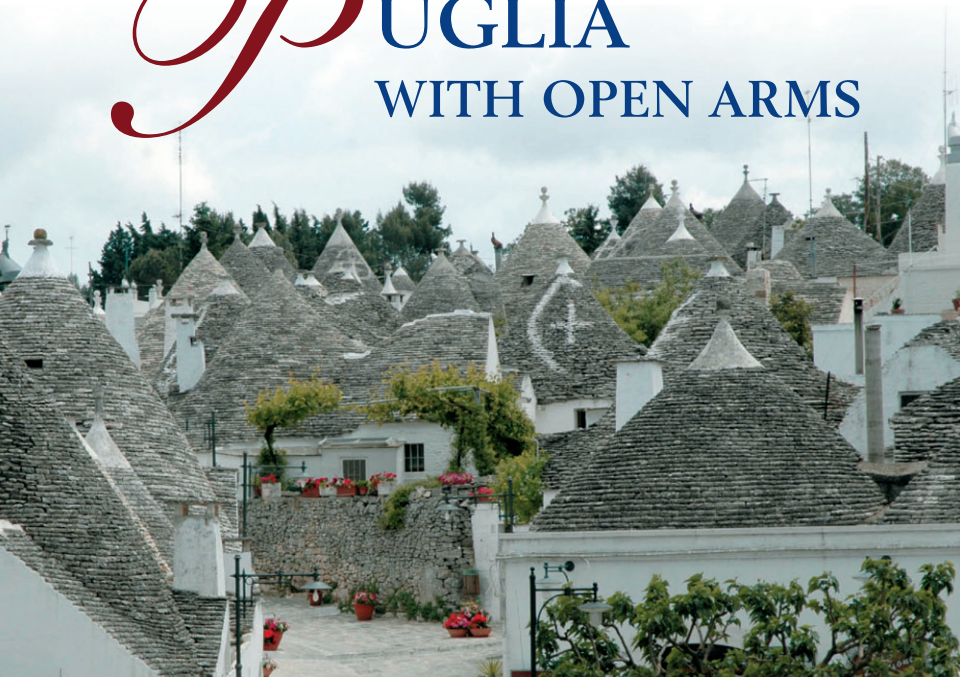
HÉDI BOURAOUI

PUGLIA
WITH OPEN ARMS



Translated by
ELIZABETH SABISTON

CANADA-MÉDITERRANÉE
ÉDITIONS
CENTRE

PUGLIA WITH OPEN ARMS

HÉDI BOURAOUI

PUGLIA
WITH OPEN ARMS

A Tale

Translation and Introduction by
ELIZABETH SABISTON

CMC Editions 2014

Bouraoui, Hédi, 1932 -
Puglia à Bras Ouverts
(Trans. and Intro.)
Sabiston, Elizabeth, 1937 -
Puglia With Open Arms

ISBN 978-2-9809692-5-6 (paperback)
ISBN 978-2-9812022-4-6 (PDF)
1. Tale 2. Puglia 3. Relations Puglia-Canada 4. Immigration

Library and Archives Canada Cataloguing in Publication

Bouraoui, Hédi, 1932 -
[Puglia à bras ouverts. English]
Puglia With Open Arms : a tale / Hédi Bouraoui ;
translation and introduction by
Elizabeth Sabiston.

Translation of: Puglia à bras ouverts
ISBN 978-2-9809692-4-9 (br.)
ISBN 978-2-9812022-3-9 (PDF)
1. Sabiston, Elizabeth Jean, 1937 - II. Title. III. Title: Puglia à bras ouverts. English

PS8553.O85P8313 2008 C843'.54 C2008-903819-3

Correspondence :
CMC Éditions

Canada-Mediterranean Centre
356 Stong College, York University
4700 Keele Street
Toronto, Ontario M3J 1P3
Tel: (416) 736-2100 x31004
Fax: (416) 736-5734
cmc@yorku.ca
http://www.yorku.ca/laps/fr/cmc/index.htm

Editing: Elizabeth Sabiston
Digitization: York University Printing Services

Legal Deposit: March 2014
© CMC Editions, Hédi Bouraoui, Elizabeth Sabiston

A La Famille D'Ambrosio,
grands et petits

Contents

Introduction *ix*

1. A Visit to Puglia 3
2. Convivial Puglia 17
3. Seductive Puglia 33
4. Welcoming Puglia 51
5. Puglia in Canada 65

Introduction

For readers accustomed to think of Hédi Bouraoui as a complex literary and cultural theoretician (see *Transpoétique*), or as the author of highly experimental, densely charged novels where conventional plot and characters are erased (see *La Pharaone*, *La Femme d'entre les lignes*, etc.), or as the poet of neologisms, of language twisted and tortured at will, *Puglia with Open Arms* may come as a surprise, perhaps even as a refreshing change because of its accessibility. Here we find the genial, warm, laughing Bouraoui, always present in all his texts, but in *Puglia* foregrounded, unmasked. His Mediterranean heart and spirit make the book appealing to a wide audience.

Be it said, however, that if a genial, laughing spirit pervades the most avowedly "serious" works, on such subjects as Transculturalism, Transpoetics, culture shocks in the global village we inhabit, immigration, war and peace, behind the Mediterranean warmth of *Puglia* there lurks a serious purpose – indeed several subjects of weight, including immigration, Transculturalism, and Transpoetics. But in this terse, compact *récit* – a tale rather than a novel – they surface in the background, leavened by wit and the Southern *joie de vivre*. It can be said that Samy Ben Meddah, the talespinner from the southern, North African shore of the Mediterranean, creates his own culture, as in Bouraoui's concept of "C*réaculture*," through his

interaction with his Italian neighbors, the Pugliesi, from the northern Mediterranean shore. And this culture created is by definition transcultural, and also transcontinental, inasmuch as Samy binds together the Maghreb, land of his birth, Canada, his adoptive country where he lives, and Italy, the land of his (and our) Western past, which he visits and loves.

The *récit* is, in fact, a kind of picaresque novel in miniature in which the somewhat naïve, innocent hero-picaro comes to terms with past and present through a series of loosely strung together episodes. To say that the tale is picaresque, however, is not to deny its strong sense of structure. If we take the central theme as "immigration," in the broadest sense of the word, Bouraoui presents a wide and variegated spectrum of emigrations and immigrations. First of all, there is the literal, geographical emigration from the Maghreb north to Canada, south again to Italy. Secondly, there is immigration towards the past, as well as towards the future. Last, but far from least, is the artistic immigration. As Samy says to his listeners (and Bouraoui could say to his readers), "I migrate into you," if the "you" understands. Thus, ideally, there takes place a kind of communion that transcends communication.

Puglia with Open Arms, as the title suggests, is above all a love story, a Valentine, to southern Italy. Readers have commented that it makes one want to visit. Bouraoui depicts feelingly and enthusiastically the warmth, kindness and generosity endemic to the Italian, and generally the Mediterranean temperament. The group scenes with members of the Italian community – university administrators

and faculty, politicians, huge extended families, bookstore managers and browsers (not to say clients), businessmen and women, medical professionals – are inspired, masterful, and warmly appreciative. And because Italy is Italy, the country is also a repository of the past, a museum, but one which is living and breathing. The book manifests Bouraoui's "Spirit of Place," to borrow D.H. Lawrence's expression. Bouraoui breathes life into antiquity, but also into the present and the future of the people whose existence Samy touches.

The five chapters of the tale could correspond to the five acts of a classical drama. Though each in a sense could stand on its own as a complete short story, or a play, together they constitute what has been called a "modular novel." The first chapter, "A Trip to Puglia," focuses on the problematic of rhetoric, the art of discourse, of which Samy is a master. It also introduces the theme of the pioneering Italian immigrants, a major ingredient in the Canadian mosaic, who contributed to the building, often literally, of their adopted land. Chapter Two, "Convivial Puglia," introduces the "female lead," Chiara Bonelli, curator of the museum at Ruvo di Puglia which houses the Jatta Collection – for what is a love story without a heroine? Through Chiara (whose name means clear, or clarity), the "museum world" comes to vibrant life in the present for Samy.

In Chapter Three, "Seductive Puglia," the written word is stressed at the bookstore, the sacred precinct of La Feltrifarfalle, where it seems only St. Peter will permit entry. Here Samy is to introduce the *spoken* word of Chapter One, of his oral folk tradition from which all writing stems. Samy contributes to erasing

the line of demarcation between supposedly "high" and "low," popular culture, which both inspires and reinvigorates the more academic manifestations.

Chapter Four focuses on the religion of Puglia, and its Patron Saint Nicholas (for whom half the population seems to be named). The Patron of sailors, fishermen, apothecaries, single women, lawyers, those seeking justice, St. Nicholas comes to the aid of Samy, "the navigator of words." Last but not least, St. Nicholas is the iconic figure of Santa Claus or *Père Noël* or Father Christmas throughout Western, and even penetrating Eastern cultures. St. Nicholas is in many ways the central character of the tale. It is this chapter that introduces the theme of the immigration to Italy, sometimes without choice, of Slavic refugees, and of the Jewish survivors of the Holocaust, the *Shoah*. From an old enemy, Italy becomes the generous host.

Finally, the book comes full circle with Chapter Five, "Puglia in Canada." As Samy's Italian journey began in his adoptive Canada, it ends with his return to Canada and his meetings with a fellow immigrant to the New World, this one from Puglia, Nicola (anglicized as Nick) Zambrotta. This final chapter looks at the American Dream of the new immigrants: equal social status leading to material success, or as St. John Crèvecoeur put it in the eighteenth century, "*Ubi panis, ibi patria*." This chapter is linked to the previous one by both immigration and the religious theme, for it depicts Italian immigrants who assimilate in most ways to Canadian life, but who insist on marrying within the Italian culture and religion. The question is subliminally raised, whether Canada may make too *much* allowance for

rootedness at the expense of the new *patria* which can be created. Chapter Five, in effect, looks ambiguously at the future, in which cultures are interchanged with the lightning rapidity of the Internet. We live in a world where we can either keep the trace of other cultures we acquire, or produce a hodge-podge, or, as Bouraoui describes it in *Ainsi parle la Tour CN*, a Tower of Babel which his talking CN Tower resists.

To look more closely at some of the characters populating the episodic tale, Samy the talespinner is the Jamesian central consciousness, or point of view character. While he shares some background and personality traits with his creator, Bouraoui is careful to distance himself from this rather naïve young man. It might have been interesting to make him frankly a writer, rather than a public speaker, as many of his philosophical and socio-political ideas sound rather sophisticated for a youth of his background. On the other hand, Bouraoui clearly wants to stress the importance in world literature of the oral tradition which was to lead to the epic about the founding of a city, or a nation-state (*The Iliad*, *The Odyssey*) and later to the picaresque novel (*Tom Jones*, *Moll Flanders*, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*) in which a hero (or anti-hero) who rebels against conventions provides a sounding-board for the ills, evils, and weaknesses of his society.

Chapter Two presents a human love story, which is symbolic of Samy's love affair with Italy, for it is Chiara who introduces him to the glorious Roman and Italian past, which includes the story of his ancient compatriot Hannibal who was the last to effect an invasion from the south shore of the Mediterranean to the north. If there is a problem with the love story,

it is that the symbolism tends at times to override the realism, as the love seems rather abruptly dismissed.

Then there are the four Nicola's: the friend Nicola D'Alema, Samy's gracious host; the verbose, pontificating Nicola Colangelo, who makes his fortune at home and is never tempted to leave Italy; Nicola (Nick) Zambrotta, the Pugliese who does immigrate to Canada and prospers abroad; and, of course, overriding all, St. Nicholas himself. If Chiara personifies Italy, St. Nicholas personifies the local "*patria*," Puglia. Vergil, in fact, in *The Georgics*, used the term to refer to his birthplace, not Italy as a whole. The reader might like to see a little more of the hospitable Nicola D'Alema. But the other two Nicola's, while seemingly opposite in fate and ambition, are actually alter egos. Both represent the older generation, the one who immigrates and the one who stays home. But both are entrepreneurs who prosper, and both remain conservative on religion and culture. It could be argued, in fact, that Nick Zambrotta remains *more* rooted in Italian culture, as he retains the values he brought with him after the Second World War, which remained fixed even while his children and grandchildren assimilated to a greater degree with the majority culture. Nicola Colangelo is an intriguing character who is fully and humorously realized. At first, in Chapter One, he seems obnoxious and pretentious. But by the time we arrive at the politics of the bookstore in Chapter Three, Nicola Colangelo shows that he understands well the muddle that is Italian politics – one observer cries, "We need to collect them all, and speed them to their funeral" (34), and a recent radio interviewer

remarked that Italy is "*un pays immobile dans un monde qui a changé*" [an immobile country in a world which has changed]. Nicola, "Apollo to his friends, God of light, warrior and pastor, protector of the Muses," knows how to get action, manipulates the manager cleverly, and succeeds in introducing Samy into the bookstore (41). The latter in turn tells them tales of modern attempts at postcolonial immigration to Europe, of the Subsaharan Ahmadou who never succeeds in leaving, and the North African Abdelhak, who immigrates, but winds up in prison for robbing a bank in frustration at the lack of opportunities. Thus the old colonials become the new aspiring colonists in old Europe, with all the traumas they experience. Bouraoui here introduces a number of North African and Subsaharan dialectal expressions to give the flavor.

