ICS EVENTS

Social meetings start at 3:00 PM on the third Sunday of the month, September thru May, at the Friendship Heights Village Center, 4433 South Park Ave., Chevy Chase, MD (See map on back cover)

Thursday, November 8: Pianist Francesca Hurst in Concert 7 PM at the Embassy of Italy (See page 4)

Sunday, November 18: Dr. Alberta Campitelli discusses the restoration of Roman villas and gardens. (See pages 3 and 9)

Sunday, December 16: FESTA DI NATALE!!

Sunday, January 20: Riccardo R. G. Cannavò discusses and demonstrates the Teatro de Pupi (Sicilian Puppet Theater)

Movie of the Month: “Io Sono l’ Amore” 1 PM. See page 11

Italian Lessons and Conversation on November 18 at 2:00 PM

PRESIDENT’S MESSAGE

Our 21 October meeting featured a surprise speaker, Prof. (emeritus) Umberto Neri, who provided us with a lively presentation (complete with props) about the interesting period of the 19th and 20th century in the world of Italian mathematicians. Prof. Neri had been an undergraduate student in Italy and came to know some of the people about whom he spoke before coming to the University of Chicago to earn his Ph.D. and later take up a teaching career at U. Md. I say surprise speaker because Umberto was gracious in his acceptance of an invitation to speak on short notice due to a sudden cancellation by the scheduled speaker, Dr. Louis De Santi. If our mutual schedules permit, we may hear from Dr. De Santi at another time. As for the Italian Language program, our adult classes are off to a strong start with a significant increase in enrollment, and our Corsi Integrativi are also off to a smooth start. (You will remember from last month’s message that these courses will become the responsibility of CILS on Dec. 31, and we are happy to be able to hand them off to that organization in good order.) We are continuing to work on updating office procedures for efficiency and making plans for expanding our in-house teaching activities.

For the November meeting we are happy to be collaborating with SMATCH in hosting dott.essa Alberta Campitelli who will tell us about the restoration of Villa Borghese and Villa Torlonia in Roma. Dr. Campitelli is an art historian and Director of the City of Rome’s Office of Historic Villas and Parks, Department of Cultural Affairs (Direttore dell’Ufficio Ville e Parchi Storici della Soprintendenza ai Beni Culturali del Comune di Roma). It is an honor for us, and very much in keeping with our mission of being an exponent of Italian culture in the DC area to be able to bring you such a distinguished person. We hope you will join us in strong numbers to welcome her and enjoy her presentation.

Ron Cappelletti, president

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WELCOME TO NEW ICS MEMBERS

It is with great pleasure that we welcome those Members who have joined us recently. As we welcome them we hope that they will take advantage of all that the Society has to offer and that they will contribute with their knowledge and expertise to the success of the Society’s mission:

Anna fiore
Benvenuta!

ICS Poche Parole Publication
Arrigo Mongini, Editor
Romeo Segnan, Paolo Vidoli, Riccardo Cannavò
Italian Editors/Writers

Poche Parole is published each month from January through May and September through December. The deadline for the submission of all articles and ads for a newsletter issue is the 25th of the month preceding publication of the issue. Please send submissions via the Internet to e-mail address: icspoparole@verizon.net or on a computer diskette/CD to:
Editor, Poche Parole
4827 Rugby Avenue, Suite 301
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Italian Cultural Institute continued:
Terraferma (a film) Wed. Nov. 7PM at the Embassy.
La Risonanza chamber music concert, Thurs. Nov 29, 8 PM at the Library of Congress.
http://www.iicwashington.esteri.it/IIC_Washington/Menu/Gli_Eventi/Calendario/ for info. on both above events


Piazza Italia: http://www.meetup.com/DCitalian/ Italian Language meetup group. See website for details

Antenna Italia is now on the AMICO website. Get news from Italy and information on Italian and Italian-American events as well as music & commentary in streaming audio. Log on any time at Pino Cicala’s web site www.italianamericancommunications.org

NOVEMBER 18 PROGRAM

Alberta Campitelli, an art historian, directs the office of historic villas and parks of the City of Rome’s organization for the preservation of cultural resources. She is responsible for 42 historic gardens owned by the City of Rome and has curated the restoration of numerous gardens and villas.

