

Popes, Plagues, and Politics on the Written Page:
A Literary Tour of Italian History

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Fall 2018 Course Reader

Cantico delle creature (Canticle of the Sun), 1224
St. Francis of Assisi

(Text reproduced from <http://www2.webster.edu/~barrettb/canticle.htm>)

Most high, all powerful, all good Lord! All praise is yours, all glory, all honor, and all blessing. To you, alone, Most High, do they belong. No mortal lips are worthy to pronounce your name.

Be praised, my Lord, through all your creatures, especially through my lord Brother Sun, who brings the day; and you give light through him. And he is beautiful and radiant in all his splendor! Of you, Most High, he bears the likeness.

Be praised, my Lord, through Sister Moon and the stars; in the heavens you have made them, precious and beautiful.

Be praised, my Lord, through Brothers Wind and Air, and clouds and storms, and all the weather, through which you give your creatures sustenance.

Be praised, My Lord, through Sister Water; she is very useful, and humble, and precious, and pure.

Be praised, my Lord, through Brother Fire, through whom you brighten the night. He is beautiful and cheerful, and powerful and strong.

Be praised, my Lord, through our sister Mother Earth, who feeds us and rules us, and produces various fruits with colored flowers and herbs.

Be praised, my Lord, through those who forgive for love of you; through those who endure sickness and trial. Happy those who endure in peace, for by you, Most High, they will be crowned.

Be praised, my Lord, through our Sister Bodily Death, from whose embrace no living person can escape. Woe to those who die in mortal sin! Happy those she finds doing your most holy will. The second death can do no harm to them.

Praise and bless my Lord, and give thanks, and serve him with great humility.

La divina commedia (The Divine Comedy), 1308-1321
Dante Alighieri

(Excerpts reproduced from the Online Library of Liberty at oll.libertyfund.org)

Inferno: Canto I

Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita
mi ritrovai per una selva oscura
che' la diritta via era smarrita.

Ahi quanto a dir qual era e` cosa dura
esta selva selvaggia e aspra e forte
che nel pensier rinova la paura!

Tant'e` amara che poco e` piu` morte;
ma per trattar del ben ch'i' vi trovai,
diro` de l'altre cose ch'i' v'ho scorte.

Io non so ben ridir com'i' v'intrai,
tant'era pien di sonno a quel punto
che la verace via abbandonai.

Ma poi ch'i' fui al pie` d'un colle giunto,
la` dove terminava quella valle
che m'avea di paura il cor compunto,

guardai in alto, e vidi le sue spalle
vestite gia` de' raggi del pianeta
che mena dritto altrui per ogne calle.

English translation by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow:

Midway upon the journey of our life
I found myself within a forest dark,
For the straightforward pathway had been lost.

Ah me! how hard a thing it is to say
What was this forest savage, rough, and stern,
Which in the very thought renews the fear.

So bitter is it, death is little more;
But of the good to treat, which there I found,
Speak will I of the other things I saw there.

I cannot well repeat how there I entered,
So full was I of slumber at the moment
In which I had abandoned the true way.

But after I had reached a mountain's foot,
At that point where the valley terminated,
Which had with consternation pierced my heart,

Upward I looked, and I beheld its shoulders,
Vested already with that planet's rays
Which leadeth others right by every road.

Then was the fear a little quieted
That in my heart's lake had endured throughout
The night, which I had passed so piteously.

And even as he, who, with distressful breath,
Forth issued from the sea upon the shore,
Turns to the water perilous and gazes;

So did my soul, that still was fleeing onward,
Turn itself back to re-behold the pass
Which never yet a living person left.

After my weary body I had rested,
The way resumed I on the desert slope,
So that the firm foot ever was the lower.

And lo! almost where the ascent began,
A panther light and swift exceedingly,
Which with a spotted skin was covered o'er!

And never moved she from before my face,
Nay, rather did impede so much my way,
That many times I to return had turned.

The time was the beginning of the morning,
And up the sun was mounting with those stars
That with him were, what time the Love Divine

At first in motion set those beauteous things;
So were to me occasion of good hope,
The variegated skin of that wild beast,

The hour of time, and the delicious season;
But not so much, that did not give me fear
A lion's aspect which appeared to me.

He seemed as if against me he were coming
With head uplifted, and with ravenous hunger,
So that it seemed the air was afraid of him;

And a she-wolf, that with all hungerings
Seemed to be laden in her meagreness,
And many folk has caused to live forlorn!

She brought upon me so much heaviness,
With the affright that from her aspect came,
That I the hope relinquished of the height.

And as he is who willingly acquires,
And the time comes that causes him to lose,
Who weeps in all his thoughts and is despondent,

E'en such made me that beast withouten peace,
Which, coming on against me by degrees
Thrust me back thither where the sun is silent.

While I was rushing downward to the lowland,
Before mine eyes did one present himself,
Who seemed from long-continued silence hoarse.

When I beheld him in the desert vast,
"Have pity on me," unto him I cried,
"Whiche'er thou art, or shade or real man!"

He answered me: "Not man; man once I was,
And both my parents were of Lombardy,
And Mantuans by country both of them.

'Sub Julio' was I born, though it was late,
And lived at Rome under the good Augustus,
During the time of false and lying gods.

A poet was I, and I sang that just
Son of Anchises, who came forth from Troy,
After that Ilion the superb was burned.

But thou, why goest thou back to such annoyance?
Why climb'st thou not the Mount Delectable,
Which is the source and cause of every joy?"

"Now, art thou that Virgilius and that fountain
Which spreads abroad so wide a river of speech?"
I made response to him with bashful forehead.

"O, of the other poets honour and light,
Avail me the long study and great love
That have impelled me to explore thy volume!

Thou art my master, and my author thou,
Thou art alone the one from whom I took
The beautiful style that has done honour to me.

Behold the beast, for which I have turned back;
Do thou protect me from her, famous Sage,
For she doth make my veins and pulses tremble."

"Thee it behoves to take another road,"
Responded he, when he beheld me weeping,
"If from this savage place thou wouldst escape;

Because this beast, at which thou criest out,
Suffers not any one to pass her way,
But so doth harass him, that she destroys him;

And has a nature so malign and ruthless,
That never doth she glut her greedy will,
And after food is hungrier than before.

Many the animals with whom she weds,
And more they shall be still, until the Greyhound
Comes, who shall make her perish in her pain.

He shall not feed on either earth or pelf,
But upon wisdom, and on love and virtue;
'Twixt Feltra and Feltra shall his nation be;

Of that low Italy shall he be the saviour,
On whose account the maid Camilla died,
Euryalus, Turnus, Nisus, of their wounds;

Through every city shall he hunt her down,
Until he shall have driven her back to Hell,
There from whence envy first did let her loose.

Therefore I think and judge it for thy best
Thou follow me, and I will be thy guide,
And lead thee hence through the eternal place,

Where thou shalt hear the desperate lamentations,
Shalt see the ancient spirits disconsolate,
Who cry out each one for the second death;

And thou shalt see those who contented are
Within the fire, because they hope to come,
Whene'er it may be, to the blessed people;

To whom, then, if thou wishest to ascend,
A soul shall be for that than I more worthy;
With her at my departure I will leave thee;

Because that Emperor, who reigns above,
In that I was rebellious to his law,
Wills that through me none come into his city.

