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# **The Stories My Mother Told Me:**

## A Comparative Study of the Folktales of Palmi in the Context of the European Oral Tradition

Submitted by  
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(Dip.T, Grad Dip Ed.)

A thesis in total fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of  
Master of Philosophy

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## **FILE CONVERSION**

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This thesis was written using a word processing program incompatible with current online computer systems.

To allow compatibility with these systems it was converted to a suitable format.

As a result of this process, some of the line spacing and fonts changed and the footnotes for some chapters were lost.

The lost footnotes for those chapters have been retyped and efforts made to produce as consistent as possible presentation throughout the thesis.

There are some minor but unavoidable variations between the hardcopy held at ACU and this electronic copy regarding fonts, spacing and page numbers.

The author has attempted to minimise these inconsistencies wherever possible.

*This thesis is dedicated to my husband,  
**John Nolan**  
without whose support this work would never have been  
finished,  
and  
to my mother  
**Carmela Speranza**  
who continues to keep the stories alive.*

*Particular thanks to my supervisor  
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generously and with unwavering enthusiasm*

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## PART A

### **Preface**

The Rare Situation of the Teller 1

### **Introduction**

Purpose 7

Method 8

## PART B

### Contextualising the Stories within the European Folktale Tradition

#### Chapter 1

##### **Oral Tradition and the Printed Word**

Introduction 16

Sounds Unique to the Spoken Word 16

What's in a Name? 17

The Non-Verbal Element 18

The Untranslatable 20

The Importance of Rhyme 22

Different Categories of Folk Literature in this Thesis 23

#### Chapter 2

##### **The Form and Function of the Folktale**

Introduction 27

Function of the Folktale 28

The Hero in the Folktale 31

Our Daily Bread 34

Style and Composition 36

### **Chapter 3**

#### **The Academic Study of Folktales**

Introduction	41
Pioneers in Academic Study of the Folktale	42
The 'Laws' Governing the Folktale	45

### **PART C**

#### **The Folktales of Mrs Speranza**

### **Chapter 4**

#### **Triumphant Peasant Folktales**

Introduction	54
Folktales and Commentary	61

### **Chapter 5**

#### **Anti-clerical Folktales**

Introduction	81
Folktales and Commentary	89

### **Chapter 6**

#### **Jesus and Saint Peter Folktales**

Introduction	102
Folktales and Commentary	110

### **Chapter 7**

#### **Instructional Folktales**

Introduction	127
Folktales and Commentary	130

### **Chapter 8**

#### **Folktales Reflecting Attitudes Towards Women**

Introduction	157
Folktales and Commentary	169

## **Chapter 9**

<b>Conclusion: The Power of Story</b>	188
---------------------------------------	-----

## **PART D**

### **Appendices**

#### **Appendix A**

Map of Calabria	196
-----------------	-----

#### **Appendix B**

Complete List of Stories	197
--------------------------	-----

#### **Appendix C**

Dialect Transcription of Folktales in this Thesis	203
---	-----

#### **Appendix D**

Story from R. Lombardi Satriani Collection	223
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## **PART E**

### **Bibliographies**

Bibliography of English Language Texts	226
--	-----

Bibliography of Italian Language Texts	232
--	-----

## **DECLARATION**

This thesis contains no material extracted in whole or in part from a thesis by which I have qualified for or been awarded another degree or diploma.

No other person's work has been used without due acknowledgment in the main text of the thesis.

This thesis has not been submitted for the award of any degree or diploma in any other tertiary institution.

Signed \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_



## **ABSTRACT**

### **Aims**

The aim of this thesis is to record and preserve folktales from the oral tradition of the town of Palmi in Calabria, Southern Italy. It examines how the tales were the product of the time, place and culture from which they originated and how they reflected and transmitted the values and beliefs of that particular culture. It takes what has only ever existed in the oral tradition and transposes it into written text in the dialect of Palmi, which is then translated into English. It also seeks to place the stories within the broader context of the European Folktale Tradition.

### **Scope**

The thesis examines stories from the oral tradition of the family of Mrs Carmela Speranza which were told to her by her father. It does not attempt to document the wider oral traditions of the town of Palmi, rather concentrating on the stories that were told within this one family.

Reference is made to other collections of Italian folktales taken from the oral tradition, including the works of writers such as Italo Calvino. Attention is also given to collections of folktales taken specifically from the Calabrian region, in particular the works of Letterio Di Francia and Raffaele Lombardi Satriani.

The thesis further attempts to examine Mrs Speranza's stories within the conventions of folktale analysis and to show through this that they belong to the broader European Folktale Tradition.

### **Conclusions**

The thesis concludes that the folktales told by Mrs Speranza are drawn from the oral tradition. They reflect the values and customs of the society from which they came and reveal universal truths about the human condition. The thesis also concludes that the stories can be justifiably placed within the broader context of the European Folktale Tradition as they contain the essential elements of these types of tales, complying, for example, with Olrik's 'Epic Laws of Folk Narrative' and Bascom's 'Four Functions of Folklore.' The stories also contain the style, composition, themes and structures which Luthi has identified as hallmarks of the European folktale.

# **PART A**

## **Preface and Introduction**

**PREFACE**  
**THE RARE SITUATION OF THE TELLER**

To appreciate fully the background to the folktales contained in this thesis, we need to understand something about the teller's life and the town and the region these stories come from. It is a unique set of circumstances which allows us a glimpse into an ancient past.

Carmela Speranza (nee Tripodi) was born in 1926 in the town of Palmi which is found on the Southern tip of the Italian peninsula in the region of Calabria (refer Appendix A). She lived in the town until 1957 when she migrated to Australia. In those thirty-one years she never left the country community that she was part of and only went into the town itself on very rare occasions. Palmi, a town so insignificant that it is not shown on most maps of Italy, constituted her whole world. The only life she knew was family life, growing up with seven brothers and sisters in a close-knit community where someone from a neighbouring town of twenty minutes walking distance was regarded as a stranger or foreigner. It was a very small and insular world compounded by the fact that there was no television, radio, electricity or running water, and no books or newspapers in the farming community as the great majority of the country people were illiterate.