Chapter Four takes place under the sign of Saint Nicholas, and we move from the negative, repressive reception of the old colonials in our own time, to the contrasting welcome of the Holocaust survivors.

Saint Nicolas is transported by Nick Zambrotta from Puglia to Canada. Bouraoui early signals the central theme of the tale: "This trip to Puglia inspired him to understand the reasons that push people to leave their birthplace, and those who choose to live there all their lives. A difficult task which he doesn't know how to accomplish!" (14). Samy himself wants to take his Italian roots with him, while he continues to "*nomader*" around the world: "Samy loves Puglia for its convivial modesty, its seductive discretion, its natural simplicity… the *bonhomie* of the olive trees which are twisted into astonishing, versatile, intriguing silhouettes. These venerable trees never miss the opportunity to highlight their thousand-year history…

and what a dramatization!" (31-32).We smell the salt air, taste the wonderful fresh local produce, the crisp *taralli* (round pastries), the local wine. The hospitals even seem warm and more humane than in the northern countries. We visualize the *trulli*, charming cone-shaped dwellings which used to be storage sheds for farm tools, and the *masserie*.[1] Not the least of the attractions is the seductiveness and sensuality manifested in the present by Chiara, in the past by the ancient statues.

As he leaves Puglia for Canada, Samy summarizes its manifold pleasures for him:

> *It is simple … natural … welcoming … convivial … seductive … generous … affectionate … Then it will be forever part of my journey… for to return here is to find again an old friend… with whom I lived an unprecedented love… It is also to leave again for new horizons… for so many encounters… so many communions…* (63)

Samy is not to embrace fixity, however, but find his creativity, his inspiration in the interstices.

At the end, however, in Chapter Five, Samy seems to move to straight *reportage*, most of the views expressed being those of Nick Zambrotta. Nick would prefer to die where he was born, however proud he is of his material success in Canada. He also seems fixated on his first wife, who died in Italy, and resists the changes embraced by the younger generation. Nicola Colangelo, who has saluted Samy fraternally when the latter leaves Puglia, wonders if Nick is his old school friend, but Nick

1 These were highlighted in a June 30, 2007 article in the travel section of *The Toronto Star*, which prophesied that Puglia will become the new Tuscany (not, perhaps, an unmixed blessing).

seems uninterested.

While the overall tone of the book is sunny and optimistic, the last paragraph is more ambiguous:

> Only the American apple… lustrous… waxed with perfect contours… has the same taste… Bland taste of the leaves of Barbary figs in Toronto, Chicago, Addis Ababa… Shanghai, Rome, Paris, Tananarive… or Bari! (79)

If building bridges between people is positive, it is also crucial to cherish differences and resist conformity. The American apple dominates all over the world, and symbolizes the American Way of Life, and the *leaves* of Barbary figs (unlike the figs themselves) are tasteless.

Just before this dire warning against conformity, however, is an appeal to the reader:

> Like a weaver's spindle, each coming and going is a new thread being born…. Like an artist who places tiles to create a mosaic… he still doesn't know the coherence… nor its effects! His ending will remain forever a work in progress! (79)

Like the title, Puglia welcomes the reader with open arms, and the tale is indeed a work in progress.

A VISIT TO PUGLIA

1

A Visit to Puglia

He had the surprise of his life! Samy Ben Meddah had never been welcomed so warmly! The red carpet usually reserved for heads of state, while he was only a modest talespinner, performing under the ramparts of Maghrebian cities. It's true that he had been informally received at Acquaviva delle Fonti in Puglia, a bridge between East and West. Neither the desert of his native land, with its fantastic mirages… nor the tricolored Arch of Triumph of his educational center, which celebrates only incompetents for their inconsequential babble… nor the multicultural Mosaic of his adoptive land, which recognizes only the native-born, legitimate and extremely chauvinistic… inspired in him this visceral joy. Oh! Not the happiness of triumph, the success of conquest, or the self-justification of egoism, but the pleasure inspiring multitudes of rainbow-hued words to return it, echoing back to those who created it.

A true son of the Supreme Wordmaster, in good standing, he adored Italy. Especially Puglia which brought back to him so many Mediterranean traits evoking his birthplace. His native land is a friendly neighbor a few knots from the Peninsula. Then too he is convinced that Roman blood, mixed with so many others, flows in his veins. In addition to this special affection he has for people who accept him in true brotherhood. Without drums or trumpets! Just

like this evening at his friend Nicola D'Alema's at a feast reuniting several generations of his family. From Grandmother to Mother, to brothers, sisters, wives, husbands, teenagers, children… Balm to the heart to experience such vibrant conviviality, such warm hospitality… to taste an earthly and spiritual meal where everyone perfects and sounds his personal note of shared love. The grandmother and her *polpette di Cardi*… everyone has his special dish, from the *entrée* to the main course, to dessert… the host and hostess radiant and punctiliously attentive… to the little Francesco, no bigger than a peanut, who lent him his room and his private bath. The next day, they moved from the family to the older community, who prepared a pot luck supper to celebrate his visit to this province which appears to be an adjustable spanner on a reduced map of Italy. The opening radiating from the four cardinal points of affection.

One surprise leads to another. The last one even more astonishing! He expected to meet a few friends, but more than one hundred and fifty people were waiting for him. The minute he entered, they all rose, applauding him energetically to welcome him to the *Università delle Terza Età*. He was so moved, he couldn't get over it! He expected anything, except this ovation coming straight from the heart. Mediterranean warmth shows its feelings in a spontaneous explosion. No calculation, no ulterior motive. The atmosphere was electric in this enormous hall. Silence laced with affection flooded the space, resonated in everyone's heart. But in aid of what, these warm greetings? No doubt to welcome this writer, invited to tell them stories of his life.

Or is it because they heard his voice, distant and foreign, giving speech to the silenced and excluded? He hasn't, and never will have, dogma to impose. Rather smile trying to save the grain revitalizing the human condition, so traumatized on this earth. No magisterial lesson. Rather an initial step encouraging everyone to cultivate the garden of his own humanity? A heritage bedecked with flowers of our inner sea. Sunflowers lighting souls, uniting different races, religions, cultures… avoiding quarrels, hatred and wars… strengthening bonds of tolerance and peace. The global village is leading straight to destruction… and it's terrifying! We must prepare ourselves. More than ever a little idealism to reactivate the swollen cells of the universe. The laws of the market have frozen solidarity to the point of its disappearance. Economics gone mad whose limping steps have difficulty adjusting their pace. We all stand to gain only when harvested shoots of love are offered to the passersby at all times of the year. They will be useful for every unforeseen event such as "Desert Storm" and other Tsunamis.

The group gathered for a festival of hopeful speech immediately realized that Samy never played the game of the holy Monster. Like a Mandarin in the mobile pillories of old Italy. Important personages crowned with certitude, exploiting innocent neophytes to enhance their personal glory. None of that caste completely imbued with self in this player with words-ideas he sows to the four winds without charlatanry nor bridles.

After a long, eloquently sensuous discourse – a consummate art of southern Mediterraneans – the University President signals the festivity organizers. A

group of children begins to sing and act individual sketches which are greeted with vigorous applause. Impressive talent producing one surprise after the other. Then adults of all ages perform regional dances. The awkwardness of age fails to hinder them. Everyone appreciates the folkloric costumes. From the Administrative Council of the University, seated in the first row, an elderly woman rises to offer the stranger a wooden shoe braided with grains of wheat, dried flowers, a folded paper message… Samy is not supposed to discover its secret until he is back home. After the offering, the lady addresses the President:

"This Gentleman is like us… he's a brother!"

This compliment goes straight to the heart of the stranger, who immediately loses his foreignness. Then from the front of the scene, a man about eighty is selected to play a major role. Short, with protruding eyes behind thick glasses, with carefully combed hair, a parting over one-third of the skull. His dark blue suit, white shirt and tie signal his official role. He takes charge of the microphone, begins an interminable speech… chaotic bad poetry which is well enough received. The end of each sentence hammers flat sonorities with predictable vowels. The more he proceeds into the speech, the more heated he gets. Red as a poppy. He throws himself into the praise of the professors who offered him so many distant lands without his ever leaving his own. Sometimes he glances at a beautifully decorated diploma. Sometimes he seems to improvise. A facile poetry resembles cotton candy falling off a stick. The declarations to the beautiful women of the region turn the heads of old and young. Finally, he gives

the parchment to the guest on the part of the whole group. Infected, the recipient thanks him in equally grandiloquent terms. Everyone is invited to a buffet where regional dishes are generously displayed. Samy advances timidly to serve himself, but the movement and the crowds keep him from reaching the food. He is invited to sit at the table of honor. Everyone redoubles his attention to make him taste such dishes as *involtini di melanzane*, *polpa alla cipolla*, *torta di ricotta*, *vino rosso*, *limoncello*…

Love revealing a whole art of savoring the delicious products of the land! During these meals larded with rambling discussions, Samy is solicited on every side. Everyone has his little question! But what makes this stranger tick who resembles them like two drops of milk? However, he doesn't have the same soul as they have. A physical resemblance which doesn't gibe with his way of living or speaking. The last orator seizes him when he gets the chance.

"You don't know me… But I know your stories without having moved from my village. I am Nicola Colangelo. I admire your way of wandering all over the world… What energy! I'm not capable of that…"

"You know… wandering is an inner compulsion…. Thank you for the beautiful speech… a little too flattering…"

"I said what we were thinking, my colleagues and I."

"The poetic speech… it's your talent… isn't it? You improvise… or is it prepared in advance?"

"Half-improvised… half learned by heart! Tell me, you are an eternal wanderer – no roots… isn't that right? However, you boast of belonging to three continents! A little too ambitious, no?"

"My nomadance carries with it all the roots it

acquired on its path!"

"Impossible! When you tear up the roots of an olive tree… it dies!"

"Yes, I come from the region of olive trees, like you… and you know that the stem continues to grow even when the tree dies…. Moreover, I choose to be a fig tree which is more generous… I'm not a tree. In place of roots, I prefer rootlets… which mock their fixity!"

Nicola Colangelo didn't much appreciate the reply. Grumbling, he leaves to fill his plate, promising to come back soon. For, he says, "I have a little service to ask of you, we'll have time to talk about it!"

As in the past, each time Samy arrives in Puglia, his friend Nicola D'Alema takes him to visit a corner of the province that he adores. In reality, he has him taste pleasant little regions one shouldn't exploit too much. Like a memorable dinner in *Polignano a mare* where the sea sculpts its waves in joyous chorals under their feet. On another occasion, they take a bowl of fresh air in the *Selva di Fasano*, stop at the belvedere overlooking a sea green with olive trees. In the distance, they admire the white crests of the *trulli* and the *masserie*, those fortified farms…. Then they visit their friend Angela who lives in a *trullo* which is tastefully decorated. Samy loves this deluxe dwelling which was, to start with, only a conical hangar in dry stone where they kept the farm equipment. In the interior, three cupolas end in pyramidal points. On the outside, the cut stone is positioned dry and built up in cylindrical forem towards the bottom, to taper at the top. Transformed into a maisonnette, the *trulli* crown the shepherds' prestigious landscape. Angela serves them *panzerotti* and a very fresh

prosecco. Many memories are awakened of moments spent together after bathing on the rocky beaches of Monopoli. Admiration for the ingenuity of cast iron, balconies flowering in vivid colors brightening the Mediterranean white and blue, narrow streets twisting into arcades, curves, and other irregular shapes.... Towns and villages with poetic names: Ostuni, Alberobello, Molfetta, Otranto, Conversano, Foggia, Fasano, Brindisi, Taranto, Torrecane... accents of the land adjusting to the Apuleian architecture, reflecting so many influences, from Greek to Arab, from Norman to Pisan....

During each trip to Bari, Samy enjoys scrutinizing the zigzag coast of this capital of the region, its valiant protuberances, recalcitrant or frankly timid, rolling in the shades of the sea. Necklaces of lamps trace the limits of a land proud of its acts and gestures. Once on departure at the airport, he runs into a compatriot from Tozeur who asserts to him that "Sfaxians are the model of working people. They resemble the Pugliesi... moreover, I'm accompanied here with a delegation armed with a project of several million... on what we have in common: citrus fruit, olives, and oil." In effect, the flat countryside reminds him of the Tunisian south, the olive trees, the flowering almond trees.... Only here, the greenery carpets the land everywhere, while over there the land is more or less desert.

