Cesare Barbieri Courier

Spring 1964

Volume VI, Number 2

Cesare Barbieri Courier

SPRING 1964 VOLUME VI, No. 2

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Published by The Cesare Barbieri Center of Italian Studies at Trinity College, Hartford, Connecticut

The *Cesare Barbieri Courier* is issued twice a year and is designed to stimulate interest in matters of Italian culture and to provide information concerning the affairs of The Cesare Barbieri Center.

Distributed at no charge to *Friends of the Center*. Subscription price $1.00 a year; single numbers: 50 cents.

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Poetry and Action:

LAURO DE BOSIS 1901–1931

by Neville Rogers

During the early months of 1931 a certain Paris hotel had an unusual concierge. In between answering doorbells and telephones he was engaged in two occupations that might have surprised the guests. One was the correction of proofs, from the Oxford University Press, of an anthology, *The Golden Book of Italian Verse.* The other was a close study of aeronautical literature and of a map of the Mediterranean. The friends among whom he moved in his off-duty hours included distinguished scholars, scientists and writers from England, Italy and America. Two years before, he had himself been in America as a lecturer at Harvard and other American universities. His name was Lauro de Bosis. At the age of 29, he was already known as a poet, a bright thinker and one of the potential hopes of Italy. The anthology was a fulfillment of what lay behind – his success in the diffusion of Italian culture. The map was a symbol of what lay ahead – an attempt to translate into action his belief in the need for, and the power of, the human imagination as a political force. The aeronautical literature was a hint of the means he might employ, and the job as concierge covered his secret planning.

This article was originally given as a lecture at Trinity College, March 6, 1964.

Let me try to put this unusual young man into historical perspective. By the end of the nineteenth century, Italy was rejoicing in the freedom both from the foreign invader and from petty tyrants at home which she had won during the Risorgimento. That great uprising of the human mind had translated into action ideas about happiness and the freedom of man which transcended alike the French Revolution, the European wars of Napoleon's time and the oppressive reactions that had followed. "Liberalism in art," said Victor Hugo, "precedes liberalism in politics." Shelley put this more powerfully in the preface to *Prometheus Unbound:* "The cloud of mind is discharging

its collected lightning, and the equilibrium between institutions and opinions is now restoring or is about to be restored." Was there ever, may I ask, a better expression for what today we are pleased to call "the free world" than that phrase "the equilibrium between institutions and opinions?" Such was the nineteenth-century ideal which had so sadly fallen away in De Bosis' time. In 1915 Italy had entered the First World War, largely with the hope of completing her unity by regaining the territories still ruled by Austria, but the peace treaty had somewhat disappointed her. An early result was the outburst of flamboyant nationalism of which d'Annunzio was the symbol. On top of this came an inevitable conflict between the working classes, newly infected with the virus of the Russian revolution, and the social and industrial system which had been corrupted by the decay into selfish, unimaginative conservatism of the old Liberal ideals. Anarchy, and anarchic opinion seemed likely to upset the equilibrium in one direction when in came Mussolini to overthrow it in the other. In the Italy of De Bosis' day, fascism, like all forms of totalitarianism, had become one vast institution which, after absorbing others, outweighed the power of free opinion. Again, I quote Shelley: "The great writers of our age," he wrote, "we have reason to suppose, are the companions and forerunners of some unimagined change in our social condition or the opinions which cement it."

In returning to Shelley I am returning also to the young concierge and his map, for Shelley was his forerunner, and very much his companion just then. That was not unnatural, since his father, Adolfo de Bosis, had been not only a poet in his own right but a fine translator of Shelley, and his gifted American mother had shared his profound understanding of the English poet. In Lauro de Bosis Shelley met the young men of the Risorgimento. He was, like them, very much a man of his time. With his knowledge of classical and modern literatures and the arts generally, he combined a profound interest in the physical sciences, his major field of study at the University of Rome. For him, as for Shelley and Lucretius, there was no separation of cultures. Today the philosophic and social implications of the history of science are receiving attention as a special subject in many universities. De Bosis put aside a treatise he was writing on this subject for his more immediate concern – man's freedom in Italy.

Like many spirited young men he had at first been taken in by the pretensions of fascism. But, while some of the Anglo-Saxon wiseacres were busily perceiving a healthy, anti-Bolshevik form of therapy in cudgels and castor oil, he soon began to think otherwise. It was time that opinion made a move. Institutions, now the party and the state were one, had all but outbalanced it. As he sat in his concierge's office he thought of the battle ahead of him. An earlier battle had been fought and lost. Back in Rome he had founded an organization known as the Alleanza Nazionale which disseminated instruction by an ingenious system of chain letters. A few, well chosen points were hammered home. Fascism was the prime danger: that must never be forgotten. Some might dislike the Church, and some the monarchy, for instance, but these lesser foes could be dealt with later. Meanwhile they were *forces,* forces which could be turned against the main enemy. There was no time for indifference, or for the weak people who will always say "Why bother? All governments are evil anyhow." Fascism involved everybody. A danger especially created by such people, even the idealists among them, was that if ordinary, decent people stood aside from the struggle, the "subversive elements," not forgetting the Communists, would always be ready in order to steal the spoils. Subsequent history, especially the partisan movement, has shown how prescient were these points, especially the last one. Simple ways were recommended by the *Alleanza* by which official falsehood could be short-circuited, and recipients were asked to make and distribute copies of its publications to trusted friends who would further spread the truth by continuing the process. Sanctions, too, were suggested which citizens could impose on the state: for instance, since tobacco was a state monopoly, an anti-smoking campaign could deprive fascism of much revenue. The scheme snowballed into a bogey of the kind best calculated to play on the Duce's personal fears, and special police were detailed to watch letter-boxes. De Bosis was away, seeking help abroad, when the blow fell. Two of his lieutenants were caught red-handed posting the circulars. In addition to the imprisonment of his friends, the persecution of his family and the defeat of his enterprise, he had to face the ridicule which fascist propaganda proceeded to shower on him and his ideas. He was tempted to join his friends in prison; but he decided to show that his ideas were not yet dead.

I come back to Shelley again. Tough critics there are who think of Shelley, and sometimes even of poets in general, as characterized by the line, "I fall upon the thorns of life! I bleed." But poets there are for whom a Pearl Harbour or a Dunkirk is but a prelude to something else. From the black mood and the thorns

there follow the strength and the prayer for more strength, the strength of the roaring wind:

> Drive my dead thoughts over the Universe
> Like withered leaves to quicken a New Birth!

From his anthology and his map De Bosis turned to his aeronautical calculations. And here, to understand his preoccupations with flight we must once again look back a little, this time to the year 1927. In that year the imagination of the least imaginative had been stirred by Lindbergh's flight across the Atlantic. Like Gagarin's flight, three decades later, it had seemed to suggest that there might soon be no end to Man's conquest of the cosmic spaces. The scientist in De Bosis was delighted by the mechanical triumph. The poet in him reflected on the Spirit of Man and on the results which that triumph might have for the human race. Out of this came *Icaro,* a verse-drama which won the Olympic prize at Amsterdam. Its subject was suggested by the poet's mother, after reading a sonnet by Philippe Desportes, based on another well-known sonnet by Sannazero which, it is not uninteresting to note, appears in De Bosis' anthology of Italian verse. Here is the Desportes' sonnet:

> Icare est cheut icy le jeune audacieux,
> Qui pour voler au ciel eut assez de courage;
> Icy tomba son corps dégarni de plumage
> Laissant tous braves coeurs de sa chute envieux.
>
> O bienheureux travail d'un esprit glorieux,
> Qui tire un si grand gain d'un si petit dommage;
> O bienheureux malheur plein de tant d'avantage,
> Qu'il rende le vaincu des ans victorieux!
>
> Un chemin si nouveau n'estonna sa jeunesse.
> Le pouvoir lui faillit mais non la hardiesse,
> Il eust pour le brûler des astres le plus beau.
>
> Il mourut poursuivant une haute adventure,
> Le ciel fut son désir, la mer sa sépulture,
> Est-il plus beau dessein, ou plus riche tombeau?

In the verse-drama, *Icaro,* appear three conflicting forces of the modern world. They are personified by Minos, the tyrant of Crete; Daedalus the scientist; and Icarus, the poet, his son. They represent, respectively, Power, mechanical ability, and imagination. "Power," says the Tyrant, "I worship it and I do battle for it with the forces of Nature." Such is totalitarianism. And here is the creed of Daedalus, the scientist, whom the dictator seeks to exploit:

> Tiranni e libertà passano entrambi:
> crollano i regni, crollano gli dei.
> Solo il pensiero vigilante avanza
> e innalza un tempio, la Scienza, a fronte
> di cui l'Impero della terra è nulla.

To this single-minded, nineteenth-century profession of faith Icarus brings a twentieth-century scepticism which is commonplace in the nineteen sixties, but rather less so in De Bosis' day. "Yes," says the poet, "but will Science make Man happier?" The scepticism of Icarus has arisen from the gift which Daedalus has just made to his master of his recent invention – the iron sword. And, straight away, delighted with this advance made by science upon the bronze sword which, I suppose, might have been called in that age an instrument of 'conventional warfare,' the Tyrant prepares to use it for his purposes of destruction and enslavement. The Shelleyan theme, worked out in the drama, is that blind faith in what used to be called the 'march of science' can only bring disaster unless tempered by the imagination which alone can ensure the proper use of scientific advances. Icarus persuades his father to conceal from the Tyrant his next invention, the wings by which Man may conquer the air. He has vision of an escape through them to a world of freedom. But their plan is discovered and the Tyrant refuses to let his scientist risk his life. Icarus, knowing the hazards, conquers the air but, scientifically inexpert, flies too near the sun and falls to his death in the sea.

Thus can the Scientist bring about suffering, involving even the loss of those most dear to him. Most relevant of all, to the personal story of De Bosis is the view of the poet expressed in the poem. "I thought," says the Chorus, "that it was simply the poet's function to uplift workaday minds." That, of course, is, at all times, one popular conception of a poet, according to which "the desire of the moth for the star" would give you the whole of Shelley or De Bosis. "But," replies Icarus, "the poet has more to do than that. He must not only bring minds up to heaven but bring the light of heavenly imagination down to men." In what follows there is not only the imagination of the poet but the resolve towards action:

> Ma il mio sogno – nel centro della mischia
> Trarre lo voglio, e sia reale e armato!
> . . . e quel che oggi è sogno
> per virtu del poeta si fa viva
> forza operante, una terrena cosa.

Icarus the poet has, in fact, far more practical sense of what is needed in an emergency than Daedalus the scientist. But what this amounts to is that Daedalus, like many so-called scientists, is really only a brilliant technician. "O miseras hominum mentes, O pectora caeca!" Blind faith, which De Bosis deplored – like Shelley and Lucretius before him – is the technician's substitute which differentiates him from the poet. The true scientist has that imag-

ination which makes his vision one with that of the poet.

"Il mio sogno" – not dream, surely, the dream of ineffectual angels, but "vision," the vision of the bards of old – the vision that sees ahead of the people and without which, the people perish. During his months in the concierge's office, De Bosis' vision had become real and armed. He wrote and had printed – a true Shelley touch – 400,000 pamphlets addressed to the King and for the people of Italy. Then, borrowing some money from a friend, he bought an airplane and with a mere five hours of training in solo flying, took off for Rome. The flight came to grief in Corsica, but undeterred by the fact that he had lost the element of surprise, he bought another airplane and, on October 3, 1931, took off again from Marseilles. On his way to the airfield he posted to a friend the extraordinary document, written in French, which was to be his testament to the world in case he did not return. It was entitled *The Story of My Death.* Here is its opening:

HISTOIRE DE MA MORT

Demain, à trois heures, sur un pré de la Côte d'Azur, j'ai un rendez-vous avec Pégase.

