

NINO BELVEDERE

The island of the Sicani

Biography



I was born in the early fifties together with the members of the clique you see in this vintage photo taken by a shepherd in the Arcimusco mountains.

Without them, "L'Isola dei Sicani" would not exist as it is, they are my unconscious but strong co-authors! For this reason I write this collective biography.

I am the first on the right, the one with a piece of rusty chain attached to a loop of my jeans, now I work as a doctor near Turin. At my side while he is tasting the ricotta there is Sebà, alias Ing. Clemente D'Aveni who lives between Messina and Novara but who, if at least once a week does not breathe the air of the Edificiu, is seized by a mysterious fever . At the heart of the Carmelo Orlando group. In the novel, to redeem him, I gave him the name of Angelo because as a child he was a little devil, a plague. It always remains my Golden Ball. The second from the left is

Filippo, alias Nino Milici, take a good look at him, even now, except for a few wrinkles, he has remained like this: he is the immortal, the Highlander of the group. Finally there is Joe, as well as in the novel, we called him that every day because Salvatore Giamboi had to leave for Australia.

He is special, he has written six pages of the book (thanks Joe!) And when I think of him I always imagine him walking on the Harbor Bridge in the beautiful Sydney Harbor. But that's not all: in this photo one person is missing, namely Giovanni Puglisi, missing because when we had to leave he was late and we, taken by the frenzy of the Mission, did not wait, but he is deeply part of the group, by God, and he is author, one day he gave me a sentence, a single sentence that alone is worth a novel, these are the words: - As long as you live, shine!

The Edificiu, the place of life

Nino Belvedere's novel is intense and engrossing. It offers a story rich in pathos and sensitivity; it is about the mystery of a soul which walks backwards along the path of life in an attempt to regain the sensitivity and courage of past years, as well as the heart-rending memory of his friend Santino.

This novel is about the desperate and frantic search for the debris on which to start building anew. It is also about the awakening of the ancestral memory of a self-contained universe, closed in around the dusty clearing of the "Edificiu", the place of life.

Such and thousand of other presences make this novel into a sound which is being lowered into the depths of existence in a search for one's own linguistic, spiritual and human roots. All of this is deeply harmoniously held together by an invisible red thread which narrates stories of great social and existential interest. In the process of telling these stories, the writer lives every word of his and, through each of them, he continually discovers himself anew, until the moment when he becomes his real self, that is a spectator for what is being written.

Nino Belvedere was born in Novara di Sicilia - Messina. He has now lived and worked in the Turin province for many years. In 1980 he published a collection of poems included in the anthology "Poetry on exhibition" published by the Piedmont region. "The island of Sicans" is his first novel.

"Even if in that little world life dissolved, every house, every terrace, every glimmer, every buscion, every wrinkle, every visu and every altra cosa engraved in our soul a love that no strength could ever tear from our chest . "

An immediate and simple, universal story, full of pathos and sensitivity, the mystery of a soul that suddenly goes back through the years to rediscover the sincerity and courage of that time. The awakening of the ancestral memory of a world enclosed in the dusty clearing of the Edificiu, but above all a sounding in search of one's linguistic, human and spiritual origins. Written in 1993 and published in 1996 by Edizioni Tracce, the novel was born from a nightmare and with a bright and runaway dream ideally closes our micro-twentieth century by completing the fresco begun with the novellas by Salvatore Puglisi and continued by the autobiographical novel - Beyond the sky blue - by Concetta La Mazza.

To Giulia and Michele

L'île oubliée

Soon in the basin between Rocca Leone and Rocca Salvatesta a luminous eye will rise which in an instant, opening the door of the blue, will reveal the immense roof that arches over the town.

A long time away my eyes had seen a thousand and more times this dawn that even this morning will slowly flood the valley, will strip the lake of tiles, the terraces, the alleys and every buscion, will lighten the stony brook and the stormy edges of the mountains, infiltrating in the thick foliage of pines and hazelnuts.

