Fall 1961

Cesare Barbieri Courier, Volume IV, Number 1

Glauco Cambon

Dante Della Terza

Luigi Borelli

Sergio Solmi

Italo Calvino

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Editor: MICHAEL R. CAMPO

The Italian Risorgimento as a Phase of Literary Inspiration

A sad truth about our national "resurrection" is that we Italians of this century should have been made to feel posthumous to it. Ever since our school years we were invited to bow to the official image of the *Risorgimento*, whose awesome statues have been variously appropriated by the most disparate political parties in the hope to sanction a usurpation or to win a problematic election, until it became almost embarrassing to speak of the trailing glory in which our nineteenth-century ancestors basked.

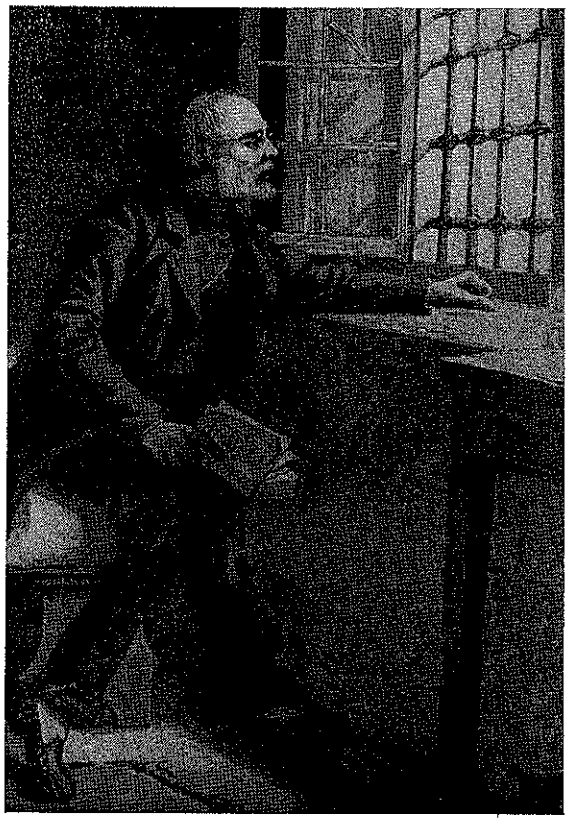
Deep down we may also feel that such glory is only the fading afterglow of an irrevocable sunset, for the heroes of our Risorgimento were, among other things, champions of the then buoyant and now sadly declining and compromised nationalism. The embarrassment diminishes when we consider how their passion for liberty has been recently emulated, in far more cruel conditions, in such a way as to make Garibaldi, Mazzini, and Pisacane inspiring presences in Italian history once again. Thus, if the inflated chauvinism of the Fascist interlude did something to make us ashamed of the nationalist myth that even first rate poets like Carducci and d'Annunzio had proclaimed long before Mussolini broke into the arena of modern history, the crisis which finally exploded it and resulted in a new rally or "liberation" taught us to look back to our Risorgimento epic in a fresh light. It is when we realize how the protagonists of the older struggle were individual sufferers, thinkers, and rebels before they became a pantheon of approved statues that we have a chance to feel close to them through the interval of a century.

This closeness is particularly felt in the literary sphere, as we reopen the well known books where blood clotted into ink long before ink inadvertently spread into dutiful oleography. The oleographic unction disappears, and we suddenly are in Silvio Pellico's coach in 1822 as he leaves his beloved Milan for the grim years of the Spielberg, and in so doing reviews in a flash the faces known and loved, the battles fought on the stage, in the columns of *Il Conciliatore*, and in the arena of the heart, the nights of work and hope, the suns of an intensely lived youth and the silent streets on which they shone.

Francesca da Rimini, that romantic phantom, re-enters the prison of the printed page; she and the other restless ghosts are no longer allowed to materialize for the patriotic Milanese audience and to proclaim to a stirred theater how vital it is for an Italian soldier to fight for his own suppressed country instead of for whatever foreign power happens to dominate it. From now on Francesca will be only a voice in the theater of memory, while her author ripens from passion to acceptance.

The romanticism of a temporarily successful tragedy will yield to a purified humanism in *Le mie prigioni*, the book of Pellico's maturity, the fruit of suffering, rebellion not tamed but converted to sainthood. The truest freedom will have been experienced in prison, quite un-Byronically, and we shall have learned to look out from that unforgettable window in the prisoner's cold cell onto the feeble light of the prison courtyard where each event becomes an advent for our gazing inmate, and there appears in his daily conversations with the deaf-mute boy, the basic model of significant human exchange. If Pellico had been Victor Hugo, he would have been so much louder about that boy or about Schiller, the compassionate jailer who helped his charge to believe in the brotherhood of man, the paradoxical namesake of a poet famous for his commitment to the cause of liberty. But Pellico had outgrown his youthful rhetoric to progress from one form of generosity to a higher one. The man who was finally to emerge from the Spielberg cell in 1830 had aged immeasurably, and was reborn in simplicity; the book he had to offer may have harmed Austria, as they said, more than a lost battle, but because it gave evidence of a purity of heart that transcended partisan hatred, it also proved beyond question that the cause of national liberty, if so espoused, need not make tribal fanatics of its champions.

More than a battle lost for Austria in the specific political situation, *Le mie prigioni* was



Mazzini in prison at the Fortress of Gaeta

The Bettmann Archive

a battle won for mankind in a perennial context. Thus we can read the book as a human and poetical document beyond the political issues that made it possible, since in its limpid pages Italy's coming Risorgimento really became Silvio Pellico's own resurrection. A product and testimonial of history in the making, *Le mie prigioni* contributed to make further history by changing in its turn the minds involved in the process of national awakening. After almost a century and a half, this temporary, if momentous, use of the book that elicited Herman Melville's admiration is amply superseded by its enduring use as an open window on existence.

From another window, in another prison, in another region, decades after, Luigi Settembrini, the Neapolitan patriot who paid like Pellico for his militant devotion to the idea of a united and Italian Italy, was to contemplate his dreamed images of deliverance; and even if his memoirs, *Le ricordanze della mia Vita,* fail to attain the unsentimental terseness of *Le mie prigioni,* they deserve a place next to it as an example of unplanned literature, sprung from the harrowed fields of personally lived history. The main tone is elegiac, so utterly unlike Mazzini's style which is shaped by the ideological passion that made the latter writer one of the protagonists of national resurrection.

Yet the modern reader cannot help comparing Pellico's and Settembrini's jail experience with Mazzini's, whose "storm of doubt" decided a personal and national destiny through an ordeal of self-questioning that transformed the Genoese apostle from a Hamlet into the Fortinbras required by the situation. Of Mazzini again we shall remark how the national idea was not narrowly conceived, or else how could he have thought of a "young Europe" along with a "young Italy"; how could he have broadened his range of interests to encompass the best of European music, literature, and philosophy. His was the fighting spirit, the belief in an imminent era of shared freedom, the determination to sacrifice everything to the concrete goal of Italian and European regeneration; but there is nothing crude about it, and we can recognize in his writings the wide scope of Romanticism as expressed by the poet Berchet, not so much in his folk-like ballads, odes, and songs, but rather as expressed in the epoch-making manifesto of 1816: the *Lettera semiseria di Grisostomo,* advocating at the same time a thorough reliance on each folk community as the true source of literary inspiration, and a rejection of parochial restrictions in favor of supra-national horizons for the mind committed to poetry.

Romantic and *liberal* came to signify the same thing, in those early years of Italian awakening, and the whole of the Risorgimento, fired by dedicated adventurers like the Bandiera brothers, like Carlo Pisacane or Giuseppe Garibaldi in wave after wave of pioneering efforts, was a Romantic movement – as that hard-headed political realist, Cavour, so well knew.

To a considerable extent the original inspiration of the movement had been literary in its inception; language and literature had remained through the centuries of bondage as the main reminder of unity to the dismembered nation, and the first stirrings of a political will to emancipation had come from poets like Alfieri, like Foscolo, in the twilight of the Enlightenment. The great rediscoverer of Italian literature, Francesco de Sanctis, was also one of the earliest fighters on the barricades, and paid for his gesture with prolonged exile. If, therefore, we find the note of passionate memory so prominent in Risorgimento or pre-Risorgimento literature, rather than the peals of triumphant assurance, it agrees with the very

nature of the upheaval. Italy was striving to find itself in her past, like all of Europe, and to make this the springboard for a bold thrust into a new future. This is why the ideas of the Enlightenment, as propagated by the French Revolution, combined with a nostalgia for the times of remote greatness in which Italy had been at the center and not on the margins of history. Memory and hope, history and prophecy, set the tone for the new literature which heralds or comments on the difficult process of national emancipation. It is under this aspect that we have to recognize in Ugo Foscolo's work the first decided expression of Italian Risorgimento literature.

Paradoxically, just as Pellico's, Settembrini's, and Mazzini's crucial experiences of freedom were to take place in prison, Foscolo's romantic appeal of awakening to the dormant nation is imaged at first in a symbolic suicide: *Jacopo Ortis* ushers in the hopes of the nation-to-be by sacrificing himself, in the tumultuous pages of the 1798 epistolary novel, on the ruins of the nation that was. Better than Leopardi, whose patriotic pronouncements were to vanish into a cosmic despair, Foscolo characterized the climate of the dark interval between Napoleon and 1848 by progressing from despair to uneasy hope. If *Ortis* represents the Inferno of his ideal trajectory, *I Sepolcri*, still gravitating on death, opens up a kind of Purgatory in the interplay of memory and hope, while *Le Grazie* may well adumbrate the final goal of a fulfilling Paradise in the mythical island of Atlantis, exempted from the ravages of history. Likewise, Foscolo's criticism, nourished by Giambattista Vico's historicism as well as by his own commitment to the moral needs of the present, inaugurates whatever is sound and virile in modern Italian literary thinking. And once again we cannot help linking the stoical exile of Turhamgreen in his yearning letters to Quirina with the differently suffering, but equally sublimated consciousness of the Spielberg martyr.

