2016

A Collection of Short Stories in Translation: The Andalusian Shawl

Claire Marie Gotch
Bard College

A Collection of Short Stories in Translation:

The Andalusian Shawl

Senior Project Submitted to
The Division of Languages and Literature
of Bard College

by
Claire Gotch

Annandale-on-Hudson, New York
May 2016

Dedication

Questa traduzione è dedicata a due persone tanto importanti nella mia vita e nel mio amore della lingua e cultura italiana: i miei nonni, Giuseppe e Olga Caruana. Carissimi, avete creato e coltivato in me un grande apprezzamento e amore per le cose belle e basiche—la vera famiglia. E grazie a voi il mio mondo sarà sempre rosa. Una vita senza di voi avrebbe mancato un gusto vitale, ed Io non sarei stata la persona completa che sono oggi, senza il vostro amore. La vostra passione per la vita e la sua bellezza mi ha ispirato a ricordare che i momenti più preziosi della vita spesso sono quelli più semplici.

Acknowledgements

As I journeyed through the trials and tribulations of learning the ins and outs of translation there are several important people I would like to thank who were vital to my success.

First and foremost I would like to thank the department of Languages and Literature at Bard College for allowing and helping me to pursue my love of languages and literature throughout my four years as a student.

Secondly I would like to thank my Senior Project advisor, Franco Baldasso, for allowing me to have full disposal of his wealth of knowledge of Italian literature and culture, as well as always being a resource in times of trouble. Without his instrumental help, I would not have been able to successfully complete this translation project.

I would also like to thank my dear friends, Mark Mannara, Mikhaela Singh, Maya Knight, and Anna Kornfeld for being there for me through thick and thin.

Lastly, I would like to thank my family, Maria Caruana, Sofia Gotch, Jim Gotch, and Giuseppe and Olga Caruana, for pushing me to achieve my goals and dreams throughout my life. I love you all so much.

Table of Contents

Introduction

My Senior Project discusses and illuminates the work of Elsa Morante, a post World War II Italian writer and poet and the original author of my translation, and her innovative contributions to the literary world through her unique use of style and subject matter. I will also explain my own process and struggles with translating her collection of short stories, published in 1963 and originally entitled "Lo Scialle Andaluso", which I translated to "The Andalusian Shawl", as well as the secondary sources and translation theories I used as a guide in finding my own approach to translation. Then I will examine and compare excerpts of my own translation with their original forms and describe my methods, as well as places I struggled to maintain the integrity or Morante's writing.

Elsa Morante: A Quintessential Modern Author

Elsa Morante is a unique and revolutionary author in her own right because of her use of ambiguity and the themes of memory, childhood, and the relationship between a mother and her child to critique society, specifically Italian society, as a whole. Through the course of her literary career Morante wrote four novels, but some of them in particular presented a continuous theme, which I chose to explore in my translation of

"Lo Scialle Andaluso", specifically "L'isola di Arturo, published in 1957, and her most successful novel, "La Storia", published in 1974. Both of these novels examine the role of memory and childhood experiences, but more importantly Morante dissects and depicts relationships between mothers and their children, particularly between mothers and their sons, a theme that is often either overlooked or not included in most of the literature in the modern American literary cannon[1]. "Lo Scialle Andaluso" is different from her novels because of its short story construction, in which Morante examines the complicated and implicit Freudian relationship between a mother and son through childhood memory, which, in some cases, seems almost autobiographical. Morante even wrote late in her life "'Novels are more autobiographical than anything else one could say about oneself,'" (Riding 1)[2] solidifying the idea that most of her novels have an autobiographical aspect to them, in reference to the running themes of memory and childhood.

In addition to her unique thematic choices Morante's style greatly differs from that of her male contemporaries. Her writing style is soft and flowing, yet at the same time physical and demanding; deliberately ambiguous and implicit. Unlike writers like Cesare Pavese, Elio Vittorini, or Italo Svevo,[3] Morante chooses to avoid the common aspects of the Neo-realist genre in her writing, and instead, like other female Italian

---

[1] A set of authors and works generally included in basic American literature college courses and textbooks, and those ordinarily discussed in standard volumes of literary history, bibliography, or criticism. The progressive exclusion of literary works by women from the canon suggested that such concerns were of lesser value than those inscribed in canonical books and authors. The literary canon is, in short, a means by which culture validates social power." (Lauter 435)

[2] This is a quotation from a New York Times book review of "Woman of Rome: A Life of Elsa Morante" by Lily Tuck. In this review, Alan Riding uses this quotation by Morante to explain the inseparable relationship between Morante's writing and her own life.

[3] Three authors "The Cambridge History of Italian Literature" states as embodying the qualities of Italian Neo-realism in their writing.

authors of her era (Anna Banti and Natalia Ginzburg for example) explores the "overlapping territory between the alienation of everyday life and a metaphysical existentialism" (Brand/Pertile 547)[4]. Morante's writing is a shining example of "a genuinely new realism without the 'neo',… [and] establishes a corpus of increasingly self-conscious and self-confident feminist writing in Italy." (Brand/Pertile 548) Although most of Morante's stories can have a cynical realism that depict an almost bleak outlook on the human condition, she manages to weave dreamy imagination and hope into her story telling through the use of diction based around child narration, which contradicts and juxtaposes her ultimately pessimistic position on humanity.

Throughout her novels, and especially in "Lo Scialle Andaluso", Morante relies heavily on both the child narrator and child protagonists to tell her short stories. In *Ladro dei Lumi*, or *The Lantern Thief*, the first short story of the collection, our narrator is not necessarily a child, but someone in fact recalling her childhood memories within her narration. This suggests that life seen or depicted through the point of view of a child, or the memories of a child, are significant in explaining the reality of the present. In other words, childhood or children are integral to explaining our own present reality. In the short story *Lo Scialle Andaluso* the protagonist rather than the narrator is a child and the focal point of the story, but the reader still sees the story through the eyes of Andrea, the protagonist. This then begs the question, is a child's viewpoint more reliable than that of an adult? Morante seemed to think that there was a discrepancy and conflict between fiction and reality in life, but that the truth, or *verità*, didn't reside in the logical. Morante solidifies this idea in "La Storia" in her description of the child Useppe: "You would

[4] A quotation from the chapter *Neo-realism* in "The History of Italian Literature.

have said, to tell the truth, from his laughter, from the constant brightening of his little face, that he didn't see things only in their usual aspects, but as multiple images of other things, varying to infinity. Otherwise, there was no explaining why the wretched, monotonous scene the house offered every day could afford him such diverse, inexhaustible amusement." (Morante) Despite the havoc that World War II has wreaked on Ida and family, her son Useppe, a child, is the only one able to see beyond the pain and suffering. Through his playful imagination Useppe escapes, or simply cannot see the desolation surrounding him. This moment in childhood, and Useppe's natural ability to see the hope and beauty in an otherwise horrible life is Morante's definition of truth. It exists only when we are children, and what most would classify as fantasy or the illogical thought processes of childhood is actually our reality; but this reality is corrupted by society as we grow older. Story telling presented through the memories of a child in *Ladro dei Lumi* is an example of Morante willing the reader to recall this reality through childhood memory. Today it is common knowledge among most people and the psychology community that our childhood is one of the most significant factors in the quality of our adult life. Freud, in fact, was one of the first psychologists to delve significantly into the theories of childhood and its relationships and its impact on our adult states of mind.[5] As it turns out, Morante was an avid reader of Freud, and agreed with most of his controversial theories surrounding childhood and the subconscious, further supporting her investment in the significance of childhood the adult experience.

For Morante the imagination born from innocence of childhood is true reality, and our present as adults is actually fiction. Continuing with this point of view it is safe to say

[5] "The Psychopathology of Everyday Life" by Sigmund Freud.

that Morante considered the adult reality to be corrupt and fictional, didn't present the reality within the world because of its susceptibility to corruption, hatred, and deceit. Morante suggests through this theory that as we mature and lose our childlike qualities of imagination and innocence and genderlessness, we become conditioned to a society that directly contradicts childhood tendencies, therefore negating what she considers to be our true reality as human beings. In writing novels with child narrators and protagonists, Morante is trying to open our eyes to our self-made fantasy, and bring our minds and selves back to our childhood memories, which were in fact our one and only true reality. This is also evident in her other collection of short stories, poems, and songs "Il Mondo Salvato dai Ragazzini", which translates to "A World Saved by Children". The title itself solidifies Morante's idea that an adult world and society full of politics, corruption, and a lack of childlike imagination is responsible for the lack of humanity that is overwhelmingly present in our everyday lives, and that our only hope as a society in regaining that humanism is the memory of the world that exists in childhood imagination.

In addition, the short story "Lo Scialle Andaluso" concentrates on the intensely strong and complicated relationship between a mother and child, specifically a mother and her son, and the implications of that relationship on both of their futures: one as a young man, and the other as a woman and mother in a very gendered and traditional Italian society. We see a critique of the delusions and pressures of tradition that Italian society has imposed upon the role of women through the eyes of a young boy named Andrea. Morante focuses in on their relationship because of the unique role and place an Italian *madre* holds in the Italian tradition. The word *madre,* due to the gendered nature of Italian, has a much more complicated and intense meaning rooted in tradition and

Catholicism than the English word “mother”. Through the eyes of Andrea the child, this story highlights moments of tension between a woman, and mother, being pulled in two different directions: in the direction of her son, to fulfill her duty as a mother who puts her children above her entire life, and that of a modern woman, who wants to break away from those traditions and pursue her dreams as a dancer and artist. The catch twenty-two is that society has made it so that she cannot be both an independent, fulfilled, successful woman and *madre* at the same time because those two concepts directly contradict each other in Italian culture and tradition.

Morante’s decision to concentrate on more intimate aspects of the human condition, but more importantly in this case, the dichotomy of the female condition, and the equivalence of childhood and childhood memory with absolute truth acts as a direct critique of the patriarchal culture that had and still has a hold on Italian culture and society today. Morante hones in on this difficult subject through the use of a uniquely personal and idiosyncratic style, taking her writing to a new sociological and psychological level.

Although the fact that she is a woman and not a man writing these novels is significant, Morante herself opposed this gender label when it came to her writing. In fact she didn’t want to be called a writer at all. In Italian, writer translates to *scrittore*, but unlike English, Italian has gendered nearly every single word in its language; so in Italian Morante would normally be referred to as *scrittrice* in correspondence with her female gender. Morante strongly rebelled against the Italian language’s natural propensity to gender her and her writing by referring to herself, and asking for others to refer to her, as *un poeta*, a noun that is neither male nor female and therefore rejects the perpetual sexism

associated with Italian society and culture. She did not want to be associated with either gender; rather she wanted her writing to be viewed as a universal. Morante further critiques patriarchy within Italian academia when she writes in "Pro e Contro la Bomba Atomica", "Una delle possibili definizioni giuste di *scrittore*, per me sarebbe addirittura la seguente: *un uomo a cui sta a cuore tutto quanto accade, fuorché la letteratura*" (Morante 97), or "One of the possible correct definitions of a writer, for me would be the following: a man who takes to heart all that happens, except literature." (Morante 97) Morante does not wish to be associated with either the female or male author, and instead wants her writing to transcend categorization and exist as a form of imagination and reality, despite the risk of contradicting the feminist nature of this disassociation. This idea also takes the form of the literary themes previously discussed in this introduction. Morante and her works directly challenge a transparent patriarchal tradition present in Italian institutions and society, which permeate as deep as the language itself.

This patriarchal culture is not limited to Italy, and is pervasive throughout the world. Most of Morante's works, apart from "La Storia", combatting the patriarchal systems that still exist today have been neglected in English-speaking countries like the United States, and have not been translated. My translation aims to expose the English-speaking world to Elsa Morante and her radically unique themes and writing, and create a readership outside of the male dominated American cannon.

The Duty of the Translator

As I contemplated the intimidating task of translating these two short stories, while protecting and upholding the central themes and characteristics of Morante's

writing, three essays in particular helped and guided me throughout my own journey of translation: Walter Benjamin's *The Task of the Translator* William Weaver's *The Process of Translation*, and Ann Goldstein's *Four Young Soldiers*. Each of them, in their own unique way, gave me a starting point and goal as I attempted translation for the first time.

Benjamin's *The Task of the Translator* immediately states in the first line, "In the appreciation of art or an art form, consideration of the receiver never proves fruitful," (Benjamin 253) banishing any thoughts or ideas about a translation being for a specific public. Benjamin also says the word art in reference to a translation, suggesting that a translation is not just a reproduction or an original, but a work of art itself. This contradicted my previous assumption that a translation served the sole purpose of creating a new readership. The reality is that it does in fact, by nature, create a new readership within the language of the translation, but that is a side effect and not its only goal. Benjamin later adds that, "The task of the translator consists in finding the particular intention toward the target language which produces in that language the echo of the original. (Benjamin 258) This means that a translation is not just a copy or an original, nor an attempt to recreate the original, and is instead independent of the original. A translation, according to Benjamin, attempts to reinvent the same feeling and intention of the original through new language that doesn't aim to copy exactly the language of the original.

> Fidelity in the translation of individual words can almost never fully reproduce the sense they have in the original. A literal rendering of the syntax casts the reproduction of meaning entirely to the winds and

> threatens to lead directly to incomprehensibility. (Benjamin 259-60)

In this quotation Benjamin touches upon the fine line between something that is implied through writing, and something that is overt and explicit. If a translation tries to directly copy the syntax and wording of its original, it is bound to fail in rendering the tone and true meaning of the original, therefore failing the original author.