But in the nightmare of this night, the edge of the sun was torn by the blue of the missiles which, breaking through the dense hood of blackness, crashed in Sammasi on the cliffs and katafurchi of Rocca Roccazza and exploded, scattering around flames, splinters, lightnings and raising walls of dust. And multicolored fumes swirled from the brook, gathering in a hazy mantle studded with the continuous and merciless throwing of grenades.

Wherever you looked you could see an ashen landscape, strewn with bodies crushed by gutted houses, crucified or razed to the ground.

In that nightmare I glimpsed a defenseless and tortured country: a lethal vice gripped it from the sea, the earth and the sky, without a moment's respite: hell! The enfer!

An island. A gloomy island. Quiet. A deserted and forgotten island. On the poor valley, unhappy and wretched, a dense rain of death had fallen: long low mountains, crushed under a trubuadu sky; distant, distant and motionless waves of a glazed sea. The sun had disappeared. The sun would not reappear on a day that no longer had a palm of blue. Dilapidated and destroyed houses, walled up like tombs, did not breathe the breath of life or the light of existence. In that nightmare everything was strange and unreal, in fact Marianne, Sebà and I were leaving the school barefoot and half naked when a pillow of wind transported us, in less than nothing, to another place in the country, while giant planes unleashed flames and bombs everywhere; to save ourselves from that horrendous massacre we passed through the narrow fissures that wound in the ridge of the castle and we reached, with our heart choking our throat, in the basement of the church; there, lifting the slab of the vault, we came out into the baptistery. Then, slipping between the niches and the shadows of the colonnade, we went up the staircase to find refuge inside the pulpit, at the edge of the central nave.

The place was unsafe because enemies could arrive at any moment. The walls of the church were illuminated by the flashes that burned the neighboring houses and which, reflecting on the canvases of the niches, revealed the scenes of the paintings.

While we were looking for a way out, from behind the statue of the Assumption a hoarse and insistent voice invited us to the foot of the altar. It was old Ernesto who exhorted us by pointing with his hand to the wooden caryatids, where there was a secret passage under the floor.

With Ernesto's help, we lifted the marble slab and went down the staircase touching two large sandstone basins. From the bottom of the crypt entered a faint, whitish gleam.

Beside our feet we saw the re-readings of skulls and other human bones scattered on the pavement, dusty and cobweb-covered coffin, a body wrapped in a black cloak with a three-piece cap on its head. In a corner Sebà and Marianne came across a decapitated relic and another veiled by a reddish cloak.

Everywhere in the crypt floated shadows, dense, damp shadows. We found a broken chest near the niche and uncovered it; with relief we discovered that at the bottom there was an opening which revealed a spiral staircase, descending which and following a fresh current of air, we found ourselves in another large basement.

Hearing the thunder of our footsteps we ran into the gallery and after a run that took our breath away, we arrived exhausted in Badiavecchia in the hypogeum of the monastery.

There Leo, Ernesto's dog, met us, while in a cell, slumped on a bench, Filippo, Angelo and Joe were waiting for us; they were wounded and stained with blood but were saved, while that same night after the sacking and devastation of the village, next to an elm tree on the river bed, Ulysses, Costante and other companions, unarmed and innocent, were killed amid screams and the agony of the poor local farmers.

(This piece is dedicated to Italo Zopolo author of "Ulysses")
As long as you live, shine!

In Badiavecchia we hid in the basement of the abbey. A profound sense of mystery hovered in that sacred place and, although we were terrified, we still perceived the aroma of that distant and unchanging purity; those walls, which smelled of candles and ancient incense, sparse, simple and yet majestic, devoid of frills and useless ornaments, guarded not only our miserable bodies, but also our thirst for life and the poisonous seeds of our damnation.

- Lord, you spread the sky like a carpet: you covered it with stars that illuminate us in this night, while the wild beasts roam and the lions roar looking for us as prey. Above the sky you deposited the waters, which you then make to fall by secret ways on the land so dear to us, to satisfy us with wheat, wine, fruit and oil; so we do not seek our bread we sweat in vain, but we find it and we feed ourselves, tasting, O Lord, your sweetness...

Filippo had found a manuscript under the rubble of the chapter house and Marianne was reading those delicate words on the parchment; moreover he prayed and urged us with tenacity to open our hearts, to believe in heavenly mercy.