Romanticism means for all of Europe an intensified awareness of history; for Italy in particular, the rediscovery of Vico is symptomatic, when we realize that such various writers as Foscolo himself, Leopardi, Gioberti the believer in a mythical primacy of his people, Giuseppe Ferrari, and Alessandro Manzoni all found in him a fountainhead of thought and poetry. That some of them should have interpreted Vico in a Christian way, seeing in history the warp and woof of Divine Providence, and others instead in a completely untranscendent way, is only too natural. What matters more is that, whether history was felt as the domain of the merely human or as the stage of an interplay between man's effort and Divine design, it became available to the imagination as it hadn't been, in Italy, for a very long time.

We may feel, with Foscolo and Leopardi, that man is the sole, unsupported, ephemeral creator of values in a magnificently indifferent universe, or conversely, with Manzoni, Pellico, Gioberti, and Mazzini, that God presides over the ultimate destinies of the world and inspires human consciousness; but in each case, no matter if we agree with the materialist, the stoic, the orthodox Catholic or the romantic idealist, we have a conception that asserts the fundamental dignity of man, even against tremendous odds.

History indeed was the new Muse of the European writers, after Vico, Herder, Hegel, Michelet, and Carlyle; and it served well the purpose of national self-consciousness as catalyzed by the French Revolution. As for Italy, more than in the "historical" poems of Berchet, Aleardi, Prati, or in the "historical" novels of Grossi, Visconti, and d'Azeglio, or in the "historical" plays of Niccolini, the operation of that colorful Muse is to be traced in the impressive work of Alessandro Manzoni and, in a minor key, in Ippolito Nievo's increasingly revaluated novel, *Le memorie di un ottuagenario*. Manzoni's unequivocal commitment to the cause of liberty and national unity, bound up with a profound Christianity that led him to believe in the providential pattern of history, did not find a consistently direct outlet in his literary work. Despite this it will not do to say, with Alberto Moravia, that the Milanese novelist's magnum opus, *I promessi sposi*, represents an evasion of actual issues through the offices of the complacent historical Muse. For in the plight of seventeenth-century Lombardy, ill-governed and oppressed by its Spanish rulers, Manzoni allegorically presents the condition of Italy in his own time, and the novel is all a plea for the humbled and the downtrodden. Like Pellico, this leader of Italian Romanticism does not seek an escape in his religion, but is spurred by it to vindicate whatever is valid in man; and he leaves no doubt on which side he is when it comes to a choice between Holy Alliance and unalloyed holiness.

A nation both young and old struggling to find its political identity needed representatives of this noble kind, and not only men of action and propagandists. On the other hand, in Manzoni's tragedies, *Adelchi* and *Conte di Carmagnola*, the allusions to Italy's present plight are strong and unmistakable. Manzoni, writing in the pre-Garibaldi interval, chastises the Italians by reminding them of their long

inertia and of the fratricidal struggles into which they had let themselves be entangled to the point of missing their unification and losing their independence. The note of brotherhood, national as well as human, rings out clear in the chorus of the Maclodio battle from *Carmagnola*. Much like Pellico, though with an oppressive emphasis, Manzoni forcefully stated the inviolability of our brotherly pact: "Siam fratelli, siam stretti ad un patto. . ."

If, therefore, the Risorgimento inspired the early nineteenth-century Italian literature more in an oblique than in a direct way, it nevertheless reached the roots of the national imagination. The Risorgimento was in some respects a limited movement, and left much more to do than it had actually accomplished when Italian unity was finally achieved; but it was at the same time a resurrection of the Italian sensibility in a land that had seemed to Madame De Staël and to Lamartine a "terre des morts." Nievo's interpretation of history took the form of an imaginary autobiography reviewing eighty years of Italian life, from the decadence of Venice to the uprisings of the Carbonari and the later patriots.

My personal allegiance to his version of "remembrances of things past" is a matter of response to the poetry in the book. When Leopardo meets and woos Doretta at the spring, the girl's white foot stirring the clear pool shines mysteriously in my mind as if what is being stirred were the pool of memory, of history returning to life; and the lively girl, no less than the protagonist's love. Pisana, may well stand, in a very personal allegorization of the novel, for the resurrected soul of Italy. For the Risorgimento was not just a matter of politics, arms, and the men.

GLAUCO CAMBON
Rutgers University

Some Sociological Remarks on the Contemporary Italian Novel

Last summer when I was in Rome I met a young Italian writer, Antonio S., whom I had known in college. I remembered him as carefree, talented, and optimistic, but now he spoke with surprising bitterness of the literary situation in Italy, a country, he said paradoxically, where everyone knows how to write and no one knows how to read. He spoke of the meanness of fellow-writers, and finally of a personal problem which was in effect the reason for his bitterness: for two years his second novel (the first had been published with some success) has been making the rounds of the publishing houses – from Einaudi to Feltrinelli, to Mondadori, Bompiani, etc. without success. While he spoke I remembered that I had read in certain circumstances a typed copy of his novel and been asked to render a confidential judgment on it. The book had seemed to me more moving than beautiful, written by one who in finding the world unjust tended to make the real world coincide with the world of his own personal experience, and to turn this into a denunciation, an exposé. I had judged the book nevertheless worthy of attention, but I tried now to see objectively what the obstacles to the publication of the novel might be.

Above all the story seemed implausible, possibly because it was all too true. A man is shared by two women, and the wife is willing to accept this indelicate situation. The action takes place in a truly exceptional social context for a country like Italy where even the richest industrialist they say has relatives looking for work, where unemployment is an endemic phenomenon. Antonio had written about the singular case of a small town where the employees and workers are corrupted by their own well-being and drown their combative instincts in their own self-satisfaction. The thought occurred to me: perhaps this town really exists and these strange characters too. Here we have the makings of a fine case of slander; the publishers obviously do not want any trouble.

As for the intrinsic merits of the novel, I

felt that Antonio had closed a part of his heart up in his drawer with his manuscript, a moment in his life whose most vibrant emotions and humiliations one does not forget. But these sentiments were still waiting for the style that would extract them from their autobiographic heritage and transport them beyond the individual experience enclosing them. I would define this type of novel my friend wrote as a story in search of a style. Naturally this definition is purely metaphorical, since he always has a style, the style of denunciation which inspires the novel; but what I mean is that this story suffers from the pathos of its own content, and what is singular is that today in Italy such a novel finds a publisher only with great difficulty.

If we think of the main characteristic of the major part of Italian literature since the war, of the documentary and autobiographic nature of the narrative series, *I Gettoni,* published by Einaudi until several years ago, we can not help asking ourselves the reason for this sudden editorial discretion. It is obvious that today in Italy powerful political and religious forces are working to coordinate the different groups within the country. Extremely sensitive to the problems of the continuity of the State, these forces tend to search out an equidistance between a clerical and a lay conception of the State, between the revolutionary feelings inspired by the Resistance, and a loyalty to the traditional institutions. This attitude of mediation which has lasted for fifteen years has certainly had reverberations on the public conscience in Italy, influencing, to a degree we can not yet estimate, the whole of contemporary Italian culture, and contributing to the shift from a literature of crisis, whose characteristic was courageously, implacably critical, to a literature of a more uncertain character – more subtle, multiform, yet socially, morally, and ethically less conditioned.

Should we call this self-absorbed literature and this editorial activity that is less anxious to alter the structure of the world, the culture of the age of de Gasperi, as we called the previous one the literature of the Resistance, or that which fell between the 19th and 20th centuries *letteratura dell'età umbertina,* the literature of the age of King Umberto? Only the future historian will be able to answer that question, and tell how much such a formula will interest writers whose political position is often very far from that of the dominant political party in Italy.

Limiting my attention to the relationships existing today in Italy between writer and publisher, between writer and the reading public, it seems to me I can say that the writer thinks of his public as being made up only of his co-writers and a certain very limited number of cultivated, up-to-date, habitual novel readers. The writer today has no illusions, as he did during and after the war, of exercising a direct influence on the destiny of his country; nor does he think of writing a best-seller, of taking the vast public away from the Romance stories, the *fumetti,* and the "true story" magazines. As for that public of habitual novel readers, the fact that they are up-to-date does not preclude a perplexity of judgment that is manifested in extreme cases like that of the *Leopard* by Lampedusa, or to mention a foreign novel published in Italy, *Dr. Zhivago,* by eternal debates as to the value of the novel.

Let us imagine for example two readers discussing a well-known novel, *La Noia* by Moravia, a book which did have considerable commercial success. Even if these readers are critically prepared, you can have a great deal of oscillation in their attitude: the enthusiastic reader could for example note the perfect coherence of style and inspiration in the novel; the penetration, worthy of a great moralist, of the conditions of *la noia,* boredom; the mature, symbolic gravitation of Moravia's usual theme of sex toward a representation of a reality that the artist, like the painter in the novel, can never really possess; the vitality of the characters, the egoism of the mother whose love for her son is reduced to gestures of calculated renunciation, the desperate eroticism of the old painter, etc.

The anti-Moravia reader could on the contrary point out the artificiality of the point of departure, the taste for the anti-climactic situation where everything has already happened before the first word is spoken, the necessity to have recourse to a *deus ex machina,* to the artifice of the automobile accident, which is rather common in Moravia's novels when he doesn't know how to end a story, and so on. I say all this not because I wish to express scepticism as to the possibility of a valid critical judgment of this novel or any other novel, but rather to bring out the problems of perspective posed by the works of contemporary writers, and the difficulties, perhaps not sufficiently appreciated, that face the professional critic.

What is the consequence of this oscillation of judgment on the most recent novels? Faced with the novel of an unpublished writer, the editor, who knows his specialized public and, with rare exceptions, knows already in advance the limited number of copies a book will sell, reacts by giving the manuscript to a reader, a

writer of taste like Calvino for Einaudi, Bassani for Feltrinelli, who will be attentive first and foremost to the style of the novel. If a mediocre novel gets by them, escaping the vigilance of a professional reader like Calvino or Bassani, we can point it out not as "a story in search of a style," as we mentioned before, but rather as "a style in search of a story." And it is characteristic that the most recent Italian novels pass the severely discriminating stylistic tests, and present themselves as the refined product of an able technician.