He governs everywhere, and there he reigns;
There is his city and his lofty throne;
O happy he whom thereto he elects!"

And I to him: "Poet, I thee entreat,
By that same God whom thou didst never know,
So that I may escape this woe and worse,

Thou wouldst conduct me there where thou hast said,
That I may see the portal of Saint Peter,
And those thou makest so disconsolate."

Then he moved on, and I behind him followed.

From Paradiso (Canto 33)

As the geometrician, who endeavours
To square the circle, and discovers not,
By taking thought, the principle he wants,

Even such was I at that new apparition;
I wished to see how the image to the circle
Conformed itself, and how it there finds place;

But my own wings were not enough for this,
Had it not been that then my mind there smote
A flash of lightning, wherein came its wish.

Here vigour failed the lofty fantasy:
But now was turning my desire and will,
Even as a wheel that equally is moved,

The Love which moves the sun and the other stars.

Il Decameron, 1348-1353
Giovanni Boccacio

(Excerpt reproduced from The Gutenberg Project at www.gutenberg.org, trans. John Payne.)

THE FOURTH STORY

Day the Sixth

**CHICHIBIO, COOK TO CURRADO GIANFIGLIAZZI, WITH A READY
WORD SPOKEN TO SAVE HIMSELF, TURNETH HIS MASTER'S
ANGER INTO LAUGHTER AND ESCAPETH THE PUNISHMENT
THREATENED HIM BY THE LATTER**

LAURETTA being silent and Nonna having been mightily commended of all, the queen charged Neifile to follow on, and she said, "Although, lovesome ladies, a ready wit doth often furnish folk with words both prompt and useful and goodly, according to the circumstances, yet fortune whiles cometh to the help of the fearful and putteth of a sudden into their mouths such answers as might never of malice aforethought be found of the speaker, as I purpose to show you by my story.

Currado Gianfigliuzzi, as each of you ladies may have both heard and seen, hath still been a noble citizen of our city, liberal and magnificent, and leading a knightly life, hath ever, letting be for the present his weightier doings, taken delight in hawks and hounds. Having one day with a falcon of his brought down a crane and finding it young and fat, he sent it to a good cook he had, a Venetian hight Chichibio, bidding him roast it for supper and dress it well. Chichibio, who looked the new-caught gull he was, trussed the crane and setting it to the fire, proceeded to cook it diligently. When it was all but done and gave out a very savoury smell, it chanced that a wench of the neighbourhood, Brunetta by name, of whom Chichibio was sore enamoured, entered the kitchen and smelling the crane and seeing it, instantly besought him to give her a thigh thereof. He answered her, singing, and said, 'Thou shalt not have it from me, Mistress Brunetta, thou shalt not have it from me.' Whereat she, being vexed, said to him, 'By God His faith, an thou give it me not, thou shalt never have of me aught that shall pleasure thee.' In brief, many were the words between them and at last, Chichibio, not to anger his mistress, cut off one of the thighs of the crane and gave it her.

The bird being after set before Messer Currado and certain stranger guests of his, lacking a thigh, and the former marvelling thereat, he let call Chichibio and asked him what was come of the other thigh; whereto the liar of a Venetian answered without hesitation, 'Sir, cranes have but one thigh and one leg.' 'What a devil?' cried Currado in a rage. 'They have but one thigh and one leg? Have I never seen a crane before?' 'Sir,' replied Chichibio, 'it is as I tell you, and³⁰² whenas it pleaseth you, I will cause you see it in the quick.' Currado, out of regard for the strangers he had with him, chose not to make more words of the matter, but said, 'Since thou sayst thou wilt cause me see it in the quick, a thing I never yet saw or heard tell of, I desire to see it to-morrow

morning, in which case I shall be content; but I swear to thee, by Christ His body, that, an it be otherwise, I will have thee served on such wise that thou shalt still have cause to remember my name to thy sorrow so long as thou livest.' There was an end of the talk for that night; but, next morning, as soon as it was day, Currado, whose anger was nothing abated for sleep, arose, still full of wrath, and bade bring the horses; then, mounting Chichibio upon a rouncey, he carried him off towards a watercourse, on whose banks cranes were still to be seen at break of day, saying, 'We shall soon see who lied yestereve, thou or I.'

Chichibio, seeing that his master's wrath yet endured and that needs must be made good his lie and knowing not how he should avail thereunto, rode after Currado in the greatest fright that might be, and fain would he have fled, so but he might. But, seeing no way of escape, he looked now before him and now behind and now on either side and took all he saw for cranes standing on two feet. Presently, coming near to the river, he chanced to catch sight, before any other, of a round dozen of cranes on the bank, all perched on one leg, as they use to do, when they sleep; whereupon he straightway showed them to Currado, saying, 'Now, sir, if you look at those that stand yonder, you may very well see that I told you the truth yesternight, to wit, that cranes have but one thigh and one leg.' Currado, seeing them, answered, 'Wait and I will show thee that they have two,' and going somewhat nearer to them, he cried out, 'Ho! Ho!' At this the cranes, putting down the other leg, all, after some steps, took to flight; whereupon Currado said to him, 'How sayst thou now, malapert knave that thou art? Deemest thou they have two legs?' Chichibio, all confounded and knowing not whether he stood on his head or his heels, answered, 'Ay, sir; but you did not cry, "Ho! Ho!" to yesternight's crane; had you cried thus, it would have put out the other thigh and the other leg, even as did those yonder.' This reply so tickled Currado that all his wrath was changed into mirth and laughter and he said, 'Chichibio, thou art in the right; indeed, I should have done it.' Thus, then, with his prompt and comical answer did Chichibio avert ill luck and made his peace with his master."

THE FIFTH STORY

Day the Fourth

LISABETTA'S BROTHERS SLAY HER LOVER, WHO APPEARETH TO HER IN A DREAM AND SHOWETH HER WHERE HE IS BURIED, WHEREUPON SHE PRIVILY DISINTERRETH HIS HEAD AND SETTETH IT IN A POT OF BASIL. THEREOVER MAKING MOAN A GREAT WHILE EVERY DAY, HER BROTHERS TAKE IT FROM HER AND SHE FOR GRIEF DIETH A LITTLE THEREAFTERWARD

ELISA'S tale being ended and commended of the king, Filomena was bidden to discourse, who, full of compassion for the wretched Gerbino and his mistress, after a piteous sigh, began thus: "My story, gracious ladies, will not treat of folk of so high condition as were those of whom Elisa hath told, yet peradventure it will be no less pitiful; and what brought me in mind of it was the mention, a little before, of Messina, where the case befell.