Pégase – c'est le nom de mon avion – a la croupe rousse et les ailes blanches; bien qu'il soit fort comme quatre-vingts chevaux, il est svelte comme une hirondelle. Il s'enivre d'essence et bondit dans les cieux comme son frère de jadis, mais s'il le veut, dans la nuit, il sait glisser dans l'air comme un fantôme.

But the prose of the poet quickly changes to the terser style of the man of action. As he makes plain the purpose of his mission we perceive that the visionary is a man of balanced ideas. He believed that the good should be preserved and the bad reformed. Risorgimento Italy had gone wrong, but that was no reason why it should be swept away by either communism or fascism. What was needed was thought, and thought could not be applied or even exist until the equilibrium between institutions and opinions had been restored. What particularly exasperated him was the Fascist cry that the rottenness of Italian youth made a dictator necessary.

Rome devint pour moi comme le Cap Horn pour le Hollandais Volant: vivant ou mort, j'ai juré d'y arriver. Ma mort (quoique embêtante pour moi personnellement, qui ai tant de choses à achever) ne pourra qu'accroître le succès du vol. Comme les dangers sont tous au retour, elle ne pourra arriver qu'après avoir délivré mes 400.000 lettres, qui n'en seront que mieux recommandées! Après tout, il s'agit de donner un petit exemple d'esprit civique et d'attirer l'attention de mes concitoyens sur l'irrégularité de leur situation. Je suis convaincu que le Fascisme ne finira pas s'il n'y a une vingtaine de jeunes gens qui sacrifient leur vie pour éperonner l'esprit des Italiens. Tandis que, dans le Risorgimento, il y avait des milliers de jeunes gens prêts à donner leur vie, aujourd'hui il y en a très peu. Pourquoi? Ce n'est pas que leur courage ou leur foi soient moindres que ceux de leurs pères. C'est que personne ne prend au sérieux le Fascisme. Tous, à commencer par ses chefs, s'attendent à une fin très proche et il paraît hors de proportion de donner sa vie pour faire finir une chose qui va s'écrouler par soi-même. C'est une erreur. Il faut mourir. J'espère qu'après moi beaucoup d'autres suivront et réussiront enfin à secouer l'opinion publique.

Après avoir survolé à 4.000 mètres la Corse et l'île de Montecristo, j'arriverai à Rome vers huit heures, après avoir fait en vol plané les vingt derniers kilomètres. Quoique je n'aie fait que sept heures et demie de vol seul, si je tombe, ce ne sera pas par un défaut de pilotage. Mon avion ne fait que 150 kilomètres à l'heure et ceux de Mussolini en font 300. Il en a neuf cents et ils ont tous reçu l'ordre d'abattre coûte que coûte à coups de mitrailleuse tout avion suspect. Si mon ami Balbo a fait son devoir, ils sont maintenant là qui m'attendent. Tant mieux: je vaudrai plus mort que vivant.

About eight o'clock on the evening of October 3, 1931, the airplane appeared out of the clear autumn sky, flying low over Rome for some half-hour while leaflets fluttered and showered. Then the pilot was seen to turn westward. There was no need for pursuit by the surprised and humiliated Fascist Air Force. Inexpert with his airplane, like Icarus with his wings, Lauro de Bosis fell victim to his own technical miscalculations. Like Shelley in his boat, he disappeared into the mists of the Tyrrhenian Sea. Like Shelley he was within a few months of his thirtieth birthday.

And there it might all have ended, had the vision been a false one. But it did not. I possess some memoranda made in Rome two or three days after the flight by an American friend who went there for news of him. Though the identity, the fate and the purpose of the airman were unknown to most people, three points clearly emerged. The first was the complete psychological success of his exploit: this was most noticeable in the atmosphere of the squares and the cafés over which he had flown. The second was the effect on Mussolini himself. Shortly after the disappearance of the plane, "spontaneous demonstrations" were made by Fascist groups in various parts of the city, and these were prominently reported in all the newspapers. One paper, unfortunately, indiscreetly let out the fact that the "spontaneous reaction" had been ordered by Mussolini himself. The third point was the complete surprise of the Italian Air Force. "Mon ami Balbo" had been caught badly napping and this was a very considerable tactical feat. Such "loss of face" is something no dictatorship can ever afford.

Like De Bosis' life the catalogue of his writings is sadly short. But the Shelleyan voice was not silenced. Dictatorship could not prevent the publication of *The Story of My Death* in both the *New York Times* and *The Times* of London, and when, shortly afterwards, the Oxford University Press published, on both sides of the Atlantic, *The Golden Book of Italian Verse* and a translation of *Icaro*, there were moving prefaces written by G. M. Trevelyan and Gilbert Murray. When a translation of *Icaro* appeared in France, Romain Rolland contributed another fine preface. At Harvard the endowment of a Lauro de Bosis Chair of Italian Studies enriched the United States with the wisdom of the poet's friend, the great Gaetano Salvemini who later, after the war, brought out an edition of his letters and *ultimi scritti.*

"The cloud of mind," said Shelley, "is discharging its collected lightning." When men's minds have once begun to be stirred it becomes difficult to say just to what extent any particular influence, direct or indirect, is responsible. During the 1939–45 war, leaflet raids or "nickelling" as they were called in the RAF were regularly carried out, and many of those who risked their lives to pick up the leaflets have since borne witness to the power that these words of truth could then have.

Col. Stevens' famous broadcasts from the BBC were a logical continuation of De Bosis' anti-Fascist diagnosis and exhortations; after the landings in Italy these were disseminated among the civilian population who found them a helpful restorative to political sanity. When the break-up of fascism occurred in 1943, it came about exactly as De Bosis had predicted: the monarchy, with encouragement from the Church, turned on the party leaders and imprisoned Mussolini. For the monarchy, unfortunately, the change of heart came too late for its own salvation; the people could not be convinced that its change was due to motives other than to save itself. But in his estimate of his younger compatriots De Bosis proved even more accurate. The courage with which people of all social and intellectual levels took part in the partisan movement was certainly not less than that of their forefathers in Garibaldi's day. All that they needed was to be convinced that action was necessary. Events brought them that conviction. "I hope," he had written "that plenty of others will follow me and that they will succeed in shaking public opinion." After 1943 those others were not wanting. And on September 8 of that year, in the dark hour of defeat the message of Lauro himself was brought to thousands who had never known it: it came in the form of a broadcast by the BBC on his work and teaching. Lauro became what, in the popular psychological jargon of this country, is called an "image" for the rehabilitated Italy. Twenty years after his death the poet's mother wrote to tell me that near the former Foro Mussolini, Rome now has a Piazza Lauro de Bosis. Then, after some general comments on the progress of the regenerated Italy that she had lived to see, she remarked that the vision of *Icaro* had, indeed, become a thing of this world, *una terrena cosa.* "You see," she added, "Lauro's leaflets are still falling."

Such a dramatic story must always provide food for journalistic speculation. The innocent ardour of Rupert Brooke, the flamboyance of D'Annunzio, and the fanaticism of the Japanese suicide pilots have all been adduced as psychological analogies. Of their ineptitude, the pragmatical near-humorous style of the greater part of *The Story of My Death* might be proof sufficient. Of the action which accompanied that clear thinking no complicated psychologising is necessary: it speaks clearly for itself.

All this, some might say, is just a romantic tale belonging to old, unhappy far-off things and battles long ago. And so it would be were it not for the thought that underlay those battles long ago. May I try to get it into perspective? You may perhaps forgive me if I pause for one moment to refer to one egregious piece of academic stupidity typical of what might here obstruct. A not uninfluential American professor once referred to the "inanity of attempts to make a wise man out of Shelley." What is really inane here, and what matters, is not so much the failure to understand Shelley as the failure to understand how an educated man should approach what he reads. What we have to consider, surely, is not what we can *make* of a poet but what he *is*. The rabbitry of this – if I may express it in terms of business – Babbitry lies in the emphasis on salesmanship rather than on the nature of the goods: hereby criticism – abandons the proud, useful prerogative derived from its Greek sense of "judgment" and the critic becomes what I should like to call a "critician" – one who does to the immortal part of Man what his fellow, of whom Miss Jessica Mitford has so usefully written, does – and with the same motives – to the mortal part. What makes my reference worth while is that this notorious rabbitry came from Harvard – that same Harvard where, a few years later, Lauro de Bosis, then regarded by the Fascists as their leading young intellectual and a fine

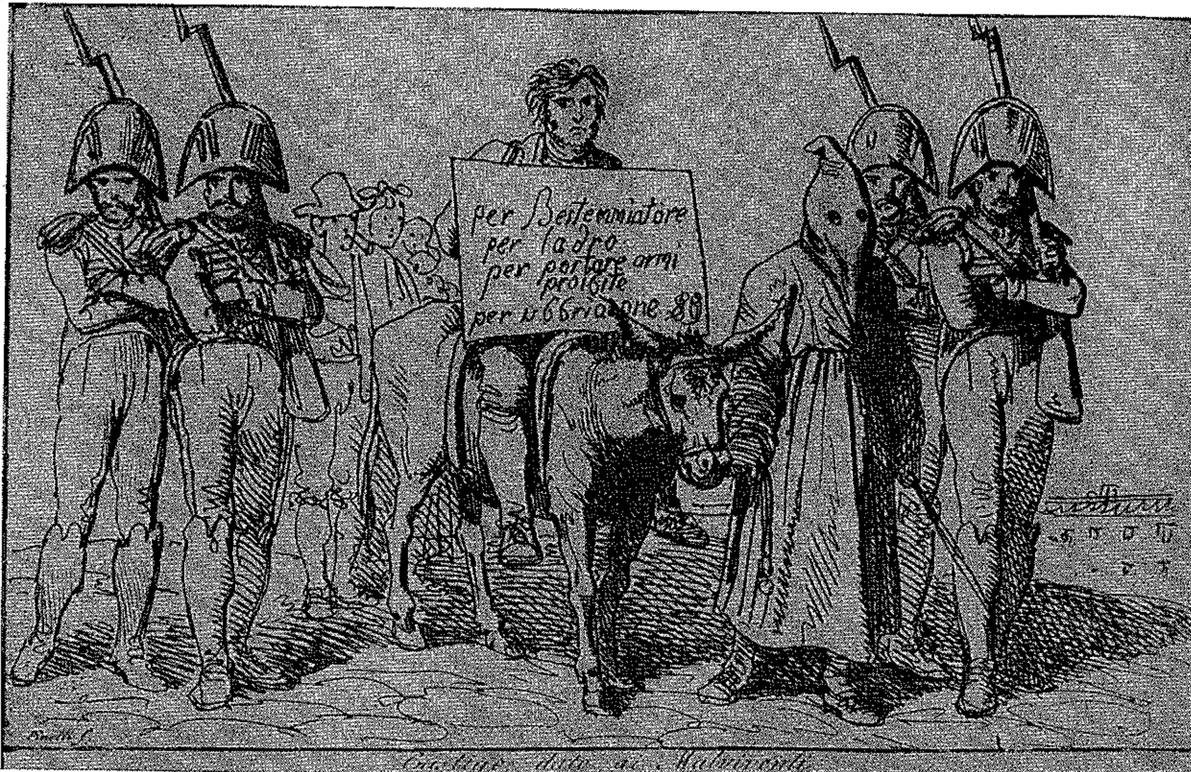
advertisement for fascism abroad, was awakened to no small degree of wisdom by the combination of Shelley's ideas and his contact with the wiser of his American friends.