When Mrs Speranza came to Australia she never went out to work. She remained at home looking after her four children and never had any real contact with the Australian culture. Lacking extended family, formal education and unable to read or write in Italian or even speak Standard Italian, she became very isolated. To add to this difficult situation, Mrs Speranza found herself in a country and culture that was truly foreign to her. Consequently, she began to rely heavily on all the things she had learned as a child and to pass these on to her own children and to some extent her grandchildren. The stories, songs, prayers and other folklore that her

parents had taught her remained very much alive in her memory and formed what she considered to be her real world here in Australia. All of these, including the folktales, were in the dialect of Palmi, the town of her birthplace, childhood and early adulthood. It was a dialect which had remained almost unchanged for centuries<sup>1</sup> which the teller brought with her to Australia in the 1950's and that she passed on to her children. Through her memory and because of the unusual set of circumstances concerning her background, we have been given a privileged insight into one of the few remaining pockets of ancient culture where the oral tradition was still practised in the teller's lifetime as it had been for centuries before. The stories have remained uncontaminated by the written word and the influence of 'education.' All of these factors have combined to make it possible for us today to share in the richness of the oral tradition which would otherwise have been lost many generations ago.

Within the Italian community in Australia, and the broader European migrant community, it is not uncommon to find people who have some direct links with the oral tradition and who believe they possess what they consider to be folktales. On closer analysis and discussion however, it is apparent that these stories could not be considered part of the folktale genre nor are they strictly oral traditions - being rather family anecdotes about relatives and friends or members of the village community. While these are interesting and valid in their own right as they give an insight into personal history and past, they do not encompass the wider collective wisdom which was shared by the entire community either as listener or teller. It is important to note that:

not all oral sources are oral traditions, but only those which are reported statements - that is, sources which have been transmitted from one person to another through the medium of language. Eyewitness accounts, even when given orally, do not come within the sphere of tradition because they are not 'reported' statements. Oral

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<sup>1</sup> Despite the fact that any language is subject to some change over time, the dialect of Palmi has remained relatively static: the Di Francia material from the late Eighteen Hundreds to early Nineteen Hundreds indicates very little change between it and Mrs Speranza's dialect of the late twentieth century.

traditions exclusively consist of hearsay accounts, that is, testimonies that narrate an event which has not been witnessed and remembered by the informant himself, but which he has learnt about through hearsay.<sup>2</sup>

It must be stressed that the stories contained here from Mrs Speranza are uniquely a relic - a fossil, of an ancient past of a pre-literate people whose way of imparting their wisdom, knowledge, beliefs and social mores was through the oral tradition. Equally important, the stories were originally transmitted to the author not as a collector, but as a child who was being given the culture as it had been passed down by word-of-mouth since time immemorial.

The stories recalled by Mrs Speranza were told to her in her childhood by her father as they had been told to him by his father and so on back through the generations. Slightly unusual in this case is the fact that the keepers of the stories for at least two generations were male, suggesting that the stories were taken-up by the best storyteller from a very large family group, that is, the one who had the memory capacity and necessary art.

The stories were told by Mrs Speranza to all her children, yet were best remembered and cherished by the author of this dissertation. Similarly, while a few of the stories were remembered by Mrs Speranza's siblings, none of the other seven brothers and sisters could recall such a large number with clarity and detail. The eldest sister was the only one who could recall three stories completely although she best remembered the prayers and songs. One explanation for Mrs Speranza retaining the stories while her siblings remembered only fragments of them is that Mrs Speranza is the storyteller of the family: she possesses what Ruth Sawyer calls the "living art"<sup>3</sup> of the storyteller, a gift few people possess. As in the tradition of the Irish seanachies, "the ancient storytellers of Ireland,"<sup>4</sup> who could hold an audience

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<sup>2</sup> Jan Vansina (1965) *Oral Tradition*, Middlesex: Penguin, p 20.

<sup>3</sup> Ruth Sawyer (1966) *The Way of the Storyteller*, London: The Bodley Head, p 19.

<sup>4</sup> Sawyer, p 106.

with their gift of storytelling, Mrs Speranza has “the art by nature and inheritance.”<sup>5</sup> She belongs to the traditional storytellers who have assimilated their stories “by repeated telling, by living with them and absorbing them until they [have] become so much an unconscious part of them that the telling” becomes “involuntary and spontaneous.”<sup>6</sup> Von Sydow, a theoretician who studied the mechanics of folklore transmission believes that:

only a very small number of active bearers of tradition equipped with a good memory, vivid imagination, and narrative powers do transmit the tales. It is only they who tell them. Among their audience it is only a small percentage who are able to recollect a tale so as to recount it, and a smaller percentage still who actually do so.<sup>7</sup>

Kevin Crossley-Holland has outlined the qualities traditionally ascribed to the best of oral storytellers: a good memory; thoughtfulness - meaning that the storyteller cares for and gives proper weight to each character and action and is involved in a tale but may also stand outside it and comment on it; accuracy which comes with a mastery of the language; vividness in the use of words to make memorable images and sounds; constant changes of mood because a folktale embodies a wide range of emotion; use of face and hands to enact a story through expression and gesture and finally delight in the story and in the art of storytelling and in the sharing that comes with this.<sup>8</sup> When listening to Mrs Speranza telling a story, all these qualities are evident as she brings it to life. Her rural background in Southern Italy and the isolation of her life in Australia were conditions that fostered the traditional storyteller as also revealed by Ruth Sawyer’s comment:

I have noticed that the best of the traditional storytellers whom I have heard have been those who live close to the heart of things - to the

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<sup>5</sup> Sawyer, p 10.

