



La Rondine

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE ITALIAN CLUB OF ST. LOUIS

Dec 2003

2003 Holiday Celebration- "Italian Folktales"

Next Meeting

Wednesday

December 17th

Cocktails- 6:30p.m.

Dinner- 7:00p.m.

Reservations must be made- see insert

(636) 537-5960

or

ItalianClubSTL
@aol.com

"Was the famous Doge the warm and friendly individual so described by his Crusader allies in glowing and complimentary terms - or was he the dark, sinister and clever conniver - always concealing the true motives underlying his actions - as depicted by his contemporary Byzantine enemies?"

Three Italian folktales, adapted from Italo Calvino's monumental work, "Italian Folktales," a collection of 200 tales from all regions of Italy, and translated by Calvino from the dialects to standard Italian, will be dramatized by the Panettone Players.

Italo Calvino, a literary innovator, was one of the most important and powerful writers of the 20th century, whose superb storytelling, whimsical and imaginative fables, and science fiction won him world wide renown during the post World War II era.

In 1947 he wrote his first, critically acclaimed novel, "Il Sentiero del Nido di Ragno" ("The Path of the Nest of Spiders"), which was a consequence of his experience as a young partisan at the time of the German occupation of Northern Italy during World War II.

The folktales of Tuscany and Sicily, Calvino learned, stand out from the tales of the other regions in quality and quantity. Consequently, one folktale from Tuscany and two shorter ones from Sicily have been chosen to be performed. The Tus-

can tale, "The Old Woman's Hide," will be given in English. The Sicilian ones, from "St. Peter in Sicily" are "Stones to Bread," and "St. Peter's Mamma," both given in Italian, with written English translations for the audience to follow, if necessary.

Whether or not this is your first experience with Calvino's Italian folktales or you are already familiar with them, we think you will enjoy these three charming, deceptively simple and moralistic tales, redolent with local color.

by *Dorotea Rossomanno-Phillips*

"Doge Enrico Dandolo and the Myth of Venice" presenter *Dr. Tom Madden*

Professor Tom Madden, Chair of Saint Louis University's Department of History, a distinguished scholar and author of several books on the history of the crusades, the Venetian Republic, and the life of the late 12th century Venetian Doge Enrico Dandolo, was our November speaker. In a scholarly presentation, Dr. Madden focused on the specific role of Dandolo in the outcome of the Fourth Crusade - one of the most important and most complex of all of the major crusades.

Pope Innocent III called the Fourth Crusade in 1198, motivated, as were all crusades, by desire to liberate the Holy Land from Muslim control. Innocent's call was taken up by the cream of medieval chivalry but especially by many counts, barons, and knights of the French court. The plan was straight-forward. The Crusaders were to assemble at Venice and then sail-on to attack Muslim-held lands. Venice was to provide the ships and other necessary provisions for the mission, for which the city would be paid a pre-agreed sum.

The Crusade's specific goal was Egypt. However, when the Crusaders arrived at Venice in 1201, they were unable to raise the money to pay for the ships and supplies. The Venetians' leader, the aged (94) and blind Doge Enrico Dandolo proposed a deal - that Venice would delay payment for one year, be made a partner in the crusade and receive a share of whatever profits resulted. Then the plan began to change even further. It was decided that the Crusaders would first take the Orthodox Christian city of Constantinople, the richest in Byzantium, before going on to Muslim Egypt. The result was that the Crusaders, acting against papal directives, conquered and plundered Constantinople (1204) in what is considered one of the most profitable sacks of a city in all of history. Venice received the lion's share of the resulting booty and the Crusaders never did go on to Egypt. With the professional historian's knack for digging below the surface of things and rooting out underlying causes and relationships, Professor

Madden presented key questions that have intrigued and puzzled historians for the past 800 years about Enrico Dandolo's role in this exceedingly murky and misunderstood of crusades. Basically, why and how did Dandolo get the Crusaders to change the primary objective of the Crusade from Egypt to Constantinople? Madden's examination of this question focused on possible motives. Did the crafty old Doge take advantage of well-meaning but naive French Crusaders to work out a secret and profitable deal with cunning Egyptians to divert the Crusaders from Muslim Cairo to Christian Constantinople because of his boundless greed; or was Dandolo's motive his political hatred of Greeks because of earlier Byzantine regicide and subsequent arrests and murders of Venetians in Constantinople; or was it a personal thirst for revenge for having been blinded; or religious conviction based on a devout Roman Catholic opposition Greek Orthodoxy? Professor Madden examined each of these issues with a