What might make it even harder to get the Shelley-De Bosis *sogno* into perspective is the difficulty many have today not merely in recognizing wisdom in a poet but in recognizing that thought had anything to do with poetry. Shelley in a significant passage explains that he thinks of himself as one "formed . . . to communicate the conceptions which result from considering the Universe as a whole." According to a much-quoted summary of Coleridge's the whole genius of the fine arts lies in the ability to "make the external internal, the internal external, to make Nature thought, and thought Nature." Such was the poetry of *Prometheus Unbound*: such the scope of De Bosis' *Icaro,* and its corollary, *The Story of My Death.* Such was the tradition of the poet of old, and it is to be remembered that in Greek and Latin there is but one word for "seer" and "poet." I call to mind a conversation with Dylan Thomas, chiefly about Milton and Wordsworth, of whom he knew much, wherein he commented that on the whole each age gets the poets it deserves. I have often thought since that the "Dylan Thomas image," if I may use the cant word again, is rather less than fair both to Dylan and to our age. That many a *voyant* has sometimes behaved like a *voyou* is incontrovertible: that to be a good *voyou* qualifies you to claim the privileges and respect due to the *voyant* may be claimed *for* Villon, Rimbaud and Dylan Thomas but would not, I think, have been claimed *by* these men about their sufferings. But be this as it may, the tendency today is to make the internal external and leave it at that. The Universe is narrowed to that tiny part of it – shall I say that "split atom?" – which is formed by the poet's private life and desires. For poetry which looks beyond, you just bring out the word *cerebral* and leave it at that. Both Shelley and Lauro de Bosis lived in times when the preponderant power of governmental institutions was a menace to mankind and their battle was for freedom of thought and speech. Our situation is different, basically, in that though this is true today of a great part of the habitable world a curtain still happily divides that part from the part wherein we live. Had they been but revolutionaries they would have been out of date. To the normal, reflecting mind does anything ever seem more out of date, at all times, than yesterday's revolutionary? But they did not, beyond the physical and the metaphysical, think in political terms of Right and Left: balance was their keynote. And today that "equilibrium between institutions and opinions" is more than ever vital.

During the Thirties those who saw through fascism too often tended to assume that communism was the cure for it. De Bosis saw that "*elementi sovversivi*" of one sort are easily, far too easily, replaced by *elementi sovversivi* of another. In our own day we suffer from a general displacement of balance. The type of mind which thinks McCarthyism the answer to communism, or communism justifiable by McCarthyism, will not see, or even look for anything in between. Nor can such a mind distinguish between patriotism and nationalism. A president of the United States who is doing what he can for his country in a moment of crisis may seem to the simpler sort of academic to be a rabid American nationalist. A dissimilar opinion was expressed in my hearing last summer by two *contadini* who had come into Rome for the presidential visit: "Quello che ha fatto l'anno scorso," they said, "l'ha fatto per noi tutti. Perché, oggi giorno, tutto il mondo è paese." It was the wisdom of experience, the eternal wisdom of the *contadino,* saying what Lauro de Bosis had said – we must not lose sight of the common cause, for a common cause it is.

Perhaps the problems and hopes we have today could all be summed up, so far as this is possible, in the words of a poet laureate whose conceptions were more broadly based than most of those of today: "Our stability is but balance, and wisdom lies in masterful administration of the unforeseen." In a letter written in the last few days of his life Shelley lamented "the inefficacy of the existing systems of restraining and guiding mankind." All his life it had been his principle not to abolish systems, or institutions, but to improve them by improving the opinions which are their foundation. Ten years earlier, at the head of *Queen Mab* he had said much the same thing through his choice as an epigraph of the words of Archimedes: δός ποῦ στῶ καὶ κόσμον κινήσω. In the context of *Queen Mab* and of the whole of his political thinking this might be translated "For heavens' sake let's have *some* sort of an Establishment." Lauro de Bosis, not least among those to whom he was companion and forerunner, has been himself the companion and forerunner to some and may be so to others yet to come. "Lauro's leaflets are still falling," said his mother. And in an early poem thinking of the struggles of his day, he had written:

> Cosa t'importa, se a soffrir sei tu?
> Trionferà altrove un altra gioventù.



"Gastigo, dato ai Malviventi" – Pinelli

Calcografia dello Stato

GIUSEPPE GIOACCHINO BELLI

by Thomas G. Bergin

It would not be hard to make out a case for Belli as Italy's greatest nineteenth-century poet. Certainly, as none of his contemporaries did, he created an entire world, teeming with citizens of all kinds, with personalities ranging from the pathetic to the terrifying, from the appealing to the repulsive, and all in action – talking, arguing, brawling and explaining themselves and their condition with the sharp yet somehow ingenuous cynicism of the underprivileged, as we now discreetly style them. Belli's Trastevere (celebrated in over 2,000 sonnets) is a complete world, cast in lyric form but every bit as well populated as any *comédie humaine* I can call to mind. If its creator has not been accorded the praise his genius deserves, it is in part because of his language and in part because of his tone. For he writes not in Italian but in *romano* and furthermore, one should add, a rich, authentic *romano* which the passage of time and the spread of general education have rendered, alas, somewhat archaic.

To understand a sonnet of Belli's requires copious footnotes even for one born in the shadow of *er Cuppolone* or *er Fontanone.* Further, he is consistently obscene; he has made obscenity actually an arm of art. Nowadays I think we can take it, not merely forgiving it but understanding its function, but this was not always so; Belli himself repudiated his work and would not allow it to be published in his lifetime. Of this element no more need be said but an additional word on the *romano* may be helpful. Its characteristics will be immediately apparent from the selections here presented: doubling of consonants, frequent assimilations (*nn* for *nd*, for example), *r* regularly for the Tuscan preconsonantal *l*, frequent apocopation, some morphological

developments all its own (e.g. *famo*) and, as noted in Belli's day at least, a local vocabulary. On the Italian ear (the North Italian ear at any rate) the impression is amusing and at the same time appealing; it is the speech of a warm-hearted people, perhaps more sentimental than emotional, yet at the same time pragmatic and tolerant to the point of agnosticism.

Gogol, Mario dell'Arco reminds us, found the sonnets witty and comical, recommending them to his Balabina as a cure for neuralgia. And comical they are – on first reading. Read them again and something deeper if no less therapeutic emerges: the voice of mankind in its travail, expressing a universal melancholy fatalism, made all the more dramatic by the parochial tongue that voices it. To savor Belli properly one should read a few hundred selections; in defense of our minuscule selection we may note that each sonnet is complete in itself, whether it be a description of a scene or a character, a pocket drama, a dialogue or a moment of insight. The author himself stated that each page is meant to be the beginning and the end of a book. Our first selection is of the purely descriptive sort – though it has some arresting implications. As always in Belli, the speaker is one of the "popolino."

Two Sonnets by G. G. Belli

Translated by Thomas G. Bergin

La bbona famijja

Mi' nonna a un'or de notte che vviè ttata
Se leva da filà, ppovera vecchia,
Attizza un carboncello, sciapparecchia,
E mmaggnamo du' fronne d'inzalata.

Quarche vvorta se fàmo una frittata,
Che sai la metti ar lume sce se specchia
Come fussi a ttraverzo d'un'orecchia:
Quattro nosce, e la scena è tterminata.

Poi ner mentre ch'io, tata e Ccrementina
Seguitamo un par d'ora de sgoccetto,
Lei sparecchia e arissetta la cuscina.

E appena visto er fonno ar bucaletto,
'Na pissciatina, 'na sarvereggina,
E, in zanta pasce, sce n'annàmo a lletto.

The Good Family

(1) *My grandma, the minute pop comes home at night* (2) *gets up from her spinning, poor old woman:* (3) *lights up a hunk of charcoal, sets the table,* (4) *and we eat a couple leaves of salad.* (5) *Sometimes we make an omelet* (6–7) *that if you put it to the light you can see right through it like it was an ear:* (8) *four walnuts, and dinner's over.* (9) *Then, while me and pop and Clementine* (10) *go on bending the elbow an hour or so,* (11) *she clears the table and fixes up the kitchen.* (12) *And as soon as we can see the bottom of the jug,* (13) *a little leak, a Salveregina,* (a characteristic juxtaposition, irreverent only to the unreflective and reinforced by the internal rhyme), (14) *and in holy peace we go off to bed. . . .* One need not linger on the social implications of this little vignette. Nor, indeed, on the moral ones – for this is, the poet tells us, a "good" family.

La vita dell'omo

Nove mesi a la puzza: poi in fassciola
Tra sbasciucchi, lattime e llagrimoni:
Poi p' er laccio, in ner crino, e in vesticciola,
Cor torcolo e l'imbraghe pe ccarzoni.

Poi comincia er tormento de la scola,
L'abbeccè, le frustate, li ggeloni,
La rosalia, la cacca a la ssediola,
E un po' de scarlattina e vvormijjoni.

Poi viè ll'arte, er diggiuno, la fatica,
La piggione, le carcere, er governo,
Lo spedale, li debbiti, la fica,

Er zol d'istate, la neve d'inverno . . .
E pper urtimo, Iddio sce bbenedica,
Viè la morte, e ffinissce co l'inferno.

The theme of the above composition is as old as Job and has a long tradition in both pagan and Christian literature; it is in its own original idiom the expression of the same dark and nihilistic pessimism that informs the *canti* of Belli's great contemporary, Leopardi. The peculiar impact of the sonnet owes much to the specific, extremely precise enumeration of the sordid miseries of mortal life – the life in particular of Belli's lower class Roman of the nineteenth century. Tragic indeed is man's fate, coarse if not comic to the point of burlesque, the details that buttress his argument.

The Life of Man

(1) *Nine months in corruption* ("Nihil aliud est homo quam sperma foetidum," Saint Bernard had said, and "puzza" has its own specific connotation here): *then in swaddling clothes* (2) *between kisses* ("sbasciucchi" means "repeated" and perhaps in the context "slobbering" kisses), *milk-scabs and squawlings* ("lagrimoni": literally "big tears"), (3) *then on leading strings, in the toddler* ("crino": a kind of basket to support toddling infants), *and in baby clothes,* (4) *head-protector, diapers for breeches.* (5) *Then begins the torment of school:* (6) *the ABC, whippings, chilblains,* (7) *German measles, training on the pot,* (8) *a little scarlet fever and smallpox.* (9) *Then comes the trade, the fasting obligation* (imposed on all Catholics over the age of twenty), *hard work,* (10) *the rent, jail, the government,* (11) *the hospital, debts, the piece of tail,* (12) *the sun in summer, snow in winter. . . .* (13) *and last of all, God bless us,* (14) *comes death and it all finishes with Hell.*

The content of the poem needs no exegesis; we may note with what skill the realistic descriptive elements are combined, and how economically and unobtrusively the before and after of man's lot are placed and balanced: nine months of preliminary incarceration and an eternity in Hell neatly bracket the earthly career of the son of Adam. Fra Jacopone had said much the same in his own tormented times: "O vita penosa / continua battaglia!" – and said it movingly too, but with less humor, less despair and less economy of effort.

Italy 1964:

The Publishers' Merry-Go-Round

by Sergio Pacifici

During the past few years an important revolution of a special kind has been taking place in the world of publishing in Italy. Like all revolutions, political, economic or cultural, this one, too, has brought with it beneficial changes as well as complex, new problems. Recent observers of Italy have failed to underscore the fact that that country is, in effect, experiencing in all phases of her life many, if not most, of the problems our own society has met, and learned to live with, since the middle of the nineteenth century. One must not be too surprised if, after a rather intense period of industrialization and of steady economic progress, publishing in Italy should also have become a "big business," and as such subject to much the same laws governing big enterprises.

The metamorphosis of what used to be, until the last war at least, one-man ventures into modern, efficient and highly aggressive organizations, is perhaps astonishing for the swiftness and extent to which it is remolding the Italian "cultural" temperament. Indeed, it could well provide the sociologist and the educator alike with sufficient material for a "case study" on what happens when a culture that only yesterday was "aristocratic" if not "religious" (to use T. S. Eliot's terms) is forced to co-exist and compete with a new, quantitatively overwhelming *Kitsch* (Mass Culture).