- My arid, sterile and fruitless mind is thirsty for your sweetest waters and longs to see that divine bread which feeds the angels and which nourishes the child. I long to taste all its delights in my heart. May your voice ring in my ear, oh good Jesus, so that my heart, my intelligence and the depths of my soul learn to love you: that the depths of my chest embrace you, you who are my one and only true well, my sweet and delightful joy. But what is love, my God?

In the shining vastness of Marianne's gaze a cloud snaked, she seemed to be wrapped in a celestial aura and as she read her face had returned as clear as a sunny day after a storm.

- As long as you live, shine! - Marianne said to each of us, but now the flames of horror were burning our weakened fibers and the quiet and shadowy miasma of sin crept into our minds.

Ernesto told us that, according to a legend, following tortuous pentagonal tunnels dug into the rock that pierced the valley of the olive trees towards the east, one entered a double cavity of perforated and dark tuff from which, continuing through a steep meatus, one reached an oak bridge thrown over a crevasse on the edge of the mainland, where tribes of little men, perhaps the first inhabitants of the valley, had left drawings, graffiti and reliefs on the stone, indelible traces of primordial sacred rites carved on the rocks of a small island: from that strip of land we could follow the waves of the sea and save our lives with a simple raft of reeds.

Then for days and days we searched in vain in the labyrinths of the hypogeum,

but perhaps that secret was hidden in some cell, above our heads, in the words of a Cistercian psalmody that had been dormant for centuries in the folds of a parchment, or perhaps it slept forgotten in the recesses of our own memory.

One morning, tired of waiting, we decided to leave the monastery in search of the pentagonal tunnel: we sneaked out of the crypt and, just on the transept, in front of the St. Hugh niche, a fatal shiver went through our limbs, immediately, doubts, fears and tremors fell within us.

For a moment we stopped near the altar in the warm whiteness of the church, then, taking courage, we cautiously crossed the threshold of the portal, slipped up to the buttress and ran along the pavement to the fountain; from the rusty pipe the water gurgling broke the anguish of that sepulchral inertia.

When we were about to fill the jars, hearing moans and moans coming from a bush, we pushed aside the branches of the broom. In the foliage, in a bloody pool, lay the tortured bodies of Ernesto and Scila. The dog was probably already dead.

We raised the head of that poor old man and from the beard we saw the blue of his eyes appear, staring at the ogive of the portal. Ernesto clasped his hands, dilated his chest, sighed with breathlessness and began: - This will be my last dawn, now my path crosses that of infinity and goes towards the light of wisdom...

His face, drawn and suffering, was flooded with the usual light, his words moved the air. Then something gripped his throat and he stopped talking. Marianne brought a cloth soaked in the jar to his lips and he reanimated himself, looked up and then with an increasingly faint voice resumed talking to us.

- I am passing from the storms of this valley to the quiet rest of a port, I leave the earthly bitterness and the fleeting goods of the world to reach the white perfections of the sky ... the grass will not grow, the sun will dry your tears and the night, the night, it will hide the pain. But I do not cease, you did not cease, I do not cease orare pro vobis

I won't stop, I haven't stopped, I won't stop praying for you, Ernesto whispered to us, but for him the end was now approaching; he shuddered, screamed, opened his mouth, vomiting drool and blackish blood, clenched his teeth, gripped Marianne's wrist in a vise and, while her body shook, smiled and with his face and eyes talking, he freed himself from the weight of existence and expired.

After we got lost in the blue of his eyes we wrapped him in the habit with Scila and buried them together in a pit among the mulberry roots.

Without tears, petrified and deaf to every noise, we decided it was time to leave the monastery; we prepared our backpacks and walked along a path under the thick forest of hazelnut and oak trees, bearing Ernesto's gaze in our chest, which seemed to be peering into the depths of our conscience, into the

ephemeral of our existence.