She has conceived and is currently the director of several museums in the major villas.

She has published numerous essays on the villas of Rome and Lazio, in particular on Villa Borghese and Villa Torlonia. Her most recent publication was a volume on the Vatican gardens in Rome and Castel Gandolfo, which has been translated into English, French and Spanish. She is working on a study of Rome’s villas and gardens.

She has organized international conferences on historic villas and given seminars at the universities of Rome, Naples, Milan, Florence, Pisa, Paris, Arezzo, Berlin, and Washington.

In 2001 she received a fellowship at the Harvard-run research center at Dumbarton Oaks here in Washington. She has also lectured at the Italian Cultural Institutes in Berlin, Washington, San Francisco, and Vancouver.

The title of her presentation is “Restoration in the Parks of Rome: Villa Borghese and Villa Torlonia.”

For pictures of these villas see page 9

LOCAL EVENTS OF INTEREST

National Gallery of Art:
Guided tours of the Italian Renaissance collection, West Building, main floor rotunda Mon., Fri. and Sat. 2:30, Sun. 1:30
Italian Language guided tours Tues. Nov 13 and Sat. Nov 17, West Building main floor rotunda at 12:00 and East Building, ground level info. desk at 2:00. RSVP 202-842-6247

Italian Cultural Institute:
Exhibit: Fragments and Cancellations, by artist Franco Sarnari, thru Friday, Nov. 9 at the Embassy of Italy
Pre-concert talk Post-World War II Italian Art and the Paintings of Franco Sarnari by David Gariff, Thursday, Nov. 1, 5:00 PM, and Concert with Enrico Elisi, pianist. 20th-century Italian music by Ottorino Respighi, Luciano Berio, Armando Gentiliucci, Giacomo Manzoni, Riccardo Pick-Mangiagalli, and Giacono Scelsi, and with Alessandra Marc, soprano, Songs by Arturo Toscanini 6:00 pm – at the Embassy of Italy

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Francesca Hurst
In Concert

Presented by the Italian Cultural Institute
The Abruzzo & Molise Heritage Society
The Italian Cultural Society
The Lido Civic Club

Thursday, November 8, at 7 PM
in the auditorium of the Italian Embassy

PROGRAM

Domenico Scarlatti (1685-1757)
Sonata in D Major, K 491 (1756 -1757)
Sonata in D Minor, K 9 (1738)

Domenico Cimarosa (1749-1801)
Sonata in G Minor, B III/5 (1799)

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)
6 Variations in F Major on an Original Theme, Op. 34 (1802)

Fryderyk Chopin (1810-1849)
Op. 17-4 Mazurkas (1832-33)

Jennifer Margaret Barker (1965-)
Moana (2010)

Franz Liszt (1811-1886)
Hungarian Rhapsody No. 11 in A minor (1847)

Francesca Hurst received the Doctor of Musical Arts and Master of Music degrees in Piano Performance from The Catholic University of America in Washington, DC. She graduated magna cum laude from Tulane University in New Orleans with a BFA in Piano Performance and a BA in Italian. Her teachers include Dr. Ivo Kaltchev, Faina Lushtak, Vag Papian, Giuseppe Tanzini, and Maryen Herrett. She has received numerous scholarships from such organizations as the Italian Cultural Society of Washington, Catholic University, Tulane University, the National Italian American Foundation (NIAF), and the Italian Government. In addition to performing, Dr. Hurst has been teaching for several years. She is on the music faculty at Trinity Washington University in Washington, DC, and an adjunct professor at The Catholic University, also in DC. She maintains a small private piano studio, and is a member of the Northern Virginia Music Teachers Association and the College Music Society. She is often asked to judge various competitions, and recently served on the jury of the 2011 University of Delaware Concerto Competition. www.francescahurst.com

The limited number of seats reserved for members of the Italian Cultural Society have all been taken. It may be possible to reserve seats through the web site of the Italian Cultural Institute: http://www.iicwashington.esteri.it/IIC_Washington/webform/SchedaEvento.aspx?id=419&citta=Washington
Bring photo identification and arrive well before 7 PM because of the time required for security checks.
In 1530, Fracastoro was also the first to describe and name a new disease, which Columbus’ crew had brought to Europe from the New World and which had become endemic. Fracastoro “syphilis” was then known as the “French disease”, since invading French soldiers had brought it to Italy. Fracastoro named it after Syphilus, a shepherd cursed with a dreadful disease by the god Apollo in Greek mythology.