There were then in Messina three young brothers, merchants and left very rich by their father, who was a man of San Gimignano, and they had an only sister, Lisabetta by name, a right fair and well-mannered maiden, whom, whatever might have been the reason thereof, they had not yet married. Now these brothers had in one of their warehouses a youth of Pisa, called Lorenzo, who did and ordered all their affairs and was very comely and agreeable of person; wherefore, Lisabetta looking sundry times upon him, it befell that he began strangely to please her; of which Lorenzo taking note at one time and another, he in like manner, leaving his other loves, began to turn his thoughts to her; and so went the affair, that, each being alike pleasing to the other, it was no great while before, taking assurance, they did that which each of them most desired.

Continuing on this wise and enjoying great pleasure and delight one of the other, they knew not how to do so secretly but that, one night, Lisabetta, going whereas Lorenzo lay, was, unknown to herself, seen of the eldest of her brothers, who, being a prudent youth, for all the annoy it gave him to know this thing, being yet moved by more honourable counsel, abode without sign or word till the morning, revolving in himself various things anent the matter. The day being come, he recounted to his brothers that which he had seen the past night of Lisabetta and Lorenzo, and after long advisement with them, determined (so that neither to them nor to their sister should any reproach ensue thereof) to pass the thing over in silence and feign to have seen and known nothing thereof till such time as, without hurt or unease to themselves, they might avail to do away this shame from their sight, ere it should go farther. In this mind abiding and devising and laughing with Lorenzo as was their wont, it befell that one day, feigning to go forth the city, all three, a-pleasuring, they carried him with them to a very lonely and remote place; and there, the occasion offering, they slew him, whilst he was off his guard, and buried him on such wise that none had knowledge of it; then, returning to Messina, they gave out that they had despatched him somewhither for their occasions, the which was the lightlier credited that they were often used to send him abroad about their business.

Lorenzo returning not and Lisabetta often and instantly questioning her brothers of him, as one to whom the long delay was grievous, it befell one day, as she very urgently enquired of him, that one of them said to her, 'What meaneth this? What hast thou to do often of him? An thou question of him with Lorenzo, that thou askest thus—more, we will make thee such answer as thou deservest.' Wherefore the girl, sad and grieving and fearful she knew not of what, abode without more asking; yet many a time anights she piteously called him and prayed him come to her, and whiles with many tears she complained of his long tarrying; and thus, without a moment's gladness, she abode expecting him alway, till one night, having sore lamented Lorenzo for that he returned not and being at last fallen asleep, weeping, he appeared to her in a dream, pale and all disordered, with clothes all rent and mouldered, and herseemed he bespoke her thus: 'Harkye, Lisabetta; thou dost nought but call upon me, grieving for my long delay and cruelly impeaching me with thy tears. Know, therefore, that I may never more return to thee, for that, the last day thou sawest me, thy brothers slew me.' Then, having discovered to her the place where they had buried him, he charged her no more call him nor expect him and disappeared; whereupon she awoke and giving faith to the vision, wept bitterly.

In the morning, being risen and daring not say aught to her brothers, she determined to go to the place appointed and see if the thing were true, as it had appeared to her in the dream. Accordingly, having leave to go somedele without the city for her disport, she betook herself thither, as quickliest she might, in company of one who had been with them otherwhiles and knew all her affairs; and there, clearing away the dead leaves from the place, she dug whereas

herseemed the earth was less hard. She had not dug long before she found the body of her unhappy lover, yet nothing changed nor rotted, and thence knew manifestly that her vision was true, wherefore she was the most distressful of women; yet, knowing that this was no place for lament, she would fain, and she but might, have borne away the whole body, to give it fitter burial; but, seeing that this might not be, she with a knife did off the head from the body, as best she could, and wrapping it in a napkin, laid it in her maid's lap. Then, casting back the earth over the trunk, she departed thence, without being seen of any, and returned home, where, shutting herself in her chamber with her lover's head, she bewept it long and bitterly, insomuch that she bathed it all with her tears, and kissed it a thousand times in every part. Then, taking a great and goodly pot, of those wherein they plant marjoram or sweet basil, she set the head therein, folded in a fair linen cloth, and covered it with earth, in which she planted sundry heads of right fair basil of Salerno; nor did she ever water these with other water than that of her tears or rose or orange-flower water. Moreover she took wont to sit still near the pot and to gaze amorously upon it with all her desire, as upon that which held her Lorenzo hid; and after she had a great while looked thereon, she would bend over it and fall to weeping so sore and so long that her tears bathed all the basil, which, by dint of long and assiduous²¹⁹ tending, as well as by reason of the fatness of the earth, proceeding from the rotting head that was therein, waxed passing fair and very sweet of savour.

The damsel, doing without cease after this wise, was sundry times seen of her neighbours, who to her brothers, marvelling at her waste beauty and that her eyes seemed to have fled forth her head [for weeping], related this, saying, 'We have noted that she doth every day after such a fashion.' The brothers, hearing and seeing this and having once and again reprov'd her therefor, but without avail, let secretly carry away from her the pot, which she, missing, with the utmost instance many a time required, and for that it was not restored to her, stinted not to weep and lament till she fell sick; nor in her sickness did she ask aught other than the pot of basil. The young men marvelled greatly at this continual asking and bethought them therefor to see what was in this pot. Accordingly, turning out the earth, they found the cloth and therein the head, not yet so rotted but they might know it, by the curled hair, to be that of Lorenzo. At this they were mightily amazed and feared lest the thing should get wind; wherefore, burying the head, without word said, they privily departed Messina, having taken order how they should withdraw thence, and betook themselves to Naples. The damsel, ceasing never from lamenting and still demanding her pot, died, weeping; and so her ill-fortuned love had end. But, after a while the thing being grown manifest unto many, there was one who made thereon the song that is yet sung, to wit:

Alack! ah, who can the ill Christian be,
That stole my pot away?" etc.

Il canzoniere/ Rime sparse, 1374
Francesco Petrarca

(Sonnet I of *Il canzoniere* reproduced from http://petrarca.letteraturaoperaomnia.org/petrarca_canzoniere.html.)

Voi ch'ascoltate in rime sparse il suono
di quei sospiri ond'io nudriva 'l core
in sul mio primo giovanile errore,
quand'era in parte altr'uom da quel ch' i' sono,

del vario stile in ch'io piango e ragiono,
fra le vane speranze e 'l van dolore,
ove sia chi per prova intenda amore,
spero trovar pietà, non che perdono.

Ma ben veggio or sí come al popol tutto
favola fui gran tempo, onde sovente
di me mesdesmo meco mi vergogno;

e del mio vaneggiar vergogna è 'l frutto,
e 'l pentersi, e 'l conoscer chiaramente
che quanto piace al mondo è breve sogno.

(English translation reproduced from <https://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Italian/PetrarchCanzoniere001-061.php>.)

You who hear the sound, in scattered rhymes,
of those sighs on which I fed my heart,
in my first vagrant youthfulness,
when I was partly other than I am,
I hope to find pity, and forgiveness,
for all the modes in which I talk and weep,
between vain hope and vain sadness,
in those who understand love through its trials.
Yet I see clearly now I have become
an old tale amongst all these people, so that
it often makes me ashamed of myself;
and shame is the fruit of my vanities,
and remorse, and the clearest knowledge
of how the world's delight is a brief dream.