<sup>6</sup> Sawyer, p 59.

<sup>7</sup> Carl Wilhelm Von Sydow (1948) “Folktale Studies and Philology: Some Points of View” in A. Dundes [ed] *The Study of Folklore*, p 231.

<sup>8</sup> Kevin Crossley-Holland (2000) “Different - But Oh How Like!” in G. Cliff Hodges *et.al.* [eds] *Tales, Tellers and Texts*, London: Cassell, p 18.

earth, the sea, wind and weather. They have been those who knew solitude, silence. They have been given unbroken time in which to feel deeply, to reach constantly for understanding. They have come to know the power of the spoken word.<sup>9</sup>

While for Mrs Speranza the spoken word remained vital to her life, all her other siblings, apart from her eldest sister, eventually became literate, some as children and others as adults and therefore lost the necessity or the need to rely on memory. This is another possible explanation why Mrs Speranza is the only one who recalls the stories so vividly. Only one other sibling came to live in Australia and soon after had the opportunity to learn to read and write. Consequently, her reliance on memory and oral tradition was not as crucial in her life. At the same time the others who remained in Italy did not consider the stories important especially as the dialect was stigmatised by poverty and was being slowly replaced by Standard Italian. This made the stories less accessible and less understood by a modern audience and the emerging, educated generation who were for the first time removed from the oral tradition. Francesco Coco in his study of Italian dialects comments:

The possession of a national language has come to be accepted more and more in recent times, as the symbol of true culture and social promotion, while the dialect has acquired a derogatory connotation being regarded as an impediment, a clinging to a tradition of poverty and ignorance.<sup>10</sup>

Undoubtedly nostalgia and homesickness played an important part in Mrs Speranza's retention of the stories. Due to her illiteracy and social isolation after migrating to Australia, the stories remained alive to her and untainted by book learning or corrupted by the influence of the mass media. They are presented in this thesis as true to the original as is possible when we consider the two gaps that must

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<sup>9</sup> Sawyer, p 18.

<sup>10</sup> Francesco Coco (1977) *Introduzione allo Studio della Dialettologia Italiana*, Bologna: Casa Editrice Patron, p 29. Translated from Italian by Grace Nolan: "Il possesso della lingua nazionale e` venuto ad assumere, in tempi recenti, sempre piu` il valore simbolico di autentica cultura e di promozione sociale, mentre il dialetto ha acquistato una connotazione spregiativa in quanto considerato una remora, un ancoraggio a una tradizione di miseria e di ignoranza."

be bridged: the cultural, when translating from one language to another and the literary, when transposing the oral tradition into a written text.

Maria Tatar has noted that when folktales first began to be printed, many changes were made to them, divesting the tales of their earthy humour, burlesque twists, and bawdy turns of phrase to make room for moral instruction and spiritual guidance.<sup>11</sup> The tales in this thesis are presented in their unexpurgated form. While, in places, they may be regarded as coarse or offensive, to safeguard their authenticity, no changes have been made to the way they were recalled by the teller.

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<sup>11</sup> Maria Tatar (1992) *Off With Their Heads!* Princeton: Princeton University Press, p 8.



## **INTRODUCTION: PURPOSE AND METHOD**

### **PURPOSE**

In the last decade in particular there has been a resurgence of interest in the migrant story and the tracing of background information and personal histories. This is evidence of an increasing awareness of the importance of family background and culture and is apparent in Australia in the publication of such texts as *Romulus, My Father* by Raimond Gaita, *Tapestry* by Maria Pallotta-Chiarolli, *Savage Cows and Cabbage Leaves* by Marie Alafaci, *Jewels and Ashes* by Arnold Zable and internationally in the success of *Angela's Ashes* by Frank McCourt and *Chinese Cinderella* by Adeline Yen Mah. All these stories, whether Italian, Jewish, Irish or Chinese, indicate a search for meaning and identity and how this is inextricably linked with an understanding of the past: how vital it is to acknowledge and preserve certain traditions and cultural ties and how important these are to our understanding of the present.

It is one of the aims of this thesis to preserve stories from the oral tradition of the town of Palmi in Southern Italy and to give an insight into the values, customs and beliefs of Palmi as represented in these ancient stories. In particular, it records those stories remembered by Mrs Carmela Speranza, a native of the town.

It is also the aim of this thesis to show how these particular folktales are part of the European Folktale Tradition.<sup>12</sup> While the European folktale may seem removed from us, it is a genre which has influenced our perceptions to such an extent that it has become intrinsic to Western society's consciousness. The thesis draws on theoretical works by many of the leading academics in this field, such as

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<sup>12</sup> While the author has previously written a minor thesis for a Graduate Diploma of Education, also using stories told by Mrs Speranza, the stories used in this thesis are not the same as the five used in the previous work. The previous work was presented with the primary focus on the personal history of Mrs Speranza. However, the main focus of this thesis is to examine the stories within the broader context of European folktale scholarship which the previous thesis did not.

Max Lüthi and Alan Dundes, to establish how Mrs Speranza's folktales are linked to the broader aspects of oral tradition and are part of the European Folktale genre.

In recording and analysing the stories in this thesis it is acknowledged that they have characteristics that find their origins in a pre-literate and pre-Christian past which in themselves are complete areas of study. While these aspects are interesting and influential in the study of folktales, it is beyond the scope of this thesis to explore in detail these and other areas such as the examination of variants of particular stories or their links to classical mythology. Taking this into account, it is the aim of the writer to save the folktales recalled by Mrs Speranza from being lost to posterity and to demonstrate how they reflect the place they came from. It must also be noted that word limits preclude discussion of all the stories remembered by Mrs Speranza. A complete list of all the stories with a brief summary of each one can be found in Appendix B.