The first modern break in medical science was, however, the arrival and work done by Flemish Andreas Vesalius (1514-1564) at the University of Padua. Vesalius, born on the outskirts of Brussels, was the son of Emperor Charles V’s pharmacist and received a good medical education at the universities of Louvain and Paris. In 1537 he proceeded to Padua, the most famous medical school in Europe, took two days of exams and was granted a Doctor of Medicine degree, Magna Cum Laude. Not only that, but he was offered the chair of anatomy and surgery at Padua; he was only twenty-three.

Vesalius stayed in Padua only five years but, in such a comparatively short time, revolutionized medical science. Rather than taking Galen’s description of this human body as gospel or leaving the dissections of cadavers (invariably executed criminals) to his students, Vesalius did most of the dissections himself, taking copious notes and making sketches of his observations and findings. He then decided to turn his notes into a book, which was first printed in August 1543. The book, De Humanis Corporis Fabrica (Of the Human Body Structure) was a six hundred sixty-three pages manual of lucidity, scientific precision, and accurate illustrations made by himself and Venetian artists of Titian’s school. Within half a century, Vesalius’ opus had become the standard textbook on anatomy in Europe, even though Vesalius, accepting criticism in good humor, incorporated corrections in following editions.

Shortly after the book’s publication, Vesalius left Padua and moved to Madrid as court physician to Emperor Charles V and subsequently to King Philip II. After a while, he pined to return to Padua to continue his studies and teach. However, Philip II would not give his permission, but relented when Vesalius proposed to go on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. He had probably arranged to get his old professorial job in Padua back on his return from Jerusalem, but unfortunately for science, he died in Greece on the way back from the Holy Land at the age of fifty.

Vesalius had been succeeded in Padua by one of his pupils, Matteo Reaolo Colombo (1516-1559). Son of a Cremonese pharmacist, Colombo became professor of anatomy and surgery in Padua. In 1545, the Medici Grand Duke of Florence appointed him as the first professor of anatomy at the University of Pisa, and in 1548 he moved to Rome as chairman of the anatomy department at the Università della Sapienza. Incidentally, Giorgio Vasari describes in his Lives of the Artists an episode of Colombo’s life where, on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, he was assailed by a terrible disease inflicted by the god Apollo. Colombo survived and returned to Padua to the chair of anatomy and surgery.

Vesalius rimase a Padova solo cinque anni ma, in quel tempo relativamente breve, rivoluzionò la scienza medica. Invece di prendere per vangelo la descrizione del corpo umano data da Galeno o lasciare agli studenti il sezionamento dei cadaveri (tutti criminali giustiziati), Vesalius sezionava i cadaveri lui stesso facendo ampie annotazioni e schizzi delle sue osservazioni e di quanto scopriva. Decise poi di convertire le sue note in un libro che fu stampato per la prima volta nell’agosto 1543. Il libro, intitolato De humanis Corporis Fabrica (Della struttura del corpo umano), era un manuale di 663 pagine di chiarezza, precisione scientifica e ricchezza di accurate illustrazioni fatte da lui e da artisti della scuola di Tiziano. Mezzo secolo dopo l’opera di Vesalius era diventato il testo fondamentale di anatomia in Europa, sebbene Vesalius che di buon garbo accettava critiche, incorporasse correzioni nelle successive edizioni.

Poco dopo la pubblicazione del libro, Vesalius lasciò Padova e si recò a Madrid come medico di corte dell’imperatore Carlo V e successivamente del re Filippo II. Dopo qualche tempo cominciò a struggersi per tornare a Padova per continuare nei suoi studi e dedicarsi all’insegnamento. Filippo II però non voleva dargli il permesso ma cedette quando Vesalius gli propose di andare in pellegrinaggio in Terra Santa. Probabilmente aveva pianificato di tornare alla sua vecchia professione a Padova al suo ritorno da Gerusalemme ma, sfortunatamente per la scienza, durante il viaggio di ritorno dalla Terra Santa morì in Grecia all’età di cinquanta anni.