Silently we trudged through the last flashes of the explosions when a swirling wind pushed us hard until it rose and carried us into a loophole in the cliffs above the town. Sebà and Joe with raised hand pointed to the disk of the sun that was rising over Rocca Salvatesta; our eyes wounded by so many days in the dark, opened to the breath of that sky and we breathed the fresh colors of dawn.

When the gasps in our hearts subsided we climbed the ridge of the rocks and watched speechless. In that heaven dressed in hell, wretched, defenseless and incinerated, we were the last messengers of life but we looked like thin silhouettes animated by the wind. With the first rain the ash would have disappeared and in spring the gorse, which do not fear fire, would have flourished again, flooding the valley with a yellow sea, but we could not console ourselves.

Powerless and useless in the face of so much desolate vastness, we dragged ourselves all day through the pitiful rubble of gutted houses with a thirst to remember that had gripped us since morning.

Even if life dissolved in that small world, every tree, every terrace, every beam, every wrinkle and everything else carved in our soul a love that no strength could ever tear from our chest ... or better: even if in *chillu parmu di terra a vita stàggia sparinnu*, every arberu, every terrace, every bagliu, every wrinkle and every *autra cuosa signavo 'ta our enima n'amuri* that no one out of it can never *strazzà do nuostu pettu*. Astonished, our eyes perceived that pond petrified by pain and throbbed like that scorched earth, with the same tears, the same blood, the same hunger for life, the same dark fear of death and the same fragile, fragile and luminous heart.

Mission

(To Salvatore Puglisi)

In the late morning of the following day, Giuseppe and the rest of the gang with full backpacks found themselves in Roccazza on the steps of Angelo's house. There must have been Alfredo, Pippo and Natalino, who, the night before on the pipes of the Edificiu, had exalted themselves like monkeys but, at the fateful moment, the first two had disappeared; perhaps because they had not well understood the importance and delicacy of the operation, or they had judiciously assessed that that sudden ride in those desertified lands could be the source of great adversity.

On the other hand, it was not easy to remove them from their liturgies. Surely at that precise moment they were sprawled in front of the bar playing tresette, sipping soda and enjoying the cool breeze that breathed in the main road.

Poor Natalino, on the other hand, in order to participate, would have moved the mountains, but his father - as he began to mow the twigs - held him prisoner because he needed arms. There must also have been Clemente, who at that time lived in the seminary in Messina and was as thin as a salted sardella; he read dozens and dozens of books because when he grew up he wanted to be a priest: if he had left, fragile as he was, he would have hindered the expedition and annoyed his companions who, taken by despair, could even have roasted him on the grill.

The companions, on the other hand, sensibly assessed that Clemente, accustomed to the comforts and hot meals of the seminary, would be a drag and so, taken by the frenzy of adventure, even if reluctantly, they decided not to wait for him.

There were almost all the inhabitants of the neighborhood who followed the departure and in addition to the ritual recommendations they offered olives in brine and passion, some pieces of cheese, others prickly pear mustard, nuts, sosizza and fruit.

Women, children and old people were excited and shuddered for this adventure. Our reckless explorers, after the painful decision to leave Clemente, placed their backpacks on their shoulders and left, leaving behind the last houses of the town and Rocca Roccazza: on the opposite side Rocca Salvatesta and Rocca Leone, getting tanned in the sun, seemed to greet them.

Our people, with a soft step and head held high, took the ancient stony and solitary mule track abandoned for years, along which the ground became more and more barren and reddish, and arrived in the district behind the dead houses. Arid hills rose on all sides, the trees thinned out and only wild carnations, giant thistles, silver artichokes emerged from the parched earth.

From the crevices of the rocks stood superb green agaves flecked with white. Everywhere, however, the desert flowers dominated, the brooms, and it seemed as if we had entered a landscape from the Tex Willer comics. Filippo was the first to identify himself in that far west atmosphere, he unfastened his grandfather's pumpkin bottle and began in a reckless Italian:

- People, here we need a little fuel: I make myself a full tank of fire water! Rocks, ravines, precipices, rocks, rocks, rocks: nothing else could be seen: by now those paths, formerly traveled by their grandparents, had been abandoned to the thorns of brambles and junipers while the surrounding countryside had for years been uncultivated, wild and lonely.