The debate on the novel, such as that which appeared in the review *Nuovi Argomenti* in 1959, does not concern itself with the position and responsibility of the novel toward the society in which it is produced, as it would have fifteen years ago, but rather with the style in which it is written. Should one prefer the first person narrative or the third person narrative, the essay-novel or the *Bildungsroman?* Italian writers today, by returning to this very old habit of linguistic debate, present to us the contemporary aspects of an ancient quarrel, that of the adaptability of an overly literary language to the structure of the novel, or if you wish in more sociological terms, the "popular" qualities of the language. These linguistic discussions have been common in Italy since Dante wrote the *De Vulgari Eloquentia.* The problem is to see why they arise at certain crucial moments of Italian history. Today, with the capillary diffusion of the national language into the most peripheral zones of the country, we see the dialects losing ground, and at the same time a language full of slang being born.

The renewed interest in the linguistic planes of the novel has brought to the fore a writer, no longer very young, Carlo Emilio Gadda, whose last novel, *Quer pasticciaccio brutto de via Merulana,* met with great critical success. I read an article not long ago in the *Expresso* by a French critic, François Erval, stating that in Spain during the debate for the awarding of an international prize, Moravia presented Gadda's case with such eloquence that he almost obtained for him the prize that eventually went to Borges and Becket. No one really knew who this Gadda was, and the few who had tried to read his stories had not understood them. This is not always a decisive factor, if we think that only very recently has an Italian translator succeeded in overcoming the difficulties presented by James Joyce's *Ulysses.* What Gadda attempts is a mixture of styles, dumping into the same pot language and dialect, military slang, bureaucratic slang, scientific slang, etc. His is an omnivorous language that attacks multipolar reality by means of pluridimensional approaches in an attempt to anihilate it. A younger writer, P. P. Pasolini, prefers to draw directly on the slang of the juvenile delinquents of the Roman suburbs in a rigorous philological operation.

The most recent writers then have come to a paradoxical situation which can perhaps be defined thus:

1) By avoiding completely any division into school or group, they try determinedly to find a highly individual solution to the problem of style; and when they have thus accomplished their task as artisan-writer, they mix with the human community and are assimilated by it. Calvino, for example, who is one of the most talented writers of our generation, has been known not to object to having himself photographed in the trees, as if he wished to satirize his own myths which he holds as a writer. A similar gesture would have been considered an act of supreme self-derision by a writer like Pavese, a gesture of self-destruction.

2) One of the aspects of the exasperation of the problem of language is the reduction to essay dimensions of the most human of all novels, the historical novel. *The Leopard,* by Lampedusa, manifests a desolate vision of the world, and a reduction of the world of history to the geological world of nature. Who does not recall the conclusion of this famous novel? Concetta, the daughter of the Prince, isolated in the house after the death of her father, disappointed in her exasperated prudery by the Cardinal, nearing the end of her life decides to do away with all her souvenirs including the embalmed dog, Bendico, who had been her father's pride and joy. As she throws the dog out the window onto the garbage heap, it seems to recompose itself in the air for an instant in a gesture of life, then it falls into a pile of livid dust. We do not have here an attempt to understand and explain the world, but a return of the world to the original chaos; not an intuition of reality founded on man, but the dissolution of man into *pulvis et umbra.*

3) Dominant among writers and critics today is a conception of reality which resembles neither that of Aristotle who stressed the plausibility and credibility of events, nor that defended in our day by Lukacs who conceives of the work of art as an esthetic mirror of reality. This conception of reality is considered realistic not because it repudiates that which is fabulous or marvelous, which it does not, but because it

affirms in the work of art the necessity of the evidence of the thing represented. This form of realism, inspired by Auerbach's *Mimesis,* translated into Italian in 1956, has met with critical good fortune in Italy because its formulation coincides with the crisis of what we know as Neo-realism. In an inquiry on the novel that appeared in 1957 in the review *Ulisse,* the critic Goffredo Bellonci extends the neo-realistic definition to almost the whole of Italian novel production, thus destroying the validity of the definition. He cites among others the case of the writer Gianna Manzini, the most Proustian of Italian writers, who would be a realist according to Bellonci because she proceeds in her stories from the vague instance of memory to the detailed and precise reconstruction of the objects of memory itself.

Still, having arrived at this extreme formulation of the position of the Italian novel, a position of stylistic self-absorption rather than of expansive and epic force, we ask ourselves why we have in Italy nothing resembling the objective novel in France, the work of the "école du regard" as it is known. The answer is that in the end the Italian novel remains anchored to a humanist position. The singular civilization that each Italian province embodies defends itself from any levelling, any contamination, through the voice of its writers. The stylistic choice to which the writers have recourse to indicate any given humble gesture in daily life does not form a part of a contest in linguistic precision, because the provincial humanity, beseiged in the heart of its own dialects, cannot resign itself to its own death, but finds its ancient roots in its gestures and words. Words, as the late Merleau Ponty put it so well, are attracted by emotions and passions as are the tides by the moon. It is because of this tie between word and sentiment that Pasolini was able to create in spite of the barrier of slang, a living character in Tommasino, the protagonist of *Una Vita Violenta;* and Gadda was able to present in the Commissario Ingravallo, an extremely human policeman, a character who justifies on the human level the linguistic mixture adopted by the writer – the confusion of languages and slangs that expresses the multiformity of the world of human suffering.

And thus to continue we could affirm that as there are ties between sentiment and word even for these writers who consider the stylistic factor the determining one in the novel, so there exists in writers like Calvino, who have definitely chosen the style of the fable, a tendency to balance reality and fable. The stories of Calvino are openings on the aerial world of fable, but his Barons are men of the Enlightenment who do not renounce discourse with the world; and the trees in which they live, if they look toward the sky, nevertheless have their roots in the ground.

Cassola, Calvino, Pratolini, Bassani, Pasolini, seem today to defend with better fortune than others the literary destiny of their generation. The hope for the continuance of the fruitful season of the Italian novel which we have all witnessed hinges on their capacity to persevere and on the success of their experiments.

DANTE DELLA TERZA
University of California at Los Angeles

Poems by Luigi Borelli

Translated by Olga Ragusa

Forse No

Pioveva sole giallo
per gli intervalli
tra foglia e foglia del bosco,
e le parvenze disegnate
aleggiavano instabili
fra cespugli e piante basse,
in quel pomeriggio d'aria calda
e d'estate.
Fra il verde vario e tremulo
e il fruscìo dell'acqua
e dell'aria
e il trascorrere delle cose,
seduta su quella roccia,
proprio all'altezza dei nostri occhi,
c'era una donna nuda.
O forse no.

Maybe There Was Not

Yellow sun rained down
in the pauses
between forest leaf and leaf,
and tenuous apparitions
trembled
among the bushes and low plants,
that hot summer
afternoon.
Among the varied tender greens
and the rustling of the water
and the air
and the flow of things,
seated on that rock,
exactly level with our eyes,
was a naked woman.
Or maybe there was not.

Dimensioni

Nel mio giardino crescono
certi fiori selvaggi,
che non distruggo, anzi coltivo.
Fra non molto
le rose rosse e gialle
s'apriranno al sorriso delle donne
che superbe se n'orneranno il petto.
Ma qui fin d'ora a me
queste umili stelle,
d'un giallino pallido,
scosse dal vento d'aprile,
fanno pensare a un lontano
soggiorno in montagna.
Oh, i colori dei piccoli fiori
nella brezza alpina
sul verde smeraldo dei prati!
L'erba folta e i miracoli dei grilli
sotto la volta lucida del cielo!
Papà e mamma erano giovani
ed io ero piccolissimo.

Dimensions

In my garden grow
wild flower weeds,
which I don't uproot, but cultivate.
Shortly
red and yellow roses
will open to the smiles of women
who proudly wear them on their bosom.
But here even now
these humble stars
of pallid yellow,
shaken by the April wind,
turn my thoughts to a distant
mountain holiday.
Oh, the hues of little flowers
in the Alpine breeze
on the emerald green of grass!
The thick blades and the miracle of crickets
beneath the shiny vault of heaven!
Father and mother were young
and I was very small.

Trasparenza

Correvano i cavalli al galoppo,
criniere al vento,
sullo specchio delle tue pupille,
mentre un sorriso s'apriva lontano
nel tuo profilo.
Il tempo degli attimi scoccati
è fisso oltre gli schermi,
né la mente ha ripensato mai
al tumulto dei nostri petti.
La memoria è fuori della carne.

Transparency

The horses gallopped,
manes to the wind,
upon the mirror of your eyes,
a smile broke distant
on your lips.
The time of moments fled
is fixed beyond recall,
nor has the mind thought back
to the tumult of our hearts.
Memory is outside flesh.

Rimpianto

Nelle ore notturne
vegliavi attenta il mio tormento
e dalla sponda del letto
m'aiutavi nella febbre
col sorriso vivo del tuo volto.
Quante volte poi
nella tua tarda età
t'ho sorpresa a dormire!
Nel silenzio del tuo respiro
invano ho imitato
quel tuo materno sorriso.

Lament

In the hours of night
wakeful you tended to my pain
and from the bedside
eased my fever
in the bright smile of your eyes.
How often later
– you were very old –
I came upon you in your sleep!
In the quiet of your breath
I shaped that mother's smile
in vain.

Le Navi

Nuvole, molte nuvole
d'improvviso schierate in lontananza,
disposte a raggiera,
e la flotta dei miei pensieri
pronta a salpare!
Il vento di marzo le spinge,
caravelle,
sugli altipiani del silenzio,
la mente è sveglia,
e già immagina i barbagli d'oro
dei nuovi continenti lontani:
oh, luce, luce del sole!

Ships

Clouds, many clouds
suddenly drawn up afar,
a halo of rays,
and my thoughts, like a fleet,
ready to set sail!
The March wind drives them,
galleons,
upon the high plateaus of silence,
the mind is wakeful,
already picturing the golden splendor
of new continents afar:
oh, light, light of the sun!