Orlando Furioso, 1516-1532
Ludovico Ariosto

(Excerpt reproduced from The Gutenberg Project at www.gutenberg.org, trans. William Stewart Rose.)

Canto 1

I
OF LOVES and LADIES, KNIGHTS and ARMS, I sing,
Of COURTESIES, and many a DARING FEAT;
And from those ancient days my story bring,
When Moors from Afric passed in hostile fleet,
And ravaged France, with Agramant their king,
Flushed with his youthful rage and furious heat,
Who on king Charles', the Roman emperor's head
Had vowed due vengeance for Troyano dead.

II
In the same strain of Roland will I tell
Things unattempted yet in prose or rhyme,
On whom strange madness and rank fury fell,
A man esteemed so wise in former time;
If she, who to like cruel pass has well
Nigh brought my feeble wit which fain would climb
And hourly wastes my sense, concede me skill
And strength my daring promise to fulfil.

III
Good seed of Hercules, give ear and deign,
Thou that this age's grace and splendour art,
Hippolitus, to smile upon his pain
Who tenders what he has with humble heart.
For though all hope to quit the score were vain,
My pen and pages may pay the debt in part;
Then, with no jealous eye my offering scan,
Nor scorn my gifts who give thee all I can.

IV
And me, amid the worthiest shalt thou hear,
Whom I with fitting praise prepare to grace,
Record the good Rogero, valiant peer,
The ancient root of thine illustrious race.
Of him, if thou wilt lend a willing ear,
The worth and warlike feats I shall retrace;

So thou thy graver cares some little time
Postponing, lend thy leisure to my rhyme.

V

Roland, who long the lady of Catay,
Angelica, had loved, and with his brand
Raised countless trophies to that damsel gay,
In India, Median, and Tartarian land,
Westward with her had measured back his way;
Where, nigh the Pyrenees, with many a band
Of Germany and France, King Charlemagne
Had camped his faithful host upon the plain.

VI

To make King Agramant, for penance, smite
His cheek, and rash Marsilius rue the hour;
This, when all trained with lance and sword to fight,
He led from Africa to swell his power;
That other when he pushed, in fell despite,
Against the realm of France Spain's martial flower.
'Twas thus Orlando came where Charles was tented
In evil hour, and soon the deed repented.

VII

For here was seized his dame of peerless charms,
(How often human judgment wanders wide)!
Whom in long warfare he had kept from harms,
From western climes to eastern shores her guide
In his own land, 'mid friends and kindred arms,
Now without contest severed from his side.
Fearing the mischief kindled by her eyes,
From him the prudent emperor reft the prize...

From Canto 23

CXXIX

All night about the forest roved the count,
And, at the break of daily light, was brought
By his unhappy fortune to the fount,
Where his inscription young Medoro wrought.
To see his wrongs inscribed upon that mount,
Inflamed his fury so, in him was nought
But turned to hatred, phrensy, rage, and spite;
Nor paused he more, but bared his faulchion bright;

CXXX

Cleft through the writing; and the solid block,
Into the sky, in tiny fragments sped.
Wo worth each sapling and the caverned rock,
Where Medore and Angelica were read!
So scathed, that they to shepherd or to flock
Thenceforth shall never furnish shade or bed.
And that sweet fountain, late so clear and pure,
From such tempestuous wrath was ill secure.

CXXXI

For he turf, stone, and trunk, and shoot, and lop,
Cast without cease into the beauteous source;
Till, turbid from the bottom to the top,
Never again was clear the troubled course.
At length, for lack of breath, compelled to stop,
(When he is bathed in sweat, and wasted force,
Serves not his fury more) he falls, and lies
Upon the mead, and, gazing upward, sighs.

CXXXII

Wearied and woe-begone, he fell to ground,
And turned his eyes toward heaven; nor spake he aught.
Nor ate, nor slept, till in his daily round
The golden sun had broken thrice, and sought
His rest anew; nor ever ceased his wound
To rankle, till it marred his sober thought.
At length, impelled by phrensy, the fourth day,
He from his limbs tore plate and mail away.

CXXXIII

Here was his helmet, there his shield bestowed;
His arms far off; and, farther than the rest,
His cuirass; through the greenwood wide was stowed
All his good gear, in fine; and next his vest
He rent; and, in his fury, naked showed
His shaggy paunch, and all his back and breast.
And 'gan that phrensy act, so passing dread,
Of stranger folly never shall be said.

CXXXIV

So fierce his rage, so fierce his fury grew,
That all obscured remained the warrior's sprite;
Nor, for forgetfulness, his sword he drew,
Or wonderous deeds, I trow, had wrought the knight:
But neither this, nor bill, nor axe to hew,

Was needed by Orlando's peerless might.
He of his prowess gave high proofs and full,
Who a tall pine uprooted at a pull.

CXXXV

He many others, with as little let
As fennel, wall-wort-stem, or dill, up-tore;
And ilex, knotted oak, and fir upset,
And beech, and mountain-ash, and elm-tree hoar.
He did what fowler, ere he spreads his net,
Does, to prepare the champaigne for his lore,
By stubble, rush, and nettle-stalk; and broke,
Like these, old sturdy trees and stems of oak...

Rima 28, 1554

Gaspara Stampa

(English translation of poem from <https://mypoeticside.com/show-classic-poem-28161>.)

When before those eyes, my life and light,
my beauty and fortune in the world, I stand,
the style, speech, passion, genius I command,
the thoughts, conceits, feelings I incite,
in all I'm overwhelmed, utterly spent,
like a deaf mute, virutally dazed, all reverence, nothing but amazed
in that lovely light, I'm fixed and rent.
Enough, not a word can I intone
for that divine incubus never quits
sapping my strength, leaving my soul prone.
Oh Love, what strange and wonderful fits:
one sole thing, one beauty alone,
can give me life and deprive me of wits.

I promessi sposi (The Betrothed), 1827
Alessandro Manzoni

(Excerpt reproduced from The Gutenberg Project at www.gutenberg.org, trans. Count O'Mahony.)

CHAPTER I.