### **METHOD**

Lüthi has warned:

anyone who wants to discover the distinct character of the European folktale must not rely exclusively on recordings made by the collectors of today, who are equipped with tape recorders and publish their recordings or shorthand notes unaltered ... what is valid for the modern narrator may not necessarily have been true for a narrator who was still a member of an active, storytelling community of adults. The expectations and needs of that earlier audience would have influenced narrative style in another manner than today, when an isolated narrator is influenced by an audience of children or even by the presence of the folktale scholar, to whom he may at last again tell one of the beloved old tales.<sup>13</sup>

While being mindful of this problem, the collection of the stories in this work avoids the pitfalls Lüthi outlines as far as is possible. In this particular case, both the teller

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<sup>13</sup> Max Lüthi (1982) *The European Folktale: Form and Nature*, Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues, p 109.

and the set of circumstances surrounding her are rare, as detailed in the Preface. For this reason, the stories themselves are as authentic as can be found in Australia today: the teller comes directly from a community and local culture, which up until the 1950's in the area where these stories were told, had remained virtually unchanged for centuries. Furthermore, in telling the stories for this thesis, Mrs Speranza affirmed that she recalled and retold the stories as they were told to her.

The folktales recalled by Mrs Speranza were recorded on audio tape and then transcribed by the author in their original dialect. The stories were then read back to Mrs Speranza to check details and accuracy before they were translated into English.<sup>14</sup>

In this thesis the English translation is followed by a commentary with the dialect version contained in Appendix C. (Each of the stories in English is numbered and this number corresponds with the dialect version in the appendix). After each story, a commentary has been included. This commentary places the story in its social and cultural context and analyses its didactic content.

### **Previous Work on the Folktales of Calabria**

Letterio Di Francia was born in Palmi in the mid 1800's. He collected folktales from the town and surrounding region at the turn of the century which were published in three volumes.<sup>15</sup> After extensive searching, these works were located and examined by the author of this thesis at the Alexandrina Library of Rome University. The stories collected by Di Francia are interesting on a number of levels. The dialect is not often seen in its written form, and here it is presented with all its colourful expressions and turn of phrase. Although the stories date from over a century ago, it is unmistakably the dialect of Palmi and the same as that of the teller

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<sup>14</sup> Details of the difficulties encountered in translation are discussed in Chapter 2 of this thesis.

<sup>15</sup> Letterio Di Francia (1929 Part 1; 1931 Part 2; 1934 Part 3) *Fiabe e Novelle Calabresi*, Turin: Casa Editrice Giovanni Chiantore.

of the stories in this thesis. The first two volumes contain stories which would mostly be classified as fairytales rather than folktales, though with an obviously local flavour. Di Francia lists the variants which can be found throughout Italy and Europe. In the third volume however, there are two variants and one partial variant to the stories in this thesis. The stories in this final volume could be classified as folktales and saints' legends which have a great deal of similarity to the folktales told by Mrs Speranza. Notably none of the stories in the Di Francia collection is the same throughout as those of Mrs Speranza. The most that can be said is that they are variants, the similarities and differences of which will be noted where appropriate in the commentary of each individual story.

They provide us with an insight into the language, culture and customs of over one hundred years ago in the town of Palmi and how this is very much in keeping with all that Mrs Speranza has said about the lifestyle and all that has been researched about the historical background and the unchanging past. The Di Francia stories and the comparison they allow with those told by Mrs Speranza also give us an opportunity to experience first hand the differences between storytellers and their biases and emphases as well as the similarity in expressing the values and belief system of the community - the undercurrents which run through each story and are at the heart of the folktale.

The work by Di Francia provides an example of the dialect in written form, which the author of this thesis has used as a model for transposing the oral stories into a written text. A further model of the written dialect was also found in Mandalari's collection of songs from the South of Italy in his book *Canti Del Popolo Reggino*<sup>16</sup> published in 1887. In addition to these, a model of a modern text was the

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<sup>16</sup> Mario Mandalari (1983) *Canti Del Popolo Reggino*, Naples: Arnaldo Forni [ed]; reissue of "Edizione di Napoli, 1881/83."

poetry anthology written by a well-known contemporary poet of Palmi, Mario Bagala`, *Jettumi i luvari* published in 1998.

Another major work is *Racconti Popolari Calabresi* by Raffaele Lombardi Satriani (1873-1966). He published a collection of folktales from Calabria in their various dialects in a number of volumes. The works of both Di Francia and Lombardi Satriani contain variants of a few of the stories told by Mrs Speranza and, where appropriate, reference is made to this. However, none of the stories from either collection are exactly the same as those retold here.

Italo Calvino's *Italian Folktales*, a selection of stories from throughout Italy and including some stories from the Di Francia and Lombardi Satriani collections, is another important work. First published in 1956, it is, however, a retelling in Standard Italian of the original dialect stories which have been adapted for a modern audience. Another scholar who published a collection of Calabrian folktales in 1903 was Pasquale Rossi, a sociologist whose interest was in collective psychology. Rossi presented the folktales already translated into Standard Italian, embellishing them and giving them in his opinion, "instead of the bare folkloric style, a literary tone which renders them more delightful."<sup>17</sup> Since no manuscript remains of his original transcription in dialect, his work cannot be analysed authentically from a folklorist's point of view. Similarly, Calvino retold the stories not in dialect but in his "own inspired and sensuous language."<sup>18</sup>

Di Francia's and Lombardi Satriani's extensive collections have remained in their original dialect form while Calvino and Rossi have presented their collections in

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<sup>17</sup> Pasquale Rossi (1983) *Le "Rumanze" ed il Folk-Lore in Calabria*, Cosenza: Pellegrini, p 10. Translated from the Italian by Grace Nolan: "invece della nuda forma folk-lorica, un tono letterario che le rende piu` dilettevoli."

<sup>18</sup> Italo Calvino (1982) *Italian Folktales*, [Translated by George Martin], London: Penguin Books, Back Cover.

