always in a position to contain. In a way, Cassola's heroes resemble Moravia's in their valiant attempts to articulate a condition, or dramatize a particular attitude, frequently above and beyond either their intellectual or emotional power, or their sensibility. So that, in a very definite sense, Cassola's characters are ideal, and not realistic — a characteristic that seems common to the writers of Cassola's generation, as for example Mario Tobino. Unlike Bassani's novel, Cassola's is basically a love story, tender, delicate, compassionate. It does not have the subtly tragic strain of Bassani's book, nor its special complexity, although it is, for obvious reasons, substantially more "sentimental."

There are no mysteries in *Un cuore arido*. Anna, a simple, eighteen-year old country girl, falls deeply in love with her sister's fiancé, Mario, who is presently serving his tour of duty in the army and is stationed in the vicinity of the town. Shortly before his discharge from the army, Mario decides to leave for the United States and join his father. Anna, who wishes him to take part of her with him, asks him to take her: before reaching maturity, Anna has already completed her most important experience and has loved a man. Resigned to her never seeing Mario again, Anna becomes tied to a well-to-do young man, Marcello, with whom she has a long affair. When he asks her to marry him, she refuses his offer, for she has become aware that she does not love him — and dedicates herself to helping her cousin Ada, and her sister Bice. One day Anna receives a letter from Mario, who, from the far America, asks her to marry him and to join him. But Anna, aware of her unfaithfulness to the memory of her first, real and only love, finds herself incapable of accepting Mario's offer. Instead, she decides to live the rest of her life alone. Her decision, reached calmly and detachedly, requires real strength of character: it proves to be a shining proof that even loneliness may be accepted by human beings as the price for their honesty and spiritual fortitude. It is Anna's wise and quite admirable decision

that brings a ray of comfort to a gray, hopeless love story.

In contrast to Bassani, Cassola makes no effort to place his story in a historical context, perhaps in the hope that he may thus achieve the universality to which every serious writer aspires. Cassola's book does not tell a contemporary story, but one that happened almost twenty years ago. This would not make it any less relevant, were it not for the fact that its scheme is too abstract and its vision too optimistic to be taken seriously. We gradually awaken from the magic spell of the author's virtuosity and regrettably realize that the experience he describes, undoubtedly admirable, is a form of a calculated refusal to deal with the issues of real life for the sake of constructing an ideal, "unproblematical" world. To be sure, Cassola's heroes do face certain problems: but their tendency is to solve them by decisions inconsistent with their temperament or, what is worse, improbable in view of the range of their emotions. The reader will no doubt find *Un cuore arido* eminently readable, for few in Italy can write with as much feeling and ease as Cassola. But he will also detect that the absence of certain tensions within the novel, as well as with its audience, diminishes its validity in its cultural context.

It is instructive to compare Cassola's "situation" to that of another contemporary novelist, who also belongs to the same generation. Mario Tobino, resident psychiatrist at the Lucca hospital, prolific author of several books, has recently published a long novel about the Italian Resistance. His Strega prize-winning narrative, *Il clandestino* (Mondadori, 1962), is an accurate and enormously sympathetic portrayal of the underground activities that took place in the fictitious town of Medusa (in reality Viareggio), during the last months of World War II. Tobino's heroes are engaged in sabotage and rescue operations, and in organizing the liberal elements of the town into a disciplined force ready to strike against the detested enemy. His novel begins on the fateful day of July 25, 1943, with the broadcast of the late Marshal Badoglio's announcement of his historical resignation of Mussolini and of the King's decision to continue the war. Tobino's book abounds in unusually interesting episodes that are sure to contribute to a finer understanding of an important historical period. Its excellent characterization, its linearity of plot, may be considered illustrations of the kind of honest, limpid writing not frequently found in today's Western narrative.

*Il clandestino* is also a convincing statement about the meaning of the Resistance as a struggle. It is a vividly told tale, whose numerous participants, however, are seldom three-dimensional. Indeed, one is left wondering whether *Il clandestino* is really a novel in the usual sense of the term or a faithful transcription, unfiltered through the poet's sensibility, of certain events in which Tobino himself might have been involved. As someone has suggested, Tobino's characters have no difficulty finding their particular place in the novel even though they have not undergone the customary process of transfiguration and "distortion" to which all characters and events borrowed from reality are usually subjected. Personally, I found Tobino's novel not as tightly constructed as it should have been, and its language a little too *sciolta* to be consistently poetic. Yet there is one feature of the work that does demand special consideration: its pervasive feeling of disillusionment with the turn history has taken since the end of the last war and with the role played by political leaders and voters alike in resolving certain ideological conflicts inherited from pre-war Europe. The very poem chosen by Tobino as worthy of being placed as the epigraph of his novel illuminated the inner meaning, and the "lesson" itself of the book. It is a very beautiful poem that Tobino must have composed in a period when he was striving to reach a poetic synthesis of the experience narrated in *Il clandestino*:

Fu un amore, amici  
che doveva finire;  
credevamo che gli uomini fossero santi,  
i cattivi uccisi da noi,  
credemmo diventasse tutta festa e perdono,  
le piante stormissero fanfare di verde,  
la morte premio che brilla  
come sul petto del bambino  
la medaglia alle scuole elementari.  
Con pena, con lunga ritrosia,  
ci ricrederemo.  
Rimane in noi il giglio di quell'amore.

It was a love, friends/ which had to end;/  
we believed that men were saints,/ the wicked,  
those killed by us,/ we thought all would be  
feast and pardon,/ that plants would rustle  
fanfares of green/ that death would be a prize/  
like the elementary school medal/ on the  
child's breast./ With pain, with great reluctance,  
disenchanted we became./ The lily of  
the love remains in us.

Like Cassola and Bassani, Tobino also looks back to the past, but only as a means to

illuminate the present. Cassola's ambition is to give us insights into the fate of the individual, disappointed in love and yet firm to his ideals; Bassani's novel dramatizes the necessity for humans to prepare themselves for an inevitable double death. Tobino, if I understand him correctly, also looks to the past with a certain admiration, with an understandable longing (and in this he is very close to all writers of the *generazione di mezzo*). But he sees in the particular experience he depicts the best expression of his people to work together, and suffer together, so that a better tomorrow might arrive – only to discover that their love was destined to end. His countrymen, having achieved their initial goals, gave up fighting for what was essentially a cause larger than just winning the war – the transformation of mankind. They returned to their homes, their families and their individual destinies, and gave up searching for the courage and the vision so badly needed in crucial times. History was, once again, made by people who did not share the ideals of the Resistance, nor its aspirations. Soon enough, mankind was confronting the very condition it had fought so hard to overcome. Was not the sacrifice of thousands of young men useless? Perhaps it is

with this question in mind (never explicitly asked by Tobino) that one must understand *Il clandestino*. His work, imperfect as it may be, is like a mirror turned toward the past, and the image of the past, reflected in the mirror, serves to fill the missing contours and the background of a picture that is the present.

The past and present; industrial society and the individual; engagement and alienation; love and hate. Italian fiction and poetry are still showing an intense awareness of eternal and contemporary problems. Produced in a time of changes, imaginative writing in the "new" Italy is the record and the conscience of what the country and her people have become. In a way, literature resembles a child, inexperienced despite his wisdom, kind despite adverse conditions, naive and yet profoundly gifted with a sense of justice and truth, leading – but *not* consoling – that symbolical blind man that is society to find himself again and hoping, that by his so doing, he might learn to live again not only with his neighbors but with himself.

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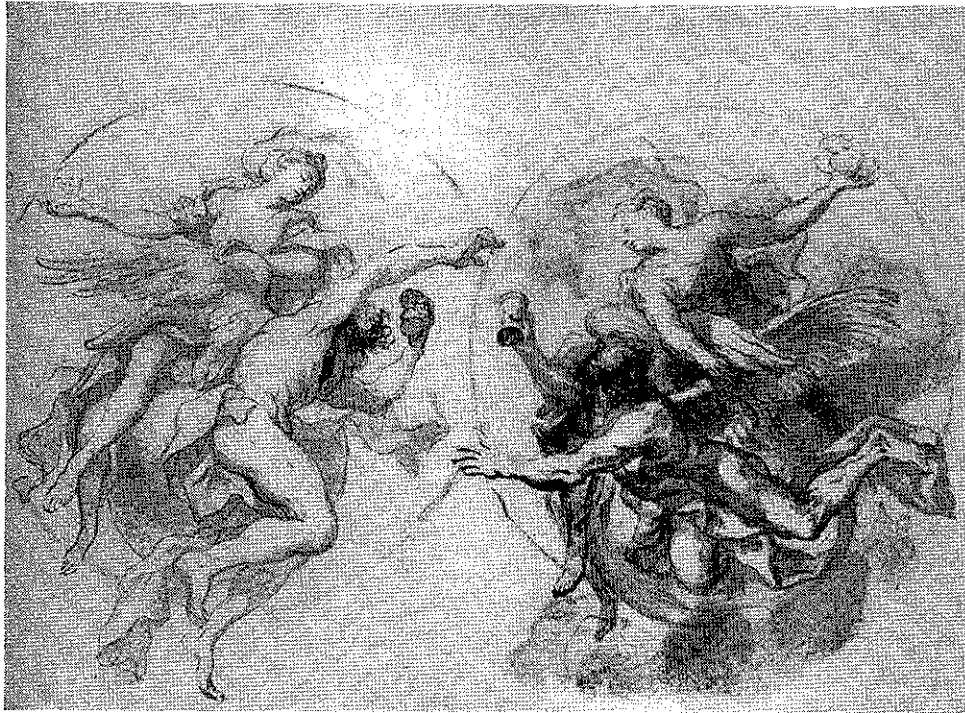
*This essay is dedicated to Rigo Mignani, James and Dodo Hershman – kind, loyal and wise friends.*

## A Poem

by Thomas G. Bergin

*... una cosa venuta/ dal cielo in terra a miracol mostrare*

And so the lover reverent, beside  
the Arno waited for his miracle.  
And saw her pass and marveled. Well he might.  
Not one but myriad miracles went by:  
under the pearl-like skin the blood, called forth  
to mingle in dark union with the chyle,  
pulsed in subservient rhythm with the heart,  
true primum mobile beyond our hope  
of understanding, muscles stirred the bones,  
the thirsty membranes of the lungs transmuted  
the Tuscan air to fuel of life and speech.  
From these, from filtering kidneys, glands distilling  
their secret virtues, from the bile-charged liver,  
all marvelously walled within the flesh  
of a young female, came the emerald sheen  
which shone forth from those ardent eyes wherein  
the poet saw the serried ranks of saints,  
the rose empetaled and the sheaves of Grace,  
the vision ultimate, the Empyrean.