Similar to Benjamin's explanation of a translation that maintains the original author's integrity is Weaver's *The Process of Translation*, which explains his own style of translation down to the steps of the process he took when translating a paragraph. He is very clear about the "how" rather than the "why", and creates a sort of template translation through examples of his own thought process through the drafting process of a translation, in this case a the first paragraph of 'Notte di Luna' by Carlo Emilio Gadda. Weaver explains:

> I have tried to make conscious and logical something that is, most of the time, unconscious, instinctive. Faced with a choice between «perhaps» and «maybe», the translator does not put the words on trial and engage attorneys to defend and accuse. Most probably, he hears the words in some corner of his mind, and likes the sound of one better than the other. Of course, his decision is only apparently instinctive. His instinct will be guided by his knowledge of the author's work, by his reading in the period. It will almost certainly not be guided by any rules, even self-made ones. (Weaver 1)

Translation by nature does not have formal rules, and in fact, any rules that might exist in a translation are created by the translator themselves based on instinct and their knowledge of the original author's previous works and style. In this quotation Weaver explains that there is no formula for translation, and that it instead works as a sort of system of guesses and checks, but that the worst mistake a translator can make is to directly translate because the original is only a "starting point" or framework for the translator. Weaver further explains, "Because there are no rules, no laws, there cannot be an absolute right or an absolute wrong." (Weaver 1) This means that no single process of translation is the same, and the translator must develop their own rules unique to their style and to that of the original author. At the end of his essay Weaver mentions that as a result of the lack of formal rules a translation can become a never-ending process in search of a "nonexistent perfection", something that, unfortunately, can never exist. But at the same time he says that knowing this allows the translator to strive less for a "perfect" translation and more for a translation that conveys the same significance through a means other than word for word translation.

Ann Goldstein explains her own process and reflections on translation in reference to Primo Levi and her translation of an entire volume of his complete works. She begins this essay by explaining her overall process and style of translation, explaining that she "[tends] as a translator to stick quite closely to the text" (Goldstein 6), a choice that is typically the translator's prerogative, and strays from Benjamin's theories of interpretation and poetic license. Rather, she says:

> I don't feel that my job is to improve or elaborate on what an author has written...or to explain or comment on it. In general I prefer not to create

> something that is "equivalent"…Naturally there are situations where you have to depart from the text, but the hope is not to go too far, to remain within the limits of faithfulness. (Goldstein 8)

Goldstein puts her emphasis on a translator's faithfulness to a text rather than their ability to successfully replicate the original. It seems that to Goldstein, a translation is a compromise between faithfulness to the context of the original and proper syntax. Goldstein also explains the difficulties of translating Italian specifically, as opposed to another language, into English, clarifying that "English has no genders, no masculine and feminine…this means that English syntax is less flexible than Italian," (Goldstein 12) which means an English sentence structure cannot always respect the same structural qualities of Italian.

Analysis and Interpretation

Each of these essays on the theory of translation gave me a good starting point for my own first attempt at translation, and served as a guide for my work. My journey through the discovery of what it means to translate someone else's work was an arduous one. Morante is known for her lofty and poetic prose that flows smoothly and softly, yet at the same time packs a punch with harsh physical and graphic imagery. My main goal within my own translation was to maintain these stylistic dichotomies as well as preserve the weight of Morante's emphasis on the importance of story telling. In *Il Ladro dei Lumi* I found that the toughest things to translate were descriptions of people, specifically their faces or expressions, because those descriptions were told from the memory of a child, and therefore contained a unique blend of physical and fantastical characteristics.

In order to explain in detail my own attempted method of translation, I have chosen two passages from Morante's "Lo Scialle Andaluso", one from *Il Ladro dei Lumi*, and the other from *Lo Scialle Andaluso* itself. To achieve authenticity, my translation had to include interpretation, intuition, precision, and the willingness to paint the Morante's words in English while remaining faithful to the original hues of the Italian. This is one paragraph, in Italian, that blurred fantasy and reality to create an almost surreal quality and was particularly difficult to articulate in translation:

> Questa nonna era sorda, e pareva di legno. Un seguito d'anni innumerevole l'aveva succhiata lentamente, fino a ridurla un piccolo scheletro di legno, che forse non poteva neppure piú morire. La sua testa era quasi calva e le palpebre oscure sempre abbassate. Teneva ferme lungo i fianchi le mani, dalle unghie di un turchino livido. Con mio stupore, avevo scoperto che si fasciava il petto e i fianchi, come si fa ai bambini, e, su tutte queste fasce, poneva degli ampi stracci grigi. Dicevano che fosse ricca. (Morante 12)

In my finalized translated version and interpretation of Morante's words I tried to maintain the very corporeal description of the old woman, as well as the dreamlike quality and tone of this childhood memory:

> This *nonna* was deaf and seemed to be made of wood. The consequences of countless years had slowly sucked away at her until she was reduced to a tiny wooden skeleton that, for all I knew, was no longer able to die. Her head was almost bald and her dark eyelids were always lowered. She held her hands, whose nails were colored blue by bruises, firmly to her sides.

> To my amazement I had discovered that she bandaged her chest and hips, the way you swaddle babies, and on these wrappings she placed large grey rags. People said she was rich.

When I first translated this paragraph one of my first doubts was whether or not to keep the word *nonna*, which translates to grandmother, in the translation. After a lot of thought and consideration I decided that keeping the original names, nicknames, and pronouns was essential to preserving the qualities of those characters, especially when it came to nicknames because they often don't have any real significance outside of the context of Italian, so direct translation in those cases was not an option. In the first sentence of the Italian the word *pareva,* the imperfect third person conjugation of the infinitive "to seem"*,* immediately threw me because I could not just say "she seemed of wood", which would have been a poor direct translation. So I took it a step further and added the helping verb "to be", which doesn't exist in the Italian, to my English version of this sentence to add a fluidity that was otherwise lacking. In addition I had to decide if I wanted the *nonna* to be "made of wood" or "wooden". I decided to stick with "made of wood" because of the physical image it evoked in my imagination of a woman so wrinkly she was literally made of wood as if someone had carved her out of a tree trunk. The next difficulty was *con mio stupor*, which can mean "with my stupor", which didn't sound right, and "with my wonder", was choppy and still didn't quite fit the context of the sentence. I eventually settled on "to my amazement", which ends up quite a bit different from the phrase I started out with. I figured wonder could easily be changed to its synonym, amazement, as well as allow for a commonly used English phrase to replace the word "with" with "to".

The Italian language has a greater level of abstraction than that of English, and its words often have multiple meanings. Morante takes this abstraction to an extreme in her writing, creating stylistic ambiguities throughout her works. I found that I struggled with both this exaggerated ambiguity as well as the way she seamlessly warps the lines between fantasy and reality throughout the short stories. In *Lo Scialle Andaluso* in particular the ending and last paragraph of the short story was so full of lofty language and ambiguities that it was very difficult to understand in its original Italian, let alone translate. This passage is especially crucial to the story because its ambiguity represents the power fantasy and imagination has on our everyday reality. Despite Andrea's wish to imagine his future as a "bold hero" In the Italian Morante writes:

> Andrea spesso s'immagina il futuro quale una specie di grande Teatro d'Opera, dietro le cui porte s'aggira una folla sconosciuta, misteriosa. Ma il personaggio fra tutti misterioso, ancora sconosciuto a lui stesso, è uno: Andrea Campese! Come sarà? Egli vorrebbe immaginare il futuro se stesso, e si compiace di prestare a questo Ignoto aspetti vittoriosi, abbaglianti, trionfi e disinvolture! Ma, per quanto la scacci, ritrova sempre là, come una statua, un'immagine, sempre la stessa, importuna:
>
> un triste, protervo Eroe
> avvolto in uno scialle andaluso. (Morante 213)

The translated version I eventually found my way towards ended up like this:

> Andrea often imagines the future like a kind of grand Opera Theater, in which a mysterious unknown crowd wanders behind its doors. But the character among all the mysterious people, still unknown to him is one:

> Andrea Campese! How will he be? He would like to imagine his future self, indulging in invoking the victorious and dazzling traits, the triumphs and boldness of the Unknown! But no matter how much he drives this image away, he always finds it there, like a statue, always the same, unwelcome:
>
> a sad, fierce Hero
>
> wrapped in an Andalusian Shawl.

My first draft of this ending paragraph—I later found out in an editing meeting—was nothing like the aimed meaning of Morante's original ending. I had confused my subjects, pronouns, direct and indirect objects, and the syntax I came up with didn't express at all what Morante was trying to say. I had to rearrange most of the words in this paragraph to accommodate and English syntax that didn't translate well directly from Italian: for example the word *misteriosa*, or mysterious, which modified the noun "crowd" had to be moved from the end of the first sentence to the middle in order to act properly as an adjective. *Come sarà* was even more troublesome because of it's lack of subject pronoun, something that is common in both spoken and written Italian, but doesn't always function well in English. In this case *sarà* could either be referring to "it" or "he", either referring to Andrea or to Andrea's future. This was unclear to me in the Italian during my first attempts at translating this paragraph. I wrongly assumed that *come sarà* was asking how his future would be not "how will he be", which is the conclusion I eventually came to. My overall confusion continued with the penultimate sentence, specifically with *se stesso*. Typically, *se stesso* can be translated as one's self or himself, but "he wants to imagine his future himself" doesn't make sense because the

word “himself” makes the sentence redundant, and one’s self doesn’t correspond with the subject pronoun “his”. I decided that to simplify things I would just translate the word *stesso* as “self”, synthesizing “his future himself” to “his future self”. I had this same issue when I came to the phrase *per quanto la scacci*, and couldn’t find the direct object’s corresponding noun, and out of habit thought that it was referring to her, Andrea’s mother. Upon further inspection *la* modifies *un’immagine*, the image, he sees rather than a person.

This breakdown and analysis of my own translation in conversation with Morante’s original writing is intended to illuminate and present the process of translation as I directly worked with the text. Obviously my translation is one of a beginner, and does not necessarily fulfill all the requirements of a great translation, though I attempted to incorporate all the important aspects of faithfulness, methods, and interpretation from Benjamin, Weaver, and Goldstein as I translated, as well as present the risks involved in not translating with Morante’s integrity in mind. In doing so I hope to have presented Morante’s writing literary themes as necessary to the human condition, no matter the nationality of the audience.

The Lantern Thief

It was me, that young girl. I am almost certain although I may not have lived a sufficient number of years to believe it. The six-floor house (my family lived on the top floor) was the tallest on the street, and at the end was the Temple.

I wasn't more than six years old. From the windows I could see passing by pale men, tanned women with all too often vulgar or menacing appearances, half naked boys gray from dust. Across the street I could see a house of a sickly yellowish color with shuttered windows, and, to the side, a large grassless courtyard.

In this courtyard, men, mostly soldiers, often waited in a line. One by one they entered for a few minutes and would then leave, exchanging banter and gossip. Mysterious, laughing women were always gazing out of the windows, their faces flushed, eyes heavily rimmed with makeup, and voices loud and forceful. Particularly at night, I could hear the low luring of those voices whenever my father would return from the café,

despite his hunchbacked frame, they would call him over, “Want to come up handsome? Do you?”

My mother, still young and slim, had a delicate face ruined by resentment. Because of my misbehavior she would always hit her forehead furiously with her fist, cursing me in a solemn Hebrew, as was her habit, as she turned an exhausted face toward the Temple. And I would remain helpless, knowing that God always receives all the curses, booming with echoes, of mothers and fathers.

As soon as night fell, while my father made his way to his regular café, she would take a walk on the ancient walls surrounding the city, together with my older sister, my beautiful and contemptuous sister while I stayed home in order to not leave my grandmother alone.

This *nonna*[6] was deaf and seemed to be made of wood. The consequences of countless years had slowly sucked away at her until she was reduced to a tiny wooden skeleton that, for all I knew, was no longer able to die. Her head was almost bald and her dark eyelids were always lowered. She held her hands, whose nails were colored blue by bruises, firmly to her sides. To my amazement I had discovered that she bandaged her chest and hips, the way you swaddle babies, and on these wrappings she placed large grey rags. People said she was rich.

As soon as the others were gone she would order me to put out the lamp with a curt phrase that slipped difficultly from between her gums: it was pointless to waste the oil on just the two of us. Then she became mute and motionless. Although I was trembling, I obeyed. Sure enough, as soon as I turned the knob of the lamp, ghosts of fear

---

[6] Nonna translates to Grandma in English.

and darkness, whose eyes were replaced instead by two black holes, rose behind me. And I, in an attempt to find some light, curled myself up against the windowsill.

This incident took place more than fifty years ago.

From the window I could see the Temple with its stocky cupola, its steps, and through the long stain glass windows the opaque red glow of the dead's oil lamps. The wrought iron lanterns hung throughout the interior of the Temple, and anyone who wanted to dedicate a lantern to the departed had to pay the guard Jusvin to feed oil to the flame day and night so that it never went out. In their own darkness, the dead were much more peaceful if they had a lamp.

The red lights from the inside of the Temple were only visible from my window. Every night I could see Jusvin climbing the steps of the stairwell to close the temple and pour the oil. He was a dark man, his face beautiful and solemn, with black eyes and curly hair and beard. When, strangely, he would wind up the stairs carrying heavy keys, the dim light of the surrounding darkness made him look like a prophet or even an angel. But one night, after he had entered, I saw the lanterns go out one by one. Then, warily looking around with his snuffer in hand, he left, leaving behind him an immense darkness.

"*Nonna*!" I cried. "Jusvin put out all the lamps of the dead!"

"No," she mumbled. "Do not waste oil. Don't relight the oil lamp."

"You don't understand?" I yelled, trembling throughout my entire body. "Jusvin put out the lamps! The lamps!"

"Yes, yes, Marianna will be back soon," the old lady responded.

So I gave up trying to explain my secret to her. All around me I saw dark shadowy figures, and I shivered thinking they would open their mouths and speak to me. I shuddered from the thought of what they would have been able to tell me, and for what God would have said.