That branch of the Lake of Como, which turns toward the south between two unbroken chains of mountains, presenting to the eye a succession of bays and gulfs, formed by their jutting and retiring ridges, suddenly contracts itself between a headland to the right and an extended sloping bank on the left, and assumes the flow and appearance of a river. The bridge by which the two shores are here united, appears to render the transformation more apparent, and marks the point at which the lake ceases, and the Adda recommences, to resume, however, the name of *Lake* where the again receding banks allow the water to expand itself anew into bays and gulfs. The bank, formed by the deposit of three large mountain streams, descends from the bases of two contiguous mountains, the one called St. Martin, the other by a Lombard name, *Resegone*, from its long line of summits, which in truth give it the appearance of a saw; so that there is no one who would not at first sight, especially viewing it in front, from the ramparts of Milan that face the north, at once distinguish it in all that extensive range from other mountains of less name and more ordinary form. The bank, for a considerable distance, rises with a gentle and continual ascent, then breaks into hills and hollows, rugged or level land, according to the formation of the mountain rocks, and the action of the floods. Its extreme border, intersected by the mountain torrents, is composed almost entirely of sand and pebbles; the other parts of fields and vineyards, scattered farms, country seats, and villages, with here and there a wood which extends up the mountain side. Lecco, the largest of these villages, and which gives its name to the district, is situated at no great distance from the bridge, upon the margin of the lake; nay, often, at the rising of the waters, is partly embosomed within the lake itself; a large town at the present day, and likely soon to become a city. At the period of our story, this village was also fortified, and consequently had the honour to furnish quarters to a governor, and the advantage of possessing a permanent garrison of Spanish soldiers, who gave lessons in modesty to the wives and daughters of the neighbourhood, and toward the close of summer never failed to scatter themselves through the vineyards, in order to thin the grapes, and lighten for the rustics the labours of the vintage. From village to village, from the heights down to the margin of the lake, there are innumerable roads and paths: these vary in their character; at times precipitous, at others level; now sunk and buried between two ivy-clad walls, from whose depth you can behold nothing but the sky, or some lofty mountain peak; then crossing high and level tracts, around the edges of which they sometimes wind, occasionally projecting beyond the face of the mountain, supported by prominent masses resembling bastions, whence the eye wanders over the most varied and delicious landscape. On the one side you behold the blue lake, with its boundaries broken by various promontories and necks of land, and reflecting the inverted images of the objects on its

banks; on the other, the Adda, which, flowing beneath the arches of the bridge, expands into a small lake, then contracts again, and holds on its clear serpentine course to the distant horizon: above, are the ponderous masses of the shapeless rocks; beneath, the richly cultivated acclivity, the fair landscape, the bridge; in front, the opposite shore of the lake, and beyond this, the mountain, which bounds the view.

Towards evening, on the 7th day of November, 1628, Don Abbondio, curate of one of the villages before alluded to (but of the name of which, nor of the house and lineage of its curate, we are not informed), was returning slowly towards his home, by one of these pathways. He was repeating quietly his office; in the pauses of which he held his closed breviary in his hand behind his back; and as he went, with his foot he cast listlessly against the wall the stones that happened to impede his path; at the same time giving admittance to the idle thoughts that tempted the spirit, while the lips of the worthy man were mechanically performing their function; then raising his head and gazing idly around him, he fixed his eyes upon a mountain summit, where the rays of the setting sun, breaking through the openings of an opposite ridge, illumined its projecting masses, which appeared like large and variously shaped spots of purple light. He then opened anew his breviary, and recited another portion at an angle of the lane, after which angle the road continued straight for perhaps seventy paces, and then branched like the letter Y into two narrow paths; the right-hand one ascended towards the mountain, and led to the parsonage (*Cura*); that on the left descended the valley towards a torrent, and on this side the wall rose out to the height of about two feet. The inner walls of the two narrow paths, instead of meeting at the angle, ended in a little chapel, upon which were depicted certain long, sinuous, pointed shapes, which, in the intention of the artist, and to the eyes of the neighbouring inhabitants, represented flames, and amidst these flames certain other forms, not to be described, that were meant for souls in purgatory; souls and flames of a brick colour, upon a ground of blackish grey, with here and there a bare spot of plaster. The curate, having turned the corner, directed, as was his wont, a look toward the little chapel, and there beheld what he little expected, and would not have desired to see. At the confluence, if we may so call it, of the two narrow lanes, there were two men: one of them sitting astride the low wall; his companion leaning against it, with his arms folded on his breast. The dress, the bearing, and what the curate could distinguish of the countenance of these men, left no doubt as to their profession. They wore upon their heads a green network, which, falling on the left shoulder, ended in a large tassel, from under which appeared upon the forehead an enormous lock of hair. Their mustachios were long, and curled at the extremities; the margin of their doublets confined by a belt of polished leather, from which were suspended, by hooks, two pistols; a little powder-horn hung like a locket on the breast; on the right-hand side of the wide and ample breeches was a pocket, out of which projected the handle of a knife, and on the other side they bore a long sword, of which the great hollow hilt was formed of bright plates of brass, combined into a cypher: by these characteristics they were, at a glance, recognised as individuals of the class of bravoos.

“Property”, Little Novels of Sicily (“La roba”, *Novelle rusticane*), 1883 Giovanni Verga

(Short story reproduced from <https://gutenberg.ca/ebooks/verga-littlenovels/verga-littlenovels-00-h.html>, trans. D.H. Lawrence.)

The traveller passing along by the Lake of Lentini, stretched out there like a piece of dead sea, and by the burnt-up stubble-fields of the Plain of Catania, and the evergreen orange-trees of Francoforte, and the grey cork-trees of Resecone, and the deserted pasture-lands of Passanetto and of Passinatello, if ever he asked, to while away the tedium of the long dusty road, under the sky heavy with heat in the hour when the litter-bells ring sadly in the immense campagna, and the mules let their heads and tails hang helpless, and the litter-driver sings his melancholy song so as not to be overcome by the malaria-sleep, "Whom does the place belong to?" was bound to get for answer, "To Mazzaro." And passing near to a farmstead as big as a village, with store barns that looked like churches, and crowds of hens crouching in the shade of the big well, and the women putting their hands over their eyes to see who was going by:—"And this place?"—"To Mazzaro."—And you went on and on, with the malaria weighing on your eyes, and you were startled by the unexpected barking of a dog, as you passed an endless, endless vineyard, which stretched over hill and plain, motionless, as if the dust upon it were weighing it down, and the watchman, stretched out face downwards with his gun beneath him, beside the valley, raised his head sleepily to see who it might be. "To Mazzaro."—Then came an olive grove thick as a wood, under which the grass never grew, and the olive-gathering went on until March. They were the olive trees belonging to Mazzaro. And towards evening, as the sun sank red as fire, and the countryside was veiled with sadness, you met the long files of Mazzaro's ploughs coming home softly, wearily from the fallow land, and the oxen slowly crossing the ford, with their muzzles in the dark water; and you saw on the far-off grazing land of Canziria, on the naked slope, the immense whitish blotches of the flocks of Mazzaro; and you heard the shepherd's pipe resounding through the gullies, and the bell of the ram sometimes ringing and sometimes not, and the solitary singing lost in the valley.

All Mazzaro's property. It seemed as if even the setting sun and the whirring cicalas belonged to Mazzaro, and the birds which went on a short, leaping flight to nestle behind the clods, and the crying of the horned-owl in the wood. It was as if Mazzaro had become as big as the world, and you walked upon his belly. Whereas he was an insignificant little fellow, said the litter-driver, and you wouldn't have thought he was worth a farthing, to look at him, with no fat on him except his paunch, and it was a marvel however he filled that in, for he never ate anything more than a penn'orth of bread, for all that he was rich as a pig, but he had a head on his shoulders that was keen as a diamond, that man had.