L'Angolo Del Presidente by James Tognoni

My dear fellow members:

I hope you had a marvelous Thanksgiving holiday and the chance to get together with family and friends. For many of us this turns out to be a very hectic time of the year. Shopping, cooking, visiting, traveling. Often we lose sight or never take the time to consider what the season means to each of us. I am sure each of you has a favorite holiday memory. One of mine is the sight of Nonna and Nonno sitting at the dining table after a huge meal. There was always the obligatory bottle of Chianti, a huge ball of Mozzarella and a cornucopia filled with fruit and nuts. Nonno would pull a folding knife from his pocket and

systematically cut away at the ball of cheese, sip the wine (quite often) and pick at the fruit and nuts.

Much planning has gone into our annual Christmas Holiday party. You will find the menu and other pertinent information on the enclosed insert. We really hope that you will join us. Make sure to make sure to send in your reservation as soon as you can, as attendance will be limited.

Our November meeting was action packed. The first annual Eugene Mariani Awards were given to two students from St. Louis University. Congratulations to Jessica Bellomo and Jennifer Rose and many thanks to Dr.

Simone Bregni.

Dr. Tom Madden was our presenter with a most interesting talk on Dandolo. If you were in attendance I hope you enjoyed it. If you couldn't make it to the meeting that evening the recap is in this issue for your reading pleasure. A quick reminder that we WILL have a January meeting. We will give a recap of this past year's activities, elect a new Director to the board and find a few other interesting things to do. We will have more information for you in the next issue of this newsletter.

Buon Natale e Felice Nuovo Anno!

Ciao, Jim



Jennifer Rose, Dr. Simone Bregni, Gene Mariani, Jim Tognoni, and Jessica Bellomo. Jennifer and Jessica are the first recipients of the Mariani Award at St. Louis University given by the Italian Club.



"Doge Enrico Dandolo" cont'd

scholar's approach, citing references from the literature on both sides of each question and then giving his interpretations and conclusions. However, much of what really happened during the Fourth Crusade is still uncertain and especially little is known about Enrico Dandolo's role and motives. Was the famous Doge the warm and friendly individual so described by his Crusader allies in glowing and complimentary terms - or was he the dark, sinister and clever conniver - always concealing the true motives underlying his actions - as depicted by his contemporary Byzantine enemies? History's view of old Dandolo has been clouded by myths and misunderstandings through the centuries, just as history's view of life in medieval Venice is hazy and little understood today - based not on actual knowledge of conditions in the Venice of the middle ages, but by opinions developed in much later times. Madden illustrated this graphically by showing part of an influential BBC documentary film that gave misleading impressions of medieval Venetian life by implying that late Renaissance period conditions in Venice also existed there in the middle ages; an assumption which was simply not correct.

The fall of Byzantine Constantinople in 1204 marked the end of the Fourth Crusade. Scholars are still debating its implications; but clearly one is the sharp separation that exists to this day between the Greek Orthodox and the Roman Catholic Churches. Enrico Dandolo died on June 1, 1205 at age of 98. Dandolo was buried in the Church of Santa Sophia in 1205. But his bones were scattered by the Turks when they converted the church into a mosque in 1453. *by Gene Mariani*

Condolences to Marie Passiglia Luhn on the death of her brother, Peter Passiglia.

Look for your 2004 Dues Notice

Italian Club membership dues notices for 2004 will again be sent to all members as an insert in your January issue of LaRondine. Dues will remain at \$30 for 2004 and be due by January 31. Details for sending dues payments will be provided with the notice. We thank you for choosing to be a member of the Italian Club!

Hill Nativity Walk

The first annual Hill Nativity Walk, co-sponsored by the Italian Club of St. Louis and the Hill Business Association, will run from December 1, 2003, to January 4, 2004. Various merchants on Shaw, Daggett, and Marconi will host displays of Italian-style nativity scenes. A brochure explaining the history of the nativity scene, or "presepio", and listing the participating nativity scenes and locations, will be available at Girasole, 2103 Marconi. We hope that you will enjoy this beautiful Italian tradition that we have brought to St. Louis!