Yet for centuries the people of the valley had found a nest through pastoralism and agriculture, a reason for living in those harsh, hard, difficult to cultivate lands, but by now all activity had ceased, there were no longer shepherds and farmers to animate those mountains.

In fact, the people of Sperlingo either piled up on the trains that rattled from the south to the north of Europe or they embarked on the ships that, following oceanic routes, landed in the distant ports of the Americas and Australia.

To preserve memories of life remained the haystacks, shelters built with stone and branches, the sheepfolds, the threshing floors on which the wheat was beaten with the horses, and the stone walls that delimited the funds.

Who knows what sacrifices, pains, joys, enormous efforts and other scenes those lands had seen. Our people had already come a long way and there was absolute silence around them, but you could feel the heartbeat of an ancient life.

In the distance behind them you could see faded, caressed by the clouds, the peak of Rocca Salvatesta which seemed to lift its head to follow the mission of its valiant sons. Sebà, with the handkerchief around his neck and long blond hair, acted as a guide and often, with the help of a stick, flaunted his knowledge:

- Here, here, on that floor at the top of the neck there was once a threshing-floor; who knows how much wheat my grandmother threshed.

- Excuse me Professor Occultis - Joe asked Sebà - who worked those green lands near the stream at the bottom of the valley?

- Simple Joe. My grandmother told me that grandmother Michela lived in that valley with her large family. A widow who, with great sacrifices, supported the whole family. Just think that she had only a third of the crops left because she had to give the rest to the feudal lords who, without touching a hoe, found their houses full of wheat. Other times, my dear, then ...

It seemed that Sebà had studied the history of the place for years, or that fifty years earlier he had personally commanded the oxen behind the plow. He knew everything down to the smallest detail. Meanwhile the mission proceeded smoothly and the intrepid explorers crossed lonely valleys, ravines and thick hazelnut groves now deserted, but once teeming with farmers and shepherds.

- That's Portella Mancina. It is called this because at the time of the large estates, seven laborers died in a single day. For starvation wages they worked grueling hours under a scorching sun; the strong heat killed them. -Yes, but how do you know all these stories? Asked Angelo impressed.

- My grandmother, she was the one who told me everything. After all those hours of travel under the sun the water supplies in the flasks were starting to run low and the heat made the throat dry up, but the usual Sebà instilled drops of courage in the thirsty:

- Come on debauched, move your paws, one more little effort and we will be rewarded.

After a few minutes in that silent valley the gentle gurgling of the water began to be heard and suddenly, after a hundred meters, a small spring appeared as in a mirage.

The thirsty in a hurry rushed to the sandstone pool and while Philip danced thanking the rain gods, the others plunged their feet into the pool and began to gulp water until it burst.

- Let's wash our guts! - they shouted, but the wise Sebà admonished them:

- Calm down, calm foolish, do not overdo it, otherwise the funny ones (frogs!) Are born in your belly. After filling their bellies and flasks with fresh water, they resumed their journey as the sun's rays lowered more and more and gigantic silhouettes stood out on the ridge of the plateau: one in the shape of an eagle ready to take flight towards the sea and another had the appearance of a female figure with joined hands gathered in prayer.

Our exhausted explorers began to feel fatigue in their muscles and sank with their shoes into the dusty ground, but the further they advanced the more the perception of isolation increased.

Were it not for the rustle of the wind that swept the plateau, silence reigned around them and a feeling of enchantment fueled by the mysterious shapes of stone. Only the crows and the whining song of the omnipresent cicadas cheered their mission.

Only Joe had not lost his good humor and to raise the spirit of the group shot nonsense:

- Come on, come on idlers, we have an appointment with history, the one with a capital S! Here, either you make Italy, or you die! Perhaps he, being the strongest of the group, was not in danger of bursting, on the contrary he lengthened his pace to shake his companions who resisted like ancient warriors. Joe did not give up but Sebà, with a pat on the back, warned him: - Calm down, calm down Joe, let's not waste energy, the track is still very long.