In fact, with that head as keen as a diamond he had got together all the property, whereas previously he had to work from morning till night hoeing, pruning, mowing, in the sun and rain and wind, with no shoes to his feet, and not a rag of a cloak to his back; so that everybody remembered the days when they used to give him kicks in the backside, and now they called him *Excellency*, and spoke to him cap in hand. But for all that he hadn't got stuck-up, now that all the Excellencies of the neighbourhood were in debt to him, so that he said *Excellency* meant poor devil and bad payer;

he still wore the peasant's stocking-cap, only his was made of black silk, which was his only grandeur, and lately he had started wearing a felt hat, because it cost less than the long silk stocking-cap. He had possessions as far as his eye could reach, and he was a long-sighted man—everywhere, right and left, before and behind, in mountain and plain. More than five thousand mouths, without counting the birds of the air and the beasts of the earth, fed upon his lands, without counting his own mouth, that ate less than any of them, and was satisfied with a penn'orth of bread and a bit of cheese, gulped down as fast as he could, standing in a corner of the store-barn big as a church, or in the midst of the corn-dust, so that you could hardly see him, while his peasants were emptying the sacks, or on top of a straw-stack, when the wind swept the frozen country, in the time of the sowing of the seed, or with his head inside a basket, in the hot days of harvest-time. He didn't drink wine, and he didn't smoke, he didn't take snuff, although indeed he grew plenty of tobacco in his fields beside the river, broad-leaved and tall as a boy, the sort that is sold at ninety shillings. He hadn't the vice of gaming, nor of women. As for women he'd never had to bother with any one of them save his mother, who had cost him actually a dollar when he'd had her carried to the cemetery.

And he had thought about it and thought about it times enough, all that property means, when he went with no shoes to his feet, to work on the land that was now his own, and he had proved to himself what it was to earn his shilling a day in the month of July, to work on with your back bent for fourteen hours, with the foreman on horseback behind you, laying about you with a stick if you stood up to straighten yourself for a minute. Therefore he had not let a minute of his whole life pass by that wasn't devoted to the acquiring of property; and now his ploughs were as many as the long strings of crows that arrive in November; and other strings of mules, endless, carried the seed; the women who were kept squatting in the mire, from October to March, picking up his olives, you couldn't count them, as you can't count the magpies that come to steal the olives; and in vintage time whole villages came to his vineyards, so that as far as ever you could hear folks singing, in the countryside, it was at Mazzaro's vintage. And then at harvest time Mazzaro's reapers were like an army of soldiers, so that to feed all those folks, with biscuit in the morning and bread and bitter oranges at nine o'clock and at mid-day, and home-made macaroni in the evening, it took shoals of money, and they dished up the ribbon-macaroni in kneading-troughs as big as wash-tubs. For that reason, when nowadays he went on horseback along the long line of his reapers, his cudgel in his hand, he didn't miss a single one of them with his eye, and kept shouting: "Bend over it, boys!" He had to have his hand in his pocket all the year round, spending, and simply for the land-tax the King took so much from him that Mazzaro went into a fever every time.

However, every year all those store-barns as big as churches were filled up with grain so that you had to raise up the roof to get it all in; and every time Mazzaro sold his wine it took over a day to count the money, all good dollar pieces, for he didn't want any of your dirty paper in payment for his goods, and he went to buy dirty paper only when he had to pay the King, or other people; and at the cattle-fairs the herds belonging to Mazzaro covered all the fairground, and choked up the roads, till it took half a day to let them go past, and the saint in procession with the band had at times to turn down another street, to make way for them.

And all that property he had got together himself, with his own hands and his own head, with not sleeping at night, with catching ague and malaria, with slaving from dawn till dark, and going round under sun and rain, and wearing out his boots and his mules—wearing out everything except

himself, thinking of his property, which was all he had in the world, for he had neither children nor grandchildren, nor relations of any sort; he'd got nothing but his property. And when a man is made like that, it just means he is made for property.

And property was made for him. It really seemed as if he had a magnet for it, because property likes to stay with those who know how to keep it, and don't squander it like that baron who had previously been Mazzaro's master, and had taken him out of charity, naked and ignorant, to work on his fields; and the baron had been owner of all those meadows, and all those woods, and all those vineyards, and all those herds, so that when he came down to visit his estates on horseback, with his keepers behind him, he seemed like a king, and they got ready his lodging and his dinner for him, the simpleton, so that everybody knew the hour and the minute when he was due to arrive, and naturally they didn't let themselves be caught with their hands in the sack.

"That man absolutely asks to be robbed!" said Mazzaro, and he almost burst himself laughing when the baron kicked his behind, and he rubbed his rear with his hand, muttering: "Fools should stop at home. Property doesn't belong to those that have got it, but to those that know how to acquire it." He, on the contrary, since he had acquired his property, certainly didn't send to say whether he was coming to superintend the harvest, or the vintage, and when and in what way, but he turned up unexpectedly on foot or on mule-back, without keepers, with a piece of bread in his pocket, and he slept beside his own sheaves, with his eyes open and the gun between his legs.

And in that way Mazzaro little by little became master of all the baron's possessions; and the latter was turned out, first from the olive groves, then from the vineyards, then from the grazing land, and then from the farmsteads and finally from his very mansion, so that not a day passed but he was signing stamped paper, and Mazzaro put his own brave cross underneath. Nothing was left to the baron but the stone shield that used to stand over his entrance-door—which was the only thing he hadn't wanted to sell, saying to, Mazzaro: "There's only this, out of everything I've got, which is no use for you." And that was true; Mazzaro had no use for it, and wouldn't have given two cents for it. The baron still said *thou* to him, but he didn't kick his behind any longer.

"Ah what a fine thing, to have Mazzaro's fortune!" folks said, but they didn't know what it had taken to make that fortune, how much thinking, how much struggling, how many lies, how much danger of being sent to the galleys, and how that head that was sharp as a diamond had worked day and night, better than a mill-wheel, to get all that property together. If the proprietor of a piece of farm-land adjoining his persisted in not giving it up to him, and wanted to take Mazzaro by the throat, he had to find some stratagem to force him to sell, to make him fall, in spite of the peasant's shrewdness. He went to him, for example, boasting about the fertility of a holding which wouldn't even produce lupins, and kept on till he made him believe it was the promised land, till the poor devil let himself be persuaded into leasing it, to speculate with it, and then he lost the lease, his house, and his own bit of land, which Mazzaro got hold of—for a bit of bread. And how many annoyances Mazzaro had to put up with! His half-profits peasants coming to complain of the bad seasons, his debtors, always sending their wives in a procession to tear their hair and beat their breasts trying to persuade him not to turn them out and put them in the street, by seizing their mule or their donkey, so that they'd not have anything to eat.

"You see what I eat," he replied. "Bread and onion! and I've got all those store-barns cram full, and I'm owner of all that stuff." And if they asked him for a handful of beans from all that stuff, he said:

"What, do you think I stole them? Don't you know, what it costs, to sow them, and hoe them, and harvest them?" And if they asked him for a cent he said he hadn't got one, which was true, he hadn't got one. He never had half-a-dollar in his pocket; it took all his money to make that property yield and increase, and money came and went like a river through the house. Besides money didn't matter to him; he said it wasn't property, and as soon as he'd got together a certain sum he immediately bought a piece of land; because he wanted to get so that he had as much land as the king, and be better than the king, because the king can neither sell his land nor say it is his own.