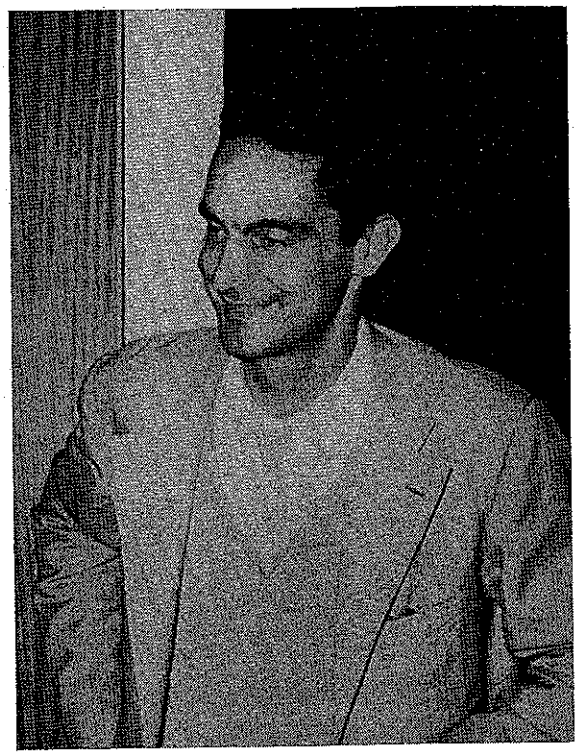
The Adventure of a Near-sighted Person

by Italo Calvino

Amilcare Carruga was still young, not without ability, yet free of far-fetched material and spiritual ambitions; nothing, therefore, stood in the way of his enjoying life. Still, he had noticed for some little time that life was gradually losing its flavor for him. Little things like, for instance, staring at women in the street; once he used to run his eyes over them avidly, but now when he turned to stare, they seemed to fade away like the wind without giving him the least sensation. Indifferently he'd turn aside his gaze. Once new cities gave him a lift – he was a businessman and traveled often – but now they left him bored, confused, and annoyed. Living alone as he did, he used to go to the movies all the time and he'd enjoy himself no matter what was on. Going every evening is like seeing one immense, continuous film; you get to know all the actors, even the bit players and extras, and just the chance of recognizing them each time is amusing in itself. Well, now all those faces in the movies had become vague, dull, anonymous; he was bored.

And then finally he realized what was the matter: he was near-sighted. The oculist prescribed a pair of glasses for him and from that moment his life changed, richer a hundred times over than before.

He got a thrill just putting his glasses on each time. He would find himself, let's say, at a bus stop, overwhelmed with sadness because all the people and things around him were so indefinite, banal, and worn out with being what they were while there he was in the middle of them, grubbing about a flabby world of uncertain shapes and colors. Then he would put his glasses on to read the number of a bus pulling up and everything changed. The most ordinary things, even telephone poles, stood sharply defined in all their smallest particulars; faces, all those unknown faces, became filled in with their previously unsuspected markings – beard stubble, pimples, wrinkles, and lines; and clothes showed what they were made of – materials could be recognized, worn-out spots detected. Seeing became a sport, a game – not just seeing some definite thing or other, just seeing. And so Amilcare Carruga would forget to pay attention to the numbers and would lose one



Italo Calvino

bus after another or else get on the wrong one. He was seeing such a lot of things that he almost felt he no longer saw anything. He had to form the habit all over again, gradually, of learning what to look at, what to skip over.

As for the women once reduced to impalpable, unfocused shadows, being able to see them now with the exact play of fullness and emptiness that their bodies made moving within their clothing, being able to size up the freshness of their skin and the warmth contained in their glance – it was more than just seeing them, it was like actually possessing them. He would, for instance, be walking along without his glasses on when he would suddenly spot a lively colored dress ahead of him. Amilcare would swiftly pull his glasses from his pocket with a practiced gesture and fit them in place on his nose. This reckless greed for sensations was often punished; sometimes the vision turned out to be an old lady. Amilcare Carruga grew more cautious. When a woman coming towards him seemed by her coloring

and her manner too plain, too unpromising to take into consideration, he would leave off his glasses. But then, just as they were about to come abreast and pass each other, he might notice that there was, instead, something about her – who could define it – that attracted him most strongly; in that instant he would seem to catch from her a look almost of expectation – perhaps the very look she had been giving him from the first and that he had been unaware of. Too late; she had vanished at a crossing, she had boarded a bus, she was far beyond the street light that held him back. In any case, he would no longer have recognized her. Thus, his having to wear glasses was slowly teaching him how to live.

But the newest world his glasses opened to him was the night world. The nocturnal city, once wrapped in shapeless clouds of darkness and blotches of color, now revealed precise divisions, reliefs, perspectives; the lights had exact outlines and the neon signs which had first been drowned in an indistinct halo shone out now, letter by letter. The best of it was, however, that the margin of indistinctness that his lens routed by daylight, stayed on by night: Amilcare Carruga would get a hankering to put on his glasses and then he'd find they were already there. The sense of fulfillment never overtook the drive of his discontent; darkness was a bottomless pit where he never tired of digging. Raising his eyes from the streets, up over homes pieced with yellow windows that he finally saw in all their squareness, he would gaze at the starry sky; and he discovered that stars were not squashed on the backdrop of the sky like broken eggs, but were sharp pinpricks of light that opened infinite distances all around him.

These new anxieties about the reality of the external world were one with his anxieties about what he himself was – all due, of course, to his use of eye-glasses. Amilcare Carruga didn't give much importance to what he was but, as often happens to just these most modest of persons, he was exceedingly fond of *how* he was. Now, passing from the category of eye-glassless men to that of the spectacled seems like nothing, but is, in fact, a very big step. Just think about it: when someone who doesn't know you tries to describe you, the first thing he says is "he wears glasses." In this way an accessory that you acquired only two weeks before becomes your first attribute, is identified with the very essence of you. It annoyed Amilcare (foolishly, if you wish) to turn so suddenly into a guy who wore glasses. But not just that. It's that once you have the suspicion that everything about you is purely accidental, liable to change, and you yourself could be completely different without it mattering a bit – well, there you are, you start to think that whether or not you exist is all the same. From then on it's only a short step to despair.

Therefore, when he had to choose frames for his glasses, Amilcare deliberately went for those that were thinnest and most mimimizing, nothing more than a pair of slender silvery bars holding up two nude lenses and fixing them onto the nose with an unobtrusive bridge. He kept them for awhile. Then he noticed that he was not happy; if by chance he happened to see himself in the mirror with those glasses on, he felt a lively antipathy for his face, as if it belonged to a class of people completely foreign to him. The glasses did it – they were so discreet, so modest, so feminine almost, that they turned him more than ever into a guy who wore glasses, a guy who had never done anything in his lifetime except wear glasses until they no longer were noticeable on him. They had become part of his physiognomy, those glasses; they had blended with his features, they had attenuated every natural contrast between what was his face – an ordinary face, but still a face – and what was a strange object, a product of industry.

He didn't love his glasses, and so it didn't take them long to fall and break. He bought another pair. This time his choice went to the other extreme and he got a pair with frames of black plastic two fingers thick, with certain fastenings that jutted out over his cheekbones like horses' blinders, and with clasps so heavy they almost bent down his ears. It was a kind of mask that hid half his face, but underneath it he felt he was himself; there was no doubt that he was one thing and the glasses another, that he only wore them occasionally and that without glasses he was a completely different man. Within the limits of his nature Amilcare Carruga was happy again.

It happened about this time that he had to go to V. on certain business matters. V. was his birthplace and he had spent all his childhood there. It was ten years, however, since he had left and his returns to V. had become always more fleeting and sporadic; several years had already gone by without his showing his face there. That's how it is when you break away from a place where you've lived for a long time – you feel like a stranger when you go back after a long interval. It seems as if either those sidewalks, those friends, those conversations in cafés are everything or they're nothing anymore; either you pursue them day by day or else you never manage to take them

up again. And since the thought of turning up after too much time has passed makes you uneasy, you get rid of the idea. In this way Amilcare had stopped looking for occasions to return to V. and when there had been occasions, he had let them pass until, finally, he avoided them altogether. But in more recent times, mixed into this negative attitude towards his hometown, there was also that sense of general estrangement that had come over him and was later found to be caused by his near-sightedness. So, finding himself in new spirits with his new glasses, he caught at the first chance to go to V. and off he went.

V. appeared under a whole new light since the last few times he had been there, and not just because of physical changes. Yes, the town was quite altered – new buildings all over the place, stores, and cafés and cinemas that were quite different from before, a traffic double what it used to be, and as for the young people – well, who knew them anymore? However, all this newness did nothing but accent and render more recognizable the old; in short, Amilcare Carruga was seeing the town again with the eyes of his boyhood, as if he had left it the day before. With his glasses he saw an infinity of insignificant particulars: a certain window, a certain iron railing. Or, rather, he was conscious of seeing them, of picking them out from everything else while once he only looked at them in a general, vague setting. He saw faces, too – some aged, others as they had always been; one a newspaper vender, another a lawyer. Amilcare Carruga no longer had really close relatives at V. and his intimate circle of friends had broken up a long time ago; but his acquaintances were endless and it couldn't have been otherwise in a town so small (such as it had been when he lived there), where you can say you know everyone, at least by sight. Lately the population had grown in V. as in all the prosperous centers of the North where there had been an influx of Southerners and the majority of faces were strange to Amilcare. But just because of this he had the satisfaction of distinguishing the old residents at first glance, and in doing so there came to his mind episodes, relationships, nicknames.

V. was one of those provincial Italian towns where the custom of the early evening stroll down the main street was still strong – *that*, anyway, hadn't changed a bit from Amilcare's time. And it always happened that the sidewalk on one side of the street was packed with an uninterrupted stream of people, while the other side was almost empty. In their day, Amilcare and his friends had always strolled on the less frequented sidewalk as a gesture of anti-conformity, tossing quips and glances and greetings across the way to where the girls were. He felt now as he had then, but even more excited, and he took to his old sidewalk, scrutinizing the people who passed. This time it didn't bother him at all to meet the town notables, it amused him, and he greeted them all. He would have even liked to stop and have a few words with someone or other, but V.'s main street was made in such a way, there was such a tight press of people pushing ahead on the narrow pavement, and, worst of all, motor traffic had become so heavy, that he could no longer stop or cross at will as he once had. His stroll was turning out to be too hurried or too slow, with no freedom of movement; Amilcare had to follow the stream or go against it with effort, and when he spotted a familiar face he had barely time to nod in greeting before it disappeared. He couldn't even tell if he had been seen or not.