The mission proceeded wearily, even Sebà no longer spoke, he had suspended the historical tracking shots and dragged himself sweaty to the back of the group, biting his parched lips and with an enigmatic look. Angelo took small steps and begged: - If we don't stop, soon someone will leave us their

feathers! Negrieri! How many miles, Professor Occultis, how many miles before the glorious end?

- Don't squawk old squaw - Sebà replied with a radiant gaze - the goal is already ours, here, here we are, here we are, open your eyes!

In less than an instant, looking up, we were stunned by the celestial reflections of the perennial snowfields on the mountains, our sacred mountains; beautiful, they were beautiful, like the day God created them. The fatigue vanished suddenly and running, following the large roots of the Turkey oaks that meandered along the path, we arrived radiant near the cool shadows of a luxuriant wood. The fiery ball of the sun, illuminating the smoke towers that rose from the immense Etna brazier, set behind the Nebrodi mountains: in that name the attikòs thousands of years earlier had carved the tangible signs of their civilization. In fact, when Telemachus tells his mother Penelope about the encounter with Menelaus, he speaks of fawns. Homer uses the word "nebrous" to indicate them.

Fawns, porcupines, tortoises, mustioli, dwarf elephants, cicindelids and, according to legend, Cyclops, lotophages, lestrigoni, scitali, harpies and also zazzanidi, limmi, gurpi, crasti, crabbi, muu, jinchì, bavaaggi, zagardò and trallaere sciammiadi there have been several undisputed rulers over those lands cloaked in beeches, oaks, chestnuts and gigantic turkey oaks plagued by thunderbolts.

In ancient times, before the appearance of man, the mouths of fire, floating on the sea, spat burning tongues, flared up the waters and thundered with roars, thunders and wrecks that shattered the sky and resounded in all the valleys and in every song.

For billions and hundreds of millions of years those primeval volcanoes had spewed incandescent slime, but for only two hundred our explorers had not been able to see them; For just two centuries, in fact, the cone of fire had been snoring.

Too bad, if they had arrived in that place just a thousand centuries earlier, their naive eyes together with the frightening ones of the last cryptosaurs surviving the Earth's glaciation could have seen the red-hot birth of the newborn Sicani island emerge from the waters of the sea.

Not far from the wood, right on top of the plateau, lined up according to the cycles of the phases of the moon, cyclopean stone temples stood, soaring and masters of the sky. Smoothed by winds and rains, indestructible and immortal, the megalithic dolmens were intent on scrutinizing the universe, the last silent witnesses of a Paleolithic station.

Traces of human existence remained indelibly engraved in the body of the white stone. In those caverns chipped pebbles, flakes of lithophones, amìgdale, prismatic chrysolites, astral maps and fragments of anthropomorphic stelae depicting scenes of life dating back millennia before Jesus Christ had been

unearthed.

That sacred place aroused reminiscences of primitive litholatrix cults with orgiastic ceremonies, propitiatory dances and songs, animal and human sacrifices and other scenes of prehistoric life.

There thousands of years ago men of flesh and blood had performed the same actions that Joe and his companions were now about to do. The story repeated itself: like our ancestors who from that palm of earth had watched the flows of the fiery beehive, so we scrutinized that sea contemplating, with the same dismay, the origin of that crumb of the world.

While the darkness thickened in every corner and tried to entangle us, we, like them, with the branches of broom and oak stumps, lit an immense bonfire that dispelled the darkness and lit up the entire valley, illuminating the cracks of the dolmens with glows. of hot flashes.

It was already dark when, sitting around the fire in that bubble of light, we began to roast the meat on the grill. Then, like angry beasts, we devoured it all still rare and finally we moved on to provola, tomatoes in oil, sardines, spicy sosizza, cheese, mustard and passion, the tasty black olives! We tore apart everything, but everything, nothing remained.

We consumed the rest of the night, playing the pebbles and singing at the top of our voices: everywhere on the plateau the dull echo of our screams boomed. Very late, in the middle of the night, we prepared the beds with the dry ferns and slipped tired and happy under the sheepskin.

She was naked and star-studded that night. We savored the same thrills and thrills that our dear ancestors had felt millennia earlier.