A Padova gli succedette uno dei suoi studenti, Matteo Reaolo Colombo (1516-1559). Figlio di un farmacista cremonese, Colombo divenne professore di anatomia e chirurgia a Padova. Nel 1545 il Granduca Medici di Firenze lo nomino’ primo professore di anatomia all’università di
of the Artists that Colombo was Michelangelo’s doctor and treated the older artist who suffered from gallbladder stones.

In 1559, Colombo published *On Anatomy*, a book in which he described the lens of the eye and, an important first, the circulation of the blood through the lungs. Michael Servetus (1511-1553), a Spanish polymath, had described a similar blood circulation system in a theological tract five years before, but Servetus’ observations were never publicized and he was burned at the stake as a heretic in 1553.

Andrea Cesalpino (1519-1603), a Florentine botanist who in 1571 described the cardiac valves and the pulmonary veins, continued Colombo’s work in the area.

Another of Vesalius’ students, Gabriele Fallopio (1523-1562), followed Colombo as a professor of anatomy at Padua in 1551. Prior to his death, Fallopio also published an anatomy textbook extending and refining Vesalius’ work. In this book, he described the structure of the skull and the ear and more importantly, the female genitalia. In his honors, the tubes through which eggs move from the ovary to the uterus are called Fallopian. Fallopio, who also taught at the Universities of Ferrara and of Pisa, is also credited with the invention of condoms, first made of linen and used to prevent syphilis infection.

Another pupil of Vesalius, Bartolomeo Eustachio (1510?-1574), born in San Severino, near Ancona, succeeded Colombo as professor at the Papal University in Rome. Eustachio, c. 1552, wrote papers describing the adrenal glands, the canal connecting the ear to the throat (Eustachian Tube), the structure of the teeth, and the facial and neck muscles. This portion of Eustachio work was not published until 1714. Eustachio also made important discoveries on blood circulation, the adrenal gland, and the nervous system. His studies had been preceded by a few years by those of a less known Sicilian doctor, Giovanni Ingrassia (1510-80), who also studied the varieties of cancerous tumors, identifying 287 of them.

Pharmacology in Italy received a boost not only by the knowledge acquired from Islamic writings but also from the work of Matteo Silvatico (c.1285-C.1342). Silvatico, a lawyer from Salerno, had a garden where he cultivated medicinal plants and herbs. In 1306, he finished the manuscript for *Pandectae Medicinae* (Collection of Medicinal Recipes) and gave it to the king of Naples and in the 15th century the recipes were published. A Venetian edition of 1523 describes 487 medicines made from herbs and plants, 157 made from mineral substances, 77 made from animal matter, and 3 that were not classified. Each medicine has a chapter in the book describing how to make it and how to use it.

In 1410, Benedetto Riino published a similar book in Venice. The book described 450 domestic medicinal plants and 111 foreign plants and their use, and contained some 440 accurate plant drawings by a Venetian artist.

Last, we should mention Quarantine, the process of separating the sick and potentially infected from the healthy. Practiced in various forms in ancient times, quarantine was first resurrected in Venice in 1348 during the sweep of the Black Death. A council of three doctors was given the power to detain in the lagoon, out of contact with persons on terra firma, crews, cargo, and ships for a period of forty days. Forty, in Italian, is “quaranta”; hence the name “quarantine”.

Pisa, and in 1548 Colombo si trasferì a Roma a capo del dipartimento di chirurgia dell’Università La Sapienza. Per inciso Giorgio Vasari riporta nel suo libro *Vite di Artisti* che Colombo era il medico di Michelangelo e curava il vecchio artista che soffriva di calcoli alla cistifellea.

Nel 1559 Colombo pubblico’ *Dell’Anatomia*, un libro nel quale descrisse il cristallino dell’occhio e, più importante, per la prima volta la circolazione del sangue nei polmoni. Miguel Serveto (1511-1553) un enciclopedico spagnolo, descrisse un simile sistema di circolazione in un trattato teologico cinque anni prima ma le osservazioni di Serveto non furono mai rese pubbliche e lui fu bruciato al rogo come eretico nel 1553.