Only one thing grieved him, and that was that he was beginning to get old, and he had to leave the earth there behind him. This was an injustice on God's part, that after having slaved one's life away getting property together, when you've got it, and you'd like some more, you have to leave it behind you. And he remained for hours sitting on a small basket, with his chin in his hands, looking at his vineyards growing green beneath his eyes, and his fields of ripe wheat waving like a sea, and the olive groves veiling the mountains like a mist, and if a half-naked boy passed in front of him, bent under his load like a tired ass, he threw his stick at his legs, out of envy, and muttered: "Look at him with his length of days in front of him; him who's got nothing to bless himself with!"

So that when they told him it was time for him to be turning away from his property, and thinking of his soul, he rushed out into the courtyard like a madman, staggering, and went round killing his own ducks and turkeys, hitting them with his stick and screaming: "You're my own property, you come along with me!"

Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore (Six Characters in Search of an Author), 1921
Luigi Pirandello

(Excerpt reproduced from The Gutenberg Project at www.gutenberg.org, trans. Edward Storer.)

SIX CHARACTERS IN SEARCH OF AN AUTHOR
A COMEDY IN THE MAKING
BY
LUIGI PIRANDELLO

CHARACTERS OF THE COMEDY IN THE MAKING:

THE FATHER. THE MOTHER. THE STEP-DAUGHTER. THE SON. THE BOY. THE CHILD.
(*The last two do not speak.*) MADAME PACE.

ACTORS OF THE COMPANY

THE MANAGER. LEADING LADY. LEADING MAN. SECOND LADY. LEAD. L'INGÉNUÉ.
JUVENILE LEAD. OTHER ACTORS AND ACTRESSES. PROPERTY MAN. PROMPTER.
MACHINIST. MANAGER'S SECRETARY. DOOR-KEEPER. SCENE-SHIFTERS.

DAYTIME. THE STAGE OF A THEATRE.

ACT I.

N.B. The Comedy is without acts or scenes. The performance is interrupted once, without the curtain being lowered, when the manager and the chief characters withdraw to arrange the scenario. A second interruption of the action takes place when, by mistake, the stage hands let the curtain down.

The spectators will find the curtain raised and the stage as it usually is during the day time. It will be half dark, and empty, so that from the beginning the public may have the impression of an impromptu performance.

Prompter's box and a small table and chair for the manager.

Two other small tables and several chairs scattered about as during rehearsals.

The actors and actresses of the company enter from the back of the stage:

first one, then another, then two together: nine or ten in all. They are about to rehearse a Pirandello play: Mixing It Up. Some of the company move off towards their dressing rooms. The prompter who has the "book" under his arm, is waiting for the manager in order to begin the rehearsal.

The actors and actresses, some standing, some sitting, chat and smoke. One perhaps reads a paper; another cons his part.

Finally, the Manager enters and goes to the table prepared for him: His secretary brings him his mail, through which he glances. The prompter takes his seat, turns on a light, and opens the "book."

THE MANAGER (*throwing a letter down on the table*). I can't see (*to Property Man*). Let's have a little light, please!

PROPERTY MAN. Yes sir, yes, at once (*a light comes down on to the stage*).

THE MANAGER (*clapping his hands*). Come along! Come along! Second act of "Mixing it Up" (*sits down*).

(The actors and actresses go from the front of the stage to the wings, all except the three who are to begin the rehearsal).

THE PROMPTER (*reading the "book"*). "Leo Gala's house. A curious room serving as dining-room and study."

THE MANAGER (*to Property Man*). Fix up the old red room.

PROPERTY MAN (*noting it down*). Red set. All right!

THE PROMPTER (*continuing to read from the "book"*). "Table already laid and writing desk with books and papers. Book-shelves. Exit rear to Leo's bedroom. Exit left to kitchen. Principal exit to right."

THE MANAGER (*energetically*). Well, you understand: The principal exit over there; here, the kitchen. (*Turning to actor who is to play the part of Socrates*). You make your entrances and exits here. (*To Property Man*) The baize doors at the rear, and curtains.

PROPERTY MAN (*noting it down*). Right oh!

PROMPTER (*reading as before*). "When the curtain rises, Leo Gala, dressed in cook's cap and apron is busy beating an egg in a cup. Philip, also dressed as a cook, is beating another egg. Guido Venanzi is seated and listening."

LEADING MAN (*to manager*). Excuse me, but must I absolutely wear a cook's cap?

THE MANAGER (*annoyed*). I imagine so. It says so there anyway (*pointing to the "book"*).

LEADING MAN. But it's ridiculous!

THE MANAGER (*jumping up in a rage*). Ridiculous? Ridiculous? Is it my fault if France won't send us any more good comedies, and we are reduced to putting on Pirandello's works, where nobody understands anything, and where the author plays the fool with us all? (*The actors grin. The Manager goes to Leading Man and shouts*). Yes sir, you put on the cook's cap and beat eggs. Do you suppose that with all this egg-beating business you are on an ordinary stage? Get that out of your head. You represent the shell of the eggs you are beating! (*Laughter and comments among the actors*). Silence! and listen to my explanations, please! (*To Leading Man*): "The empty form of reason without the fullness of instinct, which is blind."—You stand for reason, your wife is instinct. It's a mixing up of the parts, according to which you who act your own part become the puppet of yourself. Do you understand?

LEADING MAN. I'm hanged if I do.

THE MANAGER. Neither do I. But let's get on with it. It's sure to be a glorious failure anyway. (*Confidentially*): But I say, please face three-quarters. Otherwise, what with the abstruseness of the dialogue, and the public that won't be able to hear you, the whole thing will go to hell. Come on! come on!

PROMPTER. Pardon sir, may I get into my box? There's a bit of a draught.

THE MANAGER. Yes, yes, of course!

At this point, the door-keeper has entered from the stage door and advances towards the manager's table, taking off his braided cap. During this manoeuvre, the Six Characters enter, and stop by the door at back of stage, so that when the door-keeper is about to announce their coming to the Manager, they are already on the stage. A tenuous light surrounds them, almost as if irradiated by them—the faint breath of their fantastic reality.

This light will disappear when they come forward towards the actors. They preserve, however, something of the dream lightness in which they seem almost suspended; but this does not detract from the essential reality of their forms and expressions.

He who is known as THE FATHER is a man of about 50: hair, reddish in colour, thin at the temples; he is not bald, however; thick moustaches, falling over his still fresh mouth, which often opens in an empty and uncertain smile. He is fattish, pale; with an especially wide forehead. He has blue, oval-shaped eyes, very clear and piercing. Wears light trousers and a dark jacket. He is alternatively mellifluous and violent in his manner.

THE MOTHER seems crushed and terrified as if by an intolerable weight of shame and abasement. She is dressed in modest black and wears a thick widow's veil of crêpe. When she lifts this, she reveals a wax-like face. She always keeps her eyes downcast.