DOMENICO PIOLA  
"Allegory of the Solstice"  
*Lent by Mr. Janos Scholz, New York City*

BARTOLOMEO GUIDOBONO  
"A Seated Lady Playing the Lute"  
*Lent by Mr. Janos Scholz, New York City*



## Poems *by Gabriele D'Annunzio*

*Translated by Olga Ragusa*

### Le stirpi canore

I miei carmi son prole  
delle foreste,  
altri dell'onde,  
altri delle arene,  
altri del Sole,  
altri del vento Argeste.  
Le mie parole  
sono profonde  
come le radici  
terrene,  
altre serene  
come i firmamenti,  
fervide come le vene  
degli adolescenti,  
ispide come i dumi,  
confuse come i fumi  
confusi,  
nette come i cristalli  
del monte,  
tremule come le fronde  
del pioppo,  
tumide come le narici  
dei cavalli  
a galoppo,  
labili come i profumi  
diffusi,  
vergini come i calici  
appena schiusi,  
notturne come le rugiade  
dei cieli,  
funebri come gli asfodeli  
dell'Ade,  
pieghevoli come i salici  
dello stagno,  
tenui come i teli  
che fra due steli  
tesse il ragno.

My songs are children  
of the forest,  
others of the waves,  
others of the sands,  
others of the Sun,  
others of the wind Argestes.  
My words  
are deep  
like earthen  
roots,  
others serene  
like firmaments,  
ardent like the veins  
of adolescents,  
rough like the brier,  
confused like jumbled  
smoke,  
clear as the crystals  
of the mountain,  
tremulous as the fronds  
of the poplar,  
turgid as the nostrils  
of horses  
on the gallop,  
fleeting as perfumes  
diffused,  
virgin as calices  
barely opened,  
nocturnal as the dews  
of the skies,  
mournful as the asphodels  
of Hades,  
flexible as the willow  
of the pond,  
tenuous like the web  
the spider weaves  
between two reeds.

## Stabat nuda aestas

Primamente intravidi il suo piè stretto  
scorrere su per gli aghi arsi dei pini  
ove estuava l'aere con grande  
tremito, quasi bianca vampa effusa.  
Le cicale si tacquero. Più rochi  
si fecero i ruscelli. Copiosa  
la rèsina gemette giù pe'fusti.  
Riconobbi il colùbro dal sentore.

Nel bosco degli ulivi la raggiunsi.  
Scorsi l'ombre cerulee dei rami  
su la schiena falcata, e i capei fulvi  
nell'argento pallàdio trasvolare  
senza suono. Più lungi, nella stoppia,  
l'allodola balzò dal solco raso,  
la chiamò, la chiamò per nome in cielo.  
Allora anch'io per nome la chiamai.

Tra i leandri la vidi che si volse.  
Come in bronzea mèsse nel falasco  
entrò, che richiudeasi strepitoso.  
Più lungi, verso il lido, tra la paglia  
marina il piede le si torse in fallo.  
Distesa cadde tra le sabbie e l'acque.  
Il ponente schiumò ne'suoi capegli.  
Immensa apparve, immensa nudità.

I first espied her narrow foot  
running up over the scorched needles of the  
pines,  
where in a great shiver, like a white flaming  
flash, the air spread deltawise.  
The cicadas grew silent. More hoarse  
became the brooks. Copious  
the resin trickled down the stems.  
I recognized the adder by its scent.

In the olive woods I overtook her.  
I saw the branches' azure shadows  
upon her sickle back and in the leafy  
silver dome her fulvous hair soar  
soundlessly. Farther, in the stubble,  
the lark bounded from the naked furrow,  
it called her – in the heavens, called her by her  
name.  
Then I, too, called her by her name.

I saw her turning in the oleander.  
As into gold-burned harvest grain she stepped  
into the rushes, and they fell shut behind her,  
noisily.  
Farther, toward the beach, among the sea  
wrack  
and the kelp she caught her foot and faltered.  
Headlong she fell among the sand and water.  
The West wind foamed into her hair.  
Boundless, she seemed, boundless in her  
nudity.

# Maria Assunta and the Abbess

by Antonio Barolini

A year or so before her husband died, Maria Assunta had had an encounter which considerably influenced the education of her son Giovanni.

Among the meritorious works that Maria Assunta had set herself, one was particularly dear to her: the care of the altar pieces and linens for her villa chapel and the parish church. She had, moreover, made a vow to donate a new embroidered cloth to the altar of Our Lady of Lourdes – one with a Bernadette on her knees and a white-robed Madonna appearing before her in the niche of a grotto, roses beneath her feet and a spring of water gushing up nearby. When Maria Assunta spoke of all these tasks, she sighed.

In addition to her charity and piety and the direction of her household, she had now to think of the education of her son, and so the first to suffer among all her activities were her singing and painting. And yet, she would think, it was indispensable that she find time at least for singing – for Giovanni's sake, for his education in learning the joy and consolation of being able to sing the praises of the Lord. No one except her could teach him. Who, better than she, would have been able to instruct him, to bring out his spirituality of tone, his sweetness of delivery, and vocal sensibility in the interpretations of psalms and sacred hymns?

As for painting, she had undertaken to decorate the standard of the Eucharistic League at the intercession of the parish priest. The work called for the depiction of some golden grains of wheat, a chalice, and a suspended communion wafer throwing off rays like a white sun. But Maria Assunta had not been able to finish it; she just hadn't found the time.

It was just then, while looking for someone to take over for her and disposed as she was to contribute her own money towards the completion of the banner and altar cloth, that she was advised to look up the sisters of a cloistered convent that snuggled conveniently in the very heart of the city, circumvented by a vast park and an imposing perimeter of high walls spaced with colossal gates. It was called the Cloister, or more exactly, the Convent of Holy Mary the Beautiful because the sisters there

*"Maria Assunta and the Abbess" is a chapter from the current Italian novel Una lunga pazzia by Antonio Barolini, published by Feltrinelli.*

enerated a Madonna which was the great beauty among all beautiful madonnas. The Madonna was the painting of a great artist and the likeness of someone who, after a fair share of adventures and marriage with a count who left her, finally, a widow and wealthy, had ended up by taking the veil and endowing the convent with her possessions – the painting among them. The story is an old one, it's enough to say that the model had been converted in awe of having posed for a Madonna in her youth when the artist was her lover; she had learned to fuse herself mystically into that holy likeness which had in some way eternalized and transfigured her beauty and exuberant past into a relic of solemn adoration.

The cloister was reached by an isolated alleyway, tranquil and shadowy, where clumps of grass and lichen snaked their way among the cracks of the pavement leading to the little door which opened into the parlour. The parlour, dimly illuminated by two high windows with enormous iron gratings, had, for decoration, only a great Christ who stood out from the white of the walls at the room's furthest reach. Two wood benches were placed under two barred sliding panels in the inner wall and on the other side of the wall would sit the visitor to be interviewed.

To make their presence known the visitors sounded a bell whose cord (a large strand of green velvet with a tassel on the end) hung from the top of one of the gratings; and its sound came from so far off, through so many dark corridors and inky cells, that it seemed an echo sunk in the throat of two neighboring mountains. Then, too, it was always cold in the parlour.

The Abbess of the convent in those days was the Reverend Mother Superior Maria Carmela, and given the very particular devotion that Maria Assunta had for Our Lady of Mount Carmel, it is easy to sense the reason of her immediate susceptibility to both nun and ambient. After the first commissions, Maria Assunta had assumed the habit of going to Mother Carmela at least once every two or three weeks. No matter the weather, she always turned up for lengthy spiritual conversations – the only ones, she asserted, that truly comforted her; for the Abbess, unlike the usual confessors, was a woman, a saint, and if not a mother in the flesh, at least one in spirit. In



the winter, with the cold, Mother Carmela would have a foot warmer or hot water bottle brought to her guest to keep her comfortable while talking; in the summer the nuns' parlour was deliciously cool.

For the Abbess, everyone outside the threshold of the convent was in danger. Our Lady of Mount Carmel, then, had sent straight to the cloister gate a new and charitable benefactress who needed protection; and this Mother Carmela wanted to give her — without stint and as best she could, with the example of counsel and prayer. Aside from the fact that Maria Assunta continued to provide the nuns a great deal of work, and, therefore, a certain economic well-being to the exhausted forces of the modest religious community (that it was modest was seen everywhere in the crumbling pavement, and barren walls, and old furnishings), her visit was a unique diversion for the Abbess. It gave Mother Carmela the certainty of being the charitable support of an unhappy Christian soul, forced to struggle in the tempest of life. Thus the spiritual dependence of Maria Assunta upon the Abbess and the munificence with which she in turn gratified the community made her naturally more dear and cherished than if she had been just any other benefactress.