Andrea Cesalpino (1519-1603), un botanico fiorentino che nel 1571 descrisse le valvole cardiache e le vene dei polmoni, continuò’ in quel campo il lavoro di Colombo. Un altro degli studenti di Vesalio, Gabriele Fallopio (1523-1562), seguì le orme di Colombo come professore di anatomia a Padova nel 1551. Prima di morire, anche Fallopio pubblico’ un testo di anatomia che ampliava e rifiniva il lavoro di Vesalio. Nel suo libro descriveva la struttura del cranio e dell’orecchio e, più importante, degli organi genitali femminili. In suo onore i canali attraverso ai quali le uova scendono dalle ovarie nell’utero sono chiamati “trombe di Fallopio”. A Fallopio, che insegno’ anche alle università’ di Ferrara e di Pisa, e’ attribuita l’invenzione del preservativo, fatto inizialmente di lino e usato per prevenire la sifilide.


In Italia la farmacologia ricevette un impulso non solo dalla conoscenza acquisita da scritti islamici ma anche dal lavoro di Matteo Silvatico (c.1285-1342). Silvatico, un avvocato di Salerno, aveva un giardino dove coltivava piante ed erbe medicinali. Nel 1306 finì il manoscritto *Pandectae Medicinae* (una raccolta di ricette medicinali) e lo diede al re di Napoli; le ricette furono pubblicate piu’ tardi nel XV secolo. Un’edizione veneziana del 1523, descrive 487 medicine ricavate da erbe e piante,157 ricavate da sostanze minerali, 77 di fonte animale e tre che non furono classificate. Nel libro ciascuna medicina ha un suo capitolo che descrive come viene preparata e come usarla.

Nel 1410 Benedetto Riino pubblico’ a Venezia un testo simile. Il libro descriveva 450 piante medicinali domestiche e 111 straniere con il loro uso, e conteneva circa 440 disegni accurati delle piante fatti da un artista veneziano.

Infine dobbiamo accennare alla Quarantena, la procedura di isolare dai sani gli ammalati e coloro che potevano essere
The Duchy of Milan adopted a similar system in 1374, and Ragusa (now Dubrovnik), a Venice dependency on the Dalmatian coast, followed in 1377. Then, in 1405 Venice established a permanent quarantine facility on the lagoon island of St. Maria of Nazareth; from “Nazareth”, the facility acquired the name lazaretto.

To Renaissance Italy, and Milan, belongs also the record of operating the first major public hospital in Europe. The Ospedale Maggiore, or Ca’ Grande, was commissioned by Duke Francesco Sforza in 1456 and built by architect Antonio Averlino (1400-1469), known as Filarete. The building, which now houses part of the University of Milan, was very large - 920 by 320 feet-and is made up by two cruciform wings, one for males and one for female patients. The wings are built around four courtyards and are connected b to a central courtyard within which he placed a church. In its days, the hospital was the best in Europe and it even had individual toilets for each patient. The toilets were flushed by water channeled from a canal that runs in back of the hospital. Filarete’s design for the hospital, combining Renaissance structure and form with Gothic decorations, was such a hit that it was copied in hospitals throughout Europe and Latin America.

The hospital was a city within a city, with stores, a garden for fresh vegetables, a mill to grind grins for daily fresh bread, laundry facilities, and even a crypt for those who died there. It had fresh running water - its hydraulic system functioned well until 1800- and a sophisticated ventilation system to flush out malodorous air.

As in many other areas of endeavor, advances in medicine in Italy during the Renaissance were notable.

Luciano Mangiafico is a retired US diplomat. Among his many postings he was Consul General in Palermo and Consul in Milan.