Today, Nicola D'Alema and Samy go on an excursion to Gioia del Colle, a little village perched on the Murgiana hill, a beautiful spot on the road connecting two seas. The Norman castle restored by Frederick II, the National Archaeological Museum today, shows the luxurious life they used to live there. Everything is immense and empty, except for a few

objects exhibited on the ground floor. The friends imagine the evenings of troubadours, of *meddahs*, of *griots*, set to the rhythm of an Afro-Oriental, African-American, Occidental music.... A happy marriage of cultures, celebrating at the same the flourishing agriculture and cheese production of the region. At a dark turn of the staircase, they are surprised by a phantom voice. Abrupt, breathless murmurs of a legend that the inhabitants try in vain to erase from memory. It comes back with redoubled tenacity:

Frederick II accused Bianca Lancia of infidelity. Although she was pregnant, he locked her in the tower of the castle. After giving birth, Bianca cut off her breasts and sent them with the baby to her lover.

Pursuing this voice from nowhere, the visitors enter a cell, grope, fall on a wall where the breasts emerge in relief. They caress them as if to ease the lament of the faithful woman, wrongfully accused. Ill fortune sweats from the wall. Their hands are soiled by the injustice, but they leave haloed by the courage of the victim. Mutilation, proof of an exceptional love! Why didn't it torture the conscience of the guilty one? She still lives in the stone. Thus pass the lives of the great men of this world who take pleasure in spoiling honor, or destroying everything they touch with impunity.

When they leave, the friends buy *taralli*, round pastries they much to appease their hunger. Serene rounds soothing bad memories.

At the *Palazzo De Mari*, the Mayor of Acquaviva, taciturn, with wrinkled brow, making no welcoming gesture, the regional councilor, pleasant and thoughtful, makes up with his kindness for the austerity of his colleague. Other personalities

and friends officiate at the table of honor. Which encouraged Samy to start recounting a part of his nomadic quest:

"I arrived in the New World at the same time as 400,000 Italians. They soon went to work transforming a puritanical, half-dead city. Cosmopolitan metro Toronto was born at the hands of all the recent immigrants. In the construction trade, the Italians anointed it with a zest of *limoncello*. Thus the austere atmosphere lightened with a Mediterranean air. They not only labored on the traditional red brickwork, columnar fronts, houses where light reigns… but also in a modern vein with gigantic structures, among them the CN Tower, highest in the world. They didn't fail to invest in all the trades, enterprises, politics…. Many of them sit on local, regional, federal governments. Like the Greeks, Macedonians, Chinese, Ukrainians… they collected in certain quarters of the city.

A euphoric period where everyone carved his niche. A harmonious cohabitation which became a kind of model, until the day when internationalization and market law came to disturb this beautiful harmony. Then the epidemic of focusing on individual interests emerged. Which sowed discord in pockets, and caused cracks in the cement of collectivity.

Personally, I live in "Little Italy" like a fish in water. Since I am from the south, I don't need to plead my values to the Italians, who have the same temperament as my own. I carry on my back my Carthaginian skull, crossroads of so many civilizations, races, religions… thus I am endlessly marching towards the "Canadian Mosaic" where the mixture of peoples and ethnic groups is accomplished more or less happily… and certainly less violently than in Europe or Africa. In

the New World, Carthage and Rome concluded a peace treaty in the dignity and respect of the other. My M.P. (Member of Parliament), my doctor, barber, accountant, housekeeper… are all Italian. They are always present in my daily life. To such a point that I am often taken for one of them. A *paesano* who botches slightly the language of Dante. But what does it matter!

As I *opted to live in fluid words/ at the heart of the conferences of the whole world*, I made a career of 'storytelling.' Oh! I didn't become a millionaire, but I live a comfortable life… that's the main thing! I tell stories, wandering about, grazing on the immensely rich patrimony of nations. Thus I pitch my tent in the oasis of the "global village" and its legends. There I drink the sweet water of manners and customs. I quench my thirst for knowledge by sipping in the furrows of the most varied cultures. That is where the values of all peoples crystallize. Then I gather their dews to water the community. That one which gave me its secrets of yesterday and today. By so doing, I refresh their memory, or, needless to say, I send back to it the image it has of itself. Briefly, I recall to people their own history before asking them to pass it on to their neighbors… and do them the favor of recalling their difference!

Thus, I told the Italians the tale of the *foundation of Rome* by Romulus and Remus. *The Golden Fleece* to the Greeks. *Why the Leopard Got Its Spots* to the Africans. *The Monster-Locust* to the Chinese. *The Shepherd of the Giant Mountains* to the Germans. *Thus Was Hungary Born* to the Hungarians. *The Bride in the Tomb* of Baal Shem Tov to the Israelites. *The Foxes of Oji* to the Japanese. *Prince Krak and*

the Dragon to the Poles. *Towards the Creation of the Universe, or Sky and Earth Separated by the Atmosphere* to the Egyptians….

For me, it's not a matter of retransmitting a myth given to the people who created it, but rather making it share part of its heritage with the one he would like to receive from his neighbor. Then the different cultures would intermingle in the celebration of diversity…."

During the speech session, Nicola Colangelo grabs the mike from a speaker, and mounts on a long discourse…. He warms to the subject as he speaks. Red as a cock's crest in heat, he harangues Samy while the audience gets restless. The President orders him to ask one last question and stop speaking. He ignores her:

"You advocate traveling in different countries… you have visited the whole world! Do you know that 'A rolling stone gathers no moss'? What kind of roots have you planted in the country which welcomed you?"

"The recent immigrants have joined forces with the First Nations, the founding peoples… who believe themselves the only ones to possess legitimate roots. False! The roots of the new arrivals grow in the same way as those of the first people to arrive in 'God's Country.' A simple question of time marks the difference…. Today, everyone tries to build bridges so that an *entente cordiale* reigns… so that the whole world can move with dignity in the national territory. That's the Canadian identity… openness to difference… peaceful cohabitation in the radiance of colors, beliefs… of work towards equality…."

"Your story of roots irritates me! I don't understand… why do you try so hard to hide your origin?"

"You haven't understood anything! I never hid the least trace of all my roots.... I simply opted for 'the august gesture' of the wanderer... he who refuses to plant his body once and for all...."

Nicola Colangelo abandons the cause, and positions himself in front of the exit in order to whisper a word in Samy's ear:

"I have an old schoolmate from Sannicandro who immigrated to Canada. He lives in Toronto... his is a success story. He comes back to the country every year, but he gives no sign of life... please give him my address. I'd very much like to see him again. I never understood why he left our beautiful land! I remained here... one day I'll tell you my story...."

Samy, the perpetual wanderer, thus finds himself charged with being the intermediary between the sedentary man and the nomad. He is caught up in the game. Tossed between rootedness and wandering, he is very comfortable in his skin. This trip to Puglia inspired him to understand the reasons that push some people to leave their birthplace, and others to choose to live there all their lives. A difficult task which he doesn't know how to accomplish!

CONVIVIAL PUGLIA

2

Convivial Puglia

At the *Castello Normanno Svevo di Sannicandro di Bari*, the Mayor, a pleasant gentleman, receives his visitors like a Lord, proud of his patrimony. He reminds the guest that he knows Canada well, since he married a Canadian woman born in Willowdale. He has visited Toronto several times and even met the Deputy Mayor, Monsieur Pantalonnade! The cut stone room removes doubt, inspires confidence. Greeted as an orator from the New World, Samy knows how to persuade without becoming overly dramatic.... His direct, limpid remarks don't need theatrical help. He isn't there to sell laundry detergent or fluoride toothpaste... Rather to make his audience appreciate juicy words giving them pleasant dreams... A clarion call, his speech comes from far across the seas.... It pierces the night of time and ridicule through its division into many colors. He is not a prophet, but his multiple voice picks up the echo of the voiceless and expands, delighting in complicity.

"My Carthaginian ancestors passed over Puglia. Together with the Romans, they killed each other for a vain glory which advanced neither elephants... nor mice... nor camels... nor ants....

Oh Apulia, important region conquered by the Romans four centuries before Jesus Christ!

You witnessed their bloody defeat in the Battle of

Cannes against Hannibal… Not that it mattered! After the Carthaginians left, they reclaimed their territory. Yesterday, like today, wars break out, inflame the world, and are extinguished… Only time emerges as the victor… Men come back to life… The lost years are forgotten…. Stronger than the roots of beings who are deployed without affecting the world…

Across the wounds and tyranny gnawing at the heart of the universe, I pursue my nomadic route… without stopping, without rest… A dynamic life whose minute details of movement must be remembered…. If I made this return to a few moribund curses, it's to free myself from the past…. One must never forget it in order to build the future…To linger over the avatars of history to leave behind oneself the waste of humanity….

Silence… the almond flowers grow; we must heed their light spirits!

Silence… the buds of the olive trees sing peace; we must shelter beneath their branches… and listen to them!

Silence… the fig trees reclaim their fertility; let's accept their generosity!

I prefer to turn towards new pages distancing us from the extremist terror, from the chaos of the new scoundrels injecting "the shock of civilizations." I would rather evoke the *entente cordiale* of the peoples of the Book in Andalusia from the eighth to the fifteenth century. The three religions existed in harmony for the good of all. Think of the impact of Maïmonides, the Jewish philosopher and theologian… of Averroès (Ibn Roshd) born in Cordoba, the great commentator of Aristotle… and

all the thinkers of this civilization flourishing in peace and prosperity… until the day when a Sultan, crazed with love, overturned everything! It is easier to lose than to win. Land, reputation, or fortune….

Under the splendid vaults of the room, I hope that my stories will draw the curtain, ending solipsism. Open the scene of unveilings according to the four points of the compass… such as our friend Nicola Colangelo, here present, has just shown us, despite his small stature – typically Mediterranean, like mine… which created in him an intense shyness since his youth… exacerbated at his adolescence. Mistreated and ridiculed by society, he valiantly overcame obstacles, and emerged the victor by becoming a social Assistant. He helped to make so many people feel comfortable with themselves, curb the progress of "agrarian reform," recover the earth, or restore a subsistence being threatened…. All his life, he accomplished his task with competence and passion, serving the citizens of Foggia, Gravina di Puglia, Altamura, the province of Avellino… so many backwards places in the province…

Except for a year in the mountain dell'Ipinia, Mr. Colangelo spent all his life and career in Puglia. He only left it for a few tourist visits to Europe and Israel. And even if he would like to continue traveling, he never had the slightest intention of emigrating. The only country that would have tempted him: the United States where his wife had relatives. As he indicated several times, lack of work and unemployment are eternal maladies. That's what pushes people to leave their countries. And when there is no work, we must invent it! The historic immigration from city to city, from nation to nation… Take heed! It needs to be

well understood and well regulated. In Puglia many immigrants work without a social umbrella. A major help foreigners provide to the aged, the sick, invalids who, thanks to a modest pension and old age assistance, can pay them. Clandestine work to which one turns a blind eye… without it no inexpensive assistance…. He keeps up the hope that the Pugliesi will choose better politicians because the province possesses intelligence, a wonderful geographical setting, a port, an airport to play an important role in Italy and throughout the world."

Samy's emigration is essentially a quest for knowledge. All knowledge short of going to seek it in China! A rare commodity with the most contradictory shades… For that reason he had to harvest and sift the words. Yesterday, like today or tomorrow, he sows them to the wind in the four corners of five continents. Always ready to open the windows of discourse to air the closure of combinations of circumstances. To break silence, not to take a citadel, a tower, a drawbridge… To find the word bristling with life, cadencing misery, nourishing thoughts, sustaining tolerance… finding a passage through infinite meanings… swimming in the arcana of sentences… bathing in the stylistic sea… lying in the module of friendship… the only one to regenerate our humanity….

This evening's storyteller makes himself Ulysses and Sindbad, with a touch of Christopher Columbus in quest of new islands… All Robinson Crusoe illuminated, gifted with spiritual cathodes uniting the Unique and the Diverse…. In the very midst of his speech, a young woman asks what he thinks of the Presidential elections in the land of the

Gauls… and what were his predictions? His personal point of view didn't make empty promises! In the manner of the Presidential hopeful Barkosi, the son of middle-class immigrants… who gargles with sonorous words, stirs the incredulous, and sows horror among the clairvoyant. His appeal to the dream to console the Republic resonates like a gong of misfortune… a fantastic theatrical play supported by his friend Nerdusi, in a riot of voices…. For Samy, no crocodile tears to shed over him, but a slogan: Barkosi is a tragedy for democracy. The other candidate, born in Sénégal… will she have the heart to conquer the Grail? Marjolaine Noyal is far from being Joan of Arc on her horse! She promised hope to give back to the French the courage to believe in their stumbling future. A beautiful scary smile… A Mask of an *arriviste* in poor taste. The traditional womanly elegance… The ill-founded arrogance of the man… both manipulated by the weight of stumbling money, masters of the session pushing towards their own glory. No vision for the people who are going to put one or the other of them at the head of the country! It's all empty words! All over the world politicians use and abuse them during elections… then they forget their promises made only in their calves' heads! Thus said a certain general.