From that day on, every night I watched Jusvin close the door to the Temple behind him and extinguish the lamps. His aim was to save oil, keeping the left over money meant for the oil lamps for himself. This is how my mother explained it to me, also telling me to keep quiet about it because the man had six small children, and one word would cost him his job. So I remained silent. God could see him and would punish he who robbed the light from the dead. God always finds justice.

"Thief! Thief!" cried out my nerves and bones whenever I saw that shadow slowly ascend the stairs. In my distress I expected his hands to fall to the floor like they were two wet rags, as my mother would say. I wanted to run to the Temple, to scream: "I see you! I see you when you steal the lights from the dead! Aren't you afraid of God?" But I could do nothing but remain still, paralyzed, at the windowsill. I thought of the dead, under ground buried beneath the earth, without any light. I covered my face so as not to see until, once again, my eyes were drawn to that long shadow that now descended the stairs with its snuffer, vanishing into an alleyway.

One night he did not come, and the red flames calmly flickered behind the windowpanes. After a short period of time he reappeared, but could no longer speak. Hoarse stammering sounds escaped from his throat, and all he could do was gesture mutely, opening his eyes wide like a puppet. Until one day his gasps and screams echoed through the allies. Jusvin was dying.

"This is God's justice," they said. God's finger touched Jusvin's tongue, damning it with ravaging sores. It was an evil that people would not dare name (but because of his fantastical name, I associated it with ferocious marine wildlife and the African tropics). And those screams coursed through all the streets, echoing the sweaty writhing of the sinner's body. And they didn't have a moment's rest until there was silence.

"He will never be in peace," they said shaking their heads. "Neither him nor his children."

On my way to school I often encountered his children, specifically Angiolo and Ester. Despite their filth and nudity they were exceptionally beautiful. Angiolo's large eyes were like two burning flames, and when he laughed dimples appeared on his cheeks. Ester had splendid curls, slender legs, and her face was as round as a fruit. I watched them fearfully, thinking all the while that God's finger would touch their tongues, just as he did to their father, unleashing that strange African beast to gnaw on them. After which, they wouldn't be able to speak anymore, only able to make those wretched sounds. One after the other, mute from the curse in their mouths, Jusvin's children and his children's children would be judged by the Lord.

This scene tormented me throughout my infancy and would reappear in my dreams, but I saw something even more vivid one summer night near the Temple.

A serious misfortune befell me. My father had given me some change and told me to go out, instructing me to play three lottery numbers. On the way home from the bank, absorbed in my daydreams, I lost the ticket with the numbers I had purchased. I feverishly roamed the streets, quietly weeping, digging through dust. Nothing. So I stayed still, crouched in the moonlit shadows of the Temple's tall wall. I thought of never

returning home, of leaving the Ghetto and the city and dying. And in that thought and moment I called my father by the nickname that people had given him: *il gobbetto*[7]. So many times I've been asked, "Are you *il gobbetto's* daughter?" And now, with fear in my mind flashed new blasphemous thoughts, "*Il gobbetto* will beat me. Why does he have to beat me? I am small, but beautiful, and I have two long thin braids. He's a hunchback. I don't want him to beat me. But I lost the lottery ticket that perhaps could have won. I made a mistake and lost his chance of winning. He'll beat me, and my mother will curse me. This is the punishment. I was spinning, gazing at the houses, the windows, and the sides, thoughtless of the ticket, and I sinned. Jusvin also sinned, and the Lord punished him."

And in the presence of the Lord, there was Jusvin. The Lord has neither a body, nor a face; he's like a cloud in a storm, or the shadow of a mountain: -- Mercy, Lord, I did it for my children. Quench my thirst, give me rest. Have mercy on my path that envies the quiet dead--. These words are buried in his throat, and will never take form on his lips. The man, gurgling, gestures and sweats, his mouth twisting. And He, the formless, doesn't speak. His silence declares: You, thief.

Meanwhile, out of the walls of the Temple, others joined in silence. Their bodies are obscure masses, their faces blank staring masks; yet, I seemed to recognize someone. There's the old lady Matilda, the one who cooked pumpkin seeds and then, they told me, went to Heaven. Instead she's here, with broken shoes and a handkerchief wrapped around her sightless face. And there's Lazzarino and his son Mandolino, with long arms and top hats covering their skeletal faces. Yes, it is them and others I don't recognize, but

[7] *Il gobbetto* in Italian literally means little hunchback. The original Italian is left in the translation to preserve the effect of the use of the proper noun.

all of them resemble each other, their heavy feet dragging along the dark walls. Some of them wear bizarre clothes made of rags in either mismatched or faded colors, or tattered clothes bound around their torsos, with hats of all shapes and sizes, like the ones you see in theaters. Certain women wore blush and lipstick on their skin, and gowns that swept the ground without a sound. Others were instead pale and half-naked.

They are the dead, and they grab at the air uncertainly, lips reaching for the light as if it were a drink to quench their thirst. Without their wings they look like worms above ground. Underground, some believed they could still see the light of day in those oil lamps, and now they blindly fumble looking for it. Only the living can light and put out the lantern: that's how the silent God, who punishes the living and buries the dead in the ground, wanted it, in the middle.

This was my God, and that little girl was me, or maybe my mother, or maybe my mother's mother; I am dead and reborn, and at every rebirth a new uncertain process begins. And that little girl is always there, among the mute, fearfully questioning her incomprehensible world under the shadow of the judge.

The Andalusian Shawl

As a young girl, Giuditta, due to her love for theater and dance, had turned her back on her parents. In that good family of Sicilian traders, the profession of a dancer (even serious *classical* dance) was considered a crime and dishonor. But Giuditta, in her struggle, behaved like a heroine: she studied dance in secret, in spite of everyone. And as soon as she grew old enough, she left Palermo, her family, her friends, and she went to Rome, where, a few months later, she had already joined the Opera's *Corp de Ballet*.

Thus, the Theater, which had always been her Paradise, had welcomed her! Giuditta, in her enthusiasm, told herself that this was only the first step: she had always thought herself to be a great artist destined for glory, and a young suitor, a musician from Northern Italy she met at the Opera, encouraged her in this belief. Giuditta married him. He was handsome, and esteemed by all for his promise in the arts; but, unfortunately, three years after their nuptials he left her a widow with two small twins: Laura and

Andrea. Although they opposed her profession and marriage, her Sicilian parents did not deny her dowry. And with this money, in addition to the insufficient earnings of a dancer, the widow was able to live as best she could, with her two twins. Her career still had not made much progress, but in intimate settings Giuditta Campese behaved like a prima donna. The house shone from her pride, talents, and magnificence: and in the few rooms of her apartment, reigned the certainty that she was a *star*.

However, she quickly discovered that her passion for the theater, already very opposed by her paternal family, encountered a new opponent where Giuditta would not have expected. In fact, this new opponent was a person born and raised among people of the theater, who naturally breathed this air from the beginning, and should not have possessed certain provincial prejudices. The person in question was Giuditta's son, Andrea.

From childhood Giuditta's son was less developed than his sister in his limbs and stature, but no less pretty. His complexion was dark like his sister's and like his mother's, but the feature that distinguished him from them was his eyes (inherited, it seems, from a paternal grandmother), which were of a rare sky blue color. These pale blue eyes, usually quite clouded, revealed fully their luminous nature only when they looked at Giuditta: even when Giuditta appeared from afar his blue eyes kindled with playful beauty. Yet, from his earliest years, even before having learned to talk comprehensibly, Andrea clearly manifested a limitless hatred for his mother's profession.

Outside of her work, the widow led a solitary life. And when she didn't have to go to the theater, she spent most of her evenings at home, alone and tranquil. On these evenings, Andrea (who, along with his twin sister, was put to bed every day before

sunset), would immediately fall asleep peacefully alongside Laura, and dream until morning. But on practice or show evenings, while Laura as usual was sleeping like an angel, a suspicious Andrea would lose his peace of mind. Although no one had told him, his heart had mysteriously warned him that his mother had to leave the house. So, with difficulty Andrea fell into a fickle and uncertain sleep: in order to awaken at a moment's notice, as one would wake up to a bell, in the same moment that Giuditta went to her own room to get dressed. Having climbed out of bed, he ran barefoot to his mother's room; and similar to a poor pilgrim he stopped himself there, behind the closed door, to cry quietly.

The drama, which began like this, could have had different developments. Sometimes, Andrea would stay there to cry, almost in secret, for the entire time it took his mother to dress; but just in the same moment that she opened the door ready to leave he ran headlong back to bed to hide his crying under the sheet. Giuditta didn't want to show him pity; and most of the time she went straight and impassive, pretending not to have heard that crying, nor the running of those bare feet. On rare occasions, however, in spite of herself, she had too much pity for him and ran behind, looking to console him with kindness. But he covered his eyes with fists, fighting back sobs, and refused every false consolation. The only real consolation, for him, would have been that Giuditta remain at home instead of going to the theater, but it would have been crazy to ask something like that of the dancer!

Andrea's audacity certain evenings reached a similar madness! After having cried a little, as usual, behind the door to his mother who was dressing, he suddenly unleashed a bombardment of punches on the door. Or, holding back tears, he waited with patience

for his mother to be ready; and when finally he saw her appear (walking like a lioness, her small proud hat, and black veil against her white face, without rouge or powder), he grappled at her clothes, clung to her knees, and desperately implored her not go to the theater, at least tonight, to stay and keep him company! She caressed him, cajoled him, and tried in vain to comfort him about the inevitable, until, impatiently, she violently freed herself from him and disappeared, slamming the door. And Andrea abandoned himself on the floor of the mudroom and remained there, moaning, like an unhappy kitten left in a basket while the mother, carefree, goes for a stroll.

Giuditta had wished that it were all just a childish phase, one that could be cured with age. Instead, the years passed and Andrea's tantrum grew with him. His aversion for the theater, the eternal passion of his mother, made itself more apparent on every occasion and developed his irreparably hostile opinion. Naturally, Andrea didn't embarrass himself anymore with begging and crying as he did when he was three or four years old; he avoided such scenes, but his hatred, deprived of those childish outbursts, became even more ferocious.

Besides his stubborn whim, Andrea would not have been by any means a bad son. He never lied, he did well in his studies; and he was extremely affectionate with his mother, following her through all the rooms, searching every moment for her attention with turbulent and endearing effusions: so much so that, not infrequently, if she was busy with other jobs or with other thoughts, Giuditta had to ward him off as if he were a nuisance. When it so happened (not very often, really) that Giuditta took him out for a walk, not even a king in a stroller with his queen could have appeared more glorious and

attentive than him; and his eyes sparkled with light from the beginning to the end of the walk.

The few evenings that Giuditta didn't leave the house and stayed with her family, a vivid color bloomed on his usually pale face like a flower. His mood became carefree and angelic, boastful and adventurous. He laughed without restraint at every little domestic adventure (for example, if the cat chased a moth, or if Giuditta was unable to crack a nut) and recounted with drama the stories of the *Corsaro Nero*[8], *Sandokan alla riscossa*[9], *Pirati della Malesia*[10], and other similar stories of captains and buccaneers, which were his passion. Sometimes, he embraced his mother as if he wanted to chain her up; he was full of deference for Laura, and he listened with seriousness and modesty to their women's conversations. But if the theater, dance, or the Opera was mentioned his eyes became dark, his forehead wrinkled, and the family had to witness an extraordinary metamorphosis. As if a dove, or a young rooster transformed all of a sudden into a jinx.

On certain evenings of great festivity, his sister Laura left the house in a frenzy to attend some daytime performance at the Opera, where often, in the wake of her mother, she was even permitted to go backstage and in the changing rooms! Coming back home (where Andrea, excluded himself voluntarily, and had spent the evening completely alone), she was so excited she seemed crazy. However, in the face of the terrible looks from her brother she had to stifle every temptation to tell stories. And this silence cost her such an unnatural effort that later during the night, she spoke in her sleep.

---

[8] Black Beard
[9] Sandokan to the Rescue
[10] The Pirates of Malaysia

Andrea always refused to step foot into a theater. The simple proposal to visit similar places, to which he owed many evenings of suffering and tears, made him become pale again.

On more than one occasion it so happened that Giuditta brought one of her ballerina costumes from the Opera, and she wore it in the house to show it off. One day, she was dressed as a gypsy, with a scarlet skirt, her chest half-naked, and bracelets and necklaces made of gold coins. Another day, she was dressed as a swan, with a corset covered in glitter, stockings of the whitest silk, and a tutu of feathers. Another time she was dressed as a Nereid[11] with a short sheath of iridescent scales, and a fishing net as a cape. And another time again she was dressed as *Spirit of the Night*, and another time as an *eastern shepherdess*.

From the time she was a little girl her body was a little full/heavy, but she was a beautiful woman with her espressione risentita, brown eyes, and a seductive alabaster complexion. Other than her daughter Laura, who came to gaze at her in her room, the maid through service in which she added the doorman of the concierge. One could say that this was the only conceded public of admirers, as of yet, for Giuditta. Her theatrical career, in reality, had not made any forward progress. Giuditta Campese, still today, was nothing more than that which she was on the first day of her hiring at the Opera: an anonymous ballerina in a row in the Corp de Ballet. But to the ecstatic eyes of her familiar public, she was, without a doubt, a great star of the Theater.

After she had shown off her own costume, she flaunted herself in a dance, raising enthusiastic applause. At this point, child's footsteps, racing quickly across the corridor,

---

[11] In Greek mythology Nereid is a sea nymph, and one of Poseidon's fifty daughters.

and, Andrea appeared in the bedroom doorway almost furtively. At the sight of Giuditta, his wide eyes filled with shining naïve devotion. But, after an instant, he tore his gaze from her, and flashed his hostile eyes on the audience. He withdrew himself to the corner between the corridor and the exit, like one who had to witness the theft of his property without being able to impede it.