In surveying the situation of publishing in today's Italy, it might be best to begin by paying tribute to the publishers' resolute plan to awaken the readers to the significant achievements in the arts in Europe, both during the Fascist dictatorship and in our own days. Within a few years, thanks to the resourcefulness of such publishers as Einaudi and "Il Saggiatore," the Italian reading audience has found itself brought up to date. It is largely due to the efforts of such broad-minded houses that the Italian reader has become more sophisticated and cosmopolitan than ever before. Yet, even the most generous observer must acknowledge the fact that the quality and meaning of anything created under industrial conditions frequently and drastically changes, thus giving rise to an entirely "new" product with its own meaning and impact. For economics has taught us that when the delicate balance between supply and demand is altered, something is bound to happen in the world of trade as well as in that of the arts. In the latter, the writer might indeed find himself trapped in the absurd workings of a social system from which he can escape only if he is endowed with unusual courage and integrity, and cares, therefore, little for the success, money and prestige he is being offered as inducement to produce more "saleable" stuff. No one, I suppose, objects to the opportunity given to the writer to earn a decent and honorable living by his writing. What one must fear – I do, at any rate – is the inevitable and regrettable dispersion of energy that results from doing too many things at the same time. It is difficult, if not impossible, to write for the radio, TV, the cinema and the magazines (and perhaps hold a second job on the side, as many in Italy do) and expect that the writer will have the time, energy and dedication to give to his work.

To appreciate the dilemma in which publishers and intellectuals alike find themselves in today's Italy, one is forced to compare our times with the situation prevailing in the Twenties and Thirties. Before the end of World War II, the élite of intellectuals (which includes not merely those who devote themselves to and give form to certain intellectual or artistic pursuits but also those capable of receiving and understanding such ordered experience) was made up of people for whom art was not, and could not be, a source of sufficient income to satisfy any more than their most modest needs. Most writers cared relatively little about this and had learned to ac-

cept this state of affairs. Most held regular positions, frequently in the schools (Panzini, Pirandello, Ungaretti and Quasimodo), often in one of the professions. The most avant garde of modern Italian novelists, Italo Svevo, was the co-owner of a marine paint business; Eugenio Montale, the leading "hermetic" poet of the Thirties, was head librarian of the Florentine Gabinetto Vieusseux until he was removed from that post by the Fascists for political reasons; and Umberto Saba, perhaps the most delicate of contemporary Italian poets, managed a rare-book shop in his native city of Trieste.

To be published by a regular house was not an easy matter in those days. The distance between an author and his publisher was wide, and the mutual respect great; one approached the other with a modesty that bordered on timidity. Most publishers had come up from the ranks (Vallecchi of Florence was a typographer before becoming an editor), and because they cared passionately for what they did, they personally supervised the various stages that saw a manuscript transformed into a book. To consign the work of an author to his public was not, in short, a question of profit but an act of profound responsibility which most accepted seriously and conscientiously. Yet, although few books sold more than two or three thousand copies, the publisher took great pride in the fact that every season he managed to present to the readers a handful of worthy, "new" writers.

Anyone who has kept abreast of current developments is aware of the extent to which times have changed. The economic boom that Italy has been enjoying during the last ten years or so has raised the standard of living of all social classes and has also been instrumental in creating an apparently insatiable demand, not only for durable goods but for books as well. A mass audience with vast, untapped resources and an eagerness to become better informed, if not better cultivated, has suddenly appeared on the scene. Working under the constant pressure to enlarge its readership, publishers have shown a growing propensity to cater unduly to public taste, bringing out less what has genuine merit than what will sell because of its appeal to some particular emotional, social or ideological "mood" of the moment. Gradually, they have also discovered that a success can frequently be "fabricated" by surrounding the book with an aura of scandal or by heavily relying on the impact and effectiveness of a well staged presentation and promotion campaign. More and more, they have tended to concentrate on those few writers – domestic or imported – who can be counted upon to produce a "best seller" with an almost exasperating regularity.

Despite such moves, and for all its superficial success, it is no closely guarded secret that the Italian publishing industry is in deep trouble. Two out of three publishers can exist only because of their shrewd diversification into the magazine and comic-book business or into other subsidiary markets, such as serial publication and the cinema. One publisher is known to be operating with a yearly deficit of several million *lire*, a staggering amount in Italy. He can well afford it, thanks to his enormous personal fortune and his income from his business. In a decade, he hopes to divide the lion's share of the market with one or two publishers who will have been fortunate enough to survive the inevitable and incontrollable spiral of inflation, mounting costs and diminishing returns on the investment. Such circumstances have tended to accelerate the growing and deplorable commercialization of culture, as well as the debasement of standards and literary values which most responsible critics are beginning to view with justified alarm.

Perhaps the state of affairs I have summarily been describing – emphasizing its negative sides for the sake of dramatizing my points – will not strike the reader as being overly unusual or unusually fraught with dangers. After all, are we not living in a country where the publisher's first, if tacit, obligation (especially toward its stockholders) has been to make money before serving the cultural interests of its public? We have survived, he may add; so can the Italians. The argument would normally be a reasonable one, were it not for the fact that readers in Italy were trained to respect a publisher, to have faith in his discernment and critical judgement. He could never be suspected, in the past, of using his influence and power to manipulate the public taste for his own ends. On the contrary, he was expected to play a leading part in guiding and correcting the general level of sensibility and of aesthetic appreciation. But when the publishers, lured by the real possibilities of huge profits, began abdicating their traditional leadership, thus betraying the expectation of the public, the rôles became reversed. Today, not only has the reader grown suspicious of the books he is being urged to buy, but also he is vociferously demanding that more attention be paid to *his* likes and dislikes.

What, in my estimation, makes the situation even more complex is the fact that writers – and not business men, however cultured – are generally in charge of publishing houses.

Italo Calvino, Vittorio Sereni, Geno Pampaloni and, until recently, Giorgio Bassani, who head Einaudi, Mondadori, Vallecchi and Feltrinelli, are eminent novelists and serious critics, to be sure. But no matter how objectively they try to discharge their duties, which are numerous and onerous, they cannot escape certain conflicts between their interests as publishers and their tendencies or preferences as novelists and critics. They must bear the ultimate responsibility not only for what the public will or will not be permitted to read, but also for the long-range implications and the unpredictable repercussions of editorial policies they may have initiated.

What can happen in such circumstances is eloquently illustrated by a couple of recent events. For a number of years, Elio Vittorini edited for Einaudi a series of novels (called "The Chips") by young writers, a series that was generally unsympathetic to those writers not in the "neo-realistic" vein whom he was then sponsoring – a policy hardly designed to encourage new talent, and one whose effect on the course of Italian fiction was not necessarily a positive one. Similarly, it is a little-publicized fact that Guiseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa's *The Leopard,* surely one of the most extraordinary books of our decade, was turned down by two leading publishers for reasons that had less to do with its artistic merit than with the social, political and even literary views promulgated by its arch-conservative author. It is true, of course, that the book eventually found its way into print, thanks to the astute judgement of Giorgio Bassani – the same Bassani, incidentally, who as late as a year ago rejected Alberto Arbasino's highly controversial satire of the contemporary Italian cultural scene, *Fratelli d'Italia,* a work for which Feltrinelli himself had to find room in another of his series.

In a sense, it was probably this very situation, where the loyalties of the artist are divided between his intellect and his interests, that inspired Luciano Bianciardi to write his novel, *La vita agra.* The hero of the tale is a young intellectual from the left who leaves his native Tuscany and heads toward Milan, the heart of the Italian "economic miracle." His mission is as precise as it is terrifying; he is determined to blow up a skyscraper in order to dramatize the unnecessary death of forty-three men who have been killed in a mining accident in his town. But in the great northern metropolis he is unable to find a positive response to his plans to set things aright: the workers are too exhausted to listen to him; the press is simply not interested; and even the Communist Party is apathetic. Slowly, he is sucked in by the whirling rhythm of city life. After a short stint working for a newspaper, he finds himself free-lancing for several publishing houses specializing in "mass culture" titles. He forgets his pleasures and his passions, his polemics and his ideals, and accepts, somewhat unwillingly at first, his new rôle as professional translator and, as such, is a technician of the new "industrial" literature. Society has made him a mere robot, capable only of earning, through his hack work, sufficient income to support his wife and children, left behind in Tuscany, and his newly acquired mistress who, as his efficient secretary, makes his life somewhat more bearable by getting his work in shape for the publishers.

Undoubtedly Bianciardi has found the inspiration for his novel in dismal conditions that are unfortunately too real to be mistaken for just the product of a fertile imagination. By the time we reach the end of his novel, however, we realize that Bianciardi has used his wonderfully mimetic sensibility and his highly humorous style to give us an incisive depiction of the tragi-comedy of life in the publishing world of today's Italy. Indeed, the hero of *La vita agra* is the accurate, if oblique, counterpart of the intellectual who is enjoying his good share of the economic boom, thanks to his working in a variety of media that are far more lucrative than literature. But, by allowing his creative genius to be dispersed among so many varied activities (and *this* is a vital part of his dilemma – a condition that can be solved only at the risk of being silent for a while so as to regain a lost perspective and give a sense of direction in his work) he has also lost sight of the artist's goal. He has also lost, temporarily one hopes, that independence of judgement, that detachment and wisdom without which life can never be serenely studied, much less understood and portrayed.

Perhaps this explains, however partially, why preciously little of the overwhelming amount of fiction and poetry produced since the end of the last war will ultimately have little more than passing, or "historical" interest. The time may indeed have arrived when the artist must leave the streets onto which he has descended and accept the solitude and loneliness that are the inescapable conditions of all those who dedicate themselves to the quest of truth. For "where there is not, or where there no longer is, the cult of truth," as Franco Lombardi recently noted, "either the secret or the latent desire to be in accord with the men in power today, the need to be popular, or the thirst for success, constitute the solitary vices of the intellectual and, at the same time, [this] spells the condemnation of the thinking man."

BERTO: TEXAS AND TREVISO

by Donald Heiney

Giuseppe Berto's *The Sky Is Red* is already a classic among modern Italian novels, familiar not only to specialists in the literature but to thousands of other American readers who were excited by it and the other remarkable novels that came out of Italy just after the war: *In Sicily, Christ Stopped at Eboli, Woman of Rome. The Sky Is Red* is a war novel, one that bears the unmistakable mark of personal experience. Or so it seemed to us then. There was also a widespread impression that it was leftist in politics, an impression probably due most of all to its title. These two notions are still found today, even in Italy, and even among readers in whom one would expect a certain sophistication: literary critics, leftist intellectuals, people who claim to know Berto personally. It is an extraordinarily widespread misconception, or set of misconceptions. In actual fact *The Sky Is Red* is more like *The Red Badge of Courage* than it is like *A Farewell to Arms,* and Stephen Crane had never seen a battlefield when he wrote that finest American novel about the Civil War. Berto had seen a battlefield when he wrote *The Sky Is Red,* but it was not the battlefield he describes in the novel. *The Sky Is Red* is half fantasy and half second-hand journalism out of *Life* magazine, and it was written in 1944 in a prison camp in Texas. With all this it is still, perhaps, the best Italian novel to come out of the war.

Berto was born in the town of Mogliano Veneto near Treviso in 1914. He was trained as an army officer and served as a volunteer in both the Abyssinian War and the North African campaign of 1941–43. When the Italian army surrendered in Tunisia, he was captured and spent thirty months in a PW camp near Hereford, Texas. This, in brief, was his career as a professional soldier. With the end of it begins his career as a writer.