Samy is silent for a long moment…

The Deputy Mayor steps forward to make his speech and give him a plaque in honor of "his way of erecting bridges to cross rivers of all colors, streams of all powers, brooks of all intolerances…." While Samy thanks his hosts, he plunges into his own thoughts without exposing them to daylight…. He doesn't know if it is a prayer he is reciting to himself, or if it is

a wish he dare not express:

May each one transcend his own limits… cross the barriers inhibiting him… contemplate unsuspected horizons… recharge his batteries… revitalize his thought… his action… his movement… his steps…. First towards himself… then with respect to others… in the "global village" forever ready to explode in our face!

Following the tales told to fit the occasion, a group of friends went to lift a glass in a dark empty bar. The only advantage was that it is situated across from the castle! The aura of the place reverberates in the streets. No one is paying attention, except the foreign visitor. Just for the discovery of art ceaselessly renewed, he comes back to Italy. For him this country is a true museum opened on the plazas, the roads, the avenues. In addition to the diverse architecture typical of each region, sculpture, monuments, storefronts, houses… a feast for the observant eye. At each turn of the road lurks a surprise… such as the time Samy admires the perspective of the twelfth century cathedral of Conversano while going downstairs. In a furniture store displaying beds this sentence appeals to him: "*La cultura del dormire.*" Thus a banal daily act is raised to the level of culture. Another time, coming to the Osteria Perricci Restaurant at the appointed reservation time, Samy and his friends had to enter a line which was already very long, for over an hour. Someone exclaimed: "Take a photo of San Antonio and pray!" Every act there necessitates a dose of spirituality. A fantastic combination of beauty cultivated on a base of religiosity.

Ruvo di Puglia. An ancient Greek village flourishing from the fifth to the third century B.C., which adopted the Corinthian style while adding its own local characteristics. Samy visits the splendid Roman thirteenth century Cathedral, lingers over the rose window, the elegant campanile.... While walking some distance in this town which produces wine and oil, he comes upon a small museum which shelters the "Jatta Collection." Since the wicket is closed, he goes to the management office. He encounters an average woman, of no remarkable beauty, but who possesses a magnetic charm. In her forties, she is of a simultaneously Greek and Latin type. Her face, with regular features and olive skin, is animated by an intelligent look which scrutinizes your inner self. Almond eyes, rosy cheeks, fine lips, brown hair... Everything about her appearance and her gestures projects the harmony of two civilizations which gave birth to the so-called Occidental values.

At once, a sympathetic current embraces the foreign visitor and the curator. The museum is closed, she says, but as you are a visitor who comes from afar, I'll show you the collection in a private visit. Chiara Bonelli's hospitality astonishes him, touches him deeply. Overjoyed, he feels metamorphosed by this spontaneous kindness.... He is ready to fly to the seventh heaven of happiness. To access the Museum, they cross an open Atrium in the direction of a magnificent antique garden. Already a journey into history, suddenly brought to life by their presence. A common agreement to penetrate to the heart of a high site of memory... witness of an affection being born. Two beings who have known each other only an instant... A desire for initiation unites them... an

experienced guide and a lost tourist! She opens an immense wrought iron door accompanied by this unknown man who has suddenly become a friend. The couple discuss… as if they have known each other for a long time:

At the beginning of the fifteenth century, Ruvo was little known. There is no study of its history. When the peasants found vases on this land, only gold interested them… and they sold it for a high price. Twenty years later, thanks to the enthusiasm generated by these finds, they understood systematic digs. You have to know that in ancient times they buried people with the objects they used during their life. They believed these would serve them in the after-life. Poor people had two or three vases… the rich several….going sometimes up to sixty-six. In the tombs, they discovered so many objects: necklaces, jewels, perfume vials for women, arms for men, toys for children… The face of the dead person always turned towards the East… (Sunrise associated with rebirth). Families came to consume on the tomb a dish of cuttle-fish (symbol of survival) and pomegranates (symbol of resurrection).

This museum is conceived like a residential Palace in the Neapolitan family of Giovanni Jatta. The vases are classified according to the criteria of their beauty, according to the taste of the period. Unique in type in all of Italy, it still retains today the original disposition its founder wished. Inaugurated in 1993… certain vases in baked earth date from the fourth century B.C. Not all come from Ruvo… some from Canosa, Taranto, or directly from Greece.

Room I

Here the vases of baked earth are simply rudimentary. Less beautiful than those which will follow, she says. Decorations in lines, points, circles, squares…. It is the beginning of the exhibition… you already see, under the window, the reconstruction of a tomb in volcanic stone, surrounded by unvarnished utensils… pottery of life, of death… birth and death exhibited together….

In the middle of the room a great spherical container named *Dolio*…

Venus, or as if their dream had just come true…. Is it Aphrodite exhibiting her idyll with Adonis, associating her also with the Oriental cults?

Ancient goddesses, echoes of the Chiara of today, fashioning a love being born… under the hands of the potter… the gesture hesitates, gropes, firms up… assumes himself that under his fingers this vague object of desire emerges…. The potter exposing these wares exhales a penetrating odor of earth and tomb….

Room II

This is the largest room of the Museum with more than 700 vases! And what diversity! In place of geometric lines, there are human forms… varied characters, men, women, children, animals…. The technique changes… the color as well… it becomes red… the bottom of the vase, black. All sorts of amphorae, receptacles, containers… Here oil reigns! Doesn't it serve to feed, illuminate, massage, prepare perfumes and other hygienic products?

Love initiated in ancient times is inscribed in this

place animated with so many vestiges, in a social context which completes them. The couple floats among the crowd… distinguishes itself from it… withdraws into itself, while opening to the surroundings, to the inhabitants… Their looks don't turn towards the foreign and the foreigner to denigrate them… but let them pass… in the discretion of the moment. No cry of dilapidation! No hatred for the unsuspected. The beauty of the artisanat pacifies… offers the blessing of olive branches….

Room III

In the middle of this room, not as large as the preceding, presides the marble bust of Giovanni Jatta Junior. It is he who organized and augmented the Collection. This room, famous for its astonishing cups shaped like human heads (denominated *rhyta*, pronounced *rità*)….In place of a vertical support, the base is horizontal: once the wine is poured, it must be drunk to the lees! These splendidly decorated receptacles are big enough for water, middle-sized for wine, small for liqueurs… all used on the occasion of feasts and victories over the enemy….

The lovers are surprised… to arrive finally at the stage of emotion…. They must drink the magic potion to the lees! Celebration enchanting them… so much the more that they didn't expect it…. They have just conquered the resistance of swelling egos … and they celebrate the revitalization of their energy to dare… to unite in love… to complete the quest for the golden grail… to serpentine loves… in a world not always ready to accept difference… or to recognize the unknown in every stranger who arrives on their soil….

Room IV

(According to Chiara, there would have been a fifth room not open to the public which contains a large number of coins stolen before the beginning of the twentieth century.)

The last room highlights a bust of Giovanni Jatta Senior, founder of the Collection, and the famous Talos vase. A gigantic legendary character, supposed to guard Crete. "He circles the island three times a day… burns foreigners illegally brought there by crushing them with his metal body… a nephew and apprentice of Dedalus whom he surpasses in ingenuity… he invents the compass, the saw…. Jealous of his talent, his uncle kills him…."

No illegal landings on Italian shores… or the sentimental zigzag coasts of Chiara…. The foreigner doesn't come to seek asylum, or work, or miraculous water to restore his life…. In complete legality… complete complicity… complete accord… he fell in love with the Pugliese woman… as the latter was subjugated by her unexpected feelings…. Jason disembarked with the Argonauts on an island to quench their thirst and find food…. Samy isn't the reincarnation of the Greek hero, accosting the Chiara bust to extract from it the elixir he craves… he doesn't fear that the colossus will crush him with his powerful body… nor that Medea will intervene… invent a stratagem… prepare a magic potion.. to deliver him from the impasse… by brutalizing Talos.. as you can see on this immense vase… dying in the arms of two horsemen, Castor and Pollux, the inseparable brothers combating the Athenians…. Today, Chiara joins Oscura, not to fight against the Carthaginian… but to take him to her breast….

There is no guide or visitor… merchant or customer… superior and inferior. They love each other… equality in the transplanted love… which needs no roots… to plant itself in hearts…. Emotion fascinating them both… a fragile understanding on the worthy *nif*[2] of humanity… which needs no one to evaluate, approve, reject it… or even comment on it….

Only love and friendship can instill
Peace in the heart of Man
Gnawed by the desire to make war
Just for the glory of power and earth

Only love and friendship can redress
The contortions of the Universe going mad
Lift the challenge of Lady Justice and
Cancel violence and its results…

After the unexpected visit, impossible to separate! Chiara and Samy decide to spend a day together… weaving the perfect love. In spite of themselves and by a telluric force, they feel the need to touch, caress, embrace…. What delight to taste this love being born/ dying in unexpected natural spontaneity… But is it love? Passion? Infatuation? Something nameless uniting without rhyme nor reason.? They just don't know! This attraction baffles them. How did it happen? They don't give a damn! A deep conviction pushes them to live these moments without asking many questions about where this astonishing adventure is going to lead them.

2 *Nif* -- pride.

It leads them by car to Trani, a tourist city where the Cathedral is dedicated to San Nicola Pellegrino, Patron of this ancient Provincial capital up until the Napoleonic era. It was Joachim Murat, however, who deprived it of this status in favor of Bari. They dine at "La Bettola" restaurant, tasting a variety of antipasto, the first course, *spaghetti alle vongole*, but ending with veal, slightly leathery. A beautiful sunny day, pleasantly warm in midwinter. A walk around the port to breathe the salt air of a fabulous sea. Then in a beautiful adjacent park, they join in tireless embraces.... Gracious and intense each one in his act... to love to the point of dizziness... to wander, rest, meditate, observe... each movement, as in life, begins and fades... is born and dies... once its allotted time passes!

Chiara turns to Samy:

"I love this free love... without sacrament... nor handcuffs... nor round of celebrations... nor a rope around the neck.... Can you explain to me what is happening to us?"

"Truly, I don't know! It resembles somewhat my habit of wandering...."

"What are you trying to say?"

"It's simple.... Pitching my tent on a given terrain, I know in advance that I am going to dismantle it.... A good and sufficient reason for traveling...."

"That implies we don't put down roots."

"If you want! The roots are in us... and we can develop them in complete liberty... as much on your side as mine...."

"You mean that we have just lived a solid love... interior... felt from within...."

"Completely! A love free of all constraint... a

love agreed upon on both sides… which remains suspended….”

“To undertake other journeys.”

Chiara takes Samy back to Ruvo, to the very place from which they departed. In front of the Museum, they embrace one last time. The separation is painful. Their road bifurcates…. An unaccustomed sunset…. The dawn will still have time to hide….

SEDUCTIVE PUGLIA

3

Seductive Puglia

Puglia relaxes, enjoys sunbathing in all simplicity. She doesn't boast of spectacular horizons, such as the Bay of Naples or the admired Sorrento, a celebrated all-season vacation spot, and the home of Tasso… nor glories in its cities, such as the Serenissima built on 118 islands, separated by 200 canals straddled by 400 bridges…. Venice attracts millions of tourists…. She exhibits her history modestly as noteworthy as the greatest cultural sites of the country. Her geological landscape spreads discreetly… without ostentatious pride, even if Nicola Colangelo compares it to Canada, where he has never set foot:

"My Puglia is like Canada because she has a varied territory: mountains, forests, plains, valleys.. she is distinguished only by her original stones… I love its agriculture, the fruit of great human sacrifice… this in spite of the lack of water, of maple trees… and of the Talking Tower…. All the same, she has other attractions… especially the *limoncello* elixir, the source of human warmth one could never find… elsewhere!"

Awkward comparison! However, a very relative truth emerges from it… Samy loves Puglia for its convivial modesty, its seductive discretion, its natural simplicity… the bonhomie of the olive trees which are twisted into astonishing, versatile, intriguing silhouettes. These venerable trees never miss the

opportunity to highlight their thousand-year history… and what a dramatization! The visitor sometimes spends long minutes admiring the ingeniousness of their branches… the wild dance of their trunks and their bark…. Graceful curves in a serene sky! How can the olive tree bend its body to make its head turn according to an unexpected imagination? It's the poem of a whole life… and permits so many fertile meditations….