There, now, was Corrado Strazza, his companion at school and billiards for many years. Amilcare gave him a smile and a broad wave of his hand. Corrado Strazza came along with his gaze fixed on Amilcare, but it was as if this glance passed through him without sticking; he went right on his way. Was it possible Strazza hadn't known him? Some time had passed but Amilcare Carruga knew for a fact that he hadn't changed much; up to now paunchiness and baldness had been kept at bay and his features had not undergone any great alterations. Here was Professor Ca-

vanna: Amilcare greeted him respectfully, making a little bow. At first the professor began to reply automatically, then he stopped and looked around, as if searching for someone else. Professor Cavanna! he who was so famous as a physiognomist because he remembered the faces, first and last names, and even quarterly grades of all his pupils! Finally Ciccio Corba, the soccer team coach, answered Amilcare's salute. But right after he blinked his eyes and began to whistle, as if noticing that he had mistakenly intercepted a stranger's greeting to someone else.

Amilcare understood at last that no one would have recognized him. Those glasses with the enormous black frames, those glasses that made the rest of the world visible, made him invisible. Who would have ever thought that Amilcare Carruga, gone from V. for so long and whom no one was expecting to meet from one moment to the next, was actually behind that kind of mask? He had barely come to this conclusion when Isa Maria Bietti appeared. She was with a friend, and they were strolling along looking at the shop windows. Amilcare popped up in front of her, started to say "Isa Maria!" but his voice stuck in his throat; Isa Maria Bietti pushed him aside with her elbow, said to her friend, "But is that how they're wearing them now . . ." and walked on.

Not even Isa Maria Bietti had recognized him. He knew in a flash that it was only for Isa Maria Bietti that he had come back, that only because of Isa Maria Bietti had he wanted to leave V. and stay away so many years, that everything, everything in his life and everything in the world was only for Isa Maria Bietti, and now finally he was seeing her again, their glances had met, and Isa Maria Bietti had not known him. So great was his emotion that he hadn't noticed if she were different, fatter, older; if she were as attractive as before, more so or less; he had seen nothing except that it was Isa Maria Bietti, and Isa Maria Bietti had not noticed him.

He had come to the end of the walk frequented by the strollers. Here, at the corner of the ice cream shop or just past it at the newspaper stand, everyone turned and strolled back down the sidewalk. Amilcare Carruga turned around, too. He had taken off his glasses. Now the world had become once more that dullish mist and he was fishing around, casting his straining eyes here and there without hooking onto anything. Not that he didn't recognize anyone; in the best illuminated spots he was always just a hairsbreadth from identifying some face or other, but a shade of doubt that it might not be who he thought it was clung to him, and then, after all, who it was or was not really didn't matter so much anyhow. Someone nodded, waved, and perhaps meant it for him but Amilcare could not tell very well who it came from. Two others, passing by, nodded; he made a gesture in return but had no idea to whom. Someone, from the other sidewalk, called out "Hi, Carrú!" It might have been Stelvi from the voice. Amilcare was glad to think that they recognized him, that they remembered him. But it was a relative satisfaction because he couldn't see *them;* or else he wasn't quite sure who they were – they were persons he confounded one with the other in his memory, persons about whom, basically, he was rather indifferent. "Good evening," he said whenever he noticed a greeting, a nod. There now – that one who just passed must have been Bellintusi, or Carretti, or Strazza. If it were Strazza, he would have liked to stop awhile, perhaps, and talk. But he had already answed him so hurriedly . . . and, thinking it over, it was probably best that their relationship went no further than conventional, hurried greetings.

His glancing around, however, was clearly for a reason: to meet up with Isa Maria Bietti again. She was wearing a red coat, so he should be able to spot her from a distance. Amilcare followed a red coat for awhile but when he was finally able to overtake it he saw that she was not in it, and in the meantime two other red coats had passed in the other direction. It was a great year for light-weight red coats. Just before, for instance, he had seen Gigina – the girl who worked in the tobacco shop – with the same coat. Now someone with a red coat greeted him and Amilcare responded coldly, because it was certainly Gigina of the tobacco shop. Then it came to him that maybe it wasn't Gigina of the tobacco shop but actually Isa Maria Bietti! But how could he have possibly mistaken Isa Maria for Gigina? Amilcare retraced his steps to make sure. He met Gigina: it was she without a doubt. But if she were coming this way now she couldn't have been the one who had completed the whole circuit; or had she cut it short? He didn't understand anything anymore. If Isa Maria had greeted him and he had answered coldly, all the trip, all the waiting, all these past years were futile. Amilcare went up and down the pavement, first putting on his glasses, then taking them off; now being the first to greet everyone, or now receiving nods from cloudy, anonymous phantoms.

Beyond the stretch of pavement where the evening stroll took place the walk went on, leading straight out of town. Then there was a row of trees, a ditch, over there a hedge, and the fields. In his time, at evening, you arrived there arm in arm with a girl – those who had a girl – or, if you were alone, you went there to be even more alone, to sit down on a bench and listen to the crickets sing. Amilcare Carruga kept on in that direction; now the town was spread out a little more, but not too much. The bench, the ditch, the crickets were still there, just as before. Amilcare Carruga sat down. The night left only some great bands of shadow standing out from the landscape, and out there it didn't matter whether he put on his glasses or not. Amilcare Carruga understood that the elation his new glasses had given him was probably the last of his life, and now that, too, was finished.

Translated by
HELEN BAROLINI

Sergio Solmi

Sergio Solmi's poetic production, though it covers a long span of years, is slight in volume and could easily fit into the compass of a not very large book. In fact it soon will, since the poet is now preparing an edition of his verses for Mondadori, which will include the old as well as the new. His first collection, *Fine di stagione,* was published in 1932; it included the work of the previous eight years and even so consisted of only a dozen short poems. He has proceeded since then at the same unhurried pace; *Poesie* (1950) contains only eighteen items not found in *Fine di stagione.* It should be said that Solmi's publications are not limited to verse; he has written essays – we may mention *La salute di Montaigne* (1942) with its illuminating pages on Gide, Baudelaire, and Valéry among other subjects – and in more recent years he has edited Leopardi for the Ricciardi series of Italian classics and has not been ashamed to collaborate in presenting an anthology of science fiction (*Le meraviglie del possibile,* 1959) to the Italian public.

Perhaps the nature of his publications, their range no less than their unhurried rhythm, might give us a clue to the personality of the poet which emerges so engagingly in his poetry. Solmi is an unassuming, modest man, but that is not to say that his verse is simple. I suspect that the reader coming fresh to his patient cadences and reflective vision may find his work easier to enjoy than to classify. (Which, some might say, would certainly distinguish him from some contemporaries of whom the opposite could be said.) De Robertis, reviewing Solmi's first book, found in the poet's inheritance something of Cardarelli, inevitably something of Leopardi, and also detected elements in common with Ungaretti, Montale, and Saba. Perhaps. I find Solmi's appeal and his own special distinction – comparisons and contrasts apart – to lie in an unusual serenity of perception and a characteristic gentleness of expression; he is a poet who would rather persuade than shock. I like too his treatment of nature which he somehow humanizes without sentimentalism or histrionics.

For all his independence of approach and in spite of a well developed critical faculty (often the enemy of creative inspiration), Sergio Solmi has kept *en rapport* with his world and has been consistently articulate in the idiom of his time. He is much respected by fellow poets, one of whom, Vittorio Sereni, has this to say of him (in a note to *Levania e altre poesie,* 1956, Solmi's most recent little book of verses): "Attento e aperto come tutti sanno, avvezzo a considerare mostri e prodigi con calmo occhio interiore, Solmi offre l'esempio di una meditazione varia e costantemente aggiornata, di una mente che non rinunzia a misurarsi con quanto attorno si agita e si rinnova . . ."

Solmi was born (1899) in Rieti but has lived for many years in Milano. Aside from his books he has also contributed to *La fiera letteraria, Il Baretti, Solaria,* and many other literary periodicals.

THOMAS G. BERGIN
Yale University

Two Poems by Sergio Solmi

Translated by Thomas G. Bergin

Neve

Scende, si posa su tetti e balconi
l'antica neve. Dai vetri m'appare
incredibile e nuova, come apparve
ai miei meravigliati occhi d'infanzia.

Esita presso terra a un breve soffio
d'aria mossa, ricade leggermente.

Scendi, gelida, aerea piuma, ferma
ogni palpito, annienta ogni colore,
ogni senso alla vita. Il tuo uniforme
candido lume stupefatto abbagli
ora e sempre la memoria, a farne
un chiaro sonno interminato, e i giorni
scomparsi oltre il suo velo quasi foglie
morte nel ghiaccio. Dormano sopiti
nel tuo madido bianco decembrino
il rimorso, l'affanno e la speranza.

Vi dorma, devastato, il bel giardino.

Snow

Falling it comes to rest on roof and terrace,
the snow of old. Seen through the glass it seems
incredible and new to me, as to
my childhood vision, full of wonderment.

Hesitant near the ground, under a brief
gust of stirred air, it settles gently down.

Descend, o chill aerial plumage, arrest
all movement. Obliterate from life
all color, every sense. O may your bright
benumbed monochromatic splendor, now
and evermore, strike memory blind, bestow
instead a clear unending sleep where days
vanish beyond the veil like long dead leaves
buried in ice. Soundly beneath your moist
December coverlet of white let hope
and care and sorrow and remorse sleep on.

And give the fair and ravaged garden rest.

Alla bruma

Alfine sei tornata, amica bruma!
Alle tue bige folate m'arrendo
e mi ritrovo come in una patria,
lungi dal sole disastroso, dalla
nuda luce che odio. Come allevia
gli occhi feriti il tuo sfumato, morbido
alone. Come persuadi al giorno
l'umana, esatta misura, la forma
della casa, e discreta preannunci
lo studioso inverno. Come infondere
sai all'intera vita il molle indugio,
la stancata dolcezza, l'abbandono
del caro istante che precede il sonno.