Ai nostri lettori: Questo saggio e’ il lavoro di uno studente in una classe avanzata di italiano di Silvana Amato dell’Italian Language Program della ICS

LO ZIO GIOVANNI
di Giovanna Benevelli Bartlett

Era sempre un piacere quando zio Giovanni e la sua famiglia venivano a trovarci a Stamford in estate. Lui e il mio papà parlavano di baseball tutto il giorno. Il figlio di zio Giovanni, Gianni Boy, intrattenne me ed i miei fratelli con storie bizzarre della vita a Brooklyn. Sua figlia, Kathleen, mi insegnò come farmi la banana ai capelli, proprio come faceva lei. Zia Mabel era piuttosto riservata, parlava per lo più con mia mamma, aiutava in cucina, beveva la birra e fumava.

Quando mia mamma mi disse che zio Giovanni si era sposato due volte, rimasi sorpresa. Poi mi spiegò che la prima moglie lo aveva sposato per i suoi soldi, soltanto l’idea era assurda per me. Ne ero stupita.

Zio Giovanni aveva una gamba di legno e le braccia amputate ai gomiti. Abitava in un appartamento senza ascensore in un quartiere abbastanza malandato.

Come era riuscito a guadagnare così tanti soldi da attrarre una cacciatrice di dote? Vendeva matite all’angolo della strada in città, e inoltre, la gente veniva da lui per dirgli su infetti. Praticata sotto varie forme nei tempi antichi, la quarantena fu dapprima ripristinata a Venezia nel 1348 durante l’epidemia della peste nera. Ad un consiglio di tre medici venne dato il potere di isolare nella laguna equipaggi, merci e navi lontano dal contatto con persone sulla terraferma, per un periodo di quaranta giorni, da cui il nome di Quarantena. Il Ducato di Milano adottò’ un simile sistema nel 1374 seguito nel 1372 da Ragusa (ora Dubrovnik), una dipendenza di Venezia sulla costa dalmata. Nel 1405 Venezia fondò’ una sistemazione permanente per la quarantena nella laguna, sull’isola di S. Maria di Nazaret. Da Nazaret lo stabilimento prese il nome di Lazaretto.

Spetta all’Italia del Rinascimento ed a Milano il primato di gestire il primo grande ospedale pubblico in Europa. L’Ospedale Maggiore, o Ca’ Grande fu commissionato dal duca Francesco Sforza nel 1456 e costruito dall’architetto Antonio Averlino (1400-1469) noto col nome di Filarete. L’edificio, che ora ospita parte dell’universitá di Milano, era molto ampio - 320 m per 98 m – e composto da due ali a croce, una per gli uomini ed una per le donne. Le ali sono state attorno a quattro cortili collegate ad un cortile interno nel quale l’architetto abbinava una struttura ed una disposizione rinascimentali a decorazioni gotiche, fece tale impressione che fu copiato in ospedali di tutta l’Europa e nel Sud America.

L’ospedale era una citta’ nella citta’ con negozi, un giardino per coltivare verdure, un mulino per macinare il grano per il pane fresco quotidiano, lavanderie e persino una cripta per coloro che vi morivano. Aveva acqua fresca corrente – il suo sistema idraulico funziono’ bene fino al 1800- e un sistema di ventilazione avanzato per eliminare l’aria maleodorante.

Come in molte altre aree di attività, i progressi nel campo della medicina, furono notevoli in Italia durante il Rinascimento.

To our readers: This essay is the work of a student in an Advanced Italian course of Silvana Amato of the ICS Italian Language Program

UNCLE JOHN
by Giovanna Benevelli Bartlett

We loved it when Uncle John and his family came to visit us in Stamford in the summers. He and my dad talked baseball all day long. Uncle John’s son, Johnny Boy, regaled my brothers and me with wild stories of life in Brooklyn. His daughter, Kathleen, taught me how to put my hair in a French twist like hers. Aunt Mabel was pretty quiet. She mostly talked to mom, helped in the kitchen, drank beer and smoked cigarettes.

When my mother told me that Uncle John was married twice, I was shocked. Then she explained that his first wife married him for his money. That really floored me. The whole idea was preposterous.

Uncle John had a wooden leg and his arms were amputated just below his elbows. He lived in a walk-up Brooklyn apartment. The neighborhood was pretty run down.
quale cane o pony voleva scommettere. Lui poi passava l’informazione a qualcuno che sapeva cosa farne. Non scriveva mai niente, non perché non potesse, perché poteva, ma semplicemente non era proprio la cosa più facile da fare per lui. In quel tipo di lavoro, comunque, era più vantaggioso lavorare di memoria, senza lasciare tracce. La polizia non aveva sospetti su di lui e anche se ne avesse avuti, probabilmente, non lo avrebbe mai arrestato proprio per la sua situazione. Così, mio zio ebbe molto successo.