Standard Italian only.<sup>19</sup> While some texts have presented collections of Calabrian folktales and folklore, including the works of notable scholars such as Antonino Basile and Raffaele Corso, they have not combined all four aspects which this thesis has attempted: namely, written down folktales in dialect taken directly from the oral tradition, translated them into English, provided a commentary and placed them within the European Folktale tradition.

### **Folktale or Fairytale?**

Kevin Crossley-Holland has stated:  
 a fairy tale is only a sub-section of a folktale. Folktale is the umbrella title within which there are a number of sub-sections, like spokes. There are giant tales, fabulous beast tales, fairy stories, ghost stories, tales of kings and heroes and so on. A fairytale is actually a misnomer if applied across the board.<sup>20</sup>

Furthermore, in *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, “Folktale” is defined as:

a story passed on by word of mouth rather than by writing, and thus partly modified by successive re-tellings before being written down or recorded. The category includes legends, fables, jokes, tall stories, and fairytales or *Marchen*. Many folktales involve mythical creatures and magical transformations.<sup>21</sup>

Vladimir Propp, however, makes a clear distinction between the folk and fairytale: “my first premise is that among folktales there is a particular category called wondertales which can be isolated and studied independently,”<sup>22</sup> but interestingly he calls this “the folk wondertale”<sup>23</sup> highlighting how the folk and fairytale are inextricably linked. While in the strictest sense the forms are different, it is clear that

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<sup>19</sup> It should be noted that Calvino selected and retold in Standard Italian stories which had been collected from the oral tradition by earlier scholars and that his work has since been translated into English.

<sup>20</sup> Margot Tyrrell “Kevin Crossley-Holland” in *Reading Time*, Vol. 34, No. 4.

<sup>21</sup> Chris Baldick [ed] (1990) *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

<sup>22</sup> Vladimir Propp (1984) *Theory and History of Folklore*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, p 102.

<sup>23</sup> Propp, *Theory and History of Folklore*, p 70.

the broad definition “folktale” encompasses a variety of categories of which fairytale is one. Most scholars use the terms “fairytale” and “folktale” interchangeably which serves to add to the confusion. Baker concludes that “fairy tales are the retold versions of folk tales.”<sup>24</sup> The two terms are often substituted one for the other because the structures, themes, motifs and formulas overlap; thus Lüthi, for example, in *The Fairytale as Art Form and Portrait of Man*, draws on Axel Olrik’s work on the *Epic Laws of Folk Narrative* to provide a framework for the discussion of the fairytale. Although Lüthi and others distinguish between the folktale and the fairytale, Olrik uses “Sage” as an over-all term to refer directly to the basic element of story which forms the origins of both: they have common structures and, to a large extent, a common language for analysis that is evident in many academic texts and discussions. Therefore, even when a scholar analyses aspects of the fairytale, much of the analysis holds true for the folktale due to both forms employing many of the same laws and narrative forms.

For this thesis the term folktale is preferred because very few of Mrs Speranza’s stories contain the magic element usually associated with fairytales, which Max Lüthi terms the “fairytale proper.”<sup>25</sup> However, when quotes from academic sources are used in this study, it must be remembered that the author being quoted may have employed the word “fairytale”, when in fact they are referring to the broader term “folktale” or the point they make is equally applicable to both forms of tale.

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<sup>24</sup> Donald Baker (1981) *Functions of Folk and Fairy Tales*, Washington: Association for Childhood Education International, p 22.

<sup>25</sup> Max Lüthi (1984) *The Fairytale as Art Form and Portrait of Man*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, p X.

## Ordering the Material

Max Lüthi has noted the international importance of the “Tale - Type Index”<sup>26</sup> compiled by Antti Aarne and expanded by Stith Thompson which distinguishes between animal tales, ordinary folktales (including tales of magic, religion, novellas and tales of the stupid ogre) and jokes and anecdotes. Another method of categorisation referred to by Lüthi is Thompson’s Motif Index which distinguishes around forty thousand motifs with headings such as animals, taboo, ogres etc.<sup>27</sup> Folktales have also been classified by some scholars using the terms myth, legend, fable, animal tale, anecdote and so on.

Mrs Speranza’s stories could be grouped in these ways, however the author chose to order the material by placing each story under the heading of a particular theme. This allows us to take a closer look at their structure and meaning and examine the characteristics that place them within the Folktale genre. Five major themes were chosen as the ones which appeared most frequently in this collection of stories and which indicate their importance in the daily life of the people from whom they came. These were identified under the headings: Triumphant Peasant Folktales, Anti-Clerical Folktales, Jesus and Saint Peter Folktales, Instructional Folktales, and Folktales Reflecting Attitudes Towards Women. Due to the constraints of word limits, another major theme of Religious and Aetiological Folktales could not be included in this thesis. It is acknowledged that this is a major theme as it illustrates the mixture of pagan and Christian beliefs which permeated every aspect of the lives of the ordinary people. Stories under the heading of Miscellaneous Folktales also had to be excluded for the same reason. However, mention is made of folktales from each theme wherever possible throughout this dissertation. The Jesus and Saint Peter stories are presented under a separate

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<sup>26</sup> Lüthi, *The European Folktale*, p 120.

<sup>27</sup> Lüthi, *The European Folktale*, p 121.



theme heading to the Religious and Aetiological Folktales because they were always told as a block and not as individual stories.

In some cases, it is difficult to place individual stories under specific theme headings as they could belong to one or more categories, for example, *The Story of the Graces* could be placed under the heading of either Religious or Anti-Clerical Folktales as both themes are present in the story. However, for the purpose of this thesis each folktale was placed under the theme which seemed to be the strongest in that particular story even though other themes might also be evident.