Fog

You have come back at last, O fog of old.
I yield to your beige billows onward rolling
and find myself as in my native land
far from the catastrophic sun, secure
against the naked light I loathe. Your soft
unfocussed halo, how it solaces
my wounded eyes; how from the day you coax
human, precise proportions, giving form
to houses, silent harbinger discreet
of studious winter. What art is yours, infusing
into all life the gentle lethargy,
the weary sweetness, the complete surrender
of that dear moment that precedes our sleep!

The Kress Study Collection at Trinity College

By John C. E. Taylor

The Samuel H. Kress Foundation of New York has presented a part of its famous art collection to a selected group of colleges and universities, in which group Trinity was included. The purpose of these gifts is to provide opportunities for students to examine original works of art at first hand, and the Kress Foundation aptly calls each group of pictures a "Study Collection."

Our Trinity Collection consists of eight paintings, mostly by Italian artists, and illustrates important phases of art history during the Renaissance, specifically from the fifteenth through the eighteenth centuries. There is one exception – a fourteenth-century picture that represents the medieval style of Siena. Thus the Collection spans about four hundred years.

Though the pictures are intended for study, they are fine works of art in their own right. Five are by famous men, and three are by followers of other notable artists. Of these, one is definitely unknown but there has been some conjecture about the other two.

The Collection, though small, is a choice one and will ultimately be housed in our Fine Arts Center, the construction of which is scheduled to begin next year.

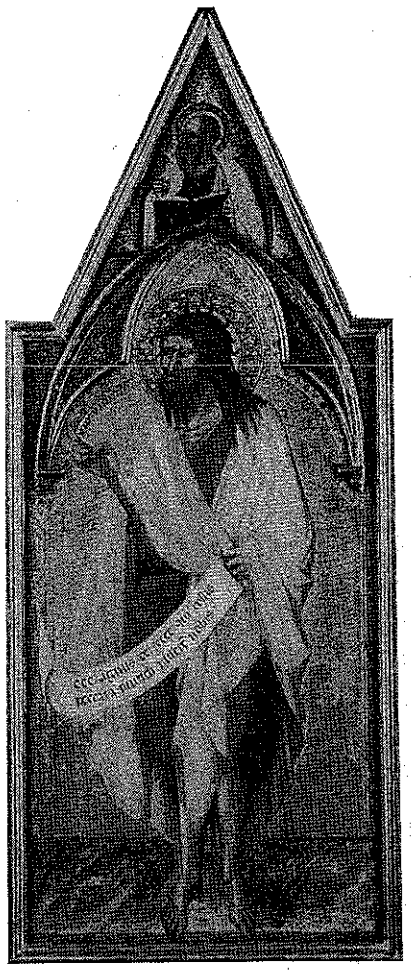
ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST (*fig. 1*)

Pietro Lorenzetti or a follower

This painting shows the characteristics of the medieval Sienese style of the fourteenth century – the conventionalized, two-dimensional form representation frequently set off against a gold-leaf background. As noted above, the artist's identity is uncertain, but he was surely a fine craftsman. Some noted authorities have commented on the picture as follows:

> In this energetic, almost savage figure of *St. John the Baptist* (surmounted by the figure, iconographically rare, of a winged St. Matthew), there is to be recognized the highly personal art of the Sienese Pietro Lorenzetti, around 1330–40.
>
> — Roberto Longhi

> The art of Pietro Lorenzetti becomes great in this figure of the Precursor . . . It is a youthful work, still stamped with the Ducciesque imprint. But the formidable energy of Pietro permeates every trait of the ascetic image.
>
> — A. Venturi



St. John the Baptist *fig. 1*

Professor John C. E. Taylor, Chairman of Trinity's Fine Arts Department, was responsible for the selection of the pictures, and is in charge of the Collection. — Ed.

HOLY FAMILY RESTING (c. 1500) (*fig. 2*)

Artist unknown

About the start of the sixteenth century the realism of the fifteenth gave way to the idealistic, or classic, approach which is particularly evident in the representation of the human figure. In this painting by an unknown artist of northern Italy, Mary, Joseph and the Child are treated more as types than as individuals, according to the classic manner.

Holy Family Resting *fig. 2*

But it is also interesting to note that the landscape background contains fantastic crags and cliffs such as we see in Flemish pictures of the same period. This suggests that our unknown Lombard was to some extent influenced by North European painting, which at that time was quite rare. Longhi, however, is certain that this "Holy Family" is the work of Francesco Napoletano:

> Comparing this *Repose of the Holy Family* in a pleasant landscape with his certain works, it is assuredly the work of the "leonardesco" Francesco Napoletano.
> It is possible to recognize the southern origin of the painter through certain affinities which he demonstrates with the Spanish "leonardeschi" (Llanos and Yanez) who are also connected with Naples. The strongest dependent affinities are, nevertheless, as in other cases, with De Predis whom Berenson considers to have been his teacher.
>
> — Roberto Longhi

MADONNA AND CHILD (*see cover*)

David or Domenico Ghirlandaio or a follower

Whoever painted this charming picture was obviously a competent practitioner of the realism that characterizes most fifteenth-century Florentine painting. The attributions suggested by several critics are quite interesting.

> Fragment of a completed picture . . . probably early Domenico Ghirlandaio.
>
> — B. Berenson

> This very attractive *tondino* – a fragment mercilessly cut out of a large altar panel – is by an extremely close contemporary pupil of Domenico Ghirlandaio . . .
>
> — F. F. Mason Perkins

> This attractive fragment (*tondo*) of a "Madonna and Child" could be attributed with some probability to David Ghirlandaio. In my opinion, the special decorative treatment of dresses and golden haloes, quite unusual at that time, point to him but these remind us of his activity as a mosaic worker. The work can be dated at the close of the XVth century.
>
> — Roberto Longhi

The Flute Player *fig. 3*

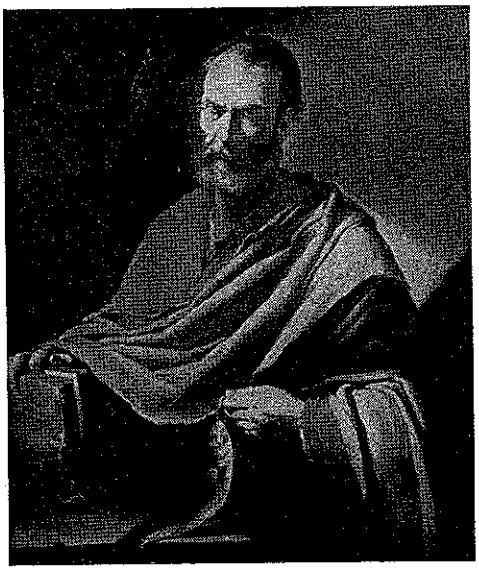
THE FLUTE PLAYER (*fig. 3*)

Francesco Zugno

Like his fellow Venetian, Zais, Zugno also lived during the rococo age – indeed, the two were almost exact contemporaries. Zugno studied under the last great Italian artist of that era – Tiepolo – and one can see reflections of that master's fluency in *The Flute Player*.

ST. PETER (*fig. 4*) *Salvator Rosa*

Rosa's work as a whole represents the baroque period, or late Renaissance, and in it we notice many of the characteristic effects sought by the artists of that era. Among these are a bold *chiaroscuro*, dramatic realism, and the principal lines of the composition often based on diagonals. In general, the objective was to make pictures as startlingly real as possible. The keenly observed facial expression and his pose of our *St. Peter* suggest that Rosa quite possibly used an actual fisherman, elderly and weatherbeaten, as a model.



St. Peter *fig. 4*

THE BURIAL OF CHRIST (about 1567–68) (*fig. 5*) *El Greco*

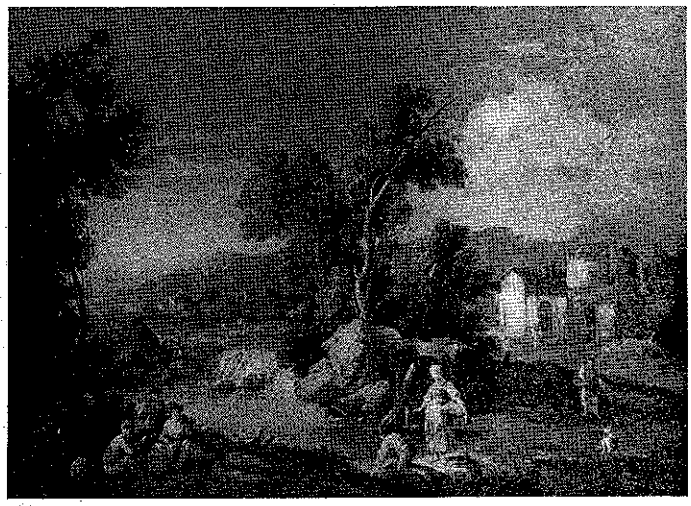
El Greco's mature style, which he developed in Spain, includes long, lanky figures, sometimes twisted and deformed, skies full of menacing storm clouds, and brilliant though often harsh coloring.

It is known, however, that while still a young man he stayed for a while in Venice before going to Spain. He evidently admired the work of Titian because the pictures that he did at this time reflect Titian's style in quite interesting ways. Our *Burial of Christ*, for example, is based on the Venetian master's version of the same subject in the Prado.

> In this free adaptation of the very well known *Burial of Christ* by Titian in the Prado (1559), Domenico Theotocopuli, . . . gives us an exercise from his early years.
> As is quite well known, numerous examples of this early Byzantine-Venetian phase of the artist have been discovered in recent years in Italy. Several of these, like this one, bear the painter's signature and, sometimes, a date. Comparing this picture with such dated works, I am of the opinion that it may be dated around 1657–58. — Roberto Longhi

The Burial of Christ

fig. 5



Landscape with Waterfall *fig. 6*

LANDSCAPE WITH WATERFALL (*fig. 6*) *Giuseppe Zais*

Zais was an eighteenth-century Venetian and a minor but competent artist. This landscape exemplifies the taste of his time for more or less romantic scenes. From the sixteenth century onward the thematic range gradually widened, and although religious subjects, mythologies and portraits continued to be painted, landscapes, along with genre subjects and still life, were increasingly demanded.