Goaded on to a vague sentimental abandon by the very story of the cloister's previous benefactress, the romantic reflex of which appeared not only in the painting of the famous Madonna but even on the visage of the Abbess herself, Maria Assunta, little by little, felt herself in her own right first a sinner like the converted countess, then, like her predecessor, on the verge of renewed grace. At any rate, she ended up by confiding to Mother Carmela not only the real torments of her life but (since these seemed few) even those imaginary ones that surged from her heart to her lips to melt away finally in a flood of tears and general pity poured upon herself and on everything and everybody.

As for her husband Pietro, Maria Assunta had not only confided to the Abbess the whole turbulent story of her rapport with him, rendering it fearfully dramatic and perturbing to the sensibilities of Mother Carmela, but, also exalted by the proof of her humility, she had not failed to make her own charity stand out against his irreligious past and blasphemous egoism. She had even arrived at the point of confiding to Mother Carmela something which she had never before confessed to anyone, something which tormented her even if she had always tried (or, at least, it seemed to her that she had tried) to drive it away. The fact

was that at times she had prayed and beseeched God to grant her the grace of seeing Pietro's mistress Regina die before her; and Pietro, finally freed from the demoniac influence, returned to be the spouse she had once known — affectionate and generous, if not overly delicate.

"Did you really wish that she would die before the time allotted her by God?", Mother Carmela murmured to Maria Assunta in an undertone, her lips and chin though shadowed and dimmed by the grating, reflecting a soft downiness. "Because the gravity lies in whether or not you wished, with her physical demise, also the spirit's death instead of its eternal life in paradise even though she is your enemy. If you did not desire her death before the time which God has prescribed for her, but simply that she die before you (and, after all, you *are* younger and this would be in the nature of things), then you need not have any remorse. Your sentiment is human and just, sustained by a holy desire for the harmony of your household. It is your right to ask this and your method is justifiable."

"Oh," responded Maria Assunta with emotion, "if God really wishes to pardon her, as I have pardoned her and continue to pardon her, let her go to heaven when she dies! That is not my affair. That's up to God." But in speaking thus, it seemed to Maria Assunta that Regina's salvation was, in truth, in her own hands; that it was she, Maria Assunta, who was the determinant.

"Yes, that is right," Mother Carmela sanctioned officiously. "Be tranquil and stay serene. God will give you the grace of seeing your family safe from every danger. The influence of your enemy will be placated with patience and meekness and abnegation. Offer all to God, have faith and pray; He will give you the recognition that is due you."

In the Abbess this reasoning was the result of the daily readings and meditations that, for years, she had made on the lives of the saints. For her, Maria Assunta had become a kind of secular nun, one more of the sisterhood who needed directing. Nor, indeed, did Maria Assunta herself suffer as much as before from the existence of Regina. Rather, she comforted herself with the pretext of *having* to suffer her, and, recalling the former situation, it seemed better to Maria Assunta to endure the pain of forgiving Regina rather than to rekindle all the old resentments. Therefore she eased her feelings in recounting, dwelling upon and elaborating each particular annoyance to the Abbess, all with the most dramatic shadings. Even the remotest facts and most insignificant of of-

enses were presented as wounds still open in her heart: "Like a perennial martyrdom for Jesus, in Jesus," Maria Assunta would repeat.

Since these sentiments were all connected one with another in the complex knot of her impaired and passionate vision, she spoke also of her anxieties and of her duties before God and men for the education of Giovanni; for the spiritual salvation of all those dependents more or less close to her; for the guidance of Annetta, her faithful personal maid, first before others. She was finally moved to tell of the renunciation and sacrifice she had made to God of her vocation and of her potential success in singing and in painting so that God would recompense her by showering Giovanni with sanctity. And thus she arrived at the little confidences of religious nature — the superstitions, the rituals, the preferences between saints and saints, between Madonna and Madonna. Maria Assunta, in short, held nothing back.

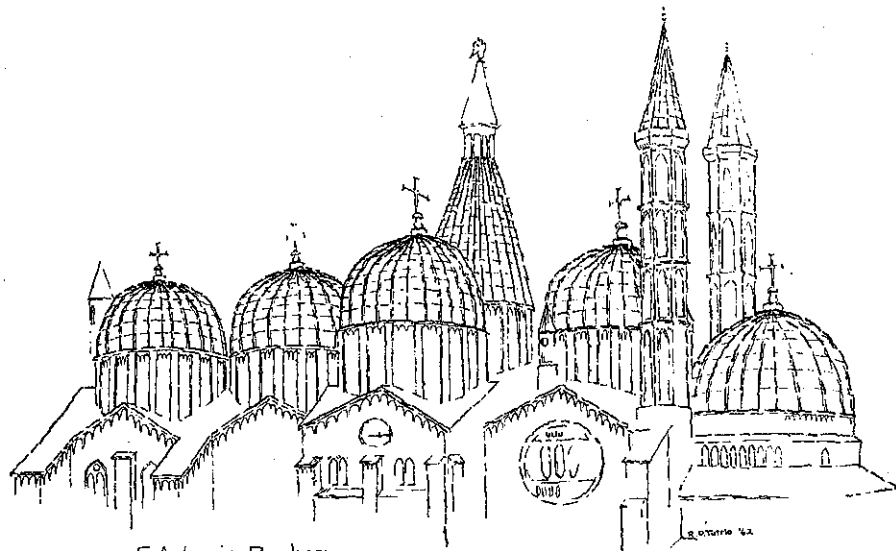
For this she secured that the community of nuns spent at least twenty minutes a day in prayer for the special intention of the Abbess, the Abbess then applying the accumulated merits of the orations toward the peace and salvation of the benefactress sent them by God; for the conversion of the benefactress' enemy; for the enlightenment of the benefactress' husband; and above all for the intention of the benefactress' son, so that Giovanni might grow up to walk, spotless and pure, in the ways of the Lord. Little by little, the sisters, with a word gleaned here, another there, had come to know all of the saintliness and sufferings of Maria Assunta. If being a saint in a convent were dif-

ficult, becoming one outside was a merit still grander and rarer. For the sisters there was no choice but to pray incessantly for the perfection of those elected souls who, like Maria Assunta, were still exposed to the temptations of the world and wealth.

Mother Carmela was a woman of no small ability even though cloistered and closed within the rock of restricted ideas. She was a concrete woman. Her ideas, right or wrong, were coherent and so hinged together that once the ladder of her premise was secured, so to speak, she would undertake to climb it with the military vigor of an advancing gendarme scaling a stronghold. One of her first acts of charity toward Maria Assunta was to recommend that Giovanni be entrusted with explicit vow to the protection of Sant'Antonio of Padua.

"But I've committed him to Our Lady of Mount Carmel," said Maria Assunta.

"That's not enough — this is the usual error," retorted the Abbess. "For everything pertaining to heaven we have the mania of disturbing the King, the Queen, the chief saints and other high commands directly — for all matters, even minor ones. Does that seem right? When you wanted to baptize your son, to whom did you go? To the Pope, or to the parish priest? So, too, with our spiritual life. Let's not disturb only God and the Madonna, let us recommend ourselves and our dear ones to the intercession of a saint. Don't think for a minute that Sant'Antonio is an ordinary saint! My dear, he's a formidable one! At Padua he has a church that you would have to see, as I



S. Antonio, Padua

did in childhood, to understand what a saint he is. It's impressed in my mind and I will never forget it. If, instead of being called to this life of contemplation, I had been called to the life of the world and should have had children, I would do what I do with the new sisters. I would not give them the names of noted saints, common to all, but names of saints unknown yet equally great. The famous saints have too much to do. They are made to think of too many people. Let's be simple and practical even in this, let's find saints who haven't too many souls to protect, who can take care of us in peace!"

The serious talk could not help but make an impression on Maria Assunta who immediately decided to have Giovanni pledge his vow to the saint at Padua. The boy, who at that time was four years old, or not much more, was brought to the sacristy of the great sanctuary at Padua where Maria Assunta, accustomed to the habitual obsequiousness of the clergy of her acquaintance, was miffed by the indifference with which the monk (a distributor of hundreds of benedictions every day) had hurriedly celebrated his office.

"He will be a saint!" murmured Maria Assunta, indicating her child, as she gave the monk an offering.

"May God grant it, *signora*," answered the monk with unconcern as he busied himself with the next postulant.

Maria Assunta frowned and regarded the monk haughtily. But as he had no chance of noting her gestures, she angrily caught the boy and dragged him away behind her. Recomposing herself she said to Giovanni with dignity, "God made you rich, very rich; but from this moment on you must learn that wealth is also responsibility and mortification: he who humbles himself will be exalted. You see, you have just humbled yourself in receiving a blessing from a poor rude peasant monk who hardly even glanced at me while I was speaking. God certainly will not discount our virtue."

The boy watched her with spellbound and frightened eyes. The church had intimidated him with its candles and incense. He had heard repeated solemnly about him the words of a vow without understanding the meaning, much less the motive behind it. Upon leaving the basilica he had been given a spun sugar candy to suck and its flavor was the impression of Padua that remained, ever after, dominant over all the obscure happenings of that memorable day.