By grouping them into these themes many aspects are also revealed about the nature and purpose of the tales. Just as in all folk and fairytales, certain recurring themes are present in the stories of Palmi. It is through these common themes that we discover a great deal about the lifestyle of the people who told them as well as the beliefs they held dear and the things they valued. Lüthi states that the:

selection of themes from the total number of possibilities and the frequency with which they appear contribute to the constitution of the fairytale as genre - and to the determination of the world and the portrait of man which appear in it.<sup>28</sup>

It is through an awareness of these themes intrinsic in the stories that we begin to see a pattern emerging - a pattern illustrating the way of life of the people of the town and the way they related to each other and to the world around them.

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<sup>28</sup> Lüthi, *The Fairytale as Art Form*, p 125.

## **PART B**

# **Contextualising the Stories Within the European Folktale Tradition**

## CHAPTER 1

### ORAL TRADITION AND THE PRINTED WORD

#### **Introduction**

All the stories in this collection were originally told by Mrs Speranza in the dialect of Palmi in the words told to her by her father, Vincenzo Tripodi, as they had been told through generations. As stated in the previous chapter, they were then recorded in writing in the actual dialect before being translated into English; however, many obstacles had to be surmounted before the spoken word, and what had existed only as the spoken word for centuries, could be transformed into a written manuscript. The transition from oral to written language is already difficult without the further task of having to translate it from one language to another, especially a language like English that is far removed from the cultural and linguistic origin of the stories. Naturally, some expressions and idioms of the dialect cannot be literally translated into English. Where this was the case, the author chose the least cumbersome translation which she judged most accurately conveyed the meaning and captured the emotion and essence of the story while not detracting from its authenticity. Reference was made to Gerhard Rohlfs' *Nuovo Dizionario Dialettale Della Calabria*<sup>1</sup> and Giovanni Malara's *Vocabolario Dialettale, Calabro-Reggino-Italiano*<sup>2</sup> to clarify meanings and assist with accurate translation.

#### **Sounds Unique to the Spoken Word**

A 'dialect' by its very nature is a spoken language rather than a written one and this means that certain sounds are difficult, if not impossible, to record in writing. The Oxford dictionary defines 'dialect' as: "a variety of speech differing from the standard language or a variety of language arising from local peculiarities."<sup>3</sup> There

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<sup>1</sup> Gerhard Rohlfs (1977) *Nuovo Dizionario Dialettale Della Calabria*, Ravenna: Longo Editore.

<sup>2</sup> Giovanni Malara (1909 reprinted 1982) *Vocabolario Dialettale Calabro-Reggino-Italiano*, Bologna: Sala Bolognese.

<sup>3</sup> *The Shorter Oxford Dictionary* (1956) London: Oxford University Press, p 500.

are certain sounds in the dialect of Palmi that do not have specific letters in the modern Standard Italian or English alphabet to represent them. A particular difficulty was encountered with a sound almost unpronounceable in the phonetic translation. The problem was overcome by following the model employed by Di Francia, Lombardi Satriani and other Italian scholars in their transposition of dialect stories who used the letters 'gghi' to represent the sound. The same method was used with a sound that has to be written down as 'chi' being the closest combination of letters to capture the sound, though still not reproducing it accurately. Even though the 'chi' combination of letters is present in Standard Italian it is quite different to the dialect sound. As there is no letter 'y' in the Italian alphabet the sound 'y' as in 'yacht' was represented by 'j', again in keeping with previous Italian scholarship.

In each case the pattern established by Di Francia and Mandalari and employed by Malara, Falcone and Lombardi Satriani was used. Another difficulty was with the sound 'x' equivalent to the 'h' sound in English. It must be noted that the Italian letter 'h' is silent. While Standard Italian doesn't use a hard 'h', some dialects contain this sound. It was common practice for Italian scholars of the past, such as those mentioned above, to adopt the Greek letter 'x' (which is equivalent to the English 'h' as in 'hope') when writing the dialects which included this sound. In this thesis, to render all the stories in recognisable modern English, the use of the Greek 'x' was replaced by the English 'h'.

### **What's in a Name?**

Max Lüthi has commented that "in former times, when there were no radios and few books, when stories were told among a group gathered for the evening, no special name was given to them."<sup>4</sup> This is certainly true of the folktales told by Mrs Speranza as in the oral tradition of Palmi the stories have no names and can be

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<sup>4</sup> Max Lüthi (1976) *Once Upon a Time: On the Nature of Fairy Tales*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, p 35.

referred to in a number of ways. One of these is in terms of motifs that appear in the story. For example, the story that has been entitled *The Three Brothers* is referred to alternatively by the teller as “the one about the sickle,” “the one about the little light” or “the one about the three brothers.” Similarly, the story given the name of *The Precious Penny* is also referred to by the teller as “the one about the little old lady,” or “the one about the little crumb” or “the one about the little coin.” The recorder was confronted with the dilemma of giving each story a title as a written text demands; this was always done with the approval of the teller by asking her “If I wanted you to tell me this story, could I say ‘Tell me the story of the ...’ would you know straight away which one I meant?” This mode of informal identification continues today with storytellers, when children often ask for a story by its subject, saying, for example, “Tell me the story about the girl and the dwarfs.”

### **The Non-Verbal Element**

Due to the fact that “literature and folklore are, despite their mutual contamination, separate in their genesis, intentions and structure,”<sup>5</sup> when a story taken from the oral tradition is written down, many changes occur even when a transcriber is aware of the problems. How does a recorder set down the hand gestures, for example, or the playful smile, the glint in the eye or the look of enjoyment which were so often present in Mrs Speranza’s telling of the stories? Max Lüthi in his comments about the difference between the spoken and printed tale, highlights some of these problems:

the nonlinguistic devices of the narrator, his facial expressions, gestures, comings and goings, and limping around (by which he imitates and represents some of his figures) are lost, and more so are the reactions of his audience, which also belong to the narrative experience.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Maria Tatar (1987) *The Hard Facts of the Grimms’ Fairy Tales*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, p xix.

<sup>6</sup> Lüthi, *The Fairytale as Art Form*, p 74.