Congratulations, Aldo Della Croce!

Italian Club member, Aldo Della Croce, was presented the Guy Gagliardi Award at the recent Fratellanza Society Banquet. Aldo is a Past-President of the Fratellanza Society and a stalwart in the Italian community!

Congratulations, Eleanore Berra Marfisi!

Italian Club member, Eleanore Berra Marfisi, has just published *The Hill- Its History- Its Recipes*. This book is a heartfelt compilation of neighborhood stories, history and family recipes. Eleanore has also written *Italian Roots, American Flowers; Dolci: Italian Sweets; Art-O-Graphics; Jewish Art in Christian Symbols and Sicily: Crossroads of Culture*.

TERZA PAGINA

I capolavori della poesia italiana

a cura di Barbara Klein

Il capolavoro di **Alessandro Ruggeri** (Arconate Milano 1928) è **Ul Mé Paés**, la raccolta di poesie in dialetto del suo paese natale ed in italiano. In occasione della prima "passeggiata dei presepi" sulla "Hill" di St. Louis, co-sponsorizzata dall'Italian Club of St. Louis ed il Hill Business Association, il 1 dicembre al 4 gennaio nelle vetrine di vari negozi in via Marconi, via Daggett, e via Shaw, vorrei proporre ai lettori la seguente poesia.

Il presepio di carta

di Alessandro Ruggeri

Nei miei ricordi più belli da bambino
c'è un presepio che aveva i personaggi di carta,
un prato di muschio e un ceppo per fare la montagna
e la paglia ben ordinata, di segale, per fare la capanna.

Quanta poesia nel presepio della mia infanzia
fatto con amor e pazienza dalla mia gente,
con le figure di carta che avevano visto tanti Natale
passati in armonia nella mia casa vicino al Canale.

La Madonna con il "Bambino" e San Giuseppe
e dietro il bue e l'asino che con il loro respiro li scaldavano,
il gruppo di pastori con le pecore e, il giorno della Befana, i cammelli
e i Re Magi che avevan i colori più belli.

Sopra la capanna, tenuto su da un fil di refe,
l'Arcangelo Gabriele mostrava una striscia con le parole
"Gloria in Excelsis Deo" scritte in latino:
faceva saper a tutto il mondo ch'era nato Gesù.

Era un presepio povero come ce n'erano tanti ad Arconate,
aveva i personaggi ritagliati dal foglio comperato dal "Marascìn"
e incollati sul cartone con un impasto di farina di segale,
un presepio povero sì, ma che faceva la casa allegra.

E ai nostri occhi di bambini con niente, ma con tanti sogni,
era uno spettacolo che aspettavam con voglia tutti gli anni
e ci faceva fantasticar, ci voleva poco allora
quando tutti noi a Natale per veder i regali ci alzavamo presto.

Per i nostri bambini oggi è Natale tutti i giorni,
poveri piccini vi han rubato i sentimenti più belli
e non potete provar quello che abbiám provato noi alla vostra età
quando il "Bambino" ci portava il cavallino da tirare.

Adesso c'è l'albero pieno di luci e di troppi regali,
ha preso il posto del presepio dei nostri sogni
e forse i più piccoli non san neanche che il "Bambino"
è il nostro Signore da piccino.

**Auguri di Buon Natale
e Felice Anno Nuovo a tutti!**

In giro per l'Italia

a cura di Barbara Klein

Il presepio italiano

L'origine del presepe è da ricercarsi nelle pagine del Vangelo, o meglio nella loro interpretazione. San Luca riferisce, che Maria diede alla luce suo figlio e che, dopo averlo fasciato, lo pose in una mangiatoia. Da qui si dedusse che Gesù fosse nato in una "mangiatoia", e poiché in Oriente le grotte naturali servivano da rifugio ai viandanti e da stalla agli animali, si iniziò a formare l'idea che Gesù fosse nato in una grotta.