Mother Carmela was enthusiastic when told of the consecration of Giovanni to Sant'Antonio - the child had been blessed as a son of

the Franciscan order and she, too, was of that order. "Now you are our brother in St. Francis," she said to the boy. "You may possess the gold and flattery of the world, but they will not touch you with their evil. They will be your instruments of charity among the miseries of the earth. Now we can recommend you to St. Francis, the Seraphic Father, in a very special way." Then she amply blessed Giovanni.

The Abbess was generally noted to excel in imparting her benediction and Maria Assunta never failed to ask her blessing both at the beginning and the end of their sessions. During mild weather Giovanni and Annetta accompanied Maria Assunta on her visits to the cloister and they too would receive the blessing, Annetta coming before the Abbess with frightened eyes illumined by contrite reverence. She'd kneel, she'd make Giovanni kneel, and thus prostrated would murmur, "May you always be praised, Holy Mother Abbess."

This Annetta had learned to do from Maria Assunta who, however, bowed a bit less than her maid. Maria Assunta used the usual devotional form of salutation except that she rendered it much less formal by genuflecting without both knees bent entirely. Her homage was that of a lady, in short, and not a servant. As for Giovanni, he bent his curly little head completely and coiled himself, awestruck, on his small knees which then became rosy from the dust of the worn brick pavement. He repeated sweetly and automatically the words of his companions while he felt the invisible and reverend shadow of Mother Carmela just beyond the grate, and to finish the rite, he made a large sign of the cross in the air.

The Abbess would then speak maternally, rigidly, probably with her hands tucked inside the folds of her large sleeves; if she spoke to the child she had a pleasing and simple manner in spite of her authoritative tone; and it seemed strange, after so much solemnity and reverence. First she asked the ritual questions on the basis of which she was informed if he, Giovanni, as well as Annetta, had been good and obedient and if both felt that they had done the duties of their own respective stations; if they had said with attention and seriousness their morning and evening prayers; if they had remembered to pray for her, a fellow sinner and doubly responsible as an Abbess called to guide a few poor sheep of the Lord's flock. After all this, Maria Assunta would begin her own personal conversation with her mentor. At the same time a little side door of the parlour would open, by itself, as if enchanted. The door opened into a little green courtyard that was not in the cloister proper.

Trees rising from the great and secret bordering garden shaded the courtyard and thrust their foliage far over the separating wall.

There, in the unrestricted area of the courtyard, the gate-keeper nun of the cloister received goods from the outside world and there Giovanni and Annetta would find a table set for them with a fresh white cloth and two cups of *caffé-latte* or chocolate with plates of sweets and biscuits; sometimes at each place there'd be some special nunnery gift like a saint's picture pasted on cardboard and embroidered round with colored yarns, or bunches of flowers made with colored tin foil carefully pressed out and saved from the occasional chocolates that found their way into the convent, or even small animal sculptures made with the soft inner part of left-over bread. Once they even found there a little Sant'Antonio, all of bread, beneath the cupola of an overturned glass just after Giovanni had returned from his visit to the basilica of Padua. No one was ever seen there in the little courtyard; everything seemed to arrive there by miracle.

But when Giovanni and Annetta were seated at the table, a voice would be heard saying, "Praise be to Jesus, Mary, and Joseph." It was a soft voice with a happy note as if of a fairy or an angel, invisible but omnipresent. It came perhaps from a little window that seemed to be in the wall, behind shutters. "I am Sister Pellegrina, the cook," it said, "I see you and know that you are good. Eat, eat up all the biscuits. They were made for you. Just for you, for Annetta, and for Sister Anacleto who is very old, very near to claiming the reward of her merits, and no longer has teeth. How are you dear Giovanni?"

The first time Giovanni and Annetta had heard the voice of Sister Pellegrina they were speechless, especially since the customary ejaculatory greeting had suddenly seemed strange and different. The sister had said, "Praise be to Jesus, Mary, and Joseph." Giovanni hesitating had finally answered, "And to our prayers grant sanctuary," but he heard in his answer a dissonance and Sister Pellegrina had laughed slyly from the opening in the wall.

"Ah, you've done it! you've done it," she said. "But of course you gave the wrong answer - you don't know the big news. I did not say 'Jesus, Joseph, and Mary' as usual. I said 'Jesus, Mary, and Joseph.' Mary is more important than Joseph and should therefore come first to stand in the middle, protected, as it were, between her divine son and her holy spouse; so you should say 'Jesus, Mary, and Joseph,' don't you agree? But then, you want

to know, how you should answer?"

"Oh yes," said Giovanni and Annetta had added, "We always said: 'Praise be to Jesus, Joseph, and Mary And to our prayers grant sanctuary.'"

"Yes, yes, but now I'll teach you the new ending. It's a new rhyme invented by Sister Rosalia who is a poetess. What rhymes with Joseph? Stone deaf! And so Sister Rosalia, rightly, suggests that we change the saying to:

'Praise be to Jesus, Mary, and Joseph

Nor to our prayers may they be stone deaf.'

"Oh," said Annetta happily, her eyes shining with respect.

"And you, Giovanni, do you like it?" pressed the voice of Sister Pellegrina. The nun's voice ran lively and crisply behind the wall, like an invisible fountain. The chocolate was good, the day sunny and Giovanni said simply, "What a funny rhyme." But from that time on he answered Sister Pellegrina's salutation with the new ending and learned to like the variation as a subtle and pleasing amusement.

From the open door of the parlour, Giovanni and Annetta were joined from time to time by the anguished sighs of Maria Assunta and the grave whisper of Mother Carmela. The admiration of Maria Assunta for the Abbess now knew no limits.

It seemed incredible that the Abbess succeeded in knowing everything and being informed of everything in the smallest detail while living there in the cloister, without newspapers, and with the sole wordly contact of occasional visitors, no one of whom, however, from some time past, had been accorded the degree of intimacy given Maria Assunta. The Abbess had already passed by some years her fiftieth birthday. She was of semi-peasant origin and to see her she seemed to have nothing in her of mysticism and a contemplative nature. She was ever vigorous and occasionally a still black hair escaped from under the white whimple that encased her head, shoulders, and chest like armor. Between the gratings Maria Assunta saw the Abbess' face only in shadow with the metallic glitter of her steel-rim eye glasses the most notable feature.

It should be noted that when Maria Assunta arrived alone Mother Maria Carmela used a grate with large openings, while when Giovanni, a male, was present she used a grate with smaller openings from which she could be heard but not seen. For Giovanni she was, therefore, a presence even more mysterious than she was for his mother. For Annetta the Abbess was the very voice of heaven. Even to

Maria Assunta the Abbess sometimes appeared as an apparition; but the fact of being a woman and so being able occasionally to see her more clearly or even being able to kiss her crucifix when the Abbess proffered it through the grating, seemed to Maria Assunta an exceptional and unique privilege.

It was a long while before the Abbess noted any excessive attitudes in Maria Assunta, probably because her religious vocation impeded her from understanding the excesses of piety. At the most she would think "Poor thing, she is so exasperated, so overcome by the daily battle with which life assaults her that if she didn't defend herself this way how else would she be able to save herself?" Therefore, if Mother Carmela could not always comfort her in the particular, many times she comforted Maria Assunta in a general way with animated maternal solicitude, insistently advising her to offer all to the love of God. Mother Carmela was not even aware of how more frequently now Maria Assunta, in her excitement and surprise at the repetition of these saintly counsels, answered almost sharply, "But it's all offered, it's already all been offered for some time now, Reverend Mother. It's understood! God knows!"

"Yes," the Abbess would answer, "tonight we'll say the rosary for you in addition to the usual orations. Yes, I promise, all for you, for your peace of mind, for the serious responsibility of your high state."

Maria Assunta told the Abbess not only everything from times past, but even the most minute, most banal of up-to-date annoyances. She referred to the most insignificant episodes of her life and she lamented if someone (usually Pietro) had acted diversely in these contingencies from what she would have wished. "You know, Reverend Mother, today he answered me so badly, so very badly, that he made me commit a veritable sin of wrath and even though it's true that a husband's discipline and authority have a divine function in the world, I would still say that the responsibility was not mine but his. It was too much! And even Annetta — yes, Annetta, who would think so? Not that Annetta answered me badly, directly and consciously, but she tolerated in too passive a way my being disrespectfully answered by another. The servant who helps out with the laundry is not bad but she has a sharp tongue. When I told her that *signor* Pietro's shirts were badly ironed — and, after all, he is the head of the house — she answered, 'This is the way you taught me, it's not my fault if you didn't teach me right.' That's how she dared to

answer! And she's a person I saved from the streets; I gave her a home; I made her a human being. But every so often the savage and demon in her lets loose. What pretensions — and all over a few shirts. It seems impossible that my husband is so fastidious in this respect and so crude in others! At any rate, Annetta evidently did not fully understand the gravity of the affront given me."

"I did understand," Annetta retorted most of the times in such a case, stamping her feet, taken by hysteric convulsions, and looking about her like an animal that seeks with his eyes a way of escape. "But Giacinta is envious of me and if I do her wrong she never gives up treating me spitefully when she can. She never gives up! And I am better than she."

Poor Annetta, semi-deficient as she was, was all shaken in those moments by her infantile excitement. Then the Abbess would sigh, "My daughter, how much patience is needed in the world for the mite of responsibility which is given us!" Thus she addressed Maria Assunta. And then, to Annetta: "And you, too, Annetta, you are good but tepid and presumptuous. How can you have the courage to say you are better than another of God's creatures if you are so afraid of everything, even lacking the courage to defend your benefactress who is a veritable mother to you?"