For Andrea the members of the chorus, ballerinas and other similar cast that now and then frequented the house were worse than ferocious beasts. During their visits, usually he went and confined himself in the back of the apartment; inside the dusty storage/broom closet that barely received/obtained any light from a small window. But if Giuditta together with her company, there in the parlor, tried to put on any scene or dance position/figure, not even in this prison could Andrea succeed in defending himself from his own demons. Even thought he forced himself not to listen, his hatred, much more subtle than usual, the notes/melodies of the from the phonograph, strange voices, the many beating hands, the thuds of jumps, the shuffle of footsteps, the breaths of twirls penetrated through the door! The prisoner was torn between anger, envy, and the temptation to climb down to the bottom of his own torment, witnessing that hated spectacle. One could believe that a spy had therefore denounced his temptation: behold a herald, his sister Laura, who arrived all out of breath to his blockaded door to invite him into the parlor on behalf of their mother, magnifying the unrivaled figures of the ballerinas. With insults and threats Andrea scared away the herald; but the weight of so many trials made him too bitter. And an instant later, he felt the need to call for his mother in a loud voice, with great authority.

Giuditta hastened, exalted and softened by beloved dances. She called her son by name: no response. She called him two, three times: and finally the door opened. The ballerina entered with passion, and laughing from that horrid reclusion, she kissed him on his hair and forehead,

"You're cold, sweetheart, apple of by eye! This son of mine is insane! What crime did you commit to want to incarcerate yourself, with all these beautiful rooms you have! Your mother has never at all made you live in the middle of trunks and spiders! With that beautiful parlor that you have, with the balcony! And the music of the phonograph, and so many talented artists, that all always ask me about you! They will think, because he never lets them see, that my Andreuccio[12] is hunchbacked or cripple! Come on, let's go show everyone what a beautiful son the Campese family has! Why are you making such a bitter face? Not even if the Sandman was over there! They are all friends, work colleagues, such wonderful men and women that give sparkling performances, and people purchase tickets to watch them! And now they have come here to dance for Lauretta and for Andrea! There are even pastries, there is Marsala, and we all want to toast to the man of the house, to you! Up, you will do us this favor, my beautiful lancer, come dance with us!"

And with a truly dance-like step Giuditta took Andrea by the hand, she drew him with her into the hallway. As soon as they reached the end of the hallway, but for a door left ajar in which he could perceive the movement of the parlor resonant with voices, Andrea, as if he had glimpsed the mouth of Hell, freed himself from his mother to lock

[12] A nickname or term of endearment meaning "little Andrea" or "sweet Andrea".

himself up once again in his prison. At this point, he shouted at his mother outside, “Go away! Get away! Go back to those bad people!” But, finding himself alone, he cried.

Thus, Andrea paid the price for his hatred, inflicting torment onto himself. Though some cases in which his violence freed itself in other ways should be noted. One day, for example, with his face against the wall, like many souls when they are being punished, he turned the faces of the framed photographs that adorned the living room shelves against the wall. They were orchestra conductors, choreographers, prima ballerinas, and other celebrities; all photographs held dear by his mother, above all for their dedications made out to her with first and last name, Giuditta Campese.

And one day when a lover of ballerinas had sent Giuditta a bouquet of roses as an homage, Andrea waited until she had left the house for her usual theater rehearsal; and all of a sudden, under the bewildered gaze of his sister Laura, he began to tear apart the roses with a savage fury. He then threw them on the ground and stomped on them. On such occasions Giuditta would call him a delinquent and assassin.

Andrea Campese spent his infancy between these sufferings.

Around ten years of age, having to prepare themselves to receive their Confirmation and First Communion, Laura and Andrea spent two weeks in seclusion: she in a nunnery, and he in a convent of Salesian priests. Before this occasion, their religious instruction had been rather neglected, and the pious life of the convent was an exceedingly new experience for the two twins. In Laura’s existence, such an experience and the teachings of the faith, in the end, did not leave more than a slight trace. But in Andrea’s life, everything changed. Immediately, as soon as Giuditta saw him again at the end of his seclusion the day of the ceremony, she realized that her son was not the same

anymore. Rather than launch himself into her arms with passion, as was to be expected after such a long separation, Andrea took her arm with an air of discretion that was almost severe. The first wrinkle of meditation marked his forehead, giving him a grave expression that was in stark contrast with his childish features and body, which remained almost too small for his age. And he responded with reluctance and almost a little impatience to his mother's many questions. The priests that had instructed and watched him told Giuditta with great satisfaction that during that brief religious course he had been the most attentive and fervid pupil of all, and he had shown a rare interest for celestial things and maturity for his age. They said he seemed greedy for the bread of angels, as if, until this moment, he had lacked his natural nutrition.

A brief sign of earthly frivolity reappeared in him when it was time to put on the new suit his mother brought him for the ceremony, which was a dark turquoise tweed with a velvet collar. Andrea was always rather ambitious regarding clothes, and he didn't hide his pleasure in finding in the little pocket of his jacket a small silver whistle tied to a drawstring made of satin (which was the crowning touch of elegance, according to certain children's French tailors). He declared, with a satisfied smile, that to wear a whistle like that was a custom of Captains and Pirates. Perhaps overcoming one of his temptations, however, he held back the urge to try the sound of the aggressive instrument. And after that unique moment of lightness passed, he appeared so intent and ecstatic for the whole Conformation ceremony that even the Bishop noticed him among the others and said, caressing him, "Ah, what a good and beautiful and young soldier of the church!" When the moment came for him to receive the Eucharist, his eyes, raised toward the chalice, shone of such innocence and glory that his mother burst into tears at the sight of him. But

Andrea did not seem to hear her weeping. Having received the Host, he closed his eyes, and it seemed in that moment that a light in the chapel had been extinguished. So he remained absorbed for several minutes, on his knees, with his face between his hands. And Giuditta, looking at his bowed head, his hair well combed and smooth for the occasion, said, "Who knows what big thoughts are going through the mind of that angel in this very moment!" His beautiful eyes finally reappeared, but, for the entire duration of the Mass, remained enraptured, staring at the lights of the altar. *'Not even one look for his mother'*, thought Giuditta.

At the end of the ceremony Giuditta brought her children home. The gate of the convent had just closed behind them, and already Laura was quick to return to her own games with levity. She began to run happily along the boulevard home in the long wedding-like First Communion dress, with a veil and crown on her head, earning the reprimands of some passersby, who referenced the appropriate demeanor that her dress deserves.

But Andrea instead walked absorbed, without occupying himself with his mother and sister, like a stranger.

From that day, he behaved in the house as if family life and domestic events didn't concern him anymore. His rebellions, his hatred and his tantrums were over, but along with these it appeared that his affection for his mother was also extinguished. If, in his presence, dance or theater was mentioned, or if one alluded in some way to Giuditta's detestable profession, only a shadow of contempt appeared on his face. He shied away from the company of ballerinas, actors, singers, and that entire world of Giuditta's friends no less than before. But his desire to withdraw himself didn't have any of the same

significance that it had before. Even though there were no visits, now, he loved to seclude himself, and he no longer even looked for his friends, he didn't play with his sister anymore, he always seemed absorbed in thoughts too difficult for his age, so much so that Giuditta worried he would fall ill. It was summer, the schools were closed, but he read for hours books he had borrowed from the priests' convent where he often went to visit. The priests explained to him the most difficult points of the books he read, and would discuss them with him, enchanting themselves with his observations. The wrinkle of meditation on his forehead was deepening even more.

In those very days a famous preacher came to speak every Sunday in the neighborhood church. In the middle of the crowd one could never miss, running to his sermons, a worshiper no taller than a meter, who, judging by meager clothes, one could have almost said he was a bad boy of the streets. Whose shining blue eyes were fixed to the pulpit, full of gratitude and interrogation. One day, while the preacher was speaking about the Passion of Christ, that attentive listener was moved to the point that he burst into desperate sobs.

But there were other memorable episodes, even more notable, of Andrea's holy summer.

In a neighborhood far from the city, near a large basilica, rose a very high staircase called the *Scala Santa*[13], of which pilgrims and believers came to from every part of the world, on their knees, and sometimes their bare feet to merit divine indulgence. The various stations of the Passion had been frescoed on the lateral walls of

[13] In Italian *Scala Santa* translates to Holy Stairs

the staircase, and at the end of the loggia[14] that concluded the climax shone a triumphant mosaic of the saints and martyrs all adorned in gold. Which seemed to wait above for the pilgrim to celebrate the end of his penance.

One early afternoon two young ballerinas from the Opera who lived nearby found themselves strolling around the Basilica. It was the great deserted hour of the summer heat wave; and passing in front of the *Scala Santa* the two ballerinas noted that at the base of the garden, in the place where the believers removed and set down their shoes to begin the ascent, there were only two very used and dusty tiny sandals. Raising their eyes, they then glimpsed, high so high, a tiny pilgrim all alone, who advanced barefoot on his knees, and had already almost touched the summit of the staircase. The small size of the sandal and their penitent owner amazed the ballerinas: according to the norm, only adults accomplished similar difficult vows. Exhilarated by the unusual spectacle, the two ballerinas, who were light natured, agree upon a joke. Having taken those little sandals, they hid with them behind the wall of the staircase, waiting for descent of the solitary worshiper. After having waited a rather long time, there he finally was. With a surprise the two hidden ballerinas, who both often frequented the house as work colleagues, recognized in that moment the son of Giuditta, the dancer who worked in the Corp de Ballet at the Opera.

Descending back down the staircase on foot, he directed his face, damp with sweat, to the now distant peak of the loggia, and, doing the sign of the cross, put back a little silver rosary back in his pocket. He then turned to look for his own shoes, and, not finding them, turned a glittering and wild gaze to the open space, with the air of an

[14] A type of mid eighteenth century Italian architecture.

unweaned wolf that had ventured into a treacherous forest. The open space, burnt by the sun, was deserted; and he turned his head back, throwing a quick look at the steps closest to the staircase. After which, without looking more for his shoes, he turned with a leap and, with bare feet, he ran away.

The two ballerinas, who had risked death from suffocating laughter, collapsed just outside of their hiding place, calling in loud voices, “Campese! Campese!” Andrea stopped, and, at the recognition of the two girls who brought him his sandals, became flushed in the face.

“We found these shoes,” the older ballerina said to him with an air of fake naivety, “are they yours?” He seized the sandals and threw them on the floor, and without bothering to buckle them, as if they were clogs, he shoved his feet into them.

“Oh!” the ballerina protested. “Are you kidding me? I find your shoes, and you don’t even thank me?”

“Do you at least remember,” intervened the second ballerina, “to also say a Hail Mary for us?” But to these words Andrea did not give a response other than a look so grim that the two jokers, in spite of themselves, felt uneasy. So he turned his back on them, and, dragging his unbuckled sandals on the floor, he quickly walked away.

This episode, and others similar, at closer look soon made Andrea’s vocation clear to the company Giuditta held. Everyone knew that the son of the Campese family renounced pleasure in amusement, and had given away his silver whistle as a gift, along with all other objects that were dear to him to better earn God’s confidence with his sacrifices. Against his mother’s wishes he underwent fasting, renouncing the foods he enjoyed the most, and sometimes at night he would climb out of the bed, which he had

slept in beside his sister Laura from his first years of infancy, and lay on the naked floor: this, in fact, is what the great Saints used to do in the stories he read. That dark whole in the wall, where, in earlier times, he usually hid his rebellions, had become his preferred shelter. And one day, when he neglected to lock the door, Giuditta surprised him while on his knees, with his hands folded and eyes full of tears while looking spellbound out of the window: as if he saw in that dusty glass divine figures. For more than an hour he stayed like this, and his knees became all red and stiff.

The only Christian virtue that Andrea didn't practice was humility; instead, he had assumed an attitude of redemption and haughty privilege with all people who were not ministers of heaven. Yet the arrogance in that child's face made people smile instead of getting irritated.

He was considered by everyone to be a saint, and many mothers envied Giuditta. She, however, who before had often treated Andrea's excessive affection as unwelcome, now sometimes showed a bitter annoyance at seeing that he didn't have room in his heart for anything other than Heaven, and had even forgotten to be a mother's son. When she now remained at home in the evenings, he (who in the past celebrated these evening as if they were a big holiday) was capable of leaving her in the kitchen with Laura to seclude himself in either his room or his closet. One afternoon, when Laura was visiting a friend, something unheard of happened: he left his mother alone in the house, to go visit his favorite priests! And one day when Giuditta invited him to go for a walk, he, who once upon a time waited for these invitations like a supreme grace, accepted them with coldness, and without gratitude. And for the entire duration of the walk, he had a sullen

and distracted attitude, as if it were a giant courtesy on his part for him to be together with her.

Because of her hurt pride, Giuditta did not invite him anymore, “If he wants to,” she thought, “he himself will ask to come along with me on a walk.” And Andrea never asked her. Sometimes, while leaving the house, at the moment of goodbye, Giuditta believed to have seen in his eyes a look of questioning and fear; but it was probably just a delusion, and in the end, with each passing day, he didn’t seem to notice at all the presence or absence of his mother. When it was time for him to leave and she said goodbye, he responded to the farewell with indifference, without raising his eyes from his book.

Where did his tenderness go? Where was his enthusiastic passion? He didn’t respond to the caresses of his mother, and even escaped them. And then, if Giuditta made him aware of the injustice of his attitude, he would look at her with this new distant and haughty expression, almost saying, “You demand that I lower myself again to those childish smirks and sneers? Those days are no longer, my dear. Now, the aim of my fondness and devotion is very different, and there is no more room for a vulgar ballerina like you. Occupy yourself with your grand affairs, and don’t disturb me.” He had a notebook, where sometimes she saw him writing for long periods of time, his eyes intent and his brows knitted together. In secret, Giuditta would leaf through this notebook, and discovered that it contained poems, of which here is an example:

GOD SPEAKS TO CAIN

What are you doing, oh infamous Cain? You made a cruel endeavor!

You killed your brother Abel!!!