When Mrs Speranza's father told *The Story of Saint Genevieve* he always wept when he came to the part about the queen telling her child to walk towards the sun if she stops breathing. He was so moved by it that he would sometimes be unable to go on with the story. He would cry again when the king finally discovers his wife in the cave too ill to be saved and then again when the deer, loyal to the end, dies on her grave. He always laughed heartily in the story of *The Landlord's Pig* when the farmer after having won the court case against the landlord also outwits the solicitor. The teller recalls with fondness, times when her father told the stories saying things like "My father always cried when he got to this part and we would too," or "He was gleeful when the farmer outwitted the landlord, as though it was really happening." It is through experiencing these sorts of reactions and emotions of the narrator that the story no longer remains something neutral but comes alive to the listener. These non-verbal components make the listener a participant in the story and leave a lasting impression which also becomes an aid to memory.

Lüthi also notes that "Many of the linguistic devices of the narrators also fail to come through in the printed tale. The position of pauses can be suggested, but not changes of pitch or intensity, of voice colouration, or of variation in narrative tempo."<sup>7</sup> In the story of *Jesus Saint Peter and the String of Sausages*, the teller always changes the loudness of her voice when Saint Peter, in pretending to follow Jesus' instruction, calls out "Who has lost a string" and the voice is lowered to a whisper "of sausages?" It is precisely because of this change in voice that the story is so humorous in the way that it shows Peter's deceit. In *The Princess and the Olive Jar* when the tramp decides to go up to the palace and attempt to save the princess he says, "But I want to go up and have a try." The word "but" is vital in conveying his attitude. Firstly it doesn't translate well and secondly we get no sense of the feeling that goes with his decision because it is the tone in which that word is said that

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<sup>7</sup> Lüthi, *The Fairytale as Art Form*, p 74.

reveals everything: “hang it all”, “stand aside” or “I’ve got nothing to lose so let me through” is implied in the weight given to “ma” but in the printed word we can’t hear the change in tone so we are forced to convey this by choosing certain words that carry some of the meaning implied. This is not simply because of the difference between the dialect and the language it is being translated into. We also need to be aware that the peasant population of this part of Southern Italy belongs to what Zanconato calls an ‘illiterate culture,’ meaning that it is not founded on the written word. He refers specifically to Southern Italy when he notes:

People of an illiterate culture do not make use of many words to express themselves. The tone of voice they use, the gesture with which they accompany the word, and the situation in which they will utter it, are sufficient to render even a single word a complete sentence... . Written words, by necessity, are very much limited to mean one single thing at a time. Whereas, spoken words, in an illiterate culture, are capable of expressing the whole man and the whole social group he belongs to.<sup>8</sup>

### **The Untranslatable**

Jan Vansina, a professor in African studies, researching precolonial history and social anthropology, defines oral traditions as consisting of “all verbal testimonies which are reported statements concerning the past. The emphasis being on the word ‘oral’ ie. statements either spoken or sung.”<sup>9</sup> Vansina goes on to state that “the truly distinctive feature of oral tradition is: transmission by word of mouth” thus a “chain of transmission comes into being.”<sup>10</sup> He is very much aware of the problems faced by a translator. In his work with transcribing the traditions of African tribes he found that:

If the informant has to try to translate them into another language he will not find it easy to express what he wants to say. Moreover, he will come up against special difficulties of translation, because the

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<sup>8</sup> Cesare Zanconato, (1979) *Search For Dignity: A Comparative Study of the Socio-religious Culture of Southern Italians*, (Translated by Joseph Visentin) Melbourne: Catholic Italian Renewal Centre, p 23.

<sup>9</sup> Vansina, p 19.

<sup>10</sup> Vansina, p 21.

concepts he wants to express do not exist in the culture to which the language he is translating into belongs, or because he cannot find an equivalent for the subtle shades of meaning of his mother tongue in the foreign language.<sup>11</sup>

This problem was encountered over and over again in translating the folktales of Palmi whose dialect is so earthy and rich in meaning.

The task of translating the stories with all their idioms, ironies and local expressions is not only a very difficult one but at times impossible. One example of this is a witty little story which not only falls flat in translation but makes very little sense simply because it relies on a humorous play on words. When translated, the play on words can't be reproduced in English and the humour becomes non-existent. The story is referred to as *A Nsugna Squagghiau*, (*The Vanished Lard*). The word "squagghiau" has a number of meanings in the dialect: it can mean melted, disappeared, vanished without a trace, dissolved. Before we can even begin to come to any understanding of the story, we need to know that "a nsugna", or "lard" was something that everyone knew about and appears in other stories from Calabria. There was a traditional way of preserving the pork offcuts which made the fat congeal so that the scraps would last throughout the winter. The play on words relates to this process and to the fact that at the end of the story the offcuts have been stolen. The man asks his neighbours, "Are offcuts supposed to congeal in the cold?" The answer being yes, he says, "But mine have melted," which plays on the double meaning of "squagghiau": melted and disappeared. It also plays on the words "quagghiau" and "squagghiau" which are opposites, "congealed" and "melted". In other words, they were meant to congeal but they melted instead and not only did they melt but they disappeared altogether.

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<sup>11</sup> Vansina, p 188.



The irony of this ending as well as the humour is totally lost in translation. Firstly, to appreciate the story, even at a superficial level, we need to know about this method of preserving offcuts which all the listeners would have instantly related to without need of explanation. Secondly, the particular words that are the key to the understanding and enjoyment of this story do not carry the same double meanings in English. Therefore, when they are translated, the story makes no sense at all.

### **The Importance of Rhyme**

Most of the stories often have an internal rhyme or sometimes end with a rhyming couplet. This presents a difficulty of its own, for example:

“A storia e` ditta  
e cacciamund’a barritta.”

“The story is said  
Let’s take the hats off our heads.”

or literally:

“The story has been told  
and let’s take off our cap.”