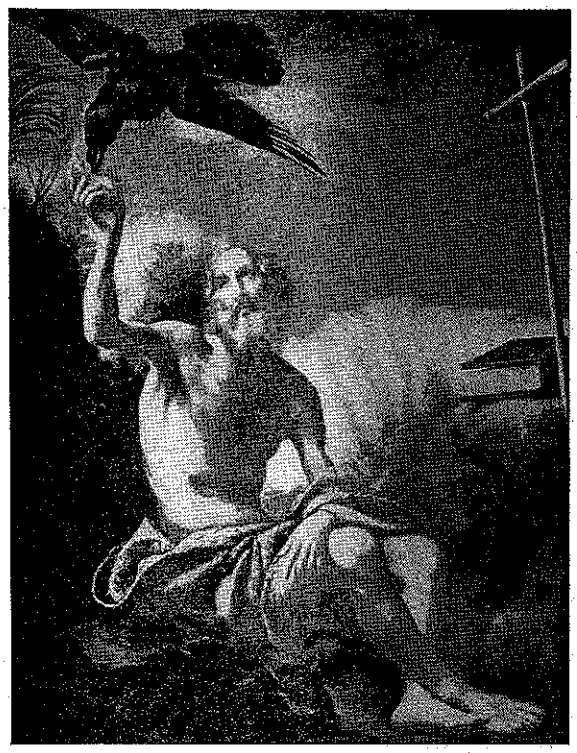
This charming view has the light touch of the rococo period during which Zais lived.

ST. PAUL THE HERMIT FED BY THE RAVEN (about 1650–60) (*fig. 7*)

Carlo Dolci

This picture shows another aspect of baroque art – its fondness for sentimentality. Dolci helped to make popular those ecstatic, rapturous saints that modern taste frowns on. *St. Paul the Hermit,* while not as extreme in this respect as some of Dolci's other pictures, has nevertheless a suggestion of these qualities.

> This figure of *St. Paul the Hermit* is a characteristic and very delicate example of the art of Carlo Dolci: that is to say, when he does not indulge himself in his overly fond treatment of sentimental *madonnine,* but rather shows real knowledge of the naturalistic tradition of Italian *seicento* painting while still harmonizing with the slightly affected pathos of Jesuitic sentiment. Also beautiful here is the vaporous landscape, and on the edge of it, the exquisite and striking note of the prayer book.
>
> — Roberto Longhi



St. Paul the Hermit Fed by the Raven *fig. 7*

BOOKS

The Square (Il Quadrato). By Bruno Munari. With an English Translation by Desmond O'Grady. Wittenborn and Company, 1961.

This is a delightful little book both in form and content: six inches square, bound in glossy white paper with a two-inch black square centered on front and back covers. Inside one finds, not a treatise on mathematics, but a kind of theme and variations, ranging all the way from purely geometric figures to complex modern machinery, interpreted from the points of view of design and of symbolic meaning. The author has pursued the rectangle through its use in architecture (the Agora of Ephesus, the palace at Tell el Amarna, the façade of Pisa cathedral); natural forms (the logarithmic spirals of a nebula and a seashell); magic and divination ("diabolic squares," metal charms against the plague); modern science (an electronic brain, a nuclear reactor). Diagrams and photographs provide an amazing variety of examples.

This bewildering mass of material has not been organized as a chronological history of the square in human civilization, but is arranged in alphabetical order, from ALBERS to WANG HSI-CHIH. Consequently one has the pleasure familiar to all lovers of good dictionaries, of discovering oddly assorted juxtapositions, many of them very good fun. For example, on pages 16–17 we have this sequence: CASA – "The word 'house' in Sumerian ideographic writing," CASA MASUZAWA – "The house of the architect Masuzawa in Tokyo, 1952," CATTEDRALE GOTICA – "Proportions of the Cathedral of Chalons-sur-Marne," and CERVELLO ELETTRONICO "Electronic brain." Naturally a good many modern abstract artists are represented, notably Josef Albers, whose "Homage to the square" series of paintings is well known, Mondrian, Klee, and Vieira; among the architects, van Doesburg, Mies van der Rohe, and especially Le Corbusier. Munari includes his own "macchina inutile 1956," a mobile composed of six aluminum strips capable of being arranged in infinite combinations. Among the more unexpected manifestations of the square are the square dance, described in some detail, the prize fight "ring," and European street signs indicating vehicular right of way (squares standing on an angle and hence "dynamic"; a square standing on its side is "static.") The only kind of square I can think of which has been omitted is the cross-word puzzle!

However, this book is no mere grab-bag of four-sided forms collected for the sake of formal relationships. Each of the examples chosen could be the point of departure for an extended study which one feels that Munari is competent to conduct. There is erudition behind the 87 pages (which include the illustrations) but even more, perhaps, creative imagination and the true artist's love of adventure. *THE SQUARE* is genuinely fascinating, as much for what it suggests as for what it includes.

Mathematicians have always known that their field of investigation embraces the world of the mysterious as well as that of demonstrable fact. If it begins with two times two, it ends in philosophy; it brings into harmony the practical and the marvelous; it involves man and his environment on all levels of experience. So, of course, does art. "The square is as high and as wide as a man with his arms outstretched. In the most ancient writings, and in the rock inscriptions of early man, it signifies the idea of enclosure, of house, of settlement." And as the author further observes, an old Chinese saying defines the infinite as a square without angles.

An inserted booklet with an English translation by Desmond O'Grady accompanies the American edition. There is an interesting bibliography that concludes the book, inviting the reader to further exploration; but *The Square* is remarkably rich and complete in itself in the current phrase, "molto suggestivo."

KATHARINE B. NEILSON
Education Director
Wadsworth Atheneum

The Real Silvestri. By Mario Soldati. Translated from the Italian by Archibald Colquhoun. Alfred A. Knopf, 1961

This long short story moves at the beginning along two rigorously symmetrical planes: there is a story told by the protagonist, the lawyer Peyrani, and a counter-story told by the girl Aurora. The first is lucid and coherent, enveloping the people and events that it conjures up from the past in an atmosphere of civil cordiality; the second is agitated and tangled, narrated by an instinctive, vulgar person who is bound to the elemental world of her own well-being. And since in both cases the object of the narration is the dead Silvestri, idolized by the lawyer as disinterested, generous, romantic, and despised by the woman as a blackmailer, we have two portraits of Silvestri; both are plausible, but they are irreconcilable. Which is the real Silvestri? The one Aurora reduces to disgusting petty proportions, or the one Peyrani idealizes, divesting of any humanly contradictory quality? In a sense one might say that the real Silvestri is closer to the description given by Aurora, who is a creature rooted to the earth like a wild plant, than it is to that of the cultured Peyrani. Peyrani's portrait of Silvestri seems to appear clear and terse in the beginning, but then it dims, now swelling horribly in a sort of distorting mirror, now retreating into distantly perceived contours.

But after all, in spite of appearances, it is not this determination of truth that really counts, because the author, with the consummate skill of the moralist, tends to shift the center of the truth in the story from Silvestri to Peyrani, from the naturalistic truth of events to their repercussions in the consciousness of the protagonists. This explains Aurora's increasing importance in the fabric of the narrative. By vehemently tracing the plausible path of Silvestri's life, she forces Peyrani, who had throughout the story defended the thesis of the uncontaminated goodness of his dead friend, to face a crisis in his vision of the past. The book which seemed bound to an irreconcilable psychological parallelism – so great was the distance between the planes in which the lawyer and the girl moved – now reveals its true dialectic and interlocutory nature. Thus Aurora is not simply an autonomous character but an indestructible pawn, a principle used to construct the moral core of the story. She springs from the secret intentions of the author who supervises her every gesture and every change of mood, in order to construct, with the subtlest of threads, the final unfolding of the story, the catharsis of Peyrani's conciousness, which is also the catastrophe of his intelligence.

Peyrani had not had that understanding of the life of his friend Silvestri that comes with real affection, but rather had enclosed him in his memory as if in a strong box, egotistically protecting his own moral equilibrium, building in his own soul an imaginary "Silvestri zone," which jealously guarded the dream coefficient that life had not succeeded in destroying in him. The imagined Silvestri was actually an image of Peyrani as he would have wished himself to be, and the destruction of the Silvestri myth, by means of Aurora's story, signifies for him a violent and salutary recall to the reality of his own being.

Having reached this point in the story (which we can define as the revelation of Peyrani's crisis) the narrative, begun in a naturalistic key, in a visual landscape, turns inward and becomes more subtle, diffusing this new dimension over the very Alpine landscape where the meeting between Aurora and Peyrani took place. As soon as the uncontaminated landscape of an illusory past is transformed into a diabolical nightmare, the real landscape as well is crystallized in repugnant forms; a world of dwarfs and obscene revelers seems to come forth from the crevices of the earth. In the Hôtel des Alpes in Barème where Peyrani takes refuge to spend the night, pale disheveled, middle-aged women and pimpled youths slump in exhaustion listening to the old dwarf Arthur sing a children's song while accompanying it with obscene gestures; and behind the hideous age of this man who already seems to live in hell, Peyrani, overcome by a confused remorse, seems to see the face of his friend Silvestri twisted in a diabolical grimace.

We should say, however, that this story – whose most secret part, or most intense morality has been brought to light – can not be read exclusively in a moralistic key. In fact if the characters were simply principles (we have cited the case of Aurora), or simply the means of construction, we would be faced with a static story made up entirely of psychological depth. Instead the story proceeds above all in a horizontal dimension of animation and movement, and this is so not because, as has been sometimes superficially stated, Soldati is a movie director, but precisely because as a subtle moralist who is above all a writer, he particularly needs room in which to balance taste for moral truth with the dynamism of the characters who live it. Thus one can say

of him that he is a moralist in the guise of an inventive writer of adventure stories, and what is equally true, that he is a dynamic storyteller who poses a moral dimension as the limit of the adventures of his characters.