From the plane, Samy sees the barren soil, the olive trees turning green, the chicken-cage houses like everywhere in the world… plastic arbors studding the ground… gravel pits, opening their giant toothless maws… a Minotaur's Eye denies the yellowing dwellings… Fortunately the olive trees ennoble this harshness.

Every time he returns to Acquaviva delle Fonti, not to the scene of the crime… but to that of happy reunions… of new encounters…. To come back not to water the stunted roots… to alleviate the lack of water…. Hasn't he always fertilized his nearest and dearest with words and affection? But to relive other moments of sharing… bringing to each and every one the *substantifique moelle* necessary for the growth of humanity in each individual….

For over fifteen years, a friend had him make "*un piccolo giro*" in the village… always the same recurrent scenes…. The *anzianai* hold discussions on the public benches for hours on end… play cards or dominos in an immense space furnished by the municipality…. school-children returning to lunch… housewives and their shopping… no one in a hurry… nonetheless the village is animated… beating to the soft rhythm of a time flowing, leaving space…. A

slowdown of gestures, of movements counterbalanced by the rapid delivery of conversations… a complete art! Really more developed in the south than the north…. The central square seems frozen…. It is only animated by prolix words.. such as those of the fair Samy attended as an observant spectator…. Numerous candidates make endless speeches without head nor tail…. The movement of friend Nicola is far from being a political party in the strict meaning of the word…. His slogan "C*ittà per l'Uomo*" pleases his guest enormously, who applauds with all his strength…. To dream of putting the city to the service of man and humanity is to transform politics… regild this ethical coat of arms. The whole team is there behind an immense banner and microphones… crackling the praise of a return to humanistic culture, always open to the participation of everyone… for the good of everyone, the social, financial condition, the level of instruction matters little…. Speeches follow one after the other, and don't resemble each other! Some are followed carefully, others not…. Attentive listening in the very middle of the square…. Many speakers criticize the politicians, their parties, their slogans…. The Christian Democrats and their cross… the Socialists and their red carnations… the Nationalists and their flag…. An observer cries: "We need to collect them all, and speed them to their funeral!" He climbs the stage to dismantle the fallacious plans of political parties…. When he begins reciting poems in dialect, he makes everyone laugh…. Applauded loudly more than the official speakers! The heart's language always emerges victorious over all strategies….

Samy and his friend Nicola D'Alema stop in front of Santa Maria Maggiori…. The parish church

is beautifully ornamented with a rose window in front… an icon in lacy stone, repeated on the telephone directory and as the insignia of a political movement being born…. At the entrance, two lions turn their heads to one side and carry two columns on their backs. Surprising sculptures reversing roles… the kings of the jungle don't reign on the heights. They are rather crushed under the weight of the stone…. Since the priest was absent, the corner barman opens the door of the stairwell leading to the clock…. Its mechanism dates from the 19th century… and must be rewound twice a day! Impossible to visit the Crypt until the end of the religious service…. When the sacristan opens the place, they find themselves confronting a real jewel of Byzantine 12th century sculptures which are very well preserved…. Marvellous to linger over the arcades decorated with stars… miniature angels painted in all colors of the rainbow…. The soaring columns support them lightly…. And when the sacristan pushes a button, the illuminated icon rises like a theatre curtain and they see the Santa, or rather "*Maria Santissima di Constantinopoli*," Jesus painted in black… their heads crowned with gold express not only the saint's halo but a third dimension…. An extraordinary jewel! And Samy says: "It's the most beautiful subterranean chapel that I have ever seen…. I prefer it to the one in Bari… which is nothing compared to this one…."

Making the tour, just behind, the black walls are tarnished with the patina of time… its construction dates from 1525. In a corner two female figurines stand… they seem to be literally exiting from the site of an outworn cult…. Their protruding breasts

roundly point their aggressiveness.... Here, bold sexuality is placarded shamelessly... legs tied, covered by a cloth twisted from left to right... curiously the feet rest on two heads of bearded, elderly men... These same feet in the form of giant claws... seize the male heads... The female forms crush them... soullessly.

What did the artist attempt to represent in this strange gargoyle of couples? The quest is always bathed in mystery.... No one can explain it! Then one day, the church resurfaced... the stone lost its blackness... The astonishing sculpture disappears, despite three tours around the Cathedral.... Vanished? No one can trace its path or locate it....

Another night, Samy was taken to visit a winery, a "C*antina Sociale.*" The manager launches into an endless speech.... Fascinating, his dramatic gestures, his speech delivery... A real spectacle! And when Nicola tries to inject a word... the other cries out, "*Ma scusa, io voglio finire....*" He continues without paying attention to his questioner.... He explains that all the vineyard owners have fields more or less the same size, the same amount harvested.... How do the grapes arrive in the press? How do you make "*la gradazione dello zucchero*"? They take a sample from the trucks...they measure the sugar content.... A tour of the winery with large pipes giving the adjacent cisterns the impression of being intestines in paunchy bellies. Viniculture: a perfected art which doesn't take second place to Bordeaux or the Côtes du Rhône.

What is striking about this region is that the standard of living is more or less the same for the well-to-do as for the less rich.... The middle-class level with everyone at ease... without excess! The true external signs of wealth must hide their heads under

the mattress! Flee to the other world of neither seen nor heard….

Samy is invited to a speech contest at Fasano… to be a Jury member… The presentation of the high school students fascinates him. Once at work, they ask him to recommend two francophone poets. When he named an Algerian and a Moroccan, they asked him, "Why don't you put yourself forward?" "I'm not a poet… a talespinner rather… modestly, I wouldn't want to put myself at the forefront of poetry." They promise to invite him in the springtime of poetry. But the promise is never kept. After this aborted meeting, he takes the bus to Ostuni. At the Town Hall, speeches, tourist brochures on the town and the region. Portraits of former mayors, lined up on the wall as if for an execution… which recalls to him the "Scoundrels" described by Jean-Paul Sartre in *La Nausée*. At the exit, he seems to encounter the same face of a bearded mayor as the one exhibited in the gallery. An impression that he emerged from a work of art… a ghost returning to normal life…. Four or five people follow an Italian guide – Samy didn't want to follow the French or English… a very pleasant young woman, well informed, has difficulty maintaining the flow of her explanations… visitors constantly interrupt her… everyone adds his two cents' worth… begins to recount personal anecdotes…. Only Samy remains silent… tastes the gaps in ellipses. Downtown, the obelisk of San Oronzo 17 meters high… has already lost 5 meters under the earth….It still remains perched on the column….The hand fell off it in 1912, during an earthquake…. A stone hand which was holding a Missal, replaced by one of greenish bronze, holding a

cross… a metal hand for having been cursed…. Because of the confused conversations of the Mayor and the public…. The guide recites a poem in dialect which Samy translates according to the Italian version:

Blessed San Oronzo/ You who are always right/ right all right/ Among us… in the center of the plaza/ You are the one who knows/ This race of crooks… of brigands…/ That we have at Ostumi…

Come down from your column/ Lift your pastoral cross/ Smite these no-goods on the back/ Break their heads… their sides/ Break all their bones/ And when you have beaten them/ You can climb up again/ On your pedestal/ To see you again above us/ May God accompany you/ To see you again…

L.Barcarullo (Priesthood of Pignatelli)

The battle took place! On the one hand, for months Chiara Bonelli mustered her arguments… like well-trained troops, so that Samy would speak in the famous institution, *La Feltrifarfalle* in Bari. On the other hand the manager refused to accept a talespinner from the Arabic market in the purely Italian precinct of her bookstore… The foreigner is trapped between two fires! He had to be patient… to await the verdict of this fierce fight between two women each convinced of the justice and efficiency of her strategy…. Chiara dared to present a similar intervention.. because she was persuaded that the speaker will substantially illuminate the question of emigration… the hot topic today… Hordes often disembark on the south shore of the country…. Incapable of stopping the flow of migration, the police don't know where to turn…. Italy, an uncontrollable strainer! It's a shame. How to dam up this global phenomenon?

Oh, Samy can't come up with a miraculous solution! He tells of lives lived in constraint and in hope.... He distills the experiences of the impoverished.... It's up to the authorities to take suitable measures....

Chiara's other attraction is that she worked in this bookstore as artistic consultant for five years.... When she made her reservation of a date and room, supported by a CV, the manager retorted:

"We will make our own inquiry about this gentleman... we will reply in a month or two... don't bother to call...."

Chiara knows that Samy is neither shady nor an illegal immigrant.... He is only a speaker who performs his romances, never written down.... No proof on paper.... Born on the south shore of the Mediterranean, he privileges the *hikaïates*, oral stories... like those his ancestors told.... Why invest in writing? Editors soon remainder every book that doesn't sell thousands of copies..... And what about the direct contact with the audience? This ceaseless flow circulating freely between speaker and public.... Inestimable, the fresh or ancient speech moving from person to person.... Without passport or visa... which leaves in the memory common embers..... No published page can match the flow of the living word! Immediacy touches without warning... living words worth their weight in gold... mouth to mouth immigration... the interaction of dialogue worth more than its weight of paper... Samy whispered to his friend: "Tell them that when I speak, I migrate into them with my voice. If they remain silent, that means they don't want to migrate into me. But if they respond to me, then they will migrate into me

by dialogue… and we will then be equal! It's in this way that we are all legal immigrants on this earth…."

Three months later, Chiara returns to the attack, claiming the privilege of having served *La Feltrifarfalle* body and soul…. And the manager resists even more strongly:

"You don't work here any more… you no longer have the right to reserve anything with us!"

This Bookstore became "an earthly paradise." To access it, you need the agreement and permission of Saint Peter… as well as irreproachable conduct in life, here….

So many phone calls… messages left on voice mail… so many silences… renewed attacks… classifications… information delivered and lost… e-mails fished out of Spam…. Those which arrive remain unanswered.

Samy begs Chiara to forget this project which doesn't seem to convince the bookstore authorities:

"Forget it! Will this advance my career in any way? It won't change the face of the universe!"

"That's no reason to give up after so many attempts… fights to be inscribed in the monthly schedule."

"Why don't you change weapons?"

"You mean write to *La Laterforza*?. . . "

"Yes… you think they won't be interested?"

"Not as prestigious as the first…. And we have put all our ammunition in the same basket…."

Nicola Colangelo, Apollo to his friends, God of light, warrior and pastor… protector of the Muses, takes Chiara's side. Warning: he often loses his temper…. Everyone who knows him is afraid of him… and yields easily to his requests…. He immediately organizes a pressure group… manipulates the rules according to his will… organizes tactics behind the front lines….

One of his friends intervenes with the manager of *La Feltrifarfalle*… tries to convince her of the need to give voice to foreigners… to hear other ideas… to sound a different point of view… perhaps they have something to teach us? The manager agrees, without consulting the executive committee….

Rumors spread….The speaker's name sticks in the gorge of bigots… "Samy" is passed around… not like a letter which is mailed… but like a lemon pressed without sparkling water! Isn't it the diminutive of Samuel? The "Ben Meddah" set off an alarm… of war about to break out! This barbarous name awakens all the apprehensions… hatreds… aversions… Especially at this time… after September 11…. They have to inquire… bug telephones… know as soon as possible… if he is really Catholic… Kosher… Halal… And even if he claims to be orthodox… don't forget to contact the CIA for his endorsement.

They came up with another line of defense: the desert orator only tells stories… of dryness… of *chergui*[3]… of a fiction having no connection with reality or *realpolitik*… of beautiful lies claiming subliminal truths… even in his most deafening silences….

The content of his tales exploded….Pure poetry… still more imbued with the suggestive than with the descriptive…. His words only multiply meanings in every direction… at every level… to lead the public astray? Evade censorship? Thumb the nose at the police? Whatever he is up to, we must distrust this grazer of words….

Samy doesn't return to Puglia to foment

3 *Chergui* – desert wind (North Africa).

revolution… to defend any cause whatsoever… except freedom of speech… but to deepen his knowledge of the Italian culture and language… enjoy the Mediterranean flavors that are his own, as in this region… especially tighten the bonds with his friends… make other friends… just for the love of capturing his image on the screen of the collective consciousness… of a people who resemble him. To understand in depth… a more refined degree… to send back the positive of life to those who procure it for him….

The *Soirée* with a capital *S* arrived! As if by a miracle the Sesame *Feltrifarfalle* opened its doors to the son of the desert… who has never seen in his life such a large bookstore, spreading over several floors…. So well lit… so well stocked… so many books, reaching often a meter and a half high… so many surveillance cameras to point their hidden eyes on countless readers moving from pile to pile… What a marvel! A rallying place for reading, beating its illuminated wings in the very heart of the Capital of Puglia….