The war was a profound experience for Berto, and one that dominates his writing even into the Sixties. His autobiographical *War in a Black Shirt* in 1955 was a remarkable diary of his North African experiences with the Italian army, ending with his capture. Berto is perfectly candid about his ingenuity in escaping the worst part of this disastrous campaign. When the confused retreat began from Libya into Tunisia, he found a convenient oasis from the war in the town of Gabès, where most of the population was French. Here, under the pretence of procuring supplies for his battalion, he spent several brief "vacations" which in any well-organized army would be considered desertion. His account of his relations with the French population in Tunisia is interesting because it is an ironic foreshadowing of the situation of the American soldiers in Italy as he later described it in *The Sky Is Red.* When he first came to Gabès, he found many women and children and few men; they had all gone off to join the Free French forces who were fighting the Italians. It was therefore "comprehensible," as he remarked, that the population should regard his uniform with a certain diffidence. The next time, he decided, he would bring the children candy. They were shy at first, but finally they flocked around him like the pigeons in Piazza San Marco. He made friends with the seven-year-old Martine, who was thin with two enormous black eyes and a small voice. For Martine he brought more gifts on his next trip, not only candy but meat and bread. She took him to her house where he found the rest of her family: a mother, an aunt, and a grandmother. "They accepted the meat and the bread with

The research for this article was made possible by grants from the American Council of Learned Societies and the Penrose Fund of the American Philosophical Society.

dignity, without thanking me excessively, and suddenly I was disappointed; I had wanted something in exchange for these things, something at least equal to them."[1] Martine was too young to understand the significance of his uniform, but the women were distant if not actually hostile. It was hard for the young officer, full of good will, to understand that women could not be friendly to soldiers who were killing their husbands and sons. "I don't think I'll go back to that house the next time," he concluded in his diary. The campaign was almost over anyhow. The Tunisian front collapsed and Berto joined the other stragglers who were waiting on the beach at Cape Bon for a ship to take them back to Italy. But the Italian Dunkerque was not very well organized and the ship never came; instead he was captured and ended up in Texas.

When he arrived at the prison camp where he was to spend the next thirty months, Berto was already a *laureato* in letters from the University of Padua, and off and on he had nourished a vague ambition to write. In a 1946 article in *Il Libraio,* a Longanesi advertising brochure, he explained how he happened to write *The Sky Is Red.* "I am convinced that if I hadn't ended up in a concentration camp, I would never have succeeded in writing a novel. But I found myself with an indefinite series of days to fill up, and there was no doubt in my mind how to fill them up. My first concern, as soon as I arrived at the camp where I would be permanently, was to build myself a table. I went around collecting the pieces of wood that were scattered over the compound and built a table out of them. I pounded in the nails with a piece of iron from the stove. Then I began writing a novel."[2] This first attempt was written on a roll of toilet paper in lieu of any better material, and the "intellectual exponents" of the camp judged it worth saving. But Berto threw it away and started over. On his second try he wrote a story which was published in a prison magazine (one copy, hand-written) published by the PW's. It was not a very good story, but in the same magazine there was another piece of fiction that seemed to him remarkable. He went to find the other prisoner and talked to him. Where had he learned to write like that? "You should read the Americans," the other prisoner told him.

There was not very much to read in the prison camp; occasionally YMCA workers brought around Italo-American books in bad Italian and a few old magazines. In back copies of *Esquire* he found "The Snows of Kilimanjaro" and "The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber." By the terms of the Geneva Convention he received a few dollars a month to spend in the canteen, and in this way he bought a few other books; one that he remembered later was Steinbeck's *The Red Pony.* This reading was all the background in American literature he had when he began to write *The Sky Is Red.* Probably it made a greater impression on him than it would have otherwise because there was nothing else to read in Compound Number 4 of the prison camp in Hereford, Texas.

Berto later described this thirty months in prison as the most unhappy period of his life. Probably these special conditions made him more hostile to America than he would have been if he had stayed in Italy, or if he had not been captured. By 1944 many Italians had begun to think of the Americans as liberators, but the soldiers with automatic rifles who stood guard in the prison compound were not anybody's liberators. Even in late 1945, when the war in Italy was over and the Italians were greeting the Americans with open arms, this hostility between PW's and guards continued. "We were still at war with the Americans, our own private war, out of our pride and our *punctilio.* And we were right, because the Americans were at war with us in the same way, and they didn't even have the excuse of being prisoners."[3]

It was under these conditions, practically with the rifles of the guards pointed at him, that he wrote his first two books. He took the manuscripts back to Italy with him in 1946; *The Sky Is Red* was published the following year by Longanesi. It was an immediate success; it won the Premio Firenze in 1948 and established Berto as one of the most important younger writers to come out of the war. The novel is set in an Italian city which is never named but is obviously Treviso; Berto had lived in Treviso as a child and gone to school there, and perhaps for this reason most of the characters are children and adolescents. The period covered is from 1943 to the fall of 1944, approximately the time when Berto was writing the novel in Texas. Treviso, a minor industrial center, suffered particularly from Allied air raids; on Good Friday of 1944 nearly half the town was destroyed by American bombers, and this was only the first of several disastrous raids. Berto learned about these air raids by reading *Life* and by talking to prisoners who arrived at the camp in 1944. He did not get a very clear picture of what was happening in Italy, and *Life,* like other American publications, tended to exaggerate the damage for propagandistic purposes. What he did understand was that his own country was being systematically destroyed by the same

people who were standing guard outside his barbed-wire fence with rifles. Considering all this his description of the raids in *The Sky Is Red* is remarkably free from hatred. He describes them with a curious ambivalence, half as an Italian and half with the detached mentality of the American flyers who are intent on their technical tasks. The section that describes the first air raid ends in a kind of meditation on the responsibility for what has happened. "For a certain time the enemy will not be able to make use of the station, the railroad tracks, perhaps the bridge if it was hit. And if to do this they have produced a sum of human suffering that nothing, not even the greatest good on earth, can ever cancel, this has no importance for them. They don't think about it, and it is not their fault, because of the universal evil."[4]

This concept of universal evil underlies Berto's whole thinking about the war and the causes that brought it about. It is reflected in the title of his second book that came out of the period, *The Works of God*. When he wrote *The Sky Is Red* he was still a Fascist; in fact, he was confined in a special section of the camp set aside for officers who refused to sign a "co-belligerency agreement" after the armistice of September 1943. The officer who wore a black shirt in Africa is not ready to blame the war on the Italians and lacks the real evidence for blaming it on the Americans. It is easier to blame it on God. The aviators, concentrating on their instruments, fly on under the stars. "And the stars fly too; they fly at fantastic speed toward the places where these men belong, in another part of the earth. In only a few hours the stars that are now over their heads will be above Kentucky, Missouri, California. And each of these men who have destroyed houses and human creatures can still think lovingly of other houses and other human creatures."[5]

This is taken from the early part of the novel, where Berto's point of view is still panoramic and Olympian. Later, after the Liberation and the arrival of the American troops, the style shifts to the typical neo-realism of the postwar period, in Berto's case formed partly on the examples of the American writing he had read in the prison camp. In a statement in the review *Galleria* in 1954 Berto admitted his debt particularly to Steinbeck, Melville, Faulkner, and Hemingway. In *The Sky Is Red* the influence of Hemingway is most obvious. At its best his Hemingwayism is almost as good as *A Farewell to Arms;* at its worst it descends to parody.

> The corporal and Bill looked towards the group of people in the piazza. There were probably seventy or eighty of them now, and the shadow of the school building was lengthening steadily toward them.
>
> "But when are they going to send us home?" said Bill.
>
> "Don't think about it, Bill," said the corporal. "It's worse if you think about it."
>
> "We ought to go, now that it's over," said Bill. "Why don't they send us?"
>
> "It's no good thinking about it," said the corporal.[6]

This is nothing more than a sophomoric imitation of the famous ending of "The Killers," which Berto had possibly read before the war; it was one of the few Hemingway stories translated into Italian in the Thirties. The resemblance extends not only to the refrain ("Well," said George in Hemingway's story, "you'd better not think about it") but to the alternation of imagistic description with short terse dialogue and to the building of effect through the echoing of key phrases. Berto is over his head in trying to write from the point of view of American soldiers, and it is here that his Hemingwayism is the flattest. When the style is assimilated and converted to Italian characters, he is better. After the death of the girl Giulia the reactions of her lover Daniele are described in a passage which resembles the similar scene in *A Farewell to Arms* – which Berto says he had not read in 1944 – but which has a keen and particular emotion of its own.

"He walked slowly up and down in the hallway. Carla was still sitting on the doorstep, and she didn't turn her head when she heard him walk. He had no desire to go to her right away. He had no desire to do anything. He leaned against the wall waiting for some thought to come, but nothing came, probably because his stomach hurt him, and all he could think about was the pain in his stomach. He went into Carla's room. He looked at himself in the mirror. On the table there was a basin full of water. He put one hand in the water and held it there for some time. Then he passed his hand over his hair, and put it back in the water, and then passed it over his hair again, and went on doing this until his hair was wet. Then he turned away from the table and went out, and sat down on the doorstep next to Carla. 'Have you got a cigarette, Carla?' he asked."[7]

In the same way Frederick Henry, in the restaurant scene in *A Farewell to Arms,* between the two hospital episodes, moves somnambulistically through banal actions as he

tries to forget that Catherine is dying: eating the hot ham and eggs, drinking beer to cool his mouth, mechanically reading the newspaper of the man opposite him. Both the narrator and the reader are constantly aware of Catherine in the hospital, but the emotions never come to the surface. Instead they are concealed in the banal mechanical motions which the narrator forces himself to carry out with a kind of rigidly willed automatism. The two passages, Hemingway's and Berto's succeed in a difficult thing: communicating a high state of emotion without ever mentioning the emotion itself. Berto might have learned this by himself, but it seems more likely that he was at least helped by Hemingway.

Berto's most successful characters are those closest to his own psychology. For this reason the Italian-American soldier, Roy, is one of the few convincing Americans in the novel. In one early scene when Daniele tries to beg gloves from two American soldiers, Roy and a non-Italian corporal, the corporal curses the boy and refuses to give him anything. But Roy says, "If I had two pairs of gloves I'd give him one." Finally the corporal, complaining, "The hell with him. These people would take the shirt off your back if they could," reaches into his pocket and throws the boy a pair of woolen gloves.[8] This is typical of the difference between Americans and Italian-Americans. Roy is more immediately compassionate; the corporal is callous on the surface but underneath it good-hearted. From ten thousand feet in the air the Americans drop the bombs and are indifferent to the suffering they cause, but when they are face to face with the Italians, they see them as human beings and try to alleviate their suffering, although they often put on a hard-boiled manner to cover up their softness. In a story published fifteen years later, one of Berto's characters says, "If men could look in each other's faces, they would never make war."[9]

It is not easy to be generous without being hated; Berto had already found this out in Tunisia. In a later chapter of *The Sky Is Red* some American soldiers, including an Italian-American cook named Appiano, get permission from their officers to give Italians leftover food out of a garbage can. But this causes a riot in which a woman is hurt. Berto had seen pictures of this kind of "American aid" in *Life*. The only one who emerges content from this incident is Daniele; in the confusion someone gives him bread and cans of food which he hides under his shirt. As he leaves the camp he smiles because the sentry is "smiling enigmatically" and pretending not to see the food under the shirt. A little later Daniele goes to work for the Americans, and when the unit is transferred he is offered a chance to go away with the soldiers. He almost accepts, but he decides to stay because of his love for Giulia, and by implication his loyalty to his own people. In spite of their power and generosity the Americans are no permanent answer to Italian misery and suffering. Their *mana* is that of foreigners; whatever it is that makes them strong seems to evaporate in the hands of the Italians.