Abel is in Heaven, and the hated envy

is clawed by tigers, in the black desert, worse than a leper.

But the Great Got said to him: “Don’t cry poor son.

Look at the Ocean! Here advances a sailing ship! On the highest flagpole

Waves a banner!

The crew at the sails. Look at the sailors!

They are Archangels and Seraphim! Now you will see the Captain,

Look at the magnificent Hero of eternal Heaven!

Forward my heroes! Don’t waste time! Run to the government!

Go, Cain, salt the deck! My bold Galleon goes two thousand

leagues per second.

In less than three moons we will be in sight of delightful Heaven.

You’ll see the immense beauty of the Great Savior’s Kingdom!

There you will see the Superhuman who triumphed over Satan.

Now you must kneel before this one King.

And He will forgive you and say, “Do you want to stay with me?” Dry your tears, miserable

Cain, I forgave you. The star of Israel shines near God

Mary, in your luxurious mantel, more beautiful than all the leading women.

Giuditta was not acquainted enough with literature to argue the metric and grammatical licenses of a poetic composition. And in reading these verses she was moved to the point of bursting into tears. She was certain to have seen by now proof of a genius and Andrea’s extraordinary virtue, and such a finding made her cry again even more than before because she was not no longer the possessor of his heart. But on the other hand, she would be ashamed to dispute her son’s fortunate rivals, who were none other than the rulers of Heaven. And what’s more, in those days, a disaster happened suddenly in her

career, which occupied all of her feelings, leaving her no time to think about her own maternal delusions. During all those years, she had always hoped to distinguish herself finally from the other ballerinas of the Opera, and to be promoted, at least, to the position of soloist, waiting to becoming Prima Ballerina. All of a sudden, she was instead dismissed from the Opera. She declared that this had to be a conspiracy plotted by her envious coworkers, but in searching the theater they said that the fault was her lack of talent, which was diminishing rather than improving. Even her body was wasting away, her legs had grown too thin, her hips heavier, she was clumsy and gave the Corp de Ballet a bad reputation.

The summer was over; the schools reopened. And when Andrea announced to his mother his intension of secluding himself in a religious Institution that housed boys destined for the priesthood where the Fathers, his protectors, could give him a room almost for free, Giuditta found it to be a providential opportunity. In fact she was preparing to sell her house. This was the beginning of the era of her pilgrimages from town to town behind the mirage of a new job, or following a wandering company. Laura was put in the care of an old school teacher who took it upon herself to help the girl in her studies, and Andrea entered as a little aspiring priest into the institute of O., a small provincial town of Central Italy, not far from the borders Southern Italy.

When her unstable life permitted her, Giuditta went to visit them. Always dressed with decorum and austerity (as was her sometimes her habit outside the theater) she had the proper look of a real lady of the house. Her body declined rapidly into an untimely maturity, as often happens to women of Sicilian blood; but her very eyes, and the eyes of her children, remained blind to a similar downfall.

Her little priest would meet her in the parlor, dressed in black twill robes, which he was outgrowing too quickly, so much so that his sleeves were not long enough to cover his delicate wrists anymore. Every time Giuditta found him taller and thinner. His face, formerly round, had worn thin in a way that his large eyes seemed to devour it. And on his meditation wrinkle that was dug into his forehead between his eyebrows, a new wide wrinkle had appeared, one of severity. He always had an air of severe detachment during visits with his mother, and if she, surrendering to her own womanly fragility, pushed on him some ancient signs of affection he would look at her harshly, furrowing his brows; otherwise he turned his face in the other direction with a sarcastic expression. He absolutely was no longer interested in her life. One time when she touched upon a truly new wish (which then turned out to be delusional) of entering La Scala's *Corps de Ballet* in Milan, he arched his brows with an air of impertinence, pursing his lips into a smirk of disregard and distain. To Giuditta's thousand questions, he responded with an annoyed reserve, and their conversations usually ended there, since he never asked questions on her behalf, if not on some rare occasion to have news of his twin Laura. In conclusion, Andrea treated his mother like the simulacrum of a disavowed object that was alive in our hearts during more innocent times, and is no longer of interest.

But Giuditta knew her son Andrea all too well to fail to obtain, even now during their conversations, some diplomatic success. Her instinct and astuteness sometimes inspired a suitable subject, a well-chosen phrase, thanks to which his enchanted and disarmed smile of childhood reappeared on Andrea's face. In those rare moments his heart grew with exhilaration.

Once, she presented herself at the boarding school completely happy and announced to Andrea that she had been granted an entire day of time off to spend together with him. She had already obtained permission from Prefect Father to go have fun with her son in the city, and had arranged for an entire afternoon for them to enjoy together: as long as she brought Andrea back to school before sunset, the Prefect had said. At similar invitation Andrea's face clouded, and he refused.

"What! You refuse to come spend time with me!?"

"Yes, I don't want to go out with you!"

"Let's go, get up! Oh, my dear son! You respond to me deliberately to spite me. I made this trip to have the honor of a walk with my handsome Reverend. And he would tell me no? Up, my good knight, don't make your mother sigh. Perhaps you find that I've become ugly, I'm not worthy anymore of your beauty? Come on, my Andreuccio, let's not waste any time. We will go together for a walk on the wall, we'll look at the panorama of the Bastion, and we'll sit at the Café and get an ice cream. Then we will entertain ourselves by looking at the billboards at the movies, where tonight they will show a film…what is it called, hold on? It is something about *a ship, and a Pirate*...

Andrea swallowed two or three times, and shot out a rabid *no*, insulting and definitive.

"No? Seriously, you responded to me with no!?"

"I don't want to go out with you, enough!" Exclaimed Andrea, with exasperated violence.

"Ah, therefore I heard well! You refuse to go out with me! And what, do you believe to be more irreproachable with this? This is not holiness, but ingratitude and malice! You will regret it; God will punish you for being so malicious!

Andrea shrugged his shoulders and did not look in the direction of his mother, but in another, with an expression of grim sarcasm as if to say, on the subject of God, it would be better for Mrs. Campese to remain silent.

"Yes, God will punish you, you will be punished, you will be punished! And why don't you want to go out with me? You go out with those wretched school robes (and have wonderful strolls, all in a line like sheep eating chicory), and, with me, no! Ah, do you want to know what the truth really is? I will tell it to you, I've never told you before, but now I will tell you. They've conspired against me, these twisted minds, that's the real truth. They've told you that your mother is a bad woman, and that if we go out together you will end up in Hell! In that case, you can tell your Lord Masters on my behalf that I know the road to Paradise better than them! And the day that I meet with your poor father again, I will be able to embrace him standing tall and tell him: *Here is your wife. Just how you left her, here she is.* One can work at the Theater and remain an honest woman, tell that to your Reverend Fathers! And the merit of honesty is still more beautiful! Know that Giuditta Campese is a lady, was, has been, and always will be a lady! And she will be an artist because she likes Art, but, on the subject of honesty, not even Saint Elisabetta was more honest than she!

Andrea was pale, fazed, but he proclaimed with an aggressive tone, "Here, nobody has ever cared about you! I have never spoken about you with anyone!"

"In that case, why do you refuse to go out? What new thoughts have come into your mind? You have precisely the fanatic blood of you grandparents, of those hardheaded Sicilians! Ah, when I was born, and I was so content to have had a male son, who would have thought that I had produced with my own blood my worst enemy! Say it then, do I make you embarrassed? Is this the motive? It shames you to go out with me!

Giuditta wept bitterly. Andrea trembled from head to toe, his whitened lips quivered: but from fury, it seemed, rather than from compassion. He tightened his fists, and burst out in a broken voice:

"Ah, why do you come here to me! Why don't you stop coming here!?"

And running to the precipice he fled the visiting room.

Speechless, with tearful eyes enlarged with bewilderment, Giuditta moved her lips to call him, but Andrea had already disappeared. In that moment a minister passed through the corridor, and so Giuditta lowered her gaze to conceal her tears and compose her face into a dignified expression. She lowered her veil again, slid on her gloves, and at a leisurely pace, like a lady who took her leave after a regular and satisfactory visit, she directed herself alone to the exit. A pack of stickers, that during that tempestuous conversation she had forgotten to give to her son, still hung from her wrist.

After a few months, when she returned to visit Andrea, just as in subsequent visits, she never said a word about what had fallen between them that day. She never again dared to ask him to go out together; she had a humble and anxious manner with him, and evaded every discussion that could make him uneasy. On his part, Andrea maintained his usual discretion that now, however, mingled with an infantile shyness. He often blushed or twisted his thin white hands without reason, and every moment he

stroked his hair with his fingers to give himself composure. If it he smiled or laughed, he would lower his eyes and turn his face with an uncertain expression between savageness and confidence.

Their encounters had become very brief. Those visits, for which Giuditta had made a long trip by train, sometimes lasted just a few minutes, every subject or pretext of conversation falling short. It seemed as if Giuditta and Andrea really had nothing more to say to each other; they both remained in silence for several minutes, seated face to face on the tall black chairs of the visiting room. Searching her mind in vain for some invention that could interest or entertain Andrea, the visitor stared at him again and again. She gazed at those cheeks, that from the front appeared to have thinned, but from the profile still showed the roundness of childhood; and that forehead (with wrinkles of meditation and severity), half hidden by a tuft of hair that his restless hand never left in peace; and those beautiful eyes that shied away from hers. She had a heartbreaking yearning to embrace the little priest, but she dare not even imply such a gesture, at any rate he instilled apprehension in her. She was mortified, confused, like someone who is bored, or on the contrary, worried of becoming a nuisance. She hastily took leave.

These visits from Giuditta usually repeated themselves three or four times a year. During breaks, Andrea received little illustrated cards and (rather infrequently) some letters, always from different cities that he had never seen, and sometimes he didn't even recognize their names. Giuditta's letters did not carry any precise news of her present existence, nor of her future projects. What's more, ever since elementary school, Giuditta had never excelled in the subject of writing. Her style was convoluted and hurried at the same time; and additionally so exaggerated that the last of the class in Andrea's school

deserved to be treated as a professor in comparison to her. But her calligraphy was majestic: big, angular and nevertheless rich with flourishes, with boundless capital letters.

Andrea responded to her always addressing, according to their agreement, *express*, to Rome: empty responses to every proclamation, but punctual and diligent.

Around the fourth year of their separation, Andrea realized that it had been more than eight months without a visit from Giuditta. No other sign of life came from her other than the usual postal orders every quarter sent to the Administration of the College, and some cards for her son, between them a deck from Austria and one from French Africa. These letters carried just a few lines of greeting, however, Andrea learned that the wandering artist did not pick up the express correspondence anymore. Then, after another two months, her cards didn't even arrive anymore.

One day, after a walk, Andrea crossed a street of the little city in line with his friends, when, on a playbill stuck to the wall, he saw a portrait of his mother. The emotion was so strong that the blood rushed to his face. Naturally, no one else, neither his companions, nor the accompanying Father had recognized that person or had shown interest in the playbill: it is illicit, in fact, for eyes consecrated to God, to linger on images of those kind. Andrea stopped, pretending to tie his shoe, and, trying not to be noticed, scanning the playbill from bottom to top he read:

ROOM GLORY THEATER

Tonight, at 9:30

FEBEA

The great international Star

Veteran of Viennese triumphs

Presents her/its classical Arabic,

Persian, and Spanish dances

Under these words, withdrawn near the center, among other figures, was Giuditta's face, crowned by a kind of star with serpentine rays, eyes encircled by a large black halo, and a gem on her forehead. Then it read still:

It will precede the usual program of great attractions

Pierrot Premier, the Prince of boîtes of Paris

Joe Rumba, with his 15 girls 15

Etc. etc.

In the grip of a tremendous palpitation, Andrea quickly rejoined the ranks of his comrades, FEBEA! There was no doubt that under this name the dancer Giuditta Campese was hidden.

At eight in the evening, the colleagues withdrew into their rooms, and at nine, the entire school slept. At ten thirty in the little provincial city the deepest silence reigned in the profoundest night.

The long and narrow dormitory was barely lit by the bluish glimmer of the night-light, glowing above the exit near the encampment of the supervising priest. The white forms of the little beds, and on the marble partitions, black crosses and the portrait of the Sainted founder of the Order framed in ebony, were distinguishable. Andrea remained calm for two hours, pretending to sleep, while instead he was more thank awake, to the

point of becoming half crazy with impatience. Just as he heard the clock strike ten, he slid out of bed, and, quietly as a mouse, he dressed (aside from his shoes, which were tied by the laces to his wrists), and left the dormitory.

It would have been futile to attempt the main door or the service door: they were barred and bolted like the entrances of manors, and furthermore under the protection of the doorman. But Andrea knew of a small window closed by a single wooden bar on the side of the dining hall of a height no more than three yards that faced a levy. Fumbling blindly along the corridors and down through the rampant darkness of the stone staircase, he found that window without incident; from there it was not difficult lower himself out. Arriving on the ground, he pulling his robes up around his knees, and, without losing time putting on his shoes, with feet covered only by short cotton socks, he began to run towards the fences.

The ancient school building stood just outside the city walls, where the end of the street lighting signaled the boundary of the countryside. The moon had already set two hours ago, but the summer firmament (it was the first days of June) gave off a dim almost lunar light in the beautiful night. Andrea turned for a moment to gaze at the façade of the school; only a stray window was lit: those of the Fathers that, alternately, remain awake every night in their cells in prayer. Along the wing of the building where the church was, the oil lamps that burned inside the chapels day and night weakly illuminated the colors of the stain glass. And on the side of the walls, on the arc of the railings, he could see the intense whiteness of the marble of the Order's crest against the serene sky.

Andrea turned towards the top of the hill, where a section of seventeenth-century wall collapsed by a landslide was sustained by a simple steel mesh. And after having

leaped over the enclosure with agility, despite the hindrance of his tunic, he ran like Hell down through the fields.