These were the moments in which Maria Assunta felt herself substantially confronted for infinite bitterness; this recognition, almost divine, of her merits seemed to put her in the ante-chamber of heaven. Annetta, on the other hand, invariably broke out into tears and asked pardon. The Abbess would bless her. Maria Assunta would bless her. "Even the just sin seventy times seven in a single day," they would murmur in absolution. The phrase became synchronous upon their lips; they intuited the glances of mutual comprehension which were exchanged on either side of the grating between them — these two mothers (one in flesh, the other in spirit) with their diversely experienced knowledge of the foibles of humanity.

"Now go in peace," concluded the Abbess, "and be happy."

And Annetta, happy and even hilarious, would take Giovanni by the hand and leave to find refuge in a little church nearby. There she said three Hail Mary's of penitence and thanksgiving. She felt happy, in her poverty and simpleness, with that child at her side — the son of her betters who was pledged to great and saintly things in the world, and she urged him to pray with her because he had innocent pray-

ers on his lips, those that go highest, right to the throne of the Most High. With this conviction even Giovanni prayed happily, exhilarating himself with Annetta's own happiness.

Maria Assunta had not omitted to confide in Mother Carmela the observation that the monk at Padua had not been up to her expectations. "Will the benediction be valid just the same?" she asked.

She was reassured when Mother Carmela had answered her with a mighty "I *am* surprised! But of course it's valid. Each priest is nothing but a minister of God's grace and if he's distracted and not completely attentive to his sacred office and to the piety of the faithful whom he serves, so much the worse for him! It would really be a sad fate for all us sinners if it were not so. They are so free and easy now, these young priests, so irresponsible and unprepared. But let us not continue to judge, it's not our business. Our business is having our cards in order for the eternal life."

Another day Maria Assunta asked Mother Carmela if it would be possible to make her confession to her rather than to her usual confessor: "How right it would be! How I would like it," she told the Abbess. "What a repose it would be for the spirit to have absolution from you."

"Why, that's all I'd need - to have this responsibility, too," Mother Carmela answered tersely, audibly astonished by the proposal. And then she advised Maria Assunta of a particular confessor to whom Maria Assunta went twice and then stopped. As she explained to Mother Carmela, "He's a person who upsets me. I don't like him. He chides me for the holiest things and pardons me with incredible lightness for the worst sins!"

At this disclosure, Mother Carmela was maternally severe with her favored guest for the first time. She made her promise to return to that confessor, not always but often and for humility, for the very reason that he *had* reproved her. Maria Assunta promised and in truth did return to the priest but only when she had little or nothing to confess.

Founded upon these pious bases, their familiarity during the year had grown to the point where even the Abbess had by now confided to Maria Assunta many of the convent's

troubles. It happened, for instance, that the cow which the nuns kept had died and the poor sisters were left without the nourishment most needed by them. Maria Assunta succeeded in snaring from her husband the gift of a young cow for the convent - it was the last charitable act that she got him to do and it touched the sisters in an unbelievable way. "But *il signor cavaliere* isn't so bad, after all," said Mother Carmela to Maria Assunta, thanking her for the munificent gift Pietro had sent them. "You know very well that charity washes away many sins and by itself opens all the doors of heaven."

"He's not bad, of course," commented Maria Assunta with a sigh. "But that's because I've had to teach him the way of charity myself, Reverend Mother. And what charity is this, after all? *One* cow, when he has barns full."

"And yet," answered the Abbess imperterbably, "these are the little things that most profoundly touch the pity and mercy of heaven."

When Pietro died suddenly, shortly after his gift of the cow, the Abbess made a long meditation before the portrait of Holy Mary the Beautiful. "I would almost say that our lovely Madonna was more beautiful than usual today," the Abbess later told Maria Assunta. "And even the child was happier. There was a particular ray of sunshine that lit the pallor of their faces into a tender milky freshness. *Signor* Pietro died without sacraments but today the Madonna, as I prayed before her for his intention, had the soft and clement smile of one who knows of a great happening. I have no doubt but that she conceded your husband the grace of a last thought of penitence, and so final absolution was granted and his soul saved."

And the sisters of the community, all without exception, confirmed this belief as they prayed before the Madonna for their deceased benefactor. It was more than sufficient proof to console Maria Assunta for all time, even more since, if Pietro had been moved to the point of giving the cow, he owed this merit, this salvation secured at the last moment by the very skin of his teeth, to the fact of having had a wife like her.

Translated by  
HELEN BAROLINI

## NOTES FROM ITALY

### Cultural Meetings at Recanati and Livorno

One of the most pleasant results of the economic boom in Europe is the frequency with which learned associations and scholarly societies have been holding special meetings. These meetings are predominantly of a professional nature, but, contrary to what, for instance, is the practice at the annual Modern Language Association gatherings here in America, the social pleasures of table and theatre, travel and tourism, are not neglected. Europe, being to such a large extent a living museum, offers a wonderful setting in which intellectual work can be quite effortlessly interrupted by a leisurely stroll to a neighboring historical site or world-renowned monument. Thus, the meeting held this past September at Leopardi's birthplace, Recanati, combined the detailed exploration of problems in Leopardi studies with delightful excursions into the surrounding countryside.

Recanati is a small hill town of less than 10,000 inhabitants, only a few miles from Loreto, goal of religious pilgrimages from all over the world, much as Lourdes. Approaching it by car or bus (there is no direct rail connection), one cannot help but think of Leopardi's deep unhappiness there, of his feeling of isolation and imprisonment, of his desire to flee. The fields lie peaceful all around; the parched earth (it hasn't rained for weeks) is dusty gray; the leaves have turned a lifeless brown. As the car winds its way up, one is inevitably reminded of Umbria and Tuscany. Yet here the land, less fertile in produce and less rich in history, is not as lovingly modelled by the hand of man. And one muses on the familiar theme of the endless variety of the Italian landscape. At the top of the hill, just before the last curve, a high brick wall seems to buttress the hill side. On it a long marble tablet, in stiff oversized letters, bears the words, "Sempre Caro Mi Fu Quest'Ermo Colle" (This lonely hill was always dear to me). It is the hill of "The Infinite," setting of one of the most perfect of Italian lyric poems. Now, the street names begin: Viale del Passero Solitario (Drive of the Lonely Thrush), Piazzetta del Sabato del Villaggio (Square of the Village Saturday), finally the medieval battlements of the Tower in the central square, Piazza Leopardi. And everywhere, commemorative tablets, inscribed with verses familiar to every Italian.

The meetings themselves were held at the City Hall, an impressive late nineteenth century construction, which together with the twentieth century building of the Centro Nazionale di Studi Leopardiani, stands in striking contrast to the uneven streets and the unassuming facades of Leopardi's *borgo* (hamlet).

All the papers read were grouped about a central theme, "Leopardi and the Eighteenth Century," an extension of the discussion ("Linguistic and Literary Problems of the Settecento") that had been the subject of an earlier meeting, held at the end of April at Mainz, Germany, by the International Association for the Study of Italian Language and Literature. Broadly speaking, Leopardi's activity was presented in relation to three main problems, the principal papers dealing with "Leopardi and Eighteenth Century Philosophy" (delivered by Professor Mario Sansone of the University of Bari), "Leopardi and the Poetry of the Arcadia" (by Professor Emilio Bigi of the University of Florence), and "Leopardi and the Problem of Language" by Professor Salvatore Battaglia of the University of Naples). The shorter communications concentrated on more specific areas of study: the relationship between Leopardi and any one of a number of predecessors from Vico to Monti, or the relationship between themes treated by Leopardi and others, ranging from irony to *ennui*.

Walking through the rooms of the Leopardi family home, stepping out into its quiet garden, pausing in the Library where the poet himself spent many passionate hours, examining the wealth of autograph material preserved at the Leopardi Center, all this contributed to a more immediate understanding of the intellectual and historical humus out of which grew Leopardi's art. And returning every night to Porto Recanati (Recanati itself boasts only one hotel, appropriately called "La Ginestra" - The Broom Plant), where the Adriatic gently laps or beats upon the long white sandy beach, made one grateful for the opportunity which made it possible to get to know one more unspoiled corner of Italy.

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Few Americans travel the short distance south from Pisa to Livorno, a resort well-known to European tourists. The luxurious beaches, masked from the road by carefully tended gardens and a line of graceful plams, are blessed by cool sea breezes even when the rest of Tuscany is scorched. Leghorn, as the city is known in English, has been the first port of Tuscany since its development by Cosimo I in 1530, and Shelley and Byron have left us records of their visits to the docks while resident in Pisa. I visited Livorno last July, as a delegate to the first *Settimana internazionale Europa oggi: l'arte italiana contemporanea nel quadro della produzione artistica europea*, a ten day international conference on the arts in Italy today in relation to artistic production in the rest of Europe.

The conference was organized by Livorno's flourishing *Centro Artistico*, which occupies the ground and fourteenth floors of the city's oldest skyscraper (which proudly bears the name of its species, *Il Grattacielo*). Under the leadership of P. Egidio Guidobaldi, S. J., the *Centro* offers the people of Livorno an active program of concerts, lectures, and exhibitions. The auditorium, offices, and an exhibition gallery are entered from the street, and a private elevator, with the awkward capacity of three passengers, carries one to the top floor. Here are a seminar room, more galleries, and a terrace, where sculpture of Modigliani (Livorno's most famous citizen in the arts) and others stand guard over the Tuscan hills and the sea.

Giuseppe Ungaretti was to give the opening address at the *Settimana*, and we gathered in the seminar room and on the terrace, awed by the opportunity to hear the elder statesman of Italian poets, and sensing the appropriateness of doing so in this magnificent setting. Father Guidobaldi, tall and stately, able to quell the inevitable confusion with a word and a gesture, collected the official dignitaries together, and dispensed with the preliminary ceremonies as rapidly as possible. Ungaretti began slowly, interspersing his prose with the silences of his poetry, but soon seemed almost to forget the immediate audience, and to appeal to posterity, in a rich, flowing, universal, and yet intensely personal discourse – on poetry, on language, on communication, on death.