There are so many things I don't understand," says the young Tullio. "Because if you take these Americans soliders one by one, there's nothing you can say against them. There are good ones and bad ones, like all the other people in the world. Maybe there are even more good ones than bad ones, and they help us whenever they can. But it doesn't do any good. Our lives get worse and worse, and they don't solve any of our problems, even if they do give candy to children.[10] Giving candy to children, of course, will not permanently correct an economic collapse. Marshall Plan tractors might, but this came later. Berto's Italians expect too much from the Americans, more than any mere army could give. They waited for the Liberation as though it were the Second Coming, and instead of the Messiah there were soldiers who passed out food in garbage cans. Who is to blame? The stars? "There will always be wars," argues the old man who serves as a kind of spokesman for Berto. "So long as one people is unjustly treated, or thinks it is unjustly treated, sooner or later there will be a war, unless the other people are willing to remedy the injustice. But that would be expecting too much from human beings. Nobody will give up what he has to somebody else, just out of love of justice. This will never happen in the world."[11]

It is true that it would be expecting too much of the French in 1940 that they should give up Nice to the Italians out of the goodness of their hearts. Or that the Abyssinians should have voluntarily offered their country to Italy in 1935 to remedy the "injustice" of the Treaty of Versailles. One of the basic realities that Berto never faces up to in this novel is that Italy got into the war in the first place through a series of cynical aggressions: the Abyssinian War, the Albanian-Greek campaign, the invasion of southern France. Berto did not start the war himself, even if he did wear a black shirt. But in spite of all his philosophizing about injustice he never comes to grips with the question of just how it did start. Furthermore, he never mentions the Resistance and the Allied support of the parti-

sans, for an excellent reason: when he wrote the novel he didn't know about them.

The chronology of *The Sky Is Red* as it relates to the actual events of history is curious. It was written in 1944, and when he wrote it Berto thought the war would end that year. Actually it lasted a year longer than he expected. His view of the Liberation is therefore unreal. Most of all he failed to grasp the implications of what happened on September 8, 1943: the Badoglio government signed an armistice with the Allies, the Nazis seized control of Italy and began arresting hostages, and the Italian people – or a large proportion of them – began to regard the Germans as their enemies and the Allies as their friends. All this he realized when he came back to Italy in 1946, but he let the novel stand. *The Sky Is Red* is therefore less a history of actual events than a document of Berto's emotions toward the war as it seemed to him in the prison camp in Texas. The attitude of the Italians in the novel is quite simple: somehow the war started, the Americans came and bombed everything and destroyed the crops, therefore it is up to them to feed the population. For this the Italians are "grateful but with dignity," like the French women in Tunisia. And after all who could be grateful for food out of a garbage can?

It is impossible for the conqueror to be loved; at the best he can hope not to be hated. At this the Americans did better than the Germans, who started out as Italy's allies. The real meaning that lies underneath *The Sky Is Red* is one Berto never gets to: the world is out of joint, and those who wore black shirts must accept at least part of the responsibility for making it that way. To the Berto of 1944 all the responsibility belongs to the victors. Perhaps he was more influenced than he realized by the psychology of the prisoner-of-war; once he lays down his arms, the prisoner falls into a passivity in which all the problems are his captor's. "And so," the old man in the novel concludes, "a soldier who gives candy to children, or a major who tries to govern a town with humanity and justice, does no good at all. They are not the ones who count. They come and go, and others come who may be good or bad, and what they do has no great importance because they are all carrying out things that are decided by people we never even see; many times we don't even know who they are. . . . Perhaps we don't deserve a better fate. But they ought to feel the responsibility they take on themselves by conquering other people. I don't mean the killing and the destruction, which may be necessary in war. But disorder, famine, moral ruin – these are things for which they ought to provide some remedy."[12]

It is not hard to guess what Berto meant by "moral ruin." In American magazines he had seen pictures of Italian girls fraternizing with American soldiers in Sicily. For the PW's this was even more bitter than the bombings; while they were in prison their own sisters and fiancées were betraying them. This was simply the result of a military situation and nobody in particular was to blame, either the girls or the Americans. A "moral ruin" is something which is easily felt but difficult to pin down, and even more difficult to correct. In any case the American army was not intended or equipped to correct other people's moral ruin. But the old man's implied indictment of America, even if it is not very logical, is human and understandable. It has its own logic, the logic of rationalization.

And, in spite of the sham Hemingway, *The Sky Is Red* succeeds in being a good novel; the characters are real and the events are described movingly and convincingly. But it is perhaps even more valuable when it is read as a psychoanalysis of Italy's Liberation trauma, the complicated and inconsistent set of emotions that Italians had toward the Americans who had "liberated" them by destroying their houses and killing Italian soldiers. At the end of the novel Berto comes back to the abstract-essay style again for a final comment. "Little by little people realized. It was no longer a war to be endured, it was a war that had been lost. In spite of everything that had been said, they had to realize now that the war had been lost. And they alone had to support the weight of this defeat, a weight too heavy for a poor people, in a country devasted and sterilized by war."[13]

In 1944 in a prison camp in Texas, this is the way it seemed to one Italian soldier. When he came back to Italy and saw what had really happened, the truth was hard to accept. It was not the war; the war was as he had imagined it. It was the politics, the way the best part of the Italian character had turned in revulsion against fascism, the way a new Myth of America had taken root in the Italian consciousness. He saw that his politics had been wrong and he swung over to the left; he became a socialist. But this didn't solve the problem; the problem was inside him. The problem was that everything he had held out for, everything he had refused to betray, in those long thirty months in prison had been wrong. Finally he stopped writing. He was sick, and he underwent psychoanalysis. When he came out he was a different person, and a different writer. He did not repudiate his earlier work – he let the

words stand as he had written them in the prison camp in 1944 – but his new work was different. *Un po' di successo,* published by Longanesi in 1963, is a collection of stories ranging back as far as the Texas days, but many of them more recent, dating after his psychoanalysis. The more recent ones are humor, of a particular, fantastic, and exuberant kind seldom found in Italian literature. "Zia Bess, in memoriam" is the most preposterous and perhaps the most entertaining version yet of an Italian myth, the legend of the American uncle. *Fatima* may very well be the funniest *novella* since Boccaccio. Meanwhile he was not quite done with his psychiatrist. In a recent article in *Fiera Letteraria,* written on the occasion of the death of his friend Giuseppe Marotta, Berto analysed the three-way connection between neurosis, physical illness, and humor, and concluded that for Marotta, as for himself, "humor is the essence of writing, because without humor there is no other way of escaping from the neurosis and anxiety that would otherwise condemn us to impotence."[14] In the summer of 1963, when I talked to him at Rosati's in Piazza del Popolo, I told him it seemed to me curious how few modern Italian writers had a sense of humor: Marotta, Calvino, Gadda, and one or two others. He told me he didn't think humor, his own kind of humor, was typically Italian. Then why did some Italians write it – what about his own case, for example? He smiled and told me simply, "It's because I am sick." A little later we both patted the small and comical toy bulldog of an actress, a casual acquaintance of his. "I like all animals," he remarked. Then did he like to go to zoos? "No," he told me, still smiling. "Because there they are all prisoners."

NOTES

[1] *Guerra in camicia nera,* Milano, Garzanti, 1955, pp. 91f.
[2] "Un nuovo romanziere italiano: Giuseppe Berto," *Il Libraio,* December 15, 1946.
[3] "La conversione," *Il Giornale d'Italia,* December 5, 1959.
[4] *Il cièlo e rosso,* Milano, Longanesi, 1957, p. 79.
[5] *Ibid.,* pp. 79f.
[6] *Ibid.,* p. 339.
[7] *Ibid.,* pp. 400f.
[8] *Ibid.,* p. 132.
[9] *Un po' di successo,* Milano, Longanesi, 1963, p. 55.
[10] *Il cielo è rosso,* pp. 240f.
[11] *Ibid.,* p. 241.
[12] *Ibid.,* pp. 242f.
[13] *Ibid.,* p. 452.
[14] "L'umorismo come salvezza," *La Fiera Letteraria,* October 20, 1963, p. 1.

Sociology in Italy Today

by Leonard W. Moss

Any report on the contemporary status of the science in Italy must be, of necessity, a sociology of sociology. The demise of Italian sociology following World War I has been variously attributed to the rise of fascism and its anti-intellectual attacks upon any knowledge which would endanger the "steady-state" principle; to the negative position taken by Croce, Gentile, De Ruggerio, and other historical-idealists; or, to the powerful figure of Corrado Gini, the self-appointed "Dean of Italian Sociology." Indeed, each of these factors contains more than a grain of truth. Fascism did write *finis* to a sociology which was already dying; a sociology afflicted by the self-destroying malady of premature closure of the general systematic approach. The work of Vilfredo Pareto and its closed system of thought, so highly prized by the Fascists, brought forth the hell-fire and damnation directed by Croce and his historical-philosophic followers. The neo-Comtean logical-positivism of Gini attempted to create a macrosociology, a theoretical frame of reference unencumbered by facts, which sought to draw together sociology, biology, genetics, demography, and Lombrosian anthropology into a biogenetic explanation of human behavior. It is precisely this "organic" all-encompassing approach which prepared the seed-bed for the frustrating fruit of sterile sociology.

The resurgence of interest in the science, following World War II, has been described by Renato Treves, Franco Ferrarotti, Constantine Panunzio, Arnold Rose, Victor Rapport, and others. There is no need to recapitulate the history of the discipline from 1945–1959. I will concentrate my remarks on the present picture. There are, however, certain conditions which must be brought to the reader's attention, else the entire context of Italian sociology becomes meaningless.

Many factors account for increased academic productivity and the growth of sociology. The growing legitimacy of the field, once branded as a *bastard hybrid* by Croce, is based, strangely enough for the Italian scene, upon its pragmatic utility. I do not intend this as a slur or polemic but I wish to emphasize that the growing acceptance of the discipline is a radical departure from the idealism and romanticism of the relatively recent past. Until the immediate period, the deeply entrenched historicism of the academic world held most of the pivotal positions. The aftermath of the Fascist defeat and the almost total destruction of the economic fabric of society brought forth a changing cultural milieu at the end of World War II. Young scholars and radical politicians were no longer willing to think in terms of centuries when faced with the immediacies of the post-war world. The problems which beset Italian society fifty years ago welled to the surface once again. Although many investigations of social problems had been made in the early years of the century, resolutions to the problems were postponed, ignored, forgotten, or destroyed by the demands of political maneuverings. The basic issues remained: over-population; need for land reform; industrialization; economic rationalization of agriculture; untrained manpower; and, as a heritage of war

The author wishes to acknowledge the aid given by the Fulbright cultural exchange program, the Wenner-Gren Foundation, the American Council of Learned Societies, and the Wayne State Fund. Without their support this research could not have been completed. The author assumes sole responsibility for observations and conclusions noted in the article.

and fascism, governmental corruption, destroyed factories, and devastated cities.

The old philosophies failed to provide solutions to the old problems and the failures became even more evident with the emergence of newer problems. The economic recovery of Italy introduced complexities of a different nature, problems well known to sociologists in the United States: internal migration, separation of families, booming industrialism, lowered death rates, growth of the urban metroplex, desertion of non-productive farmlands, and a host of other pressing situations. These changes brought forth a "New Society" which could only be analyzed by a new generation and a new sociology.

The new sociology of Italy cannot be attributed to a single source. Certainly contact with foreign scholars has been important. The part played by American Fulbright scholars should not be underestimated. However, this is but a small part of the many contacts enjoyed by Italians. Perhaps an even greater role was played by the French sociologists in influencing the growth of the Italian model. The new generation of Italian scholars have traveled widely and have received portions of their education abroad. Finally, the Fourth World Congress of Sociology (Milano-Stresa, 1959) received excellent press coverage in the Italian newspapers and journals contributing, undoubtedly, to an increased interest among the growing numbers in the literate population.