Less than a half a mile from there in a tenant farmer's house lived one of his friends a few years older than him. His name was Anacleto, he was the tenant's oldest son, and Andrea had made his acquaintance during a rural outing with his class. Andrea knew that for some time Anacleto slept in the stable on a layer of cornhusks because he was fond of a colt born two moths before by his father's mare. The stable had a low window equipped only with an iron grate, from where Andrea could have awakened his friend without anyone else hearing.

It was, however, an unpleasant surprise, for the escapee of the school, to find that the window to the stall, against all odds, was illuminated, and two voices emerged that sang in unison accompanied by the sound of a guitar. One voice, more virile, in the background, was unknown; the other, a more clarified yet unripe voice, he recognized as the voice of his friend. So, Anacleto was not alone, and this made the endeavor much more risky and uncertain. Andrea, unsure of which course to take, remained hidden behind the wall of the house for some minutes. In spite of the dramatic circumstances, he listened with pleasure to the love song sung by the two voices and the notes of the guitar. Finally, deciding to take on every possible consequence of his own daring, he approached the illuminated window.

A crude-oil lamp hung from one of the beams of the trough and spread a beautiful and clear light all over the room. The mare, with her head bent to the trough, chewed her hay, and by her side the colt played childishly: this scene of domestic bliss gripped Andrea's heart with envy. A step from the two horses on a ruddy blanket, stretched out

on the trodden soil sat Anacleto in the company of a young soldier, from his round shaved head, who played the guitar. There was no one else in the stable other than them, and this was a relief to Andrea:

"Anacleto!" He called in a low and overheated/overexcited voice, "Come out for a moment, I need to speak to you!"

Surprised as if he saw a ghost apparition Anacleto promptly leapt up and ran outside, while the soldier, not at all curious, remained seated searching for a tune on his instrument, as if, presently this was his utmost interest on Earth.

Pulling his friend to under cover behind the wall of the house, Andrea explained to him having left the School in secret because he had to, with maximum urgency, go to the city to meet someone. This meeting was the most important of his life, but he couldn't show himself in the city dressed as a priest. Would Anacleto lend him his clothes? Returning to school, Andrea would have brought them back to him, not past midnight, and reclaimed his own robes.

"And if the fathers in the meantime notice your disappearance?"

"Then I will leave the School forever. But be sure, nothing will make your name slip from my lips, not even a medieval torture!"

Imagining a riveting romance, Anacleto gave in to favor his friend. However, he was not wearing anything but pants, and from his waist up he was naked. His other clothes were in his room, but it would not have been prudent to go get them, for fear of waking his family, mostly his sister (who was a curious one). It was decided they would consult the military guitarist, a trustworthy friend who came to spend his last hours of leave, which expired at dawn, with Anacleto. This young man, whose courtesy was equal

to his discretion, was called Arcangelo Giovina, but came to be named Gallo[15] for his red curls that created an arrogant crest-like tuft on the top of his head. However, as was said, he had presently shaved his mane so that it could regrow more beautiful with the favor of summer.

From up close in the light of the oil lamp his round head, a childhood trait, already appeared to be covered in a light red fuzz. This in particular, and who knows why, filled Andrea's heart with faith and confidence. Listening to his problems, Gallo spontaneously offered to lend him his own military shirt, one of those American-style colonial fabric shirts used by our army. Even though lately Andrea had grown significantly in height, and neither Gallo nor Anacleto were two giants by any stretch of the imagination, nevertheless Anacleto's pants and especially the colonial shirt were a little excessive in size for Andrea. Additionally, the pants were made of a rural material so strong that they could stand on their own, one could say. But in present circumstances it would have been ingratitude on Andrea's behalf to be preoccupied of similar futilities.

It was decided that Andrea would leave his robe in a straw hut around two hundred meters from the house, where, on his return, he could put them back on again in place of the borrowed clothes. These clothes, passing in front of the stable, he would then drop them on the inside railing, without disturbing the sleep of Gallo and Anacleto, who had to get up at four.

No more than three quarters of an hour had passed since his escape when Andrea, in his disguise, ventured into the poorly illuminated allies of the city. He only encountered a rare passerby, and of those people Andrea chose those with kinder

---

[15] Gallo in Italian translates to rooster.

appearances to ask for directions. When he was in front of the Theater's entrance the clock sounded eleven.

There they were, the fatal doors that his declaration had rendered inaccessible throughout his life, until today! In spite of his hate and negation, their mysteries had dominated his childhood. His disobedient fantasy caused him to glimpse beyond extraordinary mirages, which, though he pushed back thousands of times with distain, always rekindled the word *theater*. Artfully decorated and brilliant like an eastern cathedral; crowded like a piazza at the festival of the Epiphany, distinguished, and of no dwelling, ever, like the Oceano! Ah, poor Andrea Campese! The theater appeared so armed and invincible to you that, in front of a similar rival, your heart, provoked into grand battle, turned to the supreme strength of Heaven!

On the door, slightly broken bright sign said THEAT GLORIA. The photographs of the artists were on display on either side of the entrance, of which the collegiate fugitive again recognized Febea with the return of a single palpitation. He saw her in double perspectives: one photo portrayed her entire body with one leg uncovered up to her hip, her ankle adorned with jewels; and another one just of her head, smiling, with a flower in her ear and on her hair a black veil.

A wooden railing near the end interrupted the vestibule of the theater, illuminated by a dusty electric globe and no other ornament other than a pair of gaudy show partitions. Beyond this, near a little door with two knockers stood a gracious girl about eighteen years old, a little military barrette on her head, where in gold letters the words: *Theater Gloria* were written. Under the little barrette beautiful brown hair fell to her shoulders in waves and natural curls, and her nude legs, although developed and strong,

were the color of fresh pink like the legs of a child. In her tight-fitting cherry red artificial satin dress, in which she seemed too developed, she had a warlike and disdainful attitude, like the doorkeeper of Palazzi Reali. Occasionally she curiously spied through the little door's keyholes (where songs and pounding heels and the sounds of various instruments could be heard from the end of the street). Otherwise she walked up and down the wooden railing, yawning without discretion like a cat.

She was the only one in the theater's vestibule. The box office window was closed, and the box office deserted. The cartel of prices was glued to the glass of the window, and only in that moment seeing that billboard did Andrea remember that he needed to buy a ticket to enter the theater, and he didn't even have one dollar.

He advanced with a resolute step towards the girl, but despite his will to dominate, he trembled as if he were in the presence of the Pope.

"Is this the entrance?" He asked with such superiority that he could as well have been the owner of the theater and major theaters of the Continent himself.

"To enter, you need a ticket," the girl responded beyond the railing, "Do you have a ticket?"

Andrea turned a fiery red color and wrinkled his forehead.

"No? Then there's nothing to do. The vendor is closed!" declared the girl. Then, seeing Andrea's distraught yet obstinate expression, she suggested in a condescendingly protective tone: "And at this hour too, the purchase wouldn't be convenient either. The show finishes in forty minutes!"

Her tone offended Andrea. “I don’t care if it finishes in forty minutes,” he aggressively responded. “I am not at all someone from the public, if you will, I can enter without a ticket from the beginning of the performance!”

“And who are you to enter without a ticket? The Police? Who are you? The Chief Inspector?”

“Why do you care?”

“Me! Listen to this comedy! Why do I care! I care to have you know that to pass through here you need a ticket. You, if you don’t have a ticket, the favored price is one dollar and fifty cents. Now we shall see. Eh, this Gentleman must have left his wallet and checkbook at home.

“I know an artist in the theater, the lady Febea!”

“*You* know her! And the artist knows *you,* knows *you*, *you*?

“She knows me by heart, forever! Try to tell her that I’m here, and you will see if she doesn’t tell you to let me in right away and give me a seat in the first row!”

“Oh, I certainly believe you! I could see at first glance that you are a viverre. If only your singer thinks of you at this hour! I’ll give you some advice. Why don’t you present yourself upstairs to the artists’ dressing rooms? Then maybe your lady will send you back to me to console you by taking you to see *The Adventures of Mickey Mouse*.

“She gave me an appointment!”

“Ah! In that case don’t waste her breath too much. Listen, it’s not here you have to pass, but through the artist’s entrance, the first door on the left in the alley. There is a doorman that used to be a prison guard. He immediately understands the type of people

who have luck with the artists. He will let you go up without asking you for any information!

"I have an appointment!" Andrea, the enemy of all lies, lied again in a tone of arrogant protest.

"You're still insisting! *You* have an appointment! With *Lady Febea*! Is this why you dressed so elegantly tonight? You will clear out the theater! And you robbed you're fathers pants and the shirt of an American to come to an appointment!"

She, malignant as she was, perhaps had already gathered that he was a runaway, and maybe was even preparing to turn him in. All that remained was to get away, get away now!

Andrea's eyes latched onto the girl with one last contemptuous and fearless look, but at the same time she saw his chin tremble. It was almost taken as remorse, but it was too late to remedy at that point. That loudmouthed night owl turned her back without answering him anymore, and a second later she was gone.

Despite everything, deciding to find Febea when she exited from the theater's main entrance, Andrea turned left into a badly paved alley without lights when the doorman the girl had indicated immediately appeared. Only open at that time of night, he was able to see an old half-lit staircase at the back of an entrance hall; to the right of the hall behind a small broken glass door patched up with newspapers, he glimpsed a doorman-cobbler intent on beating shoe soles on a cubbyhole in the light of a lamp that hung down almost to his bench from the ceiling. The appearance of this man seemed frightening to Andrea.

He flattened himself against the wall of the building to the side of the doorman in hopes of remaining hidden from his view. He didn't have the spirit to present himself to that old prison guard; and now what to do? Wait, hidden there at the artists' exit in the alley? But Andrea was suspicious of the girl in the beret: was it not possible that she lied to him? That she directed him to this little door to trick him and free herself from him, or perhaps to lead him into a trap?

From the alley he saw the cobblestones of the adjacent piazza, on which the bright letters of the theater gave off a dim bluish light. An echo of sounds and songs emerged from inside the theater and Andrea, with a heart strangled by jealousy, compared the celebration raging behind those walls to the threatening darkness of the alley. There, no one passed except for a large sheep dog, perhaps strayed from her flock, which migrated out of the city. The dog instantly understood that Andrea wanted to remain hidden, without making him say so. Glancing up from barking and making noise, she turned around to him full of concern, almost as if offering him protection. And then she sat in front of him on her hind legs and remained there contemplating him in silence with an air of accomplice, cheerfully wagging her tail. Andrea thought, 'Maybe this dog would be as happy to have me as an owner as I would be to own it. We could be happy together! But it's impossible. We know nothing about each other, and soon we will be divided again, never seeing each other again!' He snapped his fingers without making a sound, and the dog, understanding his intention, approached him and bowed her large white head to be caressed. Then she urgently and lovingly licked Andrea's hand, which seemed to be her greeting: in fact, just after she disappeared into the night, called by her unknown duties.

Her departure left Andrea in an even more tormenting nostalgia. He thought of the priests, who, up there in school were awake in prayer in their cells. He thought of his friends, of which two or three of them in particular were more dear to him than the rest (nevertheless he had even kept his own escape plan hidden from them), and compared these simple relationships to the eternal, impossible bitterness that today was hiding under the fake name of: Febea! A savage sentiment of condemnation obscured his mind like a bandit without the promise of a ransom. At that point he heard a single told from the bell tower: it was less than five minutes until eleven thirty! After a quarter of an hour the show was finished, and Andrea was seized by a fear that the artists could exit through another part of the theater outside of his view. He threw a sideways look to the illuminated lodge: the porter-cobbler was curved over his workbench, a couple of tacks between pursed lips intent on beating a shoe sole. Without any hesitation Andrea quickly snuck into the lobby, and remained still for an instant as he reached the stairs, holding his breath. There was no sign of life from the lodge: the porter didn't see him!

Andrea ran up the staircase, hoping to discover a way to the artists' dressing rooms. As soon as he reached the first landing, he saw the light filter towards an exit left ajar. He banged the doorknocker, and found himself in a badly lit room with a high ceiling and hardwood floors. There he found a motorcycle leaned against the wall; an overturned extinguished spotlight lay on a pile of boards; some sort of enormous cardboard screen with a couple of dragons painted on it; and a square wooden turret about three meters tall, and devoid of a side, which had a little red flag hoisted on top inscribed with eastern characters.

The large room appeared to be deserted, but behind a partition he heard an invisible worker beating a hammer. These providential hammers covered the sound of Andrea's footsteps, which arrived unnoticed at the end of the large room. Here, he reached the front of a great door with a lowered shutter, beyond which he heard voices. While the left side offered up a small bridge of sloping tables rose up into a loft. Avoiding the large door, Andrea urgently pushed himself up to the loft where, through a little door lined with cork that opened without a noise, he found himself suspended on a narrow ledge between two wooden stepladders: the first going up, and the second going down. Relying on fate he took the second, and at this point began to distinctly hear the syncopated singing of a woman, a sound of instruments and confused buzz.

He was so taken by an extraordinary commotion that his strength almost abandoned him. Descending, he encountered two doors that were painted green. The one that seemed to be closed from the inside didn't bear any sign. The other, at the very bottom of the stairs, which had two shutters that were drawn closed, bore a sign with the word *Silence* printed on it.

He crept through the two shutters, and there, below him, only a few fleece stairs away, his gaze embrace the entire show room!

His first instinct was to back away. But nobody took interest in him. With eyes lowered, he quickly walked down the steps and immediately found am empty chair to sneak into at the edge of the row. His neighbor, a robust man in shirtsleeves, barely gave him a look of indifference.

