

BOOK. Blues di mezz'autunno

Traci Andrighetti (January 23, 2014)



The master of Mediterranean noir marks his much-anticipated return to the literary scene with a new genre.



In October of 2013, biologist and author Santo Piazzese (b. 1948, Palermo) released his fourth novel, [Blues di mezz'autunno](#) [2] (Mid-Autumn Blues) (Sellerio). Although it's not exactly autumn, any season is a great time to talk about one of Piazzese's books. Why? For starters, his three noir novels featuring the biologist Lorenzo La Marca, which were republished in 2009 as the [Trilogia di Palermo](#) [3] (Palermo Trilogy), represent some of the finest writing contemporary Italy has to offer. And for another thing, fans waited eleven long years to get their hands on this book.

When pressed by readers and critics alike to produce a fourth noir featuring La Marca, Piazzese once remarked that he couldn't in all good conscience continue to have La Marca stumble upon dead bodies in Palermo when he himself had lived there all his life and had never even discovered one. So, in *Blues di mezz'autunno* there is no dead body. Instead, Piazzese shifts from his characteristic "**noir mediterraneo (Mediterranean noir)**" to pure Mediterranean narrative. His point of departure is "L'estate di San Martino," a short story that he wrote for a French publisher and that the late Elvira Sellerio believed was worthy of elaboration.

SUMMARY

In the opening pages of *Blues di mezz'autunno*, La Marca runs into an old college acquaintance at a professional workshop in Erice, Sicily. This chance encounter prompts La Marca to flash back to his adventures conducting research for his thesis on the Sicilian coast as a second-year biology student. But his memories are bittersweet. While he fondly reminisces about many of the people he met on the Santa Ninfa fishing boat and on the island "La Spada dei Turchi (The Sword of the Turks)," he recalls with "**un blues da mezz'autunno (a mid-autumn blues)**" an incident that occurred among the islanders nicknamed "**gli stravaganti (the eccentrics)**" at the Bar Edelveiss—one that was fundamental to his coming of age.

LANGUAGE

Although the genre of Piazzese's work has changed, his language is still very much the same. Readers will find the author's trademark cultured prose tinged with (often entertaining) irony. And linguists like myself will have the embarrassment of choice in terms of language and varieties of language to consider. In typical Piazzese style, the text contains a rich mixture of neostandard Italian marked by regional and dialect influences as well as foreign language.

ANGLICISM

push-up

"E deve pure portare le mutande push-up," disse Alessandra.

("And he probably also wears push-up underwear," Alessandra said.)

APPROXIMATION

euroinglisc (Eng. **Euro-English**; Ital. **euro-inglese**)

Parlavano l'euroinglisc standard dei loro coetanei di tutta l'Europa.

(They spoke the standard Euro-English of their contemporaries in all of Europe.)

DIALECT

picchì cu nasci tunnu 'un po mòriri quatratu (Palermo)

pirchì cu nasci tunnu 'un poti murìri quadratu (Messina and Porto Zanca)



perché chi nasce tondo non può morire quadrato (Italian)

because he who is born round can't die square (English)

JARGON

mammasantissima (Eng. literally, **extremely holy mamma**, but typically used to refer to the **boss of bosses** of the Sicilian Mafia or Neapolitan Camorra)

Un caso di wishful thinking, lo definirebbero oggi certi infallibili mammasantissima bocconiani.

(A case of wishful thinking, as certain infallible Bocconian bosses of bosses would define it today.)

HYPHENATION

sono-Simonetta-buonasera (Eng. **I'm-Simonetta-good-evening**)

Ero stato testimone auditivo di una sua epica performans, una volta, all'inizio della sua crociata contro il Nord, quando gli era capitato di prendere la chiamata di un tale "sono-Simonetta-buonasera", che esercitava con entusiasmo la tentata vendita telefonica di prodotti enogastronomici padani.

(I had been an auditory witness to one of his epic performances, once, at the beginning of his crusade against the North when he had happened to take the call of a certain "I'm-Simonetta-good-evening," who enthusiastically exercised the attempted telephone sale of gourmet products from the Po Valley.)

NEOLOGISM

piccì (the word formed from the pronunciation of the initials **PC**, the **Partito Comunista**)

"A voi intellettuali idealisti i piccì vi considera solo degli utili idioti," si era avventurato a dire, Angelini, a un certo punto.

("You idealist intellectuals, the PC considers you only useful idiots," Angelini had ventured to say at a certain point.)

SUFFIXATION

sessantottista (Eng. **sixty-eightist**; refers to a member of the social and political movement in Italy in 1968)

Ce l'aveva sopra tutto con me, in quanto sessantottista, diceva lui.

(He was mad above all at me, since I was a sixty-eightist, he said.)

REGIONALISM

bbabbiare (Sic. **bbabbiari**; Ital. **scherzare**; Eng. **to joke**)

Beato te che hai sempre la voglia di bbabbiare.

(Lucky you because you always feel like joking.)

WORDPLAY (in English)

betting/petting



Aveva fatto di tutto per convincermi a giocare in società con lui, ma io gli avevo detto che al betting avevo sempre preferito il petting.

(He tried everything to convince me to gamble with him, but I told him that I had always preferred petting to betting.)

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Although some readers will undoubtedly lament the lack of a body, others, like me, will be enthralled by Piazzese's masterful story-telling no matter what genre he chooses to write. And as a resident of Austin, Texas, I can't tell you what a thrill it was to see my hometown get a mention in *Blues di mezz'autunno*, even if it was in reference to a biophysicist with a fixation for copper atoms instead of a linguist with a passion for Italian language and literature.

IN TRANSLATION

Although Piazzese's work has been translated into French and German, there are no English translations to date. Honestly, if English-language publishers don't rectify this grave omission soon, I may have to find a way to quit my day job and translate them myself.

NOTE

Be sure to read [my post](#) [4] on the first novel in the Lorenza La Marca series, [I delitti di via Medina-Sidonia](#) [5] (The Crimes of Via Medina-Sidonia) as well as [my interview](#) [6] with Santo Piazzese. Believe me when I say that you don't want to miss the picture he gave me for the post!

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