We met each morning and again in the late afternoon for lectures, and in the evening at-

tended a play, a concert, or a new film. The two hours after lunch were reserved for enjoyment of the natural wonders of Livorno. The participants came from sixteen nations on five continents – a doctoral candidate from the University of Madrid, a priest from Madagascar, a writer from Brazil, a bearded Italian painter, a dedicated Swiss scholar now resident in Rome, a lecturer from the University of Grenoble. What brought us together was a common interest in contemporary art. We were able to broaden our artistic acquaintance by attending lecturers on all subject areas: the visual arts, literature, the cinema, theatre, music, and the artistic aspects of radio and television. The student of fine arts might nod his head understandingly when Professors Michelangiolo Masciotta and Gian Alberto Dell'Acqua spoke of contemporary painting, but his pen would fly when Maestro Roberto Lupi and Professor Mario Apollonio discussed the problems of musical and literary expression.

It was difficult, of course, to cover fully both Italy and Europe in so short a time, and the choice of emphasis was left to the individual professors. Some preferred to limit their scope to Italy; some discussed the development of an art from the particular point at which it became "contemporary;" some assumed more knowledge of the past, and concentrated on Post-War expression. When a professor completed his lectures, he led a seminar discussion. But, as so often happens, many of us from abroad, who chattered freely in Italian across the dinner table, grew timid in the presence of such eminent authorities, and left the friendly disagreements to the Italians themselves.

The *Settimana* closed with a day long journey to Elba, which I could not attend, but later heard was the visual and gastronomical highlight of the conference.

Johan Kaspar Goethe, wrote in 1740, nine years before the birth of his famous son, "If one wants to make the acquaintance of many peoples of the world, and to converse with civilized persons, one will find them (at Livorno) in abundance." Those who attend the *Centro Artistico's* summer conferences can only agree.

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## BOOKS

*Contemporary Italian Poetry. An Anthology*, Edited by Carlo L. Golino – Foreword by Salvatore Quasimodo. University of California Press, 1962.

The first thing to be said about Carlo Golino's attempt to give the English-speaking world a fair sampling of modern Italian poetry in perspective is, that it seems timely and far from amateurish, whatever reservations one may have about the details. Bilingual anthologies of verse have long been popular in Italy, where contemporary verse in the several Western languages, particularly in English, is so keenly followed by a circle of readers markedly outstripping academic specialization, and it is about time that this cultural earnestness be reciprocated from across the Alps and the oceans.

Of course, Mr. Golino is not an absolute pioneer in this field, when we consider George Kay's fairly discriminating selection and presentation of Italian verse in the Penguin series about five years ago, and Sergio Pacifici's, Allen Mandelbaum's, Irma Brandeis', and Mr. Guenther's variously successful endeavors. Mandelbaum in particular has been responsible for introducing to the English-speaking public two of the finest living Italian poets, Ungaretti and Quasimodo, and while we await decisions from New Directions concerning the much overdue English anthology of Eugenio Montale's poetry, Irma Brandeis has done her best to acquaint American readers with it by editing the special issue of *Quarterly Review of Literature*, now current. *Poetry* magazine has repeatedly published Italian verse (Quasimodo

in 1954, four young poets in Summer 1959, Montale and Piccolo a few issues ago, and a new Italian number now under way), and the publication of Alfredo de Palchi's and Sonia Raiziss' Italian anthology with a low-price paperback firm is imminent (it has been delayed by a number of nonliterary accidents). And let us not forget Robert Bly's venture with Montale's verse in a recent issue of his combative magazine, *The Sixties*, (though I wish he had sought some expert advice on semantical matters).

Inevitably, the only poets fairly enough represented in Golino's anthology are Ungaretti, Montale and Quasimodo – the triad that seems to have replaced in this century the last-nineteenth century triad of Carducci, Pascoli and d'Annunzio. The others mostly come in with only one or two pieces each, and here the taste shown in each selection becomes crucial; it is sometimes questionable, as in the case of Corazzini, whose first piece (*Desolazione del povero poeta sentimentale*) is unbearably maudlin and does no service to the cause. Corazzini is a very minor poet, but he has stronger things than that, poems graced by some chromatic sharpness, and quite a few would have taken up less space in such a highly selective book. Gozzano shows to advantage in *L'Assenza*, a poem of cold colors, sharp flashes and lucid perception which satisfies such exacting readers as Montale and Anceschi; the other poems here chosen do not come up to that level of performance, but they at least do not disgrace their author. And it is with Gozzano, by the way, that Golino is at his best as a translator.

He is at his worst, instead, with Clemente Rebora, a rugged writer whose accomplishment Golino rightly emphasizes in his introductory historical survey, while being unable to do him justice in translation. The two poems selected (*Campana di Lombardia* and *Dall'immagine tesa*) give a fair idea of Rebora's verbal power, indeed the latter glows with spiritual energy, as Sister Margherita Marchionne well knew when she took from it the title for her monograph on the poet who died a priest in the late Fifties. But Golino, intent on retaining some rhythmical effects, had to "smooth off" a focal synaesthetic metaphor in each poem, with the result that his English versions, which were meant as a guide to the texts, become totally misleading and give no idea of Rebora's baroque strength. In the first poem, the "pannocchie di armonia" (literally, "corn-cobs of harmony"), so appropriately evoked by Rebora's bells in a Lombard sky, are lopped off by the translator as undesirable knots in the

slick fluency of *Into harmony were cast/ Its resplendent change complying*. Surely, a language that had an Edward Taylor, a John Donne, an Andrew Marvell, an Emily Dickinson, a T. S. Eliot and a William Empson can afford to emulate on its own terms the eccentric soarings of a metaphysical imagination!

In the second poem, Golino likewise rationalizes a doorbell which mysteriously spreads a "pollen of sound" (*Spio il campanello/ Che impercettibile spande/ Un polline di suono*) into a bell that *imperceptibly grows/ Into fluttering sounds*. He also piously kills two subsequent metaphors that tie in with this prominent one, by refusing to find a real qualitative equivalent for *Mura stupefatte di spazio* and *sbocciare non visto*. In short, this particular version is an objective lesson in how to make originality sound flat. Despite occasional slips in *Dora Markus* and *Notizie dall'Amiata*, Golino has fortunately shown more tact towards Montale's verse, which he courageously translates himself while leaving this burdensome honor to others in the case of Quasimodo (who, as everybody knows, belongs to Mandelbaum), of Saba (well done by Thomas Bergin, except for the goat poem), of Ungaretti (quite well rendered by Lowry Nelson), Pasolini, Gatto and some more.

Now there is no sense in carping at the efforts of somebody who honestly tries. George Kay himself, who gave prose translations at the foot of each page, incurred some mistakes, but he had no personal ambition in Englishing the poems selected, and was therefore less vulnerable than the present translator-anthologist, who sometimes aims at competing with the originals. Of course, even the most self-effacing translator must take liberties; and I have already acknowledged Golino's resourcefulness in a few cases where his accomplishment rises above the level of a mere semantic guide. But a semantic guide was the prime necessity in his work, and he should have remembered it everywhere, for the sake of those readers who are not very familiar with Italian.

Speaking of the selection as such once again, I wonder why more representative Futurist work has not been included, after the appropriate recognition given to Marinetti's group in the judicious Introduction. One sample of Marinetti's extreme experiments might have helped, and certainly Ardengo Soffici and Paolo Buzzi could have contributed their mettle to these uneven pages. Even the brilliant Govoni might have been revealed in less conservative light. For the curious impression this anthology gives is that Italian Futurist writers were sedate. Then, while I would gladly omit

a non-poet like Bartolini (whatever his political merits), I do not understand why Golino has left out Arturo Onofri. Adriano Grande could also have qualified for inclusion, and I think that Vittorio Sereni should have been represented by his finest poem, *Diana*, as well as by some war verse from *Diario d'Algeria*.

Coming to the last generation, I see why Pasolini's "realism" entitles him to inclusion here, but not to the extent of crowding out far better poets like Giorgio Caproni, Bartolo Cattafi and Pagliarani. The lengthy piece anthologized has some flavor, but it eventually bogs down in poor prose (His *Scavatrice*, or something from *Le Ceneri di Gramsci*, or maybe, why not, from his earlier folk-style work, would have done better). Exclusions are always inevitable in an anthology like this, and, rather than resenting them, I just regret that the American readers should have missed a chance to familiarize themselves with the fine poetry of a Lucio Piccolo, or of exquisite dialect writers like Virgilio Giotti and Biagio Marin. In short, I am what we Italians call an *incontentabile*. And I will not close this review without arguing with Mr. Golino about his discussion of Quasimodo. Is he prepared to maintain seriously that *Oboe Sommerso* and analogous work from the pre-war years does not exhibit a strong difference from Quasimodo's recent verse? It should be acknowledged, in fairness to Golino, that Quasimodo's own attitude to hermeticism wavers: once I heard him disclaim the hermetic school in favor of direct, emotional statement, and more recently here in America, many people have listened to his vindication of priority rights in that school.

GLAUCO CAMBON  
Rutgers University

*A Guide to Contemporary Italian Literature.*  
By Sergio Pacifici - Preface by Thomas Bergin. Meridian Books, 1962.