The air in the crowded audience was muggy, dense with cigarette smoke, and there were no lights except for the scene which lit the entire theater with its splendor all

the way to the last row of chairs. For more than a minute, Andrea didn't dare raise his eyes towards the scene. At that luminous point a woman alternated the movements of a dance with measures of singing, and he recognized that voice not by its inflections, which escaped him, but for a sort of alarm that his heart gave him when he first heard it. It was the dual sentiment of a happy possibility, and of a cruel denial: too well known to him from his first years to make mistakes. Andrea asked himself in confusion what this could mean, since his mother was a ballerina, not a singer: she never told him that she sang in the theater!

When he finally dared to look straight at the scene he had no more doubts. And there, he felt the horrible return of his ancient bitterness that he perhaps presumed to have tamed somewhat! Alone on the stage was his mother—Febea: never before loved so much, and never so unattainable as now!

In a gown of elegance never seen before, one that not even the richest women on Earth are allowed to wear, but only to imaginary people from paintings or poetry. Followed in every one of her movements by large circles of light flashing only to magnify her and make her sunken eyes blaze and look enormous! She is the supreme gala of nighttime celebrations; her mysterious name is the pride of the streets and piazzas. Could any other artist stand next to her in comparison? None of the other singers and dancers in the theater's portrayals interested Andreuccio. He barely gave them a glanced at Febea's poor satellites, effigies of Febea, like the sun she occupies the center of the posters! She is the unparalleled aspiration of men and women; even if merely from the distance of the theater hall, without so much as a personal greeting! And who is among all of them Andrea? An intruder, who could be thrown out from the theater for not having

bought a ticket. Certainly no one would believe him (and he would be mocked by everyone, like just a moment ago by the girl with the beret) if he said that, up until a few years ago, he lived under the same roof as Febea. That, until a few months ago, she came to visit him in school and received cards and letters from her! A similar past now seemed equally mythical to him. That marvelous artist (he didn't dare think of her as his mother anymore), by now she had forgotten about him for months, she didn't respond to his letters anymore, and she didn't even try to look for him here, in the same town where he lives! After all, it's a thousand times better like this; he wants it to be like this. He himself rejected this woman, he himself refused to go out for a walk with her, because he wanted to be done with a similar mother! His real enemy was her excessive splendor that overflowed from the house and illuminated everyone, while he would have wanted her for himself alone. It finished like this. It's finished; Andrea Campese is the son of no one.

And how could he lie without shame, saying to the girl with the little beret that he had an appointment with Febea! He knew all too well to lie not only in regards to the truth, but also in regards to the possible! At this point it's as clear as day that Febea (such is her disregard towards Andrea Campese), even if implored, would have refused to grant him an appointment, and now if called by the girl with the beret to testify, she would be quick to deny his boasts; and she would be fiercely annoyed to find out that, in the theater, there was an indiscreet disguised little priest; and if someone announced to her in her dressing room: 'There's an Andrea here outside who came to find you', she would say: 'Who? Andrea? I've never heard of him. Tell him *that I'll not see him*, and make sure he leaves'.

At this point in his considerations, before the curtains had even been lowered, Andrea resolutely decided to leave the theater in a hurry without looking for his mother or letting her know that he had been there, and again run through the streets and the farmland, only at night, all the way back to school. If his escape was discovered and the fathers decided to expel him as a consequence, he would go to Sicily and present himself to a bandit boss to be a part of his mob.

It pains me, specifically in these instances of cruelty, he who, while sitting in that usurped chair from the Theater Gloria, had presumed, only moments ago, to be on the path of sanctity.

Imaginations, possessing his mind, took such a cruel influence that he began to sob. He realized at once with great shame that he was not even conscious of the first time he abandoned himself to a similar weakness. Almost in the same moment, an insulting laugh arose from his neighbor, and he naturally figured that to have provoked him with his dishonorable sobbing. However, a thousand other laughs of the same tone resounded from every part of the theater. Was it possible that the entire public was aware of his dishonor? In truth, no one paid attention to Andrea Campese. A growing rumble spread through the theater, from the back trivial phrases were yelled and, soon, in the stormy rumbling, the singer's voice was barely audible. Nevertheless, she continued to pretend nothing was happening, moving and singing her measures according to the rhythms of the orchestra, who continued to play. On his end Andrea was late to understand what was happening. He heard another man yell: "Enough!" and another, "Enough! Go to sleep!" "Go dress yourself!" "Go back home and wash your face!" "Enough! Enough!" The artist's fearful little voice couldn't be heard anymore under the whistles and hisses, and

only now did Andrea realize that the object of those terrible assaults was Febea! He leapt from his chair, and in that exact moment he saw the pianist down in the orchestra, his arms abandoned at his sides in a resigned attitude. In turn the violinist rose, and in an almost angry gesture put the bow and violin down on the chair, while the saxophonist stopped blowing and remained there suspended on his instrument with a questioning expression. Only the drummer continued to beat the plate of the drum and push the pedal of the tambourine for some moments as if enraptured by his own racket.

For a few moments Febea remained speechless and immobile in the middle of the scene: then she suddenly turned away and quickly disappeared backstage. Immediately the curtain lowered and the lights of the theater were relit, while the audience in unison raised an exclamation of conspicuous relief more offensive that all the preceding insults. His face dark, Andrea, shaking with anger, clenched his fists in a confused will to confront someone from the audience and kill him! But he found himself squeezed and pushed by a crowd that blocked the pathways towards the exits.

With a violent rage he defended himself from the crowd until he was among the last isolated in the half empty parterre. Under the low ceiling of the theater the light of the electric lamp put the ugly varnish of the walls, pretending to be a yellowish marble, on display. The dusty opaque hardwood floor was strewn with litter and cigarette butts, and the deserted orchestra with scattered chairs in disorder around the closed piano and drums.

On the orchestra's side a wooden stepladder lead to the stage. Andrea rushed up the ladder, pulled back the curtain and walked across the set. Two workers disassembling the sets yelled to him,

"Hey you, what are you looking for?" He shrugged his shoulders, and running bumped into a group of girls dressed as sailors, posing for photos in the light of the blinding a spotlight.

"Hey, why the hurry! Watch where you're walking!" the girls protested, and the irritated photographer exclaimed that he had ruined the picture and threw insults behind him. Finally, running at random through a disorder of empty boxes full of boards and wooden backdrops, he found on that same narrow ledge where he had descended in the theater. A girl with large black hat and naked legs came down the stairs.

"Please," he asked, "the lady Campese?"

"Who?"

"The lady…Febea?"

"Ah, Febea! Go up these stairs, she's in her dressing room."

At the top of the stairs in the dressing room corridor a little group of people had collected that Andrea saw confused, too upset to observe or listen to their conversations. However a number of sentences reached his ears, which, as it happens, only a few days later had to return to his mind and explain their meaning.

"Cry."

"Oh, yes sorry, but she should know! She hasn't found anyone who would tell her? Doesn't she look in the mirror? With those deformed thighs that look like a cow's, and those two little skeleton legs, she shows up in a skin-tight silk shirt for *classical*

dance as if she were *Tumanova!*[16] She doesn't have pitch, she has a voice that scrapes like a cicada, and insists on singing!"

"*Returned from Vienese triumphs!* Well, apparently the Vienese need to learn a lot!"

"Poor thing wants to do the dragonfly with that weight and at that age!"

"How old is she?"

"They say thirty-seven…"

"She would maybe be more suitable for some *sketch*, some comedic role…"

Andrea abruptly reproached someone of color, "Please, the lady Febea?" He was directed to a little illuminated door at the end of the corridor. Approaching, Andrea heard the sound of sobbing from inside. A small crowd of women obstructed the cramped room, and he pushed his way through them with force, as if in a piazza the day of a revolution.

Surrounded by many women (some artists and some servants) in the middle of a pile of rags at a miserable vanity full of disorder and filth sat his mother (usually so dignified!), shamelessly sobbing with a frantic passion, like the peasants of southern Italy. At the same time, she ripped flashy combs from her hair and jewels from her body, repeating: "Enough, enough, it's over."

"Mamma!" Andrea shouted.

From under disheveled hair that hung down over her face she stared at him, her beautiful tempestuous eyes clouded by black makeup, as if she didn't recognize him right

[16] Tamara Toumanova was a famous Russian-born American prima ballerina and actress, and was officially discovered by the American choreographer and founder of the New York City Ballet.

away. Then, he saw her face transform underneath the mask of makeup, and in a sharp voice full of carnal love (the typical voice of Sicilian mothers) she yelled:

"My Andreuccio!"

He threw himself into her arms and began to cry with such violence he didn't think he could stop. At last he remembered to be a man, and swallowing his cries he separated himself from her. Experiencing great shame for having abandoned himself that way in the presence of so many unknown women, he turned away from their threatening gazes, as if he intended to exterminate them all.

His mother looked at him with a intoxicated laugh:

"But how did you do it! How can you be here!?"

Shrugging a shoulder he said:

"I ran away."

"You ran away from School! And… your robe?"

He shrugged his shoulder again, and a tuft of hair fell over his eyes. Then, with a carefree smile he put his hands in the pockets of his pants.

In defense from the all the other women's curiosity he didn't look them in the face, eyeing them instead with lowered eyelids and an expression of arrogance and petulance. His mother gazed at him as if he were a hero, or a partisan who had passed the enemy lines.

"You ran away from school…to come here to me!?"

"Of course."

The surrounding women made loud clamoring comments. He furrowed his brows, and above his wrinkle of meditation the wrinkle of severity deeply marked his forehead.

"Saint! My blessed angel! My heart!" his mother exclaimed, kissing his hands.

She feverishly cleansed her face with a washcloth soaked in face cream. Then she hid behind a curtain to take off the little double-layered tulle skirt, the bust made of precious stones, the silk shirt that covered her entire body like a large sock, and put on her respectable black gown, covering her hair with a veil. Once she finished, she began to gather (from behind the curtain, the coat rack and wicker basket placed under the mirror) several skirts, tutus, feathers, jewels, putting everything haphazardly into a suitcase saying:

"Enough. Tomorrow I will not perform. You can tell the company. Goodbye." In saying so she had the royal and capricious manner of a prima donna, and pronounced the word *Company* with a contemptuous smirk, as if referring to some vulgar people incapable of appreciating true art. Now let's omit two or three little malicious and wicked phrases that some of her colleagues in the dressing room gave in response, and of which (like her malignant comments first heard in the corridor) Andrea's mind would later return to.

Acknowledging all the women there she took Andrea's hand and lead him outside and down the stairs towards the street. However, in the commotion of that moment Andrea felt like he was being treated like a child, and released his hand from hers. Then, scowling, he took the suitcase she held to her right to carry it himself. Not only did she promptly surrender the suitcase, but also, then leaned on his arm with an marvelous insight!

This time the prison guard-doorman raised his eyes at their passing, but Andrea passed in front of the lodge with an expression so defiant that, if he harbored any remnant

of human dignity, he must have felt himself burn, ashamed of his past and the thousands of times he had closed a cell door with the sinister clink of the keys.

"Cab!" Giuditta cried as soon as they were in the small piazza. Immediately, at the obliging lash of the driver, a beautiful paint horse bearing a bell around its neck moved towards our two passengers. Giuditta appeared completely healed of the pain from just a moment ago. Exhilarated, she was more enthusiastic than Andrea had ever seen her, sitting next to him in the carriage rightly holding his arm she said to him:

"Ah, my dear knight, angel of my heart, what a precious gift you gave me tonight!" She gave the driver the address of her hotel, deciding that Andreuccio must sleep with her tonight, and she herself had thought to account for his whereabouts with the priests the morning after. But then Andrea remembered his duty, namely his promise to Anacleto and Arcangelo Giovina, to bring their clothes back to the stable before one in the morning.

"Well, I'll go with you," said Giuditta. "The carriage will bring us as far as possible, and I'll wait for you there with the suitcase until you get back from the stable. Then we will go to the hotel."

And the carriage, announced by its cheerful bell, passed through the same streets that Andrea, watchful as a thief, had traveled through an hour ago, and with only the sad doubt (rather, near certainty) that he was no longer loved!

How absurd such a doubt seemed now, that shame who's black shadow distanced its spectral company beyond the starry horizon of that wonderful night!

At the end of one lane the carriage couldn't go forward anymore, and Andrea, together with his mother, got down to reach the cabin by foot where he had hidden his robe.

Rapidly advancing through the tall un-mowed grass, they frightened away a young frog, whose tiny hopping shadow reappeared in a nearby path. And Andrea instantly thought: 'Of course, now he will return to the pond where his mother, the Frog, is waiting for him.' Not only the peaceful fields, mountains and sleeping land, but even the sky seemed like affectionate rooms, where happy families, like he himself was happy in that moment, gathered. Ursa Major[17] in the sky with its thousand daughters, and near the river a family of poplars, and there, near a small rock, a large rock resembling a sheep with its lamb. Soon they were at the hut, where Andrea, stripping of his bourgeois/civil clothing, started to put on his robe. But Giuditta, whose face saddened at the sight of that black garment, dissuaded him with fair arguments from dressing as a young priest that night. And since Andrea had nothing to wear, removing his loaned clothes, she covered him in a large Andalusian shawl, part of her theater costume that she carried draped over her arm because she hadn't found room for in her suitcase. Still (she argued to convince her son), from the shed to the stable he couldn't run into anyone; they would make the coachman believe that fallen into the pond, accidentally drenching his clothes. And at this hour they wouldn't find the doorman at the hotel (half asleep in the dark entrance behind his desk); who, accustomed to the coming and going of actors, would certainly not care about the passage of an Andalusian shawl, and would perhaps mistake Andrea for a girl.

[17] Ursa Major is a constellation also known as the Big Dipper.

Giuditta remained waiting near the shed while Andrea, wrapped in the immense Andalusian shawl, ran towards Anacleto's stable. In accordance with their promise, he left the borrowed clothes inside, draped across the window grating, without waking the sleepers. Truthfully, her shawl was so silly looking that he was very tempted to wake up Anacleto and his friend: just the thought of being seen by them disguised like that made him laugh. But, reluctantly, he gave up the idea. In the stable the lamp had been shut off, and from the peaceful darkness in the familiar odor of horse hay and straw rose a masculine and funny snore: 'of course it's the soldier', thought Andrea. He then heard a slight rumble: 'Anacleto must be dreaming'. Then he felt a sigh, barely a breath, Andrea imagined it was the foal.