Zio Giovanni aveva perso le braccia e una gamba da bambino. Suo padre, mio nonno, era un minatore in Pennsylvania. I miei nonni arrivarono negli USA nel 1907. Sicuramente qualcuno gli avrà detto una grossa bugia per farli salire a bordo di quella nave, promettendogli una vita migliore. Cosa poteva esserci di peggio da essere costretti a lavorare in una miniera di carbone ogni giorno?

Vivendo in un paesino minerario mia nonna doveva uscire di casa tutti i giorni per andare a prendere l’acqua dal pozzo. Un giorno, quando zio Giovanni aveva circa tre anni, i due fratelli maggiori erano usciti per raccogliere il carbone che cadeva dai vagoni per portarlo a casa. Prima di uscire, i due fratelli avevano bloccato bene la porta con dei mobili affinché Giovanni non potesse uscire e seguirli, ma in qualche modo, lo fece. Stava cercando di attraversare i binari, aggrappandosi con le manine e c’era quasi riuscito, ma, mentre aveva una gamba ancora sui binari, un vagone lo investì.

I soccorsi non arrivarono subito. Non c’era né un’ambulanza per portalo di corsa all’ospedale, né treni giornalieri in servizio e nemmeno un elicottero per portarlo al pronto soccorso. Ci volle molto tempo prima che zio Giovanni arrivasse con i genitori all’ospedale. Immagino che quando arrivarono avessero un aspetto pietoso. All’inizio, gli furono tagliate solo le dita delle mani e di un piede, ma poi subentrò la cancrena.

Dopo l’incidente, zio Giovanni dovette andare a vivere in un centro di riabilitazione, dove gli insegnarono a leggere e a scrivere, e una suora in particolare, lo prese a cuore. Sarà stato sicuramente un bambino coraggioso che poi diventò un uomo in gamba. Era più istruito dei suoi fratelli che erano rimasti in quel buco infernale, cioè il paesino minerario. Da adulto si trasferì a Brooklyn e solo qualche volta veniva a Stamford a trovare le sorelle e i fratelli. Volevano che lui si trasferisse a Stamford, ma mia mamma diceva che preferiva vivere in città. Credeva che lì, la gente lo avrebbe guardato come un essere strano, e molto probabilmente non si sbagliava.

Si innamorò di una donna e disse alle sue quattro sorelle che l’aveva sposata, e su insistenza delle stesse la portò a Stamford per introdurla alla famiglia. Per l’occasione, le sorelle avevano preparato per la sposa tanti regali per la casa, e avevano imbandito una grande tavolata. Zio Giovanni era felice e orgoglioso di lei. Questa donna capì che zio Giovanni aveva una famiglia che gli voleva bene, ma purtroppo lei non lo amava. Mia mamma, raccontava che la gentilezza delle sorelle aveva messo in imbarazzo la donna. Più in là si scopri che lei, in un modo o nell’altro, prendeva i soldi di zio Giovanni e li dava a un uomo per cui lavorava. Si lasciarono subito dopo. Zia Mabel, fu invece una buona moglie. Con lei, zio Giovanni ebbe figli, nipoti e pronipoti.

How did he make all that money to attract a gold digger? He sold pencils on a street corner in the city. People would come up to him and tell him what dog or pony they wanted to bet on. He passed on the information to someone who did something with it. He never wrote anything down; not that he couldn’t write because he could. It just wasn’t the easiest thing for him to do. But working from memory and not leaving a paper trail were advantages in this kind of work. The police never suspected him. Even if they did, they probably wouldn’t have arrested him considering his situation. He became quite successful.

Uncle John lost his arms and a leg when he was a little kid. His father, who was my grandfather, was a miner in Pennsylvania. My grandparents immigrated to the US from northern Italy in 1907. They must have been told some huge lie to get them on that boat to come to America for what was supposed to be a better life. How much worse could it have been than to be thrown into a coal mine every day?