These hundreds of thousands of words are formidably exposed there under the myriad light bulbs… ready to be resurrected from their tombs… to jump in your face to be skimmed… then put back in place… once the essential passages are read…. Samy didn't see the reading visitors rush to the numerous waiting cash registers… so many trees cut down for so many, many books… which all end up remaindered! An arboreal tragedy! All the more so that there will certainly be a few ideas gleaned here and there… in support of whatever cause….

An optimist, Samy is happy that the heart of Bari beats to poetic words…. The capital puts books at the

disposal of its citizens.... But there you are, when he arrives accompanied by three members of his adoptive family, there is no space to put his car.... Accessibility for those of the quarter... but different for those who come from afar.... Nicola Colangelo waited for them stolidly.... No bookstore official deigned to greet this little group.... It's the friend who indicated a corner of the room... a small circle forms willy-nilly... closed in on itself despite the comings and goings of people leafing through books, reviews, magazines.... Colangelo/ Apollo makes a brief introduction... then turns it over to Samy who thanks the management of *La Feltrifarfalle* for "having given us a space...."

"I'm happy to be here among you... friends... in this intimate circle like that practiced in the *Halka* under the ramparts of Maghrebian cities or under the baobab in subSaharan Africa.... But contrary to tradition, I am going to be a little more personal... among ourselves, let's leave the masks aside... let's get to the heart of the subject: the immigration from African countries to Europe.... In other words, the quest for work in poor countries.... To illustrate my claims, I am going to tell you the stories of people I have known....

Ahmadou sold his four goats... his six chickens, plus a round sum he borrowed... to pay a filthy ferryman who turned a blind eye... a gamble to rejoin one of those developed countries where he can earn a pittance... quickly sent to his family which was unable to make a living or to travel.... Risk and sacrifice washed up on the banks of dreams.... In his attempt at clandestine immigration... he left his

skin… Adieu *Mil*,[4] *taboulé-mafé*,[5] money…. Stomachs remain empty… waiting frustrated… smoke polluting a whole continent… Ahmadou won't realize he took the wrong road. .. if not he would have turned back… he would have known which side of the *harmattan*[6] to navigate…. But where he comes from, speech is gagged… opportunities cancelled by local vultures… opportunities blocked to the right, left, center, in the heavens, on earth…. One sole solution: fling yourself at hope… narrow corridors of dreams… leading only to the final letdown…. The poor man didn't know it… and all knowledge is power!

Abdelhak, more educated than Ahmadou, chose the legal path…. He had to fill out all the forms… furnish so many papers… affidavits… certificates… copies of diplomas… stand in line for whole days before the designated consulates... come back home empty-handed… begin again the same steps… larded with more and more humiliations. For years he navigated in the illusion of reaching it, like an eel in the ocean…. The door of success… of wealth within reach…. He always believed that in European countries… they collected shovels of money like autumn leaves. His belief increased each time one of his compatriots returned to the country, driving a big car loaded with all kinds of merchandise… machines… gadgets… and other linens to sell or distribute to the family.

One day – he didn't expect it – he received the notice of a visa ready at the Consulate. Immediately, he celebrated… blew most of his savings…. A few

4 *Mil* – Subsaharan food (resembling couscous).
5 *Taboulé-mafé* – Subsaharan dish.
6 *Harmattan* – desert wind (Subsaharan).

weeks later, he sets off for Europe in quest of a better future.... He takes lodgings with a distant relative who receives him with open arms... at least for a while.... As he settles without seeking work very actively, his protector gently shows him the door.... Suddenly, he finds himself in the jungle... and can't earn his daily bread.... Day and night, he explores contacts gleaned here and there... and succeeds in obtaining a position as a teacher of Arabic.... No need to linger over the fate of the unhappy man who, disgusted, thinks only of returning home.... The shame of failure undermines him.... He wants to commit suicide..... Religion forbids it! Annihilated by this typical degradation, he plays hooky – rob a bank? He has to find poor and desperate accomplices like himself.... It's done. He is now in prison....

It goes without saying that many immigrants have led successful lives. They arrived after the Second World War.... Europe needed skilled workers.... Later, intellectuals, doctors, engineers, businessmen followed, filling a gap.... According to need and demand, the European countries absorbed so many talents.... A brain drain! But at what cost? To the detriment of the countries of origin which haven't supported either democracy, or freedom of speech. The new colonials, sons of the country, replaced foreign colonials.... And exploitation continues.... Independence raised African pride... it didn't bring balance and a just division of wealth.... Too many gaps continue to exist between the social classes.... The profiteers are always the same....

Immigration is a global phenomenon.... It must be treated in a concerted, multiple way.... I don't insist on one conception rather than another...

poor countries want to emerge from tyranny, from fundamentalism… from censorship in all its forms… to assure equitable social justice for all…. The wealthy countries can help them in showing them the difficult path to good government…. In a few words: democracy, liberty, equality of citizens. Rights of man, tolerance towards minorities. Peace and harmony. That each one may live in dignity while respecting the otherness of the other. This isn't a moral lesson… it's a point of view. Perhaps an ideal?

From the fall of the Berlin Wall, emigration changed direction. Instead of the south towards the north… it circulates now from the east towards the west… the former Communist countries furnish cheap labor… without cultural, civilizational, religious shocks… An advantage! What's the harm?

Finally they begin to emphasize a new deal…. Oh, it was always there! The Knights of all Europe threw themselves on the road to the Orient… to conquer and civilize it! As if the Orient had no civilization and only deserved colonial subjugation! From time to time, Europe proclaims loudly that it needs the 'Mediterranean dream' to respond to 'the identity crisis, the moral crisis, the confusion faced with globalization.' Yes to the Union of Mediterranean countries… but in dignity and equality. No superior, no subordinate… no paternalism, nor infantilism…. The South must dialogue, exchange, negotiate with the same rights and duties as the North. It is often forgotten that it was on the two banks of the Mediterranean that the civilization of the Occidental and Oriental worlds was forged… There where the three religions of the Book were born… there where humanism grew… flourished… bore fruit… May the

sharing of strengths and weaknesses be equitable…. May he who hears understand!"

The Meddah finishes by saying that he hopes his words have been pleasing… that they awakened thoughts, opened windows in the mentalities of the limited and their consorts…. Today he told stories of disillusioned immigrants…. And whatever one says or does, emigration is often stained with prejudice… hatred… intolerance… bitterness… sometimes with violence…. In every displacement, there is always something to take and something to leave…. A whole long period of adaptation with adoption and rejection… Not much total acceptability! To turn aside the negative currents degrading the path, he sought to incrust with Silence in suspension… in order to clear the path to equality… everyone is free to choose the route to leave his trace…. Thus he nomaded from the live metaphor to the convivial metaphor… wandered from black and white language to colored… voyaged from pleasant words to shocking… navigated from the real port to the suggestive…. From the *Mare Nostrum* crossroads to the Mosaic crossroads… not privileging any narrow or reductive chauvinism… not bringing to a head any sickly pride of belonging to a fixed point of the globe. The earth belongs only to seas and oceans… definitely to water… fluctuating springs… and moving roots. Who can claim to regulate the circuits of departures and arrivals? Who boasts of occupying eternally a patch of land? Shouldn't we renew the sharing and solidarity between men, women, animals, the environment… if only for the time of a transit? A problematical transit necessitating an overdose of spirituality… of positivity!

WELCOMING PUGLIA

4

Welcoming Puglia

Every time he turns his head in Puglia, Samy finds himself under the sign of St. Nicholas. Bari and its province identify with the fate of this Patron Saint (255-343 A.D.) who, according to Pope John Paul II, "lighted the hearts of millions of the faithful in the Orient and the Occident." The talespinner is pleased by this affirmation radiating peace and reconciliation among men of good or ill will. Through a frank speech, a deep thought, a concerted action… he always sought union in diversity… the dialogue of cultures with respect for equality… humanism greasing all the technological wheels… the welcome of others in the balm of fraternity….

Samy is delighted to discover that the basilica of St. Nicholas is considered "a spiritual reference point contributing to the growth of ecumenical sensitivity." What a beautiful ideal to follow! It seems that the majority of Pugliesi heard this message, without paying much attention to it…. But it may be that the exception makes the rule. Hasn't he acquired, in the very heart of this region, a practicing family open to other beliefs? Openness, tolerance, generosity…. These values characterize the saint. Is it because he was born in Myra (today in Turkey), and lived astride two cultures? And because he died in their interaction, after accomplishing so many miracles?

Legend has it that on the passage from Bari to Rome, he declared he wanted to be buried in the capital of Puglia. However, his remains rested in the Cathedral of his birth city until 1089. When Myra fell into the hands of the Moslems, the Pugliesi and Venetians redoubled their rivalry to transfer the Saint's relics to their own Cathedral. An expedition of sixty-six sailors left Bari, at that time under Norman domination. On their return, at the very spot where the bark landed, they placed the first stone of the Basilica. When the Venetians arrived in Myra, the grave was empty… the Baresi had already transferred the important parts of the skeleton. Revenge on the Serenissima whose dependents had to be content with minuscule fragments of bone, left carelessly.

Is it St. Nicholas, Patron Saint of sailors and fishermen… who came to the aid of Samy, the navigator of words, to give him the necessary help when he disembarked in Puglia with a fractured right arm? Thanks to this heavenly intervention, he was taken under the care of an excellent physiotherapist, Franco – Nicola's brother – who took care of him with diligence, efficiency, brotherhood… When the talespinner offered to pay him, the caregiver declared: "A right arm in a sling can't put a hand into pockets…. I will care for you with pleasure." During his whole stay, Franco came to the house, loaded with heating pads, gave him massages, movements of the arms… which were the best, compared to those administered in Paris. Sometimes he saw him at Miulli Hospital, brand new and five kilometers from the center of Acquaviva. After his work hours, he took care of him… and introduced him

to colleagues. They greeted him warmly… so many delicious discussions with "the philosopher," the nurse, the doctor…. Subjects included travel, immigration …. To speak of the art of travel, of emigration, to link oneself to globalization… is to gather the most beautiful flowers of the unknown… to penetrate a strange way of living…. Emigration requires a long period of adaptation… for a future integration which isn't, as certain Italian politicians have said, "to submit completely to the values of the host country. Not at all." Subtended blindly, without discernment or judgment! … By the same token, no denigration of the welcoming country….

"Haven't you felt an incompatibility between African and Canadian values?" asks the philosopher.

"Certainly! Things aren't done in the same way in my native land as in my adoptive country. I had to interrogate myself… understand, adopt, reject… values… make adjustments to live comfortably in my skin, in my new society."

"Could you please give us a few examples?"

"The family, Mediterranean warmth… easy contact, dignity, the respect for others… the quest for harmony and beauty…. I found all that in 'little Italy.' On the other hand, in the new world, I very much liked and adopted competition, pride in work well done, pragmatism, merit according to performance… and no favoritism…."

"You emphasize the positive!"

"I can't summarize in a few words life over several years…. I can simply say there is an equilibrium to perfect for every opening… every adventure…."

"Don't you think it's hard to change old habits?"

"Yes… but mobility allows for flexibility! The

dynamic of any individual is complex… for my part, I adore change…."

Leaving the hospital, Franco offers Samy a pulley, an elastic band, a stick for the exercises he can do at home when he returns to his country. On the street, in the very center of the town, an elderly lady accosts them, begins to tell her life story. Starting with nothing, she was a laundress…. Today, she owns a laundry employing thirty-five people. A miracle grasped by handfuls…. 'I would love to invite you to visit my business.' She insists that the friends not forget this wholehearted invitation. How would the tour of a laundry interest these passersby? It is true that Franco is the brother of Nicola, well known in the village! They use the pretext of not having much time…. Being very occupied, they decline with thanks…. Impossible to get out of it! She wouldn't let go, and phoned them the day before Samy's departure. In short, they gave in to her demand and made a detour to visit the place. These lines of immense German machines were very impressive, washing, rinsing, folding, ironing, packing, preparing very clean linen for delivery. The workers follow, like dwarfs, the circuit furnished by the giant swallowers of different sized white cloths. The husband/ foreman ignores them to concentrate on his employees, subjected to the mechanism giving them no respite. Samy hardly dares ask a question amidst the internal noise that the boss ameliorates by smoking one cigarette after another…. "This linen is destined for hotels, I suppose?"

"No, we work for boats…."

He tries to imagine how many travelers they served. Without having the slightest idea where the

linen had been.... When the visit ended, the two friends ask each other: "Why did these people invite us?" Is it a way of showing off their success? To welcome the stranger?... Show him that you can succeed without leaving your own home? Tell him that being sedentary pays off? To impress the neighbors and also win their esteem? Even if the interests of some don't correspond at all to the others!"

Finally, Samy says ironically:

"Franco, perhaps they want us to do publicity for them?"