Since we have above all wished to trace the moral dimension in the story, to complete the picture we should point out the kind of movement that exists in the episodes from the beginning of the reconstruction of the past to the conclusion of the book. Almagià, Aurora, Romolo, Silvestri and Peyrani all pass through the scenes of their destinies with means of locomotion that become integral parts of the story. There is the car that takes Romolo away to Grenoble, creating with this expedient a static space in which Aurora's story is introduced like an intermezzo; there is the airplane that takes Almagià to Brazil; the train that takes Romolo and Aurora to their night of love in Genova, and Silvestri to his Piedmont; and the taxi in which the last encounter between Aurora and Silvestri takes place, and toward which Silvestri addresses a last desperate appeal before disappearing for good. This alternation of immobility and movement, knowingly arranged creates the charm of this book that is seemingly so facile but actually extremely rich in dimensions and subtle. The vivacity of the characters, the unforeseen nature of the situations, the warm reflections on the human drama, combine to make it one of the most suggestive stories of the past few years, perhaps the most rigorous one that Mario Soldati has written.

Naturally such a book which is the product of a knowing treatment of the moral dimension and the dynamic dimension of adventure, where every action has its own horizontal rhythm and serves at the same time to edify the moral structure of the story, such a novel calls for a translator who will be extremely attentive to the nuances; and Colquhoun, to whom we are indebted for, among other things, the extraordinary translation of the *Promessi Sposi,* had every reason for succeeding at such a task. However, although the translation is smooth and pleasing, there are approximations and excessive simplifications that could have been avoided. It is possible that the translator wished to trim the text here and there in order to render it more coherent from the point of view of English style, but there are cases where he himself rhetorically overloads the text that in Italian is more spare, more nimble. On page 182 for instance the last words of Silvestri, "non hai capito che ho saltato il fosso," become "you haven't realized I've crossed the Rubicon." The expression "passare il Rubicone" exists in Italian, but could not have been spoken in truthful tones by a man who was near death. A less rhetorical, more colloquial equivalent should have been found.

On page 95 the expression "E così, con Romolo, pensammo di essere insieme come non eravamo mai stati," becomes "Romolo and I thought of spending a night together for the first time since the war." Here the translator may be said to have corrected the text, and while his version may ring more immediately plausible, he failed to realize that Aurora, if she did not speak the actual language of love, did follow the logic of desire for which the past does not exist, so that the times Aurora and Romolo saw each other before the war had simply been annihilated, canceled out of the memory.

Then if on page one the words of the Bohème are understandably eliminated, it is less clear why on page two the expression "quante case e quante cose nuove, e quante, ahimè, che non vedevo più," should laconically become, "new houses, changes"; or why on page 97 the expression "e lei si sarebbe trovata nelle stesse condizioni" should be struck from Peyrani's speech altogether; or why on page 104 "e guardai con rancore Aurora" should become "and looked at Aurora again."

The expression "che abbaglio avevano preso tutti e due" is translated on page 109 by "how mesmerized they had been, both of them." I must say I find the metaphor unclear, as I don't feel the translator took sufficiently into account the fact that despite the insistence of the word *abbaglio* in its etymology on the visual source that causes the error, in its active expression *prendere un abbaglio* has all the logical consequences of error. What the author says is that Silvestri and Aurora, each on their own, erroneously evaluated the actions of the other, and that the actions that followed were the logical consequence of this error.

These observations are the result of a rapid perusal of the book. If they are not such as to take away from the value of Colquhoun's work, praiseworthy as a whole, they nevertheless bring out imperfections and imprecisions one would have liked to have seen avoided.

— Dante Della Terza

ITEMS

• The Cesare Barbieri Center was privileged in September to receive the visit of Sergio Fenoaltea, Italian Ambassador to the United States. A ceremony was held for the occasion inducting Ambassador Fenoaltea as a Fellow of the Center.

The ceremony took place before the marble shield of the sixteenth century Bolognese academy of the Gelati. The shield, immured in the cloister of the Trinity College Chapel, was offered to the College by Dr. Gherardo Forni, Rector of the University of Bologna, in the name of the University, when he was guest at the College and spoke at the Honors Day Ceremony in the spring of 1959.

• In celebration of the Centenary of Italian Unity, the Connecticut Opera Association presented a special dedication performance of the opera *Norma* by Bellini November 21 at the Bushnell Memorial Hall in Hartford. A distinctive printed program commemorating the observance was distributed to the audience. Honored guest was Dr. Elio Pascarelli, Counselor of the Italian Embassy and personal representative of Ambassador Fenoaltea.

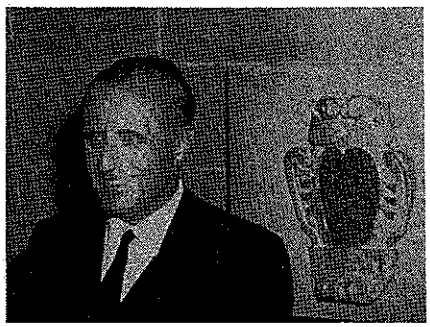
• *Lost and found*

The only missing piece in the careful reconstruction of the famed Ponte Santa Trinita (blown up by the retreating German armies in 1944) was the marble head from the statue symbolizing "Spring." Apparently it will no longer stand headless at the end of the bridge. A marble head was dredged from the river Arno October 6 and is believed to be the missing piece.

• Another step toward the integration of European countries was taken in July of this year with the approval of the establishment of a University of Europe in Italy. Plans are now under way for the construction of the University in Florence. The six nations of the European Community will share in the expenses and academic responsibilities.

• For the second consecutive year an Institute for Teachers of Italian was held at Central Connecticut State College in New Britain last summer.

The Institute consisted of seven weeks (June 28–August 12) of intensive study and training in the new approaches to language teaching under provisions of the National Defense Education Act. Twenty-four teachers of Italian from various parts of the country attended. Once again Professor Arthur M. Selvi of CCSC was the Institute's able director. Robert Serafino, foreign language consultant of the State of Connecticut, was assistant director.



Ambassador Sergio Fenoaltea

Classes and seminars extended daily from 7:30 A.M. to 4:00 P.M. in an integrated program featuring Italian civilization studies, intensive audio-lingual training work in the field of linguistics and methodology, and work with model demonstration classes, and language laboratory practice.

The Institute Staff included visiting professors Rigo Mignani of Harpur College who taught the course on Italian Civilization and Culture; William Ilgen of Yale University who taught Italian linguistics; Nicoletta Barbarito of Cornell University (now at Brown) who taught intensive oral Italian, and Laura Lilli of Smith (now at Yale) who taught intensive oral Italian and phonetics. Joseph Tursi of New Hyde Park, New York, was the teacher of the demonstration class for youngsters. Folklorist Hilda Paul provided instruction in native dances. For recreation there was, of course, the inevitable *gioco delle bocce.*

The lecturers and their subjects were Mauro Calamandrei: "I partiti politici italiani"; Filippo Donini: "La letteratura italiana del Risorgimento"; Giosué Rimanelli: "La letteratura italiana contemporanea"; and Sergio Pacifici: "L'estetica della cinematografia italiana."

Another institute for teachers of Italian was held this summer for the first time at the University of California at Berkeley.

• The first showing of an unusual exhibition of Sardinian craft art was held in Hartford in September at Centinel Hill Hall, G. Fox and Company. It was brought to the United States by the Institute of Sardinian Crafts (ISOLA). The organization, founded in 1956

by artists and professors, aims at preserving the rich traditional art of Sardinia. The regional government has lent its support. The production of contributing artisans, who are provided with equipment, materials, and regular employment, is taken to the central museum at Cagliari whence it is distributed to other parts of Italy, Europe, and now to the United States.

The museum staff, which consists of the best artists of the region, is directed by Dr. Eugenio Tavolara, sculptor. The staff actually creates each piece and then gives it out to master craftsmen for execution.

One of the outstanding features of the exhibition is the rug weaving, done by hand. All the materials are Sardinian: wool sheared from local sheep, carded and spun, then dyed by the craftsman himself with purely local vegetable colors, then woven on ancient hand looms. The finished rugs are truly striking with their traditional folk designs, yet interpreted with a sophisticated contemporary feeling. Some have modern abstract designs with subtle coloration.

Also included are some very distinctive ceramic and wrought iron pieces, wood carvings, tapestries, linens, cork items, and basketware.

The exhibition will tour the country.

CONTRIBUTORS

ITALO CALVINO is one of the most versatile and appreciated novelists of contemporary Italy. He has won both the Viareggio and Bagutta prizes. Among other novels he has written *Il cavaliere inesistente, Il visconte dimezzato,* the delightful *Il barone rampante* (translated into English *Baron in the Trees,* Random House, 1959) and a collection of short stories, *I racconti* (Einaudi, 1959), from which the story included herein has been taken.

LUIGI BORELLI is Professor of Italian at Ohio State University and is a specialist in modern literature. Since his arrival in the United States in 1948 from the University of Torino where he studied and taught he has contributed frequently to European and American journals. In recent years he has had two volumes of poetry published, *L'estate al mare,* Torino, 1958, and *Paesaggi alti,* Torino, 1959. The poems appearing in the present number are from the latter volume.

THOMAS G. BERGIN is Professor of Italian at Yale University and Master of Timothy Dwight College there. He is a specialist in Provençal and early Italian literatures and writes frequently on contemporary Italian authors. He is author of *Giovanni Verga,* editor of *Liriche di Raimbaut di Vaqueiras,* translator of the *Divine Comedy* and other works. A volume of his translations of modern Italian poets will soon appear in England.

GLAUCO CAMBON is Professor of Italian at Rutgers University. In addition to his numerous contributions to leading Italian and American literary periodicals he has translated into Italian writings by Faulkner, Dos Passos, Wallace Stevens, James Jones, Hart Crane, and others. His book on American poetry, *Tematica e sviluppo della poesia americana,* 1956, is an important work in the field.

HELEN BAROLINI often translates Italian authors and is one herself. She has written poems (a volume published in 1953 praised by Giuseppe Prezzolini), short stories, and a novel yet to appear. She is married to the distinguished journalist of *La Stampa,* Antonio Barolini.

DANTE DELLA TERZA is Professor of Italian at the University of California at Los Angeles and is a specialist in contemporary literature. This past year he was Visiting Professor at Harvard University. He is Associate Editor of the journal, *Italian Quarterly.*

OLGA RAGUSA is Professor of Italian at Columbia University and a specialist in Franco-Italian literary questions. Her book *Mallarmé in Italy* (Vanni) is an important work in the field.