Già dal 300, inoltre, Sant'Ambrogio, riferisce che, nella grotta, un bue ed un asinello avessero riscaldato col proprio alito il corpo del Salvatore. La prima descrizione, vera e propria, del luogo dove nacque Gesù, la diede comunque san Girolamo, il quale, nel 404, descrisse la grotta del Salvatore con la famosa mangiatoia, scavata nella roccia e supportata da piedi di legno. Nella grotta di Betlemme, che è ancora oggi possibile visitare, la mangiatoia di pietra venne rivestita di lastre di metallo prezioso forate, affinché i fedeli potessero vederla e toccarla. Le reliquie, presunte, della mangiatoia sono oggi conservate a Roma, nella basilica di Santa Maria Maggiore.

La rappresentazione del presepio, ossia la riproduzione a tre dimensioni della nascita di Cristo, che si fa nella case e nelle chiese tra Natale e l'Epifania, ha invece un'origine più tarda. Il primo presepio sarebbe stato rappresentato da San Francesco, con persone vive, a Greccio, vicino Rieti, nel Natale del 1223. Dopo questo primo evento, i frati francescani e domenicani, promossero la costruzione di presepi, non solo in tutta l'Italia, ma anche nel resto dell'Europa centrale. Questi presepi erano talvolta permanenti, oppure costituiti da figurine mobili, in legno, terracotta o altri materiali terracotta o altri materiali. Il più antico presepio italiano, tutt'oggi conservato, è quello dell'oratorio del Presepio sotto la Cappella Sistina, in Santa Maria Maggiore, a Roma. Risale al 1280, fu scolpito da Arnolfo di Cambio, ed è quasi intatto. A questo, succedettero molti illustri presepi scolpiti dai più grandi artisti di tutti i tempi. Ma fu soprattutto a Genova ed a Napoli, tra il Seicento ed il Settecento, che il presepe divenne una vera e propria forma d'arte. Ed oltre alle figure della Madonna, di san Giuseppe, di Gesù bambino e del bue e l'asinello, si arricchì di innumerevoli elementi decorativi: angeli, pastori e agnelli, i re Magi a cavallo, e poi anche gente comune, mandriani, botteghe, taverne, mercati, serenate e mille altre statuine, dalle pose ed espressioni più varie.

I presepi viventi esistono ancora, e vengono realizzati in molte località con presonaggi reali in costume. Tra i più famosi, quello di Rivisondoli, in Abruzzo, e quello di Revine, in Veneto. Ogni anno a Natale, l'Angelicum di Milano tiene un'esposizione dei presepi provenienti da tutto il mondo, ed esistono numerose associazioni di amici del presepio.

Per ulteriori informazioni vedi. www.presepio.org or www.presepio.it.

Buon viaggio in Italia!!

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LA RONDINE**

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80 years of
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Prossime Manifestazioni

FUTURE ITALIAN CLUB MEETINGS

December 17- Christmas celebration
"Italian Folktales"
by the Panettone Players

January 2004-Annales
by James Tognoni

February 18- Italian Trivia Revisited
by Jerry Galleano

March 17- Tenors in Opera
by Susan Wohl

April 21- Roman Gladiators
by Anna Amelung
**Washington University
Awards Night**

*The Italian Club meets the
third Wednesday
of each month for dinner at
da Baldo's Restaurant
Cocktails—6:30p.m.
Dinner- 7:00p.m.*

Visconti Film Series at the Saint Louis Art Museum

The Italian Club of St. Louis and the Saint Louis Art Museum are co-sponsoring a series of films by the great Italian director Luchino Visconti. The series, which coincides with the *German Art Now* exhibit, represents Visconti's analysis of the German culture. The films to be shown in the Museum's theatre are:

Ludwig—January 9, 2004

Death in Venice (Morte a Venezia)—January 16

The Damned (La caduta degli dei)—January 23

All films start at 7 p.m. Please tell all of your friends! We hope to see you there!

Call for Immigrant Information

The Gruppo di Storia Locale of Arconate, Italy, is preparing a history book on the emigrants of Arconate, which is located just west of Milano. Many people from Arconate emigrated to St. Louis, Herrin, and surrounding communities. The Gruppo di Storia Locale is looking for copies of photographs, immigrant stories or letters, or stories as told by the immigrant's descendents. If you know of someone who is an immigrant from Arconate, or their descendents, please contact Barbara Klein at 314-422-3102 or send the information directly to the historical society's president Elena Monticelli at elmontic@libero.it