"And what would you have said?"

"If the habit doesn't make the monk, bleach your linen, and you will bleach your sins!"

The welcome was sincere... but they left without knowing the reasons for this invitation to the son of the country, as well as the stranger....

One day, Nicola Colangelo takes Samy to Lecce, the "Florence of the south" which, according to him, is worth the side trip. Its baroque monuments are very well known and appreciated.... He wouldn't have let hs friends leave, for anything in the world, without visiting it. This beautiful region is known for its stone, *la pietra di Lecce*, a wealth which is widely exported... because it is soft and malleable for sculpture.... The stranger compares it to the soapstone which happily serves the Amerindians for their creations! The friends visit the Basilica of Santa Croce, richly decorated with grotesque figurines, bizarre animals... luxurious vegetation... the *Duomo*, San Nicolò Church and Cataldo with its original portal, its arcades with pointed arches, its frescoes from the 15th and 17th centuries... Santa Chiara for the love of the friend

Chiara Bonelli who accompanied them.

After a short walk around the town center, Nicola turns to Samy and says:

"I have a surprise for you!"

"What is it?"

"If I told you… it wouldn't be a surprise!"

Nicola walks towards a little village… the name on the panel indicates Santa Maria al Bagno. Understanding the reason for this visit, radiant, Chiara retorts:

"It's a good idea…. This place filled with history will show Samy that the Pugliesi welcomed the Jews warmly after the Second World War…."

"Yes, I was a kid at the time…. I remember it well. Let's see first of all the evidence, murals left by men and women who survived the holocaust… better still, the Shoah… crude art dramatizes well their condition… their mental state… their hope which will become "Eretz Israel."

Certain striking preoccupations recur… the immense star of David in the foreground with a radiant sun in the background, symbolizing the arrival of the refugees…. An enormous arrow indicates Italy from which a long procession departs holding placards…. The writing in Hebrew frames the point of departure (the Diaspora, or literally the blackness) and that of the arrival with the sun of the promised land…. In another drawing, an Italian soldier seems to stand on guard in front of the Wailing Wall…. His build is impressive…. A mother, with babe in arms, pulling another child who resists… going towards the star and the desert… bridges… flags waving, carrying the menora… barbed wire…. On a poster, this declaration: "May the teaching of

history be accomplished one day on the aged murals of Santa Maria al Bagno…."

Nicola begins to recount:

"I was seventeen when, on Christmas Eve 1943, the life of the little locality of Santa Maria al Bagno completely changed…. This little fishing port on the bank of the Ionian Sea was chosen by the British authorities to welcome the refugees from the Second World War. On the Allied military panels you could read: '*Displaced Persons Camp No. 34*.' The British had requisitioned this remote tourist village where the people had built small dwellings. In one night alone, they arrived in ten trucks which disgorged Slavic refugees fleeing the war that the Italians had waged with them… for a few years. I must say they were badly received… and left shortly after… But the British remained.

A few weeks later, several trucks stopped in front of the Plaza, running the length of the seafront….. From these vehicles emerged thousands of Jews…. The inhabitants of Santa Maria saw that their appearance revealed something different…. The Slavs had left bad memories…. They distrusted the new arrivals at first… then at the sight of these lonely, sad, anguished, taciturn people… they asked themselves: "Where do these refugees come from, and where have they been?" At that period, the Pugliesi knew nothing about concentration camps…. It was only when they forged ties of friendship and affection with these refugees from all over Europe that they learned the horrors of the Nazi genocide. Nourishment soon unleashed emerging admissions…. The United Nations provided meat, bread, chocolate… money from another world in this forgotten corner! The refugees began to exchange

them, then to offer them to the inhabitants of Santa Maria….. They too had known hunger… and what hunger means…. Suddenly, the economic situation in the camps, like that of the locals, improved…. All kinds of commerce saw the light of day at Lecce…. For the first time at Santa Maria, a tobacconist's shop, a clothing store, a laundry opened their doors. After many long years, they began to live again….

An old Jewish lady, Ruth Cohen, wrote to my parents: 'When they ask where I was born, I reply: 'At Santa Maria! Because it's there that my life began again.' Other witnesses testified: 'We came as refugees to Santa Maria… and we emerged as Citizens….' These Jews built their synagogue, formed their police for internal security, sent their children to the village school… their adolescents to the Nardò High School. A climate of total tolerance and peace! Life became pleasant… what can I say, a pleasure for the Pugliesi, the British and the refugees…."

On returning to Bari, Samy thanks Nicola for this visit which was balm to his heart….

"How wonderful it is when human beings from different horizons… different religions… different cultures… build bridges to circulate freely and with dignity on this earth…."

"Yes," says Chiara, "from time immemorial, Italy has welcomed Jews who assimilate into society…. They were businessmen, lenders of credit, dyers…. Unfortunately, they were also persecuted, chased out…. But they were soon missed!"

"Just so…. The periods of calm are not exempt from crises and prejudices…. Then let's march towards the beauty of accord…" says Samy.

On arrival, Nicola Colangelo proposed to his friends to go see a very rare exhibit, the Mostra di Bari, al castello Svevo:

San Nicola: Splendori d'Arte d'Oriente e d'Occidente. What a marvellous collection of art works! The museum collected everything from all around the world… from time immemorial to the modernism of an Andy Warhol… an exceptional demonstration of universal talent… that several heads of state intend to visit. Two days later, the Russian President, Vladimir Putin, landed at Bari to open it.

All the canvases dramatize the facts and gestures of San Nicola… his miracles… his interventions… his generosity… his aid to sailors, pharmacists, victims of injustice… to lawyers to rectify errors and render justice… and certainly, the joyous Father Christmas armed with his pastoral crook… sacks on his back full of gifts. Samy lingers over the representation of three young girls sleeping together in a single bed…. They can't marry for want of a dowry…. Saint Nicholas is there to help them…. For this reason, all virgins venerate him…. Farther off, the Saint calms the storm threatening to kill the sailors… carried off by the waves, they can hardly control their boat…. But the Saint is there to prevent the catastrophe of the tempest….

The group stops before the sculpture of the Virgin giving her breast to the infant Jesus who turns his head away… as if he refuses to suck. Astonished by this gesture, Samy asks his friends:

"Can you tell me why Jesus turns away from his mother's milk?"

"Maybe it embodies Spirituality? And that suffices him!" says Chiara.

"It's an interpretation, but we don't know exactly what the artist wanted to say!" retorts Nicola Colangelo.

"The sculpture comes from Saint-Maur, France…. It's the French spirit which insists on engaging in dialogue with the public… to make it reflect… participate… discover the intention and meaning of the work…."

All three leave the museum, each carrying a CD Rom as a souvenir of this unforgettable exhibition… the apotheosis of Samy's story! Before they take leave, Nicola embraces him warmly… and asks that he not forget his friends… and to contact his compatriot in Canada….

"I'd like to have his news!"

"How can I forget you… after all the affection with which you have received me? Don't worry! I will be your ambassador with the Italo-Canadian friend….

In turn, Chiara – whose love was transformed to friendship – embraces him warmly, then says to him:

"I know you will not forget me! I ask you only to take care of yourself… to keep in good health and come back and see us…."

"It's a promise!"

The three of them had great difficulty taking leave…. To wrench yourself away is to let a part of yourself sleep with the hope of awakening as soon as possible.

At the Bari Airport, Samy Ben Medah plunges into an interior multi-dialogue:

To travel is to lessen… the difficult differences separating us from each other…. It is to proclaim the pride and right to one's origin… to one's originality and revel in it with joy and happiness….

To nomad is not to bury yourself in a given place… but to move in the infinite spaces which do not terrify….. Incessant transit leading to fair exchanges… It is to profit from the stops to refresh… and leave… without nostalgia.

To wander, is to breathe liberty… and resist the tyranny of the marketplace… the fixity of stumps! It is to ignore all landmarks… all checkpoints… to embrace the imaginary and lounge at will….

To walk is the best way to know yourself and appreciate your neighbor…. Every movement not leading to fraternal communion is useless…. It can even be harmful!

And Puglia in all that?

It is simple… natural… welcoming… convivial… seductive… generous… affectionate…. Then it will be forever part of my journey… for to return here is to find again an old friend… with whom I lived an unheard-of love…. It is also to leave again for new horizons… for so many encounters… so many communions….

PUGLIA IN CANADA

5

Puglia in Canada

It took time to find someone who could inform him about the community of Pugliesi living in Canada. He asked friends from Calabria, Abruzzi, Sicily…. He almost gave up! One day he discovered an Italian family just beside his own building. The miracle was accomplished! The young woman, born in Acquaviva, arrived in Toronto at the age of two. The brother-in-law of her cousin's husband, born in Sannicandro di Bari, was very happy to talk about his experience to this young immigrant from the south shore of the Mediterranean. After a few weeks of discussion, Samy invites the neighbor, Maria, and the uknown man to dine at La Risata Restaurant, in the north end of the city. The whole family of Nicola Zambrotta (called Nick) arrives at the meeting place. No discomfort on either side. To the contrary, the host is happy to be surrounded by Pugliesi without having asked so many. The introductions were quickly made, and the group is seated at the table, consults the menu… one would say old friends meeting once a month to "socialize," as they say in this country.

Nick's most striking features are his small eyes, sparkling with intelligence and wisdom. Past seventy years, lined face, scarce hair, well-trimmed mustache, he wears a stylish leather vest, a navy blue shirt, a red tie. A likable good fellow, sure of himself, guide for

the whole group, he takes the lead in conversation, even though his wife urges him loudly and strongly to speak English. Noticing a hearing aid in his left ear, Samy makes an effort to articulate his questions clearly.

"I'm happy you've agreed to come and tell me about your experience as a Sannicandresi in Canada. What reasons pushed you to emigrate?"

"I come from a peasant family on my father's side, and from shepherds on my mother's. My father owned three or four acres; I suggested to him that he uproot the almond trees and replace them by vines. To my mother to sell a flock of forty-five sheep and invest elsewhere. No one wanted to listen to me. It was certainly so that I could be independent, could count on myself. We were poor… we were living in a region blessed by the sun… where aridity always takes its toll. Very little rain. Agriculture suffered from it. No work on the horizon. I had no choice, I had to leave. On my arrival in Canada, it took me a full year to obtain the S.I.N. (Social Insurance Number). But the greatest difficulty was the language. I took night courses… discovered from contacts that a third of English words are of Latin origin. Little by little, I acquired the rudiments permitting me to communicate… awkwardly… but the point was, I made myself understood. The Cadillac Fairview Building Company hired me as a mason. The Boss ordered us to overload the barrows with stone. One time, I defied him to push one of them! Incapable! He soon understood that we did serious work. Then I worked as a building cleaner. In 1959, I created my own business. Three years later, I had twenty people working for me, then thirty-five,

then forty-two…. If the majority of Italians only want to flirt… seduce girls… I insisted on learning to read and write. I took courses at George Brown College. I obtained my certification as a real estate agent. I opened an agency and continued to employ workers in the cleaning enterprise…. Twenty years later, I gave all my material to my employees. I reinvented myself in the investment business… in finance. A more lucrative function and not too fatiguing…. I made a real success of my life….

In Canada, we met as a club to gossip as we used to do in the village. But the police believed that we were conspiring to plan violence. We were taken for Mafiosi! At this period, no one spoke of terrorists. Their suspicions led them to think along these lines…. We were assembled in front of the church. We continued to worship *La Beata Vergine del Carmelo*, protectress of immigrants. Every year, we celebrated the feast of our *Santo Patrono*, *San Giuseppe*. I carried him in procession on my truck."

"What differences do you find between your native land and Canada?"

"In the 50s and 60s, to rid ourselves of aridity, we had to pray for water. A few years later, they invented electric drills. You could easily draw water, cultivate the land. Sannicandro, like all little villages in the region, changed. The economy improved… by leaps and bounds! Unbelievable. I am persuaded that if we had water at will, there would have been no emigration. I myself would not have left… despite the illusions of wealth we were promised in North America! Moreover, the province of Bari is considered today the second California in Italy. The Poles, Albanians, Romanians, Moroccans… immigrate to Puglia to work

in agriculture. Today, the Belarusians take care of aged people. And what do the Pugliesi do? They dream of moving elsewhere….

Canada, 'land of opportunity'… Here it doesn't rain dollars! If you have talent… if you're a hard worker, you can make a fortune. Everything is open. In Italy you have to have connections… acquaintances who can show you the road through the paper jungle… insurmountable difficulties! I'm not saying that here everything is easy, but everything is possible! Over there, the impossible is a tough nut to crack! The number of emigrants from the Bari region is the highest, compared to any other part of the country.