The newly founded (1957) Italian Association of Social Science received a much needed "shot in the arm" from its recognition by the International Sociological Association and through its role as host to the World Congress. The Association was founded despite the damnation hurled by Corrado Gini, since 1950 president of the International Institute of Sociology and spiritual leader of the Italian Society of Sociology. With the establishment of an association which recognized diverse approaches to the study of contemporary society the stage was set for the burgeoning of the new science.

The educational system of Italy is, in many ways, typical of Europe generally. With the aim of producing an intellectual elite, the system assiduously weeds out the least promising students. (I am not suggesting that there is particular merit to the Italian system; for, indeed, there are many arguments which I would wish to make against it.) The small proportion of students who survive the rigors of secondary education enter the university equipped with reading fluency in at least two languages plus Italian. They have received a solid grounding in history and classics. Their knowledge of mathematics goes far beyond the level of the typical American student's ninth grade algebra.

Only in the last few years has it been possible for a student to pursue a university degree in sociology. Hence, most of the Italian practitioners have entered sociology via another academic channel. For the most part, present-day sociologists have received their training in history, philosophy, law, or ethnography. Some few have entered the discipline through demography and statistics.

I am not prepared to debate whether the training of present-day sociologists in Italy makes them one wit better than their counterparts in other countries. I do suggest, however, their education has given them different orientations. This is giving rise to a distinctively Italian sociology, one which does not share the ahistorical, and often antihistorical, viewpoint of American sociology.

The role of the gentleman scholar is fixed in the folklore of European academia. Only recently have the Italians begun to cast off some of the stereotyped attributes of this role. The armchair remained as the permanent post for cogitation and theorizing. There was a great reluctance to soil one's hands by the dirty work of research. Yet, at the same time, there was a tendency among the galloping empiricists, particularly in the field of demography, to do voluminous amounts of field gathering of data and then theorizing far beyond the bounds of their data. The introduction of the high-speed arithmetic machines (or computers) has served to encourage rough-shod empiricism among those already committed to this approach. From my biased point of view, the greatest hope has come from those who are well grounded in history, philosophy, and mathematics; these young scholars have learned to accept the tools of modern technology and fitted them into the broader context of sociological analysis.

It is significant, perhaps, that sociology was seized upon by Italian industrialists in the early stages of its post-war redevelopment. In 1956, the First World Congress of Industrial Relations was held in Rome. The Italian sponsorship was predominantly industrial management. The paternalism of the intellectual industrialist had found a new weapon for the exploitation of the unschooled workers. Industrial relations, in its Italian model, was championed as the means for getting more work out of the laborer without paying for it. This "newfangled" industrial sociology provided, however, a double-edged weapon. Leaders of the non-Communist left began to conduct studies of their own. A new social consciousness had swept Italy and many intellectuals, not of the

Marxist variety, had rallied to the cause of the common man. The lot of the little people became a popular theme championed by such leaders of the intellectual left as Carlo Levi, Danilo Dolci, Ignazio Silone, and others.

Although these writers were not trained sociologists, their exposés of economic and social ills created a climate of interest among the literate populace. At this juncture it becomes difficult to catalogue the numerous studies generated by the young Italian scholars who found themselves drawn into the new sociology. In the early stages of the developing science, there was considerable collaboration between American and Italian scholars. Frederick Friedman, Paul Campisi, Arnold Rose, among others, were some of the first to work with the modern-day pioneers in Italy.

The late Adriano Olivetti, one of the more enlightened industrialists, gathered a group of young aspiring sociologists around his newly founded journal "Comunità," which later gave rise to a political movement by the same name. Some of the adherents of this group have gone on to establish themselves as important authors in the field: Franco Ferrarotti, Alberto Spreafico, Alessandro Pizzorno, Magda Talamo Danieli, Anna Anfossi, and others. Olivetti did much to subsidize by way of underwriting or through advertising in the struggling journals in the field: *Quaderni di Sociologia* edited by Nicola Abbagnano and Ferrarotti; *Nord e Sud* edited by Francesco Campagna; and, most recently, the *Bollettino delle Ricerche Sociali*, published by Il Mulino for the Italian Association of Social Science, edited by Giovanni Evangelisti.

In addition to the journals dominated by Gini (e.g. *Genus* and *Sociologia*), at least two other established reviews provided rallying points for the re-born science. *Il Politico* and *l'Economia* have served as forums for the elucidation of sociology as a distinct discipline. The role of faculty periodicals is an important one in a society dominated by an intellectual elite. Recognition of sociology by such a journal as *Il Pensiero Critico*, Faculty of Philosophy – Milan, was an important step in establishing the legitimacy of the field. There are, of course, many other journals, approximately one for every professor who holds a major chair, too numerous to mention in this brief account.

Publishing houses have also played an important role in spurring the discipline. Old line publishers such as Einaudi and Laterza were amongst the first to encourage the budding field. More recently, Il Mulino has undertaken translations of American works in addition to original publication by Italian authors. Feltrinelli, the publisher of Pasternak's *Dr. Zhivago*, has sponsored a series in socio-economics. Casa Editrice Taylor, operated by the American-born wife of Abbagnano, has undertaken a series of sociological treatises.

Certainly, it is too early to state that sociology is firmly entrenched as part of Italian academic life. There remains a long, slow struggle for acceptance in the universities which still tend to be dominated by the classical orientations. However, research centers are being established, some of them as part of university faculties. I might cite, as examples, the Center for Empirical Sociological Research (Faculty of Statistics, Rome, directed by Vittorio Castellano); the Center for Industrial Sociology (University of Florence, directed by Camillo Pellizi); and Center for Religious Sociology (University of Padova, directed by Sabino Acquaviva). Other centers and institutes have been established as adjuncts to university faculties or as independent study centers. By way of example, Institute of Social Science, directed by Luciano Cavalli, Genova; Lombardian Institute of Economic and Social Sciences, directed by Angelo Pagani and Alessandro Pizzorno, Milano; the recently established Center of Social and Industrial Research, Torino, staffed by Flavia Zaccone Derossi, Anna Anfossi, Magda Talamo Danieli, and others.

It is important to note that most of the centers and institutes are inter-disciplinary in nature. This may be a function of the newness of the field; an attempt of the sociologist to gain respect through association with established disciplines; or, a reflection of the early training of the Italian scholars in such diverse fields as law, history, philosophy, and so on. I should like to think, however, that the inter-disciplinary approach is one which seeks to avoid many of the pitfalls and pratfalls of the monolithic research attempts to explain all of human behavior via a single disciplinary model.

Such well-developed centers of research as Manlio Rossi-Doria's Observatory of Agricultural Economics has invited sociologists to participate in their rural research programs. The Catholic University of the Sacred Heart in Milano, following the tradition established by Don Luigi Sturzo, has created a post in sociology, currently staffed by Franco Alberoni. SVIMEZ, a quasi-governmental research agency dedicated to the development of South Italy, has encouraged many sociological studies which focus on the problems of the South. The recently deceased Enrico Mattei, head of the Hydrocarbon Trust (ENI), gave strong encouragement to industrial sociology. It remains to be seen if his successor, Professor Baldrini, an economist, will do likewise.

The many schools of social work in Italy

exist, for the most part, in an academic never-never land. There is no university degree in social work; hence, most of the schools operating under charter of the Ministry of Public Instruction occupy an anomalous position in Italian education. There is, however, the Italian Association of Social Assistance (AIAS), which is a government-sponsored agency. Through this agency, schools of social work have been able to recruit sociologists and cultural anthropologists to teach on their staffs and to develop research training programs for their students. Achille Ardigò of Bologna has been instrumental in drafting curricula for schools of social work and for pressuring fellow sociologists to devote time to the study of social problems in Italy. There remains a tendency on the part of many sociologists to avoid research on such mundane matters as Italian values and problems. This has given rise to the use of cultural anthropologists by schools of social work.

The Mediterranean Social Sciences Research Council, with headquarters at the Institute of Social Sciences, The Hague, held its convention in Catania, Sicily, 1961. The aggregation of social scientists from the entire Mediterranean basin received excellent press coverage and further encouraged the development of sociology.

The past few years have been eventful in sociology. Centers and institutes are springing up literally over night. The Dominican International University for Social Studies, Pro-Deo, Rome, has created a curriculum in sociology. The University Institute of Trento has established a degree program in sociology. The Ministry of Public Instruction held nationwide exams in 1961 to certify sociologists eligible for chairs which are to be founded at major universities. Certifications were granted to Franco Ferrarotti (now holder of the chair, Faculty of Education, Rome); Alessandro Pizzorno; and Giovanni Sartori.

The wealth of literature now being poured out defies description. It is almost as if one uncorked a bottle under pressure. Filippo Barbano and Mario Viterbi have attempted to catalogue the many articles and books in the field. Their annual bibliography provides a fine research tool for students of the Italian scene.

In recent months, strong collaborative links have been made between sociologists and the most recently established Center for Cultural Anthropology. Until 1962, cultural anthropology did not exist as a field of study in Italy. The Ministry of Public Instruction has granted certification to Tullio Tentori (now Director, Museum of Popular Art and Tradition, Rome), and Carlo Tullio Altan (Milano). The cultural anthropologists promise to be a firm bridge between the well-founded fields of ethnography, archaeology, physical anthropology and the newer sociology.

I hope I have not painted too rosy a picture of sociology in Italy. This young discipline has many problems. There remains the struggle for acceptance at the university level. Within the field there is the ongoing, internecine warfare between the theoreticians and the empiricists. In addition, Renato Treves, President, Italian Association of Social Sciences, faces a bitter struggle between those who define the role of social scientist as the objective outside observer and those who champion the role of social action. Thus far, Treves has been able to contain the arguments and has supported an unsteady and even volatile equilibrium between the differing camps.

Sociology in Italy today is a viable discipline. Its practitioners are, for the most part, young scholars who have entered this arena from other realms of discourse. They bring with them fresh ideas and deep insights from history, law, philosophy, and anthropology. Within the next decade we shall witness the emergence of a distinctively Italian sociology.

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REVIEWS

Un cuore arido. By Carlo Cassola. Torino: Einuadi, 1961.*

In his novels Carlo Cassola tends often to re-use characters who have already appeared in earlier sketches and short stories. While almost never the same, they remind us of previously evoked creations and possess many of their qualities and traits; but there is always enough of a difference to enable a distinction of their individuality. In some cases Cassola enriches the previous portrait; in others he changes the emphasis. This kind of re-thinking and re-use of personages previously imagined in a somewhat different function or conceived with a different emphasis is to be expected in a narrator like Cassola who conscientiously prepared himself in the character sketch and the short story before turning to the longer narrative form. Thus in reading Cassola's latest novel, *Un cuore arido,* one is struck by the use of material from his novelette *Il soldato,* published in 1958 (Feltrinelli). In that work a soldier from the North stationed in a garrison town in south-central Italy falls in love with a local girl of enigmatic character and less than satisfactory reputation. Their strange and often strained relationship (which never goes beyond the Platonic) is broken off suddenly by his early discharge, and he boards a train for his return home to civilian life, confused, disconsolate and, perhaps most importantly for his future, having undergone a sea change. Unfortunately for the artistic perfection of the narrative, the character of the girl is unsufficiently developed and remains hazy and puzzling. Cassola must have realized that the enigmatic Rita of *Il soldato* offered rich promise as a character study, but only in the context of a longer work, portrayed more directly and analytically, and essentially from her point of view. *Il soldato* can then be viewed as a preliminary, partial sketch for *Un cuore arido,* since in the latter work the love affair with the young soldier from the North is turned into an episode, albeit the crucial one of the novel.