This book certainly fills a gap in that it presents to the American reader a rich, diversified and reasoned view of Italian literature in our time. Italian born and educated in both countries, Mr. Pacifici is very well equipped for the job of cultural intermediary, a job of increasing significance in our age of complex and highly sensitive international relations. If Mr. Whitfield, the English scholar, stopped his concise history of Italian literature with Pirandello because he felt that subsequent produc-

tion was "too unsorted," Pacifici shows how exaggerated that prudence was, by outlining a highly informative, balanced and on the whole undogmatic picture of what has been going on in recent decades.

The usefulness of this enterprise in the present situation, when too many academic or unacademic readers flatly ignore the modern Italian contribution to Western culture, cannot be overstated; and it is to the credit of the author that he has shunned overly personal attitudes by making his style and judgment as sober as possible. To be sure, he generally relies on previous critical appraisals (which he duly acknowledges), particularly in the chapter on Moravia. But he has a pleasant way of summarizing which sends one eagerly to the books and authors in question. Rather than definitive critical statements, Mr. Pacifici has provided useful introductory ones, so to speak.

The originality of his contribution lies above all in the articulate perspective, which enables him to take into account much more cultural forces than pure literature. Thus, in addition to studying some prominent novelists like Moravia, Pratolini and Vittorini, and poets like Saba, Montale, Ungaretti and Quasimodo, he devotes a lucid chapter to the critics, with a view to acquainting the Anglo-Saxon reader with the peculiar linguistic climate of Italian letters. Furthermore, he refreshingly broadens the scope of his survey to include a history of the leading reviews in our time, from *Leonardo* and *La Voce* to *Politecnico*, *Nuovi Argomenti* and so forth; and he even tests the "contemporaneity" of Italian writing against the pervasive influence of existentialism. A chapter on the cinema proves quite valuable, along with that on Italo-American relations, for those of us who like to feel the social matrix of a culture beneath its flowering. Generally speaking Pacifici shows a liberal orientation; politically there is no mistaking where he stands.

The introductory pages or "Prolegomena" on the historical antecedents of modern Italian literature integrate the perspective in a desirable way, and the bibliographical notes enrich the text's usefulness. While I heartily agree with him that writers like Montale or Pirandello share the intellectual climate of existentialism (and did so before this philosophy became fashionable), I feel he has overrated Quasimodo (especially in his recent phase) and perhaps also Moravia. On Vittorini he is very judicious; on Pavese (whom I personally prefer to most of Moravia) it would have been desirable to see him comment more abundantly. Pirandello and Svevo perhaps should

have been more strongly present in the picture.

As for the critics, I do not know what makes Marxist critics like Muscetta or Salinari more "brilliant" than "Catholic" ones like Carlo Bo. Yet it is true that the Marxist position has proved very stimulating to Italian letters in our time, from Gramsci onwards. The American reader will find this part of the treatment most rewarding indeed, since few here, outside the academic world, suspect how rich and dramatic Italian criticism has been. Pacifici has done well to start with a portrait of De Sanctis and to follow it up with one of Croce, without which references our contemporary criticism would not be entirely comprehensible. And I strongly approve of his relating the De Sanctis-Croce school to American New Criticism.

This is obviously not a parochial book, but one which seeks to explore and present the essential vitality of modern Italian culture in its relevance to Western culture anywhere. Such a worthwhile attempt should not meet with picayunish criticism, but I hope Mr. Pacifici will take care of some minor oversights in the next edition (for instance, he has confused Domenico Rea with Enrico Pea, and on p. 153 he credits Leopardi with using *verso libero* instead of just *versi sciolti* or blank verse - *vers libre* being a later innovation.

GLAUCO CAMBON  
*Rutgers University*

*Mussolini's Enemies: The Italian anti-Fascist Resistance.* By Charles F. Delzell. Princeton University Press, 1961.

The first centenary of the appearance of a united Italy on the map of Europe was celebrated in 1961. It was a fitting occasion, for one hears much at present of a rebirth in Italy; the Italian "miracle" rightly commands widespread interest and admiration. For all the continuity of history the course of its development is often tortuous, and certain interesting comparisons could be made between the break with the past that was 1861 and the changes that our own time is witnessing. In both cases external circumstances played a catalytic role but the shape of things in Italy herself was in large part determined by the ferment of inner forces. These inner forces of change were in both cases hampered by the restrictions that the existing structure of the country imposed upon their operation. Consequently, the tradition of "Resistance," stamped by a strong conspira-

torial color, may be regarded as a deep-rooted aspect, a tradition, characteristic of the Italian milieu.

Fascism, in the shape of Prime Minister Mussolini, nominally came into control of the Italian state in 1922, but it was not until some years had passed that the true form and shape of the Fascist regime became clearly defined. The inner logic of the system, aided by specific happenings such as the Matteotti affair, helped emphasize and develop its repressive totalitarian tendencies. After 1925 what scope had been left for opposition was finally destroyed, driving it underground. As during the *Risorgimento* some of this opposition operated in clandestinity at home, some of its members sought the shelter of exile. Also, the Italian milieu is highly individualistic, hence a strong tendency to disunion has always been characteristic of it. The record of this activity is what Professor Delzell has set out to trace during the period following the coming of Fascism to control of the Italian state. His task was not an easy one for the material for his story is as scattered as it is vast and we are indebted to him for an accomplishment carried out with an industriousness matched by the objectivity that should inform scholarly history.

The first part of the book covers the entire span of the Fascist regime, the second, that of the period between the fall of Mussolini and the end of hostilities. Unequal as they are in duration roughly the same amount of space is devoted to each, a distribution justified by the complexity and the intense activity that prevailed during the second. The first in turn naturally falls into two segments divided by the outbreak of war in Europe. The cast of characters is large, ranging from Croce to Gramsci, Togliatti and Nenni, from Matteotti to Roselli, guiding spirit of *Giustizia e Libertà*, a figure reminiscent in some respects of Mazzini; their activity, their squabbles, their hopes are traced in minute and patient detail.

The fact of war, especially after the Italian participation in it, inevitably gave the opposition to Fascism a new twist. Perhaps the main effect of it was to insert the Italian Resistance more clearly into the larger struggle going on throughout Europe. Fascism, under whatever guise, whether black, brown, or other, could be fought with equal dedication everywhere and the various national Resistance movements had much in common. Their hopes were high, no less than the thoroughgoing reconstruction of European society. It is the legacy of this climate of broad common ground that has found expression in such a development as the organization of a society for the study of the

History of the Resistance. But the general war also led to certain complications. For one thing, the Communists, save during the brief uneasy passage of Nazi-Soviet cooperation, were strongly anti-Fascist; their record in the Resistance was prominent — they paid the blood tax generously — to the extent indeed that they endeavored to annex the whole movement. Granted the authenticity of the Communist ideal, the distorting fact, a source of corruption, remained that the Communists were also in effect agents of a foreign power, a power so dedicated to the manipulation of power that the suspicion could not help but grow that the ideal was used as a subservient tool to the less noble ends of the enhancement of the position of one particular state.

But Communist or otherwise the Resistance increasingly tended to assert a monopolistic position in representing the nation. This was the case everywhere; in Italy in particular, the collapse of Fascism in 1943 gave the Resistance an enormous fillip and also gave rise to premature hopes. The world was still a world of states and the war was being fought among states; it was understandably difficult for the Italian Resistance to adapt itself to the fact that Italy was but one of many theatres of war and that her fate and the shape of her future rated at best second priority to military considerations and to the fate of other peoples. Thus the end of the war produced a situation in which much confusion prevailed; it is not the least merit of such a study as the present that it furnishes much of the necessary background for understanding the subsequent uneasy passage of Europe until the definite checking of the Communist offensive. In this situation also may be seen certain parallels with much that happened during the *Risorgimento*; in both cases the struggle of deep-rooted social forces is the real key to the situation; the story, needless to say, is a continuing one.

This aspect of the matter is in fact one that could well have received more attention, though it is perhaps less than fair to criticize an author for not doing that which he never intended to do. Fairness and thoroughness, as already mentioned, characterize this study, which has in any case the great merit of bringing together in some orderly fashion a vast mass of materials that others may in turn draw upon. If it is only a preliminary task, it is also the first that one may properly expect from the historian.

RENE ALBRECHT-CARRIE  
Barnard College  
Columbia University

*Learning How to Learn - An American Approach to Montessori.* By Nancy McCormick Rambusch. Helicon Press, 1962.

In the current American debate over education, nostalgic reflection inevitably attempts to revive "the good old days," carrying with it the conviction that somehow the schools of our parents and grandparents must have been superior to the schools of today. If author Rambusch appears to join others in such fantasies, at least she does so by appealing to a great voice from the past, the voice of Maria Montessori, Italian doctor, anthropologist and educator.

The appropriateness of the so-called "Montessori Method" for contemporary American education may be seriously doubted, though the author of this book is obviously of a different persuasion. Mrs. Rambusch is the Headmistress of the Whitby School in Greenwich, Connecticut, and President of the American Montessori Society. One is not surprised to find Mrs. Rambusch convinced that the Montessori approach has much to offer. Indeed, one must applaud the effort, if not the claim, that the Montessori method stimulates an earlier cognitive development among children than "merely the 'readiness' for the lockstep supposedly *real* education which begins at six. . . ."

The author is an able student and disciple of Mme. Montessori. She understands the Montessori system and correctly observes that it is not simply a method but an entire approach to teaching and learning: "hypotheses on education." Hypotheses, nevertheless, will not long stand unchallenged. They need to be tested in the crucible of logic or checked against the latest findings in the appropriate sciences. Rambusch seems rather to accept these hypotheses on faith as underlying assumptions that need not be questioned.