"Thank you, Anacleto," he murmured, "Thank you Giovina. Sleep well everyone, even you, horses. Goodnight." And after this goodbye he ran again across the fields in the large Andalusian shawl towards his waiting mother.

No explanation was necessary: that, in fact, neither the coachman, nor the night porter of the hotel showed any curiosity for Andrea and his shawl. In truth, both accustomed to serving actors, they should have an inclination towards characters and comedy of all kinds by now. The hotel, which was more or less an inn, was called *Hotel Caruso,* and was owned by a Neapolitan man who had adorned every room with some colorful painting of Vesuvius, or a cheerful illustration of the Tarantella.[18] Giuditta's room (furnished with a few matching pieces of furniture in a style that seemed whimsical and modern thirty or forty years ago), like all of the other hotel rooms, came with two small beds. But Giuditta alone occupied it out of decorum, not wanting to share it with

[18] A fast paced spinning dance originating in Southern Italy, the name Tarantella translates to Tarantula in English.

anyone. Between the two small beds on the unfinished floor (the building was ancient) lay a little faded bedside rug with diamond and argyle patterns. The only lamp, hanging from the ceiling, gave off a faint light, continuously flickering on and off due to the broken switch, which was nailed to the wall and hung down by a thread. In one corner of the room there was a sink with cold running water, equipped with a wet towel bearing the words *Hotel Caruso* printed in black letters. One wall was adorned with a colorful painting depicting a smoking Vesuvius in the background, and, in the foreground, a nice looking old man with Moses-like beard and a red sash for a belt, gazing at the smoking volcano and smoked a pipe all alone with obvious pleasure.

The bare window looked out onto a peaceful courtyard where the soft sound of water could be heard together with the voices of cats living on the roofs.

Giuditta fluffed and carefully remade one of the two small beds for Andrea. And as soon as she saw him there, tucked into bed, she curled up on the bedside rug at his feet like a dog, and watching with an indescribable tenderness and loyalty exclaimed:

"My beautiful eyes, holy eyes, stars of your mother, ah, seeing you here in this room, in this bed, seems like a dream to me! My Lady, is this not a dream?" And she rubbed her eyes to reassure herself that she was awake: this act erupted into crying, and smiling at the same time, she said passionately:

"Andreuccio, do you want to make a covenant between us tonight? Do you want to hear my plan for the future? I'm going to retire from the theater forever, and you will leave the school. We will return to Rome, to our Lauretta, and to our home. I still have a little income from Palermo, and I will help by giving a few dance lessons as long as you

two are still in school. You and Lauretta with enroll in High School in Rome, and the three of us will live together, and you will be the head of the family.

Andrea experienced such an emotion of joy in response to this discussion that shivered from head to toe:

"You," he asked, "You won't return to the theater anymore?"

"Never again," she declared, scornfully wrinkling her forehead, and contemplating between sobs and wringing hands for fear that he would refuse the agreement, "Never again if you want. But you won't leave me alone? Will you give up the school, give up becoming a priest? Yes? Do you say yes? Yes? Yes?

He stared at her with a diligent and severe expression; then he said, nodding:

"Of course if we go back home, we will need a head of the family!"

Giuditta grabbed his hand and covered it in kisses. In that moment (she later told him), he had assumed a typically Sicilian air: of those severe Sicilian men of honor, always attentive to their sisters who never leave the house alone at night, who don't seduce lovers, who don't use lipstick! And for those men *madre*[19] means two things: *old woman* and *saint*. The appropriate color of a mother's clothes is black, or, at most, grey or brown. Their clothing is shapeless, so that no one, starting with the mothers' seamstresses, will think that a mother has a woman's body. Their age is a mystery without importance, so much so that their only age is old age. Such shapeless old age has holy eyes that don't cry for themselves, but for their sons; has holy lips that recite prays not for themselves, but for their sons. And woe is he who, in front of those sons, pronounces the holy name of their mothers in vain! Woe! It is a mortal offense!

---

[19] Mother

The great bargain concluded, Giuditta lingered with Andrea to make plans for the future. To begin, it was established that first thing the next morning she would go to the school to communicate to the fathers her son's decision not to return anymore. Then, she would go in a hurry to purchase civilian clothes, fit and tailored, for Andrea. Which, other than the robe and small linen he wore as a child that were now too small, he did not posses any other clothing on this earth since he entered school.

Andrea couldn't get out of bed until his mother returned from those errands because of the lack of clothes with which to cover himself. But she was certain to be quick enough that she would find him still sleeping when she returned.

All Giuditta's discourses were interrupted by an arrogant feminine voice that, from the other room energetically punching against the communal door, admonished: "Hey, people! It's three o'clock! When will you let us sleep?"

Giuditta burned with distain, and leaping towards the door burst out: "Ah, look who's protesting! You, who for the entire afternoon didn't let me rest for one minute with your attempts at warbling! And last night! Best not to mention it! I had to cover my ears for the shame! Them! Those two are really simpering!

A rumbling came from the next room, then some whispered laughing, and a feminine voice different from before yelled in a teasing a note:

"The Viennese triumph!"

Giuditta remained hesitant for a moment, as if she were at the point of hurling herself against the door; but restrained herself, and instead launched this one word at her invisible opponent, whose insulting intention (undoubtedly, judging from the tone) remains absolutely mysterious:

"Tenor!"

She then shut off the light, and after having undressed in the dark she curled up in her bed.

A minute later, hearing short moans and broken breaths, Andrea moved his lips, imagining himself saying:

"Mamma, don't cry."

But in reality he didn't speak a word because in that same instant he fell asleep. He reawakened suddenly after maybe just an hour (dawn had not broken yet). It was the thought of God that woke him. He remembered that he hadn't said his prayers before going to sleep or at all that night, not even for one instant, not even with just a thought, had he asked God's forgiveness for the horrible infractions committed. Now he dared neither repent nor pray: by now he was a deserter, he had renounced the conquest of Heaven! And he thought he saw the celestial Militia: immense armed fleet, gleaming steel, holy wings and flags, push away and disappear like the clouds, leaving the traitor Campese on the Earth! Andrea cried painfully at this imagination of nostalgia and remorse. The day began to break, and at the first light an ample black piece of cloth hanging from the window grip appeared through his tears: it was the Andalusian shawl, which appeared as the very image of his shame. He had to have completely lost his sense of honor that night to cover himself in a similar humiliating rag without feeling shame, rather even with a certain enthusiasm. But overpowered by anguish and exhaustion, he fell back asleep.

Giuditta woke him when she returned (it was late morning), happy to have completed her errands. The nightmare of dawn had vanished. She brought him a

complete outfit, purchased in the most elegant shop in the city: a *man's* suit, definitely of a perfect masculine shape in the finishing and cut: with long pants and summer jacket with just one button, and well padded shoulders. Insight and fortune had helped Giuditta so that the size of the suit mirrored Andrea's body, and there was no need to retouch a fold or a seam. A miraculous providence had even helped her find a small white silk shirt equipped with a collar and cuffs, which seemed cut just for Andrea. And, naturally she had not forgotten the tie, striped red and turquoise, which on the reverse bore a satin yellow label (to purchase all this elegance Giuditta had to sell her own gold trousse).

Once all dressed up, Andrea put his hands in his pockets and discovered that both his jacket pockets contained a surprise. In one was a boar skin wallet, and in the other a pack of American cigarettes!

Andrea blushed with satisfaction, and turned a smile of pride and immense gratitude towards Giuditta!

Afterwards, and within a few months, these memories had to decay, spoil. Giuditta and Andrea's reciprocal covenant was respected; their plans were carried out. But not much time had passed, and Andrea began to understand that his agreement with Giuditta, and his entire previous life had hidden a deception from him. In reality, his mother hadn't left the theater for her love of Andrea, but because no other possible way remained for her, and certainly she had been preparing a similar solution for quite some time. The determining failure of that famous night was perhaps more bitter than others, but it was certainly not the first. Now, every one of Giuditta's evenings in any city or theater finished in failure and mortification: here's the truth; even the most modest

provincial managers often refused her opportunity for work. She had failed as a classical dancer and was not suitable for *variety shows* and *revues*. In the end, Giuditta had sacrificed nothing for Andrea that night, and had only used him because the theater had rejected her.

This first bitterness for Andrea was almost like a sorceress with a mirror in which, little by little, the true shapes of all his illusions became apparent. Little by little he understood that his mother was not only never the famous artist he had imagined as a child, but she was never even a misunderstood artist, or an artist at all. The scandalous failure of that last night was not (as he childishly assumed) the monstrously unprecedented effect of provincial ignorance. The public of that small city was certainly ignorant, rough and stupid, but no public in the world could admire Giuditta Campese, who possessed only ambition but no talent. At this point Andrea recalled the malignant words heard that night in the dressing room corridor of theater. He had heard those words, but like a solder preparing for an ambush, as soon as he heard them, they had scurried into a hiding place in his mind, from where they reappeared to suddenly attack him. Andrea heard them again, one by one, and learned that they were for his mother. They were hateful words, cruel enemies from which he wanted to defend himself; but in the end, did they lie? Be careful Andrea, be honest, what response can you give? Were those words *lying*? No, they were telling the truth! Giuditta Campese was no longer a beautiful woman. Perhaps she was never very beautiful, but now she was finished, an old lady.

For these reasons, he pitied and forgave her. But forgiveness born from compassion is a poor relative of forgiveness that is born of love.

Giuditta the dancer's transformation into a mother was unbelievable, like a miracle. Now Giuditta resembled a true Sicilian mother who cloisters herself at home, and never sees the sun in order to not overshadow her children. Sicilian mothers eat dry bread, and leave the sugar for her children. They go around town disheveled, but have an extremely delicate little hand to make curls on the foreheads of their children. They dress in tattered corduroy like witches, but elegantly address their children as *Madam* and *Milord*!

But Andrea was not grateful for all of this. He looked at her with eyes full of indifference and melancholy.

He is nervous, reserved, and being the head of the family is not important to him. Rather, he seemed almost ashamed of having a family. He did not worry about surveilling his sister; if she was invited to a party or reception, he refused to accompany her. He never went to church, and he had even taken down the painting of the Sacred Heart from the head of his bed.

Recently, he had grown even more, and was already taller than Giuditta. He is thin, and a little awkward in his gestures. His cheeks were no longer tender and smooth like before. And his voice, which until a few months ago was delicate like a bird's, became tuneless and coarse.

Giuditta's little ballerinas arrive for dance lessons: he doesn't even look them in the face, and scornful and annoyed, he leaves. He spends many hours outside the house. Where does he go? Who does he meet? It's a mystery. A woman, the mother of one of Giuditta's students, in confidence confessed to Giuditta that she often sees her son in a café in the outskirts, *with a gang of fanatic and seditious youngsters.*

Giuditta, too submissive, does not dare question Andrea. She is proud of her son, in her heart he does no wrong, and she is convinced that he is destined for something great.

Andrea often imagines the future like a kind of grand Opera Theater, in which a mysterious unknown crowd wanders behind its doors. But the character among all the mysterious people, still unknown to him is one: Andrea Campese! How will he be? He would like to imagine his future self, indulging in invoking the victorious and dazzling traits, the triumphs and boldness of the Unknown! But no matter how much he drives this image away, he always finds it there, like a statue, always the same, unwelcome:

a sad, fierce Hero

wrapped in an Andalusian Shawl.

Works Consulted

Benjamin, Walter. "The Task of the Translator." 1913-1926. *Selected Writings*. Ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings. Vol. 1. London: Harvard University Press, 1996. 253-63. Print.

Brand, Peter, and Lino Pertile. "Neo-realism." *The Cambridge History of Italian Literature*. Ed. Brand and Pertile. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997. Print.

The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica. "Elsa Morante." *Encyclopaedia Brittanica*. Encyclopædia Britannica, 17 Apr. 2015. Web. 26 Apr. 2016. <http://www.britannica.com/biography/Elsa-Morante>.

- - -. "Neorealism." *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. Encyclopaedia Britannica, 23 Mar. 2016. Web. 26 Apr. 2016. <http://www.britannica.com/art/Neorealism-Italian-art>.

- - -. "Tamara Vladimirovna Toumanova." *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. Encyclopaedia Britannica, n.d. Web. 26 Apr. 2016. <http://www.britannica.com/biography/Tamara-Vladimirovna-Toumanova>.

Elsa Morante.mp4. *YouTube*. Google, 3 June 2012. Web. 28 Apr. 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6m7NXaH67-Q>.

Freud, Sigmund. *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*. Trans. James Strachey. New York: Norton, 1966. Print.

Lauter, Paul. "Race and Gender in the Shaping of the American Literary Canon: A Case Study from the Twenties." *Feminist Studies*. 3rd ed. Vol. 9. N.p.: Feminist

Studies, 1983. 435-63. *JSTOR*. Web. 2 May 2016. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3177608>.

Morante, Elsa. *La Storia*. Torino: Einaudi, 1974. Print.

- - -. *L'isola di Arturo*. Torino: Einaudi, 1957. Print.

- - -. *Lo Scialle Andaluso*. Torino: Einaudi, 1963. Print.

- - -. *Pro o Contro la Bomba Atomica e altri scritti*. Milano: Adelphi Edizioni, 1987. Print.

Riding, Alan. "Her Story." *The New York Times*. New York Times, 14 Sept. 2008. Web. 26 Apr. 2016. <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/09/14/books/review/Riding-t.html?_r=0>.

Weaver, William. "The Process of Translation." 1989. *The Craft of Translation*. Ed. John Biguenet and Rainer Schulte. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1989. 117-24. Print.