The reference to *Il soldato* points to Cassola's development from a thin, linear type narrative form to the richer, more complex texture of the *romanzo.* In *Un cuore arido* (as well as in *La ragazza di Bubè*) he has again demonstrated his concept of the novel as the story of an *éducation sentimentale,* and therefore almost inevitably concerned with youth. This latest work offers further confirmation of his special competence in portraying the unsophisticated young provincial Tuscan woman. Although critics of his fiction seem to agree that *Un cuore arido* is inferior to *La ragazza di Bubè,* they might have some difficulty in convincing readers that Mara, the heroine of the latter, is superior as a creation to Anna Cavorzio, the girl with the "arid heart."

The title of this work is a direct and obvious irony, something fairly rare in Cassola. What Anna's acquaintances, her family and the population of Marina di Cecina, a seaside village in the Tuscan Maremma, consider aridity of heart is, as the reader immediately perceives, a strong sense of honesty and reserve which protects her from the cant and the hypocrisy, as well as the compromise and the masks, forced on individuals by society. Anna's truth to her nature is intuitive and instinctive, not rationalized. Cassola, therefore, is not much concerned with delineating a "conflict" between her and the provincial minds of her fellow townspeople in this story whose time is vaguely indicated, but which evidently takes place in the years before World War II. He seeks rather to evoke the quality, the tone and the rhythms of her existence. *Un cuore arido* is then a novel of limited compass, bringing in only enough of the outside world as is necessary to its purpose, the recounting of the "sentimental education" of an unsophisticated, uncultivated young provincial seamstress who expects very little from life and whom destiny rewards in a manner commensurate with her expectation.

Perhaps what least encourages the reader who approaches this story is a lack of sparkle and excitement, on the surface at least, in incident, atmosphere and characterization. An elegaic, rather than dramatic or suspenseful, quality colors this narrative of the crucial years, between sixteen and twenty, in the life of the attractive but introspective Anna; and the suggestion that the heroine's awareness of

**English translations by William Weaver,* An Arid Heart, *published by Pantheon Press in January, 1964.*

her prosaic destiny limits her capacity to struggle against the restrictiveness of her provincial world is inescapable. Unlike Emma Bovary, Anna is no rebel; the first fact of her self-knowledge is that she could belong to no other world.

Cassola is a narrator of delicacy and sensitivity, qualities which helped him solve the most important problem posed by this story: to make Anna an interesting and significant personage. Given the novel's setting and the heroine's temperament, only love and romance could serve as plot stimuli. In essense only three things happen to the pretty seamstress during the period of the narrative: she rejects a local young suitor, Enrico, whom she does not love; she has a hopeless but sincere love affair with a soldier stationed in the nearby garrison and who had begun by courting her sister (the episode which recalls *Il soldato*); and after the departure of her true love she has a somewhat sordid affair with a wealthy son of a bourgeois family from a nearby larger town, which she voluntarily ends and which brands her as a loose woman in the eyes of society. None of these events in her life are as important to the reader as the manner in which she reacts to them; and we are interested in the workings of Anna's mind because Cassola has been able to convince us very early in the story of her singularity and superiority. A young woman of "sense," Anna possesses a rich spiritual stratum, an admirable candour and honesty, and she confronts life with dignity, simplicity and directness. The most persuasive proof of her superiority is her unconsciousness of it; she has not an ounce of pretentiousness. Without illusions, Anna has the wisdom which comes not only from experience, but which is innate and instinctive. At the beginning of the story she "had no experience of love; yet it was as if she already knew everything. It was a curious sensation. Since the time she was a child it seemed to her that she had known everything" (p. 19, Einaudi edition). The independent Anna described above was too ingenuous in her irrepressible yearning for experience, too responsive to the genuine urgings of her inner being to have an arid heart. Thus, in one of the purest of gestures she overcomes the considerate moral scruples of her soldier lover and gives herself to him for the first and only time on the eve of his departure from Marina. In Anna's frame of reference a marriage without love to the pathetic Enrico, her suitor in Marina, would have been immoral. The affair with the handsome, affluent but morally worthless Marcello, which results in the loss of her reputation, indicates that superiority does not mean perfection. Yet Anna's fall is traceable to anything but aridity of heart; generosity is involved, as well as resignation to fate and a need to counteract the shock of her losing Mario, the soldier she loved. Anna confirms her strength of character by ending the affair with Marcello and by spurning a chance to wed Mario who, after a long silence, writes her from America proposing a marriage which would have meant leaving Marina and the only life she views as possible. ". . . If they uprooted her from there, from the places that she loved, then she would have died of grief" (p. 308, Einaudi ed.). At the age of twenty her sentimental life has ended, and she is ready to face the years ahead with confidence, unafraid of the solitude to which she knows she is destined.

As is usual in Cassola's fiction the Tuscan Maremma region offers the exclusive setting for this narrative; and his fondness and intimate knowledge of it are constantly reflected. The heroine's inner and outer life are bound to the detailed impressions rendered of the natural and man-made landscape which the author's simple and limpid prose imprints indelibly on the imagination. The importance of all this cannot be exaggerated, since Anna's strength is drawn in good measure from her identification with the natural life which surrounds her, particularly the nearby pine woods, the sea and the sky.

Although Carlo Cassola has been identified regularly as a writer strongly touched by the Resistance movement of the Second World War, he deliberately avoided connecting this latest novel with the type of event which undoubtedly contributed much toward the artistic success of *Fausto e Anna* and *La ragazza di Bubè*. A sense of time and topicality are minimized in *Un cuore arido*, and we have instead a presentation in indirect but compassionate terms of the melancholy of provincial existence, particularly as it affects the destiny of the provincial girl and young woman. The theme is hardly new, since it is to be found already in the two important preceding novels. In this last work Cassola reveals even more emphatically a conviction that the surface poverty, be it intellectual, cultural or economic, of provincial life, hides a rich vein of sensibility and moral strength which may arise to combat it. The positive characters he creates to incarnate this strength are invariably women. In the creation of this character type Cassola has added a new dimension to modern Italian fiction.

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EDITOR'S NOTES

• In Italy bronze doors of every age seem to have curious and interesting stories that go along with them. No less is true of the doors projected for the Duomo of Orvieto. After decades of searching for the appropriate artist, the authorities of the Deputazione dell'opera del Duomo in 1962 entrusted the delicate and yet monumental task of the making of the doors to Emilio Greco.

Greco, of course, is an internationally known artist, famous for his series of "Bagnante" figures, the first of which was honored at the Venice Biennial in 1956; for his "Monument to Pinocchio" at Collodi; and for many other sculptures of unusual beauty. He has won numerous important prizes, has taught at Salzberg, at the Academy in Munich, and holds the chair of sculpture at the Naples Academy of Fine Arts. He is, in short, an artist richly deserving of the great honor.

The theme of the doors as proposed by the Deputazione dell'opera was to be "Deeds of Charity." Greco put himself to the task and after months of intensive study and work was able to submit a series of drawings and models which were unanimously approved by a commission of experts, including some of the most important names in the fields of sacred and profane art.

One of the central panels of the doors projected for the Duomo of Orvieto. It depicts the visit of Pope John XXIII to the Regina Coeli prison shortly after his ascension to the Papal Throne. Emilio Greco is the artist.

For the next two years Greco is absorbed by his work. Inspired by the loftiness of the undertaking, its challenge, the possibility of being remembered by posterity, he travels to Orvieto, studies the Duomo in all its details, in all its history, and struggles to escape the influence of traditional iconography and to preserve the originality of his conception.

The central scene of the doors (divided into six panels) is inspired by a contemporary example of charity, the visit of Pope John XXIII to the Regina Coeli prison shortly after his ascension to the Papal Throne. In this stirring and unprecedented act, Greco finds the key to his artistic conception. The episode becomes the theme of his first panel, which represents the corpulent figure of Pope John with outstretched arms in a gesture of brotherhood and love extended toward the prisoners behind the bars. The portrait sketch which appears on the cover of CBC is one of the original drawings made in preparation for this central motif. The other panels depict such scenes as "Visit the sick," "Bury the dead," "Provide drink for the thirsty," "Feed the hungry," "Dress the naked."

Critics and fellow artists have expressed deep admiration for Greco's achievement. C. L. Ragghianti; Enzo Carli; Manzù; Henry Moore; Bernard Dorival, Director of the National Museum of Modern Art in Paris; John Rothenstein, Director of the Tate Gallery; and many others have been unanimous in their praise.

While Greco, amid this consensus, was bringing his work on the doors of Orvieto to conclusion, at the very end of November 1963 an injunction was issued by the Superior Council of Fine Arts forbidding the placing of the doors in the Cathedral. The basis for this action supposedly was that it would be inappropriate to place modern doors in an ancient architectural structure. The action itself and the reasoning behind it have caused considerable shock in Italian cultural circles. What came to mind, of course, were the hundreds of examples of ancient Italian structures "contaminated" by artistic accretions of every age. But if this were not enough, the example of recent decades would certainly make the decision appear unreasonable if not ridiculous. This writer personally has seen in the studios of the Brera Academy the work in progress for

the doors of the Duomo of Milan by the contemporary sculptor Luciano Minguzzi. There are, moreover, the doors of the Cathedral of Siena by Messina and other sculptors and those of St. Peter by Manzù and others. Thus the precedent certainly exists.

The explanation for this categoric rejection by the Superior Council is to be found in rather regrettable and banal reasons: the human passions – of the kind that have animated many an Italian artistic episode. It's the old story of personal pique, pride, jealousy, and spite. This one has not been consulted, that one opposes figurative art, the other one was eliminated in the competition, and so on. But let it be said here and now that Emilio Greco does not deserve such a *contrattempo;* he is not of the temperament to be involved in this kind of tension. He is a person of gentleness and forbearance, of gracious and generous instincts, of exquisite sensitivity, and, of course, a consummate artist.

It is heartening to note that the cultural world of Italy has rallied to his defense. A letter signed by an impressive list of writers, artists, critics, and scholars was sent shortly after Easter to the Minister of Public Education, who alone can countermand the decision of the Superior Council. It represents a noble example of solidarity on the part of the Italian cultural world. The letter ends with the observation that if the decision is not reversed, then logically the modern doors of Siena, Rome, and Milan should all be removed.

In the month of April the central doors, which stand about 23 feet high, were sent to the foundry for casting. The side doors, smaller in dimension and very plain in design in order not to detract from the surrounding ornamentation of the façade, will soon follow. The casting was made possible through the generosity of a patron of the arts, Signor Sabatini of Siena. At this point no one knows whether the doors will stand in a museum or in their rightful place set in the façade of the Duomo of Orvieto. But they will exist – and that is the important thing.

• Neville Rogers, a Visiting Professor of English at Brandeis University, is a senior research fellow, tutor and lecturer at the University of Birmingham, England. His book, *Shelley at Work,* was published in 1956, and he is currently preparing a revision in four volumes of the Oxford edition of Shelley's works (Thomas Hutchinson, editor, 1904).

• Thomas G. Bergin, author, editor and translator, is Professor of Italian and Master of Timothy Dwight College at Yale University. His translations of modern Italian poets have appeared frequently in CBC.

• Sergio Pacifici teaches Italian at the College of the City of New York and has recently held a Guggenheim fellowship. He is the author of *A Guide to Contemporary Literature* (Meridian Books).

• Donald Heiney, a Fulbright lecturer, teaches comparative literature and creative writing at the University of Utah. He is the author of a number of books and has translated the first of Vittorini's and Pavese's criticism into English.

• Leonard W. Moss is Chairman of the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at Wayne State University. He has received travel grants from the American Council of Learned Societies and the Wayne State Fund and has been a Fulbright senior lecturer in anthropology at the University of Rome.

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