This book will appeal to those who desire to see children acquire a more subject-oriented learning at an earlier age than is now the case. But does the Montessori-Rambusch approach hold such a promise? Will a "prepared environment" that uses few books, is governed by a *direttorio*, is confident of its outcomes, and that questions the role of play in the learning process (substituting the word "work"), really stimulate the mental explorations and curiosity that are the hallmarks of normal child development? The reply of this book is an orthodox "yes," without, however, due consideration for the findings of fifty years that

have intervened since Mme. Montessori first established her principles.

Maria Montessori (1870-1952) was born in Chiaravalle, Ancona, Italy. Her early interest in engineering gave way to an interest in medicine, and she received the first Doctor of Medicine granted to a woman by the University of Rome. After graduation she worked with mental defectives and came under the influence of such great pioneers in mental illness as Saquin and Itard. Dr. Montessori's interest in the problem of training defective children led to an invitation from the minister of education to deliver a series of lectures on the subject to teachers in Rome. The enthusiasm aroused by these lectures prompted the government to establish the State Orthophenic School and to appoint Maria Montessori as Directress.

From 1901 to 1906, Dr. Montessori resumed lecturing and studied philosophy and psychology. She closed this formative period of her career as Professor of Anthropology at the University of Rome and served as University Examiner along with the playwright, Luigi Pirandello. Unquestionably her success in the training of defectives led her to consider how much more might be accomplished with physically and mentally normal children.

The third period of Mme. Montessori's career is usually considered to include the years from 1907 to 1912. In the opening of this period, she aroused considerable speculation by accepting the care of tenement children in the district of San Lorenzo in Rome. Under the auspices of a private housing association which sought to better its investment by improving the tenement district, Maria Montessori opened her first *Casa dei Bambini*. The two young women who assisted her were untrained aides and they stand in striking contrast to the untutored but resourceful "Gertrude" (Elizabeth Nef) who stimulated Pestalozzi to write his classic on education. The Italian girls were obviously present to carry out the orders of the *direttrice* and, so far as we know, contributed little to the Montessori Method. Mme. Montessori was herself an able organizer, an excellent supervisor, a tireless worker, and often dictatorial. The culmination of her tenement work appeared in her formulation of the new approach: *Il metodo della pedagogia scientifica applicato all'educazione infantile nella Casa dei Bambini* (1912).

The final phase of the career of Maria Montessori lasted to her death. It consisted of promoting what she had learned. This promotion took her beyond her native country to the four corners of the world. Under her force-

ful leadership and as a result of her tireless lecturing, Montessori Societies were formed in nearly every civilized nation of the globe. Interned in India during World War II as a subject of an Axis power, she was given considerable freedom to lecture and publish. The result was her great impact on the educational system of India. Today "Montessori Schools" are found throughout this new member of the Commonwealth. Some critics have observed that the Montessori Method is singularly appropriate for countries that are in India's stage of educational development. Yet each country has, after all, adapted the Montessori approach to its own needs. Maria Montessori died in

1952, the year of the death of John Dewey with whom she had shared the same platform in New York in 1913.

Mrs. Rambusch has performed a genuine service by keeping before American educators the name and works of Maria Montessori. Gilbert E. Donahue has appended to Mrs. Rambusch's book a definitive bibliography of materials in the English language on Dr. Montessori and the Montessori movement. Its 481 items will long serve the serious student of the history of education.

RICHARD KNOWLES MORRIS  
*Trinity College*

## EDITOR'S NOTES

• The drawings reproduced on the cover and on page 13 are from the exhibition: "Genoese Masters - Cambiaso to Magnasco 1550-1750" now on view at the Dayton Art Institute. From Dayton the exhibition moves to the John and Mabel Ringley Museum (January-February 1963) and then on to the Wadsworth Atheneum (March-May 1963).

This is the first opportunity for Americans to have a panoramic view of the works of the Genoa school. Actually this is one of the extremely few exhibitions of Genoese art ever held anywhere and indeed the only one ever organized outside of Liguria. The idea for it was suggested to Thomas C. Colt, Jr., Director of the Dayton Art Institute by Robert and Bertina Suida Manning of Kew Gardens, N.Y. The Mannings, who subsequently undertook to research and catalog the show, themselves possess a splendid collection of the works of Genoese masters. Bertina Suida Manning, who has provided the introduction to the catalogue, is the daughter of a distinguished expert on Genoese painting, Dr. William Suida, with whom she has collaborated on publications.

The Genoese school flourished a little later than the Tuscan and Venetian schools and is indeed overshadowed by their accomplishments. It remains nonetheless a most interesting contribution to the whole tableau of Italian art.

The works brought together for this occasion per force represent only one facet of the Genoa school. Anyone who has visited that proud port realizes that its greatest artistic treasures are the monumental fresco paintings decorating the numerous sumptuous palaces. No doubt the paintings and drawings of the Genoese Masters Exhibition will engender or strengthen a determination in art lovers to put Genoa hereafter on their itinerary.

Exhibitions of Italian art are flourishing elsewhere in the U.S. this season. At Finch College Museum of Art "Neopolitan Painters of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries" will be shown until December 15. At the IBM Gallery twenty-five contemporary advance-guard painters have been presented in a show entitled "One Hundred Years of Italian Industry," commissioned by Esso Standard Italiana. At the D'Arcy Galleries of NYC on November 2 opens a representative exhibition of drawings by five leading artists of Italy, "Italian Drawing Today."

• Interestingly there exists in the U.S. a number of Italian writers who recently have produced first novels: P. M. Pasinetti (*Venetian Red*), Niccolo Tucci (*Before My Time*), and Antonio Barolini (*Una lunga pazzia*, from which "Maria Assunta and the Abbess" is taken). Pasinetti's work has already appeared

in both English and Italian; Tucci's novel is now being prepared for publication in its Italian version; and Barolini's novel is being readied for its publication in English. In this country Pantheon Books, Random House, N.Y., holds the rights to *Una lunga pazzia* which was published this year in Italy by Feltrinelli with considerable critical success. The novel was frequently mentioned among the contenders for the various Italian literary prizes. (Incidentally, among the numerous prizes, the Senatore Borletti Prize – awarded to a first published work – was granted this year to Angela Bianchini who for several years resided in the U.S. and who received her doctorate from Johns Hopkins University. The content of her stories *Lungo equinozio* derives in large part from her American experiences.)

The short stories of Antonio Barolini have appeared frequently in the *New Yorker* and have also been collected in the charming volume *Our Last Family Countess* (Harper). His Italian poems which tell of American life are collected in *Elegie di Croton*. He is in addition one of Italy's distinguished journalists and the American correspondent of Torino's newspaper *La Stampa*.

Helen Barolini, the wife of the author, has translated "Maria Assunta and Abbess." She often translates Italian authors and is one herself.

- Since his last appearance in *CBC* (III, 2) Sergio Pacifici has spent a year in Italy as a Guggenheim Scholar. He has also been the recipient of a grant from the American Philosophy Society. The writing of the essay in this issue was made possible by its support. Professor Pacifici teaches Italian at Yale University. His book *A Guide to Contemporary Italian Literature* (Meridian Books) was published earlier this year and is reviewed in the present number.

- Glauco Cambon is Professor of Italian at Rutgers University. In addition to his contributions to leading Italian and American periodicals he has translated numerous American authors into Italian. His book on American poetry, *Tematica e sviluppo della poesia americana*, is an important work in the field and will soon appear in English translation (University of Indiana Press). His book of essays, *Lotta con Proteo*, will soon appear in Italy.

- Mari Hartell is a graduate student in the Department of Italian at Columbia University and is associated with the Arts Center Program there.

- Thomas G. Bergin's translations of modern Italian poets have appeared frequently in *CBC*. The original poem printed herein is one of several "that have sprung up nourished by Italian inspiration."

- Richard K. Morris is Associate Professor of Education at Trinity College.

- René Albrecht-Carrié is Professor of History at Barnard College and Columbia University, and a specialist in European history. His publications include *Italy from Napoleon to Mussolini*; *A Diplomatic History of Europe Since the Congress of Vienna*; *France, Europe and the Two World Wars*.

- It is with the thought that the poetry of Gabriele D'Annunzio has not been readily accessible to modern English readers of Italian literature that his poems are included in this number of *CBC*. The relative neglect of D'Annunzio is perhaps understandable. Although he died in 1937 his production is of an earlier period and with its esthetic decadentism and verbal artifice is colored by a *fin de siècle* sensibility quite alien to the earnest, sober spirit of more contemporary Italian literature. His reputation as a poet, moreover, has been somewhat obscured by his narrative and dramatic writing and by the notoriety of his extra-literary pursuits – military, amatory, and political.

Although D'Annunzio's verse with its intentional, exterior effects – reflects many of the shortcomings of his other writings – it also reveals undeniable artistic gifts: extraordinary fecundity of imagination, verbal brilliance, highly refined perceptions, and a keen musical ear. Such qualities are particularly apparent in those poems which describe sylvan settings and experiences. By means of striking animism D'Annunzio brings arboreal and fluvial phenomena to life. For him the natural world is a web of mysterious affinities in which he himself is caught up. Identifying himself with the elements of nature – as he does in the celebrated "La pioggia nel pineto" – he merges in organic union with twig, vine, and wave.

The poems reproduced here from the collection *Alcyone*, though they do not altogether reflect the virtuosity typical of D'Annunzio, do capture to some extent the suggestive vibrations of this literary paganism.

Olga Ragusa, the translator, is Professor of Italian at Columbia University and is a specialist in Franco-Italian literary relations.