In the mining town, my grandmother had to go out to fetch water daily. While their mother was away, John’s two older brothers went out to collect coal that fell off the coal cars to bring home to use for cooking. Before leaving the house, the brothers barricaded the door so John wouldn’t get out and follow them, but somehow he did. He was about three then. Uncle John was pulling himself over tracks, holding on with his two little hands and just about making it. He had just gotten one of his legs up when a coal car ran over him.

There was no ambulance to rush him to the hospital. Trains were not running every day. No chopper came in to whisk him off to a shock-trauma center. It took a while to get him to a hospital, and his parents and he must have looked pitiful when they arrived. Only his fingers and toes were cut off, but gangrene set in.

After the accident, Uncle John had to leave the family and live in a rehabilitation place. They gave him an education, and a nun there, one of his caretakers, took a special interest in him. He must have been a courageous little kid to have turned out to be such a nice guy. Ultimately he had more schooling than his other brothers and sisters still stuck in that hell-hole of a mining town. The mining company picked up the tab.

When Uncle John grew up, he moved to Brooklyn. He would come to Stamford occasionally to visit his sisters and brothers who lived there. They wanted him to move to Stamford and live with them, but my mom said that he preferred living in the city. He felt people would stare at him in Stamford, and he was probably right.

He became very serious about a woman. He told his four sisters he was married to her, and they insisted he bring her for a visit. They went all out for the occasion, giving her presents of linen for their home and putting out a nice spread for them. Uncle John was so happy and proud. The woman saw that Uncle John had a family who loved him. But she didn’t. Mom said that the kindness the sisters showed the woman shamed her. Evidently she was somehow taking his money and giving it to some other guy she was working for. Mom didn’t know for sure. They broke up soon after that. Aunt Mabel was the good wife. Eventually they had children, grandchildren and great grandchildren.
VILLA TORLONIA: La Casina delle Civette

VILLA TORLONIA: Il Casino Nobile

VILLA BORGHESE

VILLA BORGHESE

VILLA BORGHESE

VILLA BORGHESE
“This has a Betti number of 2”

“A mathematician walks into a bar......”

“I don’t know number theory? I hate numbers”

In vino allegria

Such good food!

Where would physics be without mathematics?
In this 2010 film Emma is the “foreign” and dignified wife of Tancredi Recchi, an influential representative of the Milanese industrial haute bourgeoisie. In a loveless marriage, Emma and Tancredi live amid comfort and hypocrisy in a grand villa in the heart of Milan with their three grown children: Elisabetta, Edoardo, and Gianluca. Closest to his father in cynicism and concreteness, Gianluca is different from his brothers, who are sensitive and idealistic like Emma, who lovingly attends to their precarious happiness. Edoardo, the pride of his mother, disappoints the expectations of his father, falling back on managing a restaurant in the countryside with his colleague Antonio, a young talented chef of lower social standing. The arrival of Antonio on the scene will subvert equilibri and destinies with the power and the “range” of love.

This is a film on the industrial upper class on which a director from Palermo has worked for seven years. The patriarch Edoardo Recchi is ready to cede command of his enterprise to the most capable of his heirs: either his son Tancredi or his grandson, Edoardo Jr.? The business is in dire straits with globalization, and the family as well with problems, conflicts, secrets and hypocrisies. Edoardo, favorite of his Russian mother Emma, helps his friend Antonio, talented chef, to open a restaurant. Between Antonio and Emma, a passion is born that takes them to a collision with a universe alien and uncomfortable to them. Written by the director with Barbara Alberti, Ivan Cotroneo and Walter Fasano, produced by Mikado, Rai Cinema and others, stunning photography by the French Yorick Le Saux, it is the most refined, ambitious and mature film by Luca Guadagnino. They have defined it as Viscontesque, and not only for content. The acting of Tilda Swinton (not dubbed) is enough to give life to a film in the best tradition of a family mixup, but dried and stylistically homogeneous. A film of cosmopolitan snobbism, dissonant in the panorama of Italian film. It took 6 months of post production for a montage that reduced the material from 3 ½ to 2 hours. One can tell.
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