Now the money is in the Middle East, the petrodollars… the Americans, French, British love what is under the soil of these countries, but not their peoples…. At the time, in Sannicandro, it was difficult to find work. And the capitalists don't pay workmen. Those who remained in the country benefited from the departure of those who went to foreign countries. The Jews left Italy for Israel…. In Canada, we meet people from all different horizons. The distance separating them diminishes through daily contact. Certain Italians aren't very adventurous…. 'They kept to themselves… but leaders are leaders.' They created clubs, associations celebrating especially religious feasts, the Madonna, the Saints… that gathers the community together. We meet not only at the church, but on the shores of Lake Ontario – there are dancing, amusements…. Unfortunately, that doesn't much interest the new generation!"

"In your successful immigration, what do you

miss the most?"

"Not to die in my town of birth! My parents are buried there.... My first wife as well.... I had an immense tomb constructed for her... in the Egyptian style."

He spreads his arms to the limit to show the grandeur of the monument, and assumes a satisfied air... fulfilled by having performed the generous deed for the woman who left him. And Samy thinks: "He doubtless wanted to throw dust in the eyes of his fellow citizens, to show them he made a great success of his emigration."

"You must have missed your family in Sannicandro?

"In the beginning, yes. But I had them all come to Canada. And here, I socialize with everyone regardless of race or religion. I feel very much at home!

I go back to Puglia every year, if only to admire the architecture of the cities and villages. Now that I'm retired, I stay there for three months. I note that there are many changes... a great deal of progress... life is more or less the same as in Canada.... Just the same... the young have more opportunities here. 15% in comparison to 10% there! In Puglia, with connections and money, you will manage to obtain something!

In the old days I couldn't be a real estate agent in Sannicandro... the houses and other properties were bought and sold by mouth to mouth. Today, advertising in the media, on the Internet... has invaded the whole world. Everything is more or less the same."

"What are the values which characterize the Mediterranean Pugliesi as opposed to the Ontarian Anglo-Saxons?"

"What distinguishes the Mediterraneans is openness

to others… the love of being together… all the generations mixed together… the art of conversation on every subject… especially politics, the scandal of the day… the generosity of welcoming into your home… conviviality. They also like to laugh, and even make fun of themselves….

Canadians tell you directly what you don't do well. They are frank and have the courage to utter an opinion, even a negative one. Which isn't the case with Italians. They hide their deepest thoughts, and don't want to offend you if you're wrong. Their openness of soul pleases me a great deal. I am proud to be Canadian, even if the Canadians are more conservative than the Americans who, for their part, are aggressive. I read many books by American authors. I want to know how they think… their way of conceiving the world. I don't like the Shit-disturber who, in two warlike mouthfuls, swallows all the markets! It's a catastrophe for the whole world….

On the death of my wife, I became more religious… I want to profit to the maximum from life… spend my money…. Nothing more matters than health and life…."

"Do you feel nostalgia for your country? What would you say to the Pugliesi?"

"First, I feel no nostalgia. I come back to the country, as I told you, but I am very happy here. As for the Pugliesi, I would tell them to deal with people who have a positive outlook on life… to read positive books… No more need to emigrate…. When there is water, even stones can grow! You have the sun, a formidable climate… take advantage of it!

When we age, we think of childhood… and

we magnify the little things of life… that makes us happy…. To live this distance, from afar, is to enjoy a double comfort…."

"At Acquaviva I encountered M. Nicola Colangelo who asked me to contact a childhood friend with whom he attended the pensionnat of Sannicandro. This friend emigrated to Canada, and comes back to the country without ever trying to see him again. Is it you? If yes, why didn't you try to see him again? He thinks that the compatriot has a swelled head…. he only comes back to show off in front of those who remained!"

"The world is small! It could be me… but I don't remember this gentleman. His attitude shows envy towards those who left…. When I return to Sannicandro, first I see the family and all the friends, including the Mayor and Councillors….

Moreover, I often remain in my birth village without moving about too much. And when I travel in the province or across the country, I don't waste my time seeking out old acquaintances. I profit from the historical surroundings, the vital force of new encounters… what else do I know? In brief, of life passing on…."

Samy is happy to gather the information from Nick, where he finds echoes of his nomadic life with, as well, ruptures distancing him from this being fixed in the duality of country of origin and country of adoption. He promises himself to recontact this Pugliesi-Canadian to question him about the present… especially about the new generation living in the adoptive country….

Nick and Samy make a date at the Second Cup, his favorite spot for Italian coffee, located on St. Clair

Avenue… in "Little Italy." Happy to meet again, they don't lose time in picking up the thread of their discussion. At present, a friendship links them…. They feel very much at ease chatting:

"Nick, you spoke to me a lot about your past in Canada…. Can you talk about the present for me?"

"You know… there are too many changes… and not in the right direction…. Today, the immigrants don't come only from old Europe… but from every continent… especially Africa, Asia… many Indians and Caribbeans…. The multicultural communities form the majority in Toronto… more than 52% of recent immigrants in the most cosmopolitan city in the world…. 'and the fastest growing city in North America.' The city has acquired its dose of criminality, of drug traffic… like all the Metropolises! You are going to think that I'm behind the times…. I admit, there are things that shock me… and I have difficulty in accepting them….

Listen, I'll give you an anecdote to clarify…. Before, we could close our house and go away without a risk of being burglarized. For about the last fifteen years, we had a bachelor friend come from Puglia to house-sit. My wife and I left tranquilly for Sannicandro to spend three months at a time…. Everything went smooth as silk…. And Antonio was happy to live for a while in Canada… a salutary exchange for him, as it was for us! This year, the friend accomplished his task well…. As usual, we had accompanied him to the airport….

Now three days later, walking in the city, my wife encounters our friend Antonio… she thinks she has seen a ghost…. She doesn't believe her eyes… it's certainly him….

'But what are you doing here? We thought you were in Italy!'

'You can't imagine what happened to me! I have just spent two days in prison….'

'What? In prison? You didn't kill someone, I hope!'

'Of course not…. Imagine that during your absence, I acquired a piece of sculpture… a little bronze rabbit… bought at a garage sale! As it's heavy, I decided to carry it with me…. Customs made me open the package…. I said simply; 'You see… it's a bunny, not a bomb….' And immediately they threw me in prison for harsh interrogation…. Since September 11, the Canadians, like all North Americans, have lost their sense of humor!'"

"Unbelievable… this story!"

"Yes… Yes… I'm only telling you the truth!"

"Tell me, Nick… do you have other stories that show how Canada has changed?"

"The changes are seen more in the little details than in the big ones…. It's too bad… it must be said that personal contact is more and more lost…. Machines have replaced it. Impossible to have a fresh and living voice at the other end of the phone line…rather an answering machine which dictates to you to push this or that button… and even in the big shopping malls, you can serve yourself and pay by credit card without using a cashier…. As for driving, it is completely chaotic… as a Czech friend said to me: "In France, everyone drives the same way… therefore you know what to expect!" Canadians drive badly…. Each one according to his temperament, his habits back home… which produces a monstrous mess! There are also dangerous districts where you can't walk at night….

I had a good rapport with Rita, my housekeeper… the poor thing retired… and after a physical, her doctor declared to her: 'General State: mediocre.' You see, no consideration for people's sensitivity… who are reduced to insurance numbers! Ironically, Rita adds, "If I were a car, they would have sent me straight to the scrapyard!" My Pugliesi was replaced by a Polish woman…who haunts the church and only talks about religion! She never stops reproaching us… us, the Italians… for not being very religious…. What does she know about it? She has never set foot in Italy! Nonetheless she repeats endlessly: 'Your churches are empty…. Even John Paul II couldn't fill them….' She offers me a whole panoply of 'her wisdom' as if we were… us, unbelievers! To fill the gap of the sick Polish lady, the employment agency sent me an Indian… when I asked her if this replacement were permanent, she parried: '*I am only a spare part!*'

You see, even human beings become mechanical… and to top it all off, without joking, she asks me to give her the bronze statue, *Lord Gneisha*, that I have on my desk, to put on her son's: 'It'll bring him luck!'"

"Nick, tell me what's happening to the new generation of Pugliesi in Canada?"

"Oh! It's almost the same thing for all the immigrants…. The first wave of arrivals wasn't very well educated… it worked hard to send the second generation to school…. You see, my three children have university degrees. They have al kept the Pugliesi dialect spoken at home… once they grow up, they no longer speak it…. As for my grandchildren – I have four – not a word of Italian or of dialect! They are sometimes more English than the English Canadians… their first names are anglicized… Roberto becomes

Bob… Giuseppe, Joe… Maddalena, Maggie…. It's my daughter who caused me the most concern…. First, she insisted on living according to the same rhythm as the Anglo-Saxons: come home late at night… be free in her thoughts and decisions… in brief, a feminist! No respect for the parents' authority! Defiant, she married a Ukrainian Catholic… that wasn't the case of the boys who married Italian girls!"

"I see that the stable element is religion… which all the rest… life style… culture… change, adapt to the environment… integrate in the 'mainstream.' I suppose that your children come back to Puglia, no?"

"Yes, once or twice… not more! My grandchildren 'don't care to visit the old country….' Too bad… Too bad… The positive: they have no prejudices about other cultures or ethnic groups…. They have the world at their fingertips by Internet or other advanced technology…."

"In every change, there are losses as well as gains! Thus language and culture disappear if you cut the contact with your own origins…. Thus cultural diversity heads towards homogeneity! The world will speak only American English! And the computer literate will soon see that the Internet is necessary, but insufficient… superficial, it must be deepened by the reading of books and other print media… just to have time for meditation and reflection…. For that, I say that everyone must navigate in his internal sea, the Mediterranean… so rich in linguistic and cultural diversity… the basis of humanism which, today, is at a turning point in a new apprehension of the world… and if *Mare Nostrum* is literally taken at it s word, it will renew its way of forging ties with the shores of the four cardinal points…. And this with dignity in

equality… fraternity in solidarity… free thinking in all its diversity… Narrow nationalisms will fade away… and projectors will be focused on gaps in order to bridge them…. No confrontation of cultures… rather exchanges and sharing of values to construct a better world."

Samy will come back to Puglia…. He will tell the story of Nick Zambrotta… without reproducing the same words of the Italo-Canadian friend… without breathing the least life into the replies received and taped! They will only be a distant echo… without soul or fate! … and even if he plays the role of Intermediary… Passerby… Ferryman… Talespinner… Interviewer… he will never be able to articulate either the approximate words… assiduously listened to in Canada… nor his own. The tone and manner will have suffered the fearsome erosions of time. The *chanson de geste* will have changed!

In Samy's wanderings… at each crossing, he recharges his eternal wanderer's batteries! Then he transfers the collected energy to those who leave with the rising wind…. If sometimes he comes back to the false appearances of the same place… he discovers that he himself has changed… as much… if not more or less than Puglia, visited many times!…

Like a weaver's spindle, each coming and going is a new thread being born….

Like an artist who places tiles to create a mosaic… he still doesn't know the coherence… nor its effects! His ending will remain forever a work in progress!…

Time, this ferocious exchange, transformed the routes of everyone… from Saint to Plebeian… from a hovel to a palace… from a valley to a mountain…. Ever the stone, supposed eternal, tarnishes or renews itself….

Only the American apple… lustrous… waxed with perfect contours… has the same taste…. Bland taste of the leaves of Barbary figs in Toronto, Chicago, Addis Ababa…Shanghai, Rome, Paris, Tananarive… or Bari!…

Imprimé au Canada à York University
4700 Keele Street
Toronto, Ontario M3J 1P3
http://www.yorku.ca/printing/index.htm

THIS tale is a love story, a Valentine, to the Puglia region of Italy. Suffused with Mediterranean warmth and geniality, it follows the adventures of Samy Ben Meddah, of North African origin, as he meets Italian counterparts from the north shore of the Mediterranean. Behind the southern warmth of *Puglia* there lurks a serious subject, the problematic of immigration and culture shocks in a transcultural world. The author presents a wide spectrum of immigrations: geographical, temporal, and artistic. But the whole is leavened by wit and the Southern *joie de vivre*. As Samy leaves Puglia, he summarizes its manifold attractions:

It is simple... natural... welcoming... convivial... seductive... generous... affectionate... Then it will be forever part of my journey... for to return here is to find again an old friend... with whom I lived an unprecedented love... It is also to leave again for new horizons... for so many encounters... so many communions...

HÉDI BOURAOUI is the author of twenty books of poetry, a dozen novels, and a number of books of literary criticism. A member of the Royal Society of Canada, he is Writer in Residence at Stong College, York University, Toronto.

ELIZABETH SABISTON is a full Professor of English at York University. She has published *The Muse Strikes Back: Female Narratology in the Novels of Hédi Bouraoui*, and a translation of his novel, *Retour à Thyna*.

ISBN 978-2-9809-692-56

9 782980 969256