THE STEP-DAUGHTER, is dashing, almost impudent, beautiful. She wears mourning too, but with great elegance. She shows contempt for the timid half-frightened manner of the wretched BOY (14 years old, and also dressed in black); on the other hand, she displays a lively tenderness for her little sister, THE CHILD (about four), who is dressed in white, with a black silk sash at the waist.

THE SON (22) tall, severe in his attitude of contempt for THE FATHER, supercilious and indifferent to the MOTHER. He looks as if he had come on the stage against his will.

DOOR-KEEPER (*cap in hand*). Excuse me, sir....

THE MANAGER (*rudely*). Eh? What is it?

DOOR-KEEPER (*timidly*). These people are asking for you, sir.

THE MANAGER (*furiously*). I am rehearsing, and you know perfectly well no one's allowed to come in during rehearsals! (*Turning to the Characters*): Who are you, please? What do you want?

THE FATHER (*coming forward a little, followed by the others who seem embarrassed*). As a matter of fact ... we have come here in search of an author....

THE MANAGER (*half angry, half amazed*). An author? What author?

THE FATHER. Any author, sir.

THE MANAGER. But there's no author here. We are not rehearsing a new piece.

THE STEP-DAUGHTER (*vivaciously*). So much the better, so much the better! We can be your new piece.

AN ACTOR (*coming forward from the others*). Oh, do you hear that?

THE FATHER (*to Step-Daughter*). Yes, but if the author isn't here ... (*To Manager*) ... unless you would be willing....

THE MANAGER. You are trying to be funny.

THE FATHER. No, for Heaven's sake, what are you saying? We bring you a drama, sir.

THE STEP-DAUGHTER. We may be your fortune.

THE MANAGER. Will you oblige me by going away? We haven't time to waste with mad people.

THE FATHER (*mellifluously*). Oh sir, you know well that life is full of infinite absurdities, which, strangely enough, do not even need to appear plausible, since they are true.

THE MANAGER. What the devil is he talking about?

THE FATHER. I say that to reverse the ordinary process may well be considered a madness: that is, to create credible situations, in order that they may appear true. But permit me to observe that if this be madness, it is the sole *raison d'être* of your profession, gentlemen. (*The actors look hurt and perplexed*).

THE MANAGER (*getting up and looking at him*). So our profession seems to you one worthy of madmen then?

THE FATHER. Well, to make seem true that which isn't true ... without any need ... for a joke as it were.... Isn't that your mission, gentlemen: to give life to fantastic characters on the stage?

THE MANAGER (*interpreting the rising anger of the Company*). But I would beg you to believe, my dear sir, that the profession of the comedian is a noble one. If today, as things go, the playwrights give us stupid comedies to play and puppets to represent instead of men, remember we are proud to have given life to immortal works here on these very boards! (*The actors, satisfied, applaud their Manager*).

THE FATHER (*interrupting furiously*). Exactly, perfectly, to living beings more alive than those who breathe and wear clothes: beings less real perhaps, but truer! I agree with you entirely. (*The actors look at one another in amazement*).

THE MANAGER. But what do you mean? Before, you said....

THE FATHER. No, excuse me, I meant it for you, sir, who were crying out that you had no time to lose with madmen, while no one better than yourself knows that nature uses the instrument of human fantasy in order to pursue her high creative purpose.

THE MANAGER. Very well,—but where does all this take us?

THE FATHER. Nowhere! It is merely to show you that one is born to life in many forms, in many shapes, as tree, or as stone, as water, as butterfly, or as woman. So one may also be born a character in a play.

THE MANAGER (*with feigned comic dismay*). So you and these other friends of yours have been born characters?

THE FATHER. Exactly, and alive as you see! (*Manager and actors burst out laughing*).

THE FATHER (*hurt*). I am sorry you laugh, because we carry in us a drama, as you can guess from this woman here veiled in black.

THE MANAGER (*losing patience at last and almost indignant*). Oh, chuck it! Get away please! Clear out of here! (*to Property Man*). For Heaven's sake, turn them out!

THE FATHER (*resisting*). No, no, look here, we....

THE MANAGER (*roaring*). We come here to work, you know.

LEADING ACTOR. One cannot let oneself be made such a fool of.

THE FATHER (*determined, coming forward*). I marvel at your incredulity, gentlemen. Are you not accustomed to see the characters created by an author spring to life in yourselves and face each other? Just because there is no "book" (*pointing to the Prompter's box*) which contains us, you refuse to believe....

THE STEP-DAUGHTER (*advances towards Manager, smiling and coquettish*). Believe me, we are really six most interesting characters, sir; side-tracked however.

THE FATHER. Yes, that is the word! (*To Manager all at once*): In the sense, that is, that the author who created us alive no longer wished, or was no longer able, materially to put us into a work of art. And this was a real crime, sir; because he who has had the luck to be born a character can laugh even at death. He cannot die. The man, the writer, the instrument of the creation will die, but his creation does not die. And to live for ever, it does not need to have extraordinary gifts or to be able to work wonders. Who was Sancho Panza? Who was Don Abbondio? Yet they live eternally because—live germs as they were—they had the fortune to find a fecundating matrix, a fantasy which could raise and nourish them: make them live for ever!

THE MANAGER. That is quite all right. But what do you want here, all of you?

THE FATHER. We want to live.

THE MANAGER (*ironically*). For Eternity?

THE FATHER. No, sir, only for a moment ... in you.

AN ACTOR. Just listen to him!

LEADING LADY. They want to live, in us...!

JUVENILE LEAD (*pointing to the Step-Daughter*). I've no objection, as far as that one is concerned!

THE FATHER. Look here! look here! The comedy has to be made. (*To the Manager*): But if you and your actors are willing, we can soon concert it among ourselves.

THE MANAGER (*annoyed*). But what do you want to concert? We don't go in for concerts here. Here we play dramas and comedies!

THE FATHER. Exactly! That is just why we have come to you.

THE MANAGER. And where is the "book"?

THE FATHER. It is in us! (*The actors laugh*). The drama is in us, and we are the drama. We are impatient to play it. Our inner passion drives us on to this.

***La luna e i falò* (The Moon and the Bonfires), 1949**
Cesare Pavese

(Excerpt reproduced from <https://archive.org/details/in.ernet.dli.2015.149109>, trans. Louise Sinclair.)

There is a reason why I came back to this place—came back to this town instead of Canarelli, Barbaresco, or Alba. It almost certain I was not born here; where I was born I do not know. There is not a house or bit of ground or a handful of dust hereabouts of which I can say: “This was me before I was born.” I do not know if I come from the hills or from the valleys, from the woods or from a great house with a balcony. Maybe the girl who laid me on the cathedral steps in Alba didn’t come from the country, either—maybe her family had a big house in town; anyhow I was carried there in the kind of basket they use for the grape harvest by two women from Monticello or Neive, or perhaps from Cravanzana, why not? Who knows whose flesh and blood I am? I have knocked about the world enough to know that one lot of flesh and blood is as good as another. But that’s why you get tired and try to put down roots. To try to find somewhere where you belong so you are worth more than the usual round of the seasons and last a bit longer.