In the Di Francia collection, many of the tales finish with this rhyme or a variation of it:

“Iddi arrestaru filici e cuntenti,  
e nu’ arrestamu senza nenti.”<sup>12</sup>

“They remained having a ball,  
And we are left with nothing at all.”

or literally:

“They remained happy and content  
And we have remained with nothing.”

In the Lombardi Satriani stories this rhyme occasionally appears at the end:

“Longa e` la strata, curta e` la via

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<sup>12</sup> Di Francia, *Fiabe e Novelle Calabresi*, (Part 1), p 83.

Diciti la vostra ca` e` ditta la mia.”<sup>13</sup>

“Long is the road, short is the street

Tell us your story for mine is complete.”

or literally this is:

“Long is the road, short is the way (or street),

Tell yours for mine has been told.”

Translating the rhyme is important, but translating it as a rhyme is even more important: the rhyme, even if not a perfect one, at least conveys some of the rhythm and unity of the story. To try to get across the wit and humour involved while remaining as true to the meaning as possible is difficult but an integral part of the translator’s task. The rhyme is a vital part of the story. If not translated as a rhyme it falls very flat and is unsatisfying to both listener and teller. Another main reason for treating the translation of the rhyme with care is that it otherwise can give the wrong impression about a story and make its structure seem so much less than it is, in other words it doesn’t do the story justice. Already when translating from a language and culture which is removed from us, so much is lost along the way even when the greatest care is taken in translation. To completely ignore the rhyming couplet or strict rhythm of a poem within a folktale when translating it, can make a story sound very trite and silly when it is actually very clever.

### **Different Categories of Folk Literature in this Thesis**

Orally transmitted folk literature can be divided into a few types of narrative. Those generally agreed upon are, folktales, fairy or wonder tales<sup>14</sup> myths, legends (including saints’ legends), fables, proverbs, riddles and farces.

Lüthi contends that, “Myths trace the essential, constantly recurring processes of real life back to a unique, fundamental event, an event that becomes destiny.”<sup>15</sup> A

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<sup>13</sup> R. Lombardi Satriani, *Racconti Popolari Calabresi, Vol. viii*, “U Gattu Mamuni”, p 54.

<sup>14</sup> For definition of Folk and Fairy tales see ‘Introduction: Purpose and Method,’ p 12.

<sup>15</sup> Lüthi, *The European Folktale*, p 83.

clear example of this is the story of *Our Lady Among the Wheat* where Mary, in trying to save her baby from the 'brigands', alternately curses and blesses the crops that she must pass through. It is her action which causes the lupin to become bitter, the chick peas to become salty and inedible and the wheat to be loved by the whole world when it becomes bread. Although there are differences between cultures and even between versions of the same myth collected from individuals of the same culture, anthropologist Clyde Kluckhohn agrees with the structuralist, Levi-Strauss, that "throughout the world myths resemble one another to an extraordinary degree; there is, indeed, an astounding similarity between myths collected in widely different regions."<sup>16</sup> Joseph Campbell in his work on myths, both Christian and pre-Christian surrounding Mary and the Incarnation says, "The story is recounted everywhere; and with such striking uniformity of the main contours, that the early Christian missionaries were forced to think that the devil himself must be throwing up mockeries of their teaching wherever they set their hand."<sup>17</sup> An explanation of this is that myths contain "deeper truths, expressing collective attitudes to fundamental matters of life, death, divinity, and existence (sometimes deemed to be 'universal') and account for "the origins of human and natural phenomena."<sup>18</sup>

Legends differ from myths in that they have fact or historical basis at their centre "usually consisting of an exaggerated or unreliable account of some actually or possibly historical person - often a saint, monarch or popular hero." They are also concerned with human beings rather than gods. An example of this is *The Story of Saint Genevieve* which is in keeping with the format of the legend as it relates the story of Genevieve of Brabant whose life story is given in many different versions, the origins of which are unclear and date before medieval times. The Jesus and

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<sup>16</sup> Clyde Kluckhohn (1959) "Recurrent Themes in Myths and Mythmaking" in A. Dundes [ed] *The Study of Folklore*, p 159.

<sup>17</sup> Joseph Campbell (1975) *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, London: Sphere Books, p 264.

<sup>18</sup> Baldick, p 143.

Saint Peter stories also fall within this category as do the stories of *Saint Peter's Mother*, *Saint Joseph and the Wicked Woman* and the story of *The Deluge*.

The fable, according to *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* is “a brief tale in verse or prose that conveys a moral lesson, usually by giving human speech and manners to animals and inanimate things.”<sup>19</sup> The beast fable “is the commonest type of fable, in which animals and birds speak and behave like human beings in a short tale usually illustrating some moral point.”<sup>20</sup> *The Cicada and the Ant* certainly falls within this category and to a lesser degree *The Precious Penny*. Although neither story has a moral delivered in the form of an epigram at the end, the moral lesson is strongly implied. According to Fyler Townsend this is the characteristic of the true fable as:

the lesson comes with the greater acceptance when the reader is led, unconsciously to himself, to have his sympathies enlisted in [*sic*] behalf of what is pure, honourable, and praiseworthy, and to have his indignation excited against what is low, ignoble, and unworthy.<sup>21</sup>

The farce, usually called the farcical tale (which scholars refer to as the German word *schwank*) emphasises the humour of things and turns seriousness into jest and mockery. Lüthi believes that the folktale is often inclined towards the farcical tale which depicts ridiculous extremes and comments that “many tales whose basic structure is like that of a genuine folktale have *schwank*-like overtones.”<sup>22</sup> The element of farce is found in the story of *The Three Brigands* and in particular in the second of these stories.

Throughout folk literature and in most cultures the riddle is very popular, whether it be in the form of a verbal puzzle or revealing the true nature of things, such as the quest to solve the mystery of Cinderella's real identity and similarly the

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<sup>19</sup> Baldick, p 80.

<sup>20</sup> Baldick, p 23.

<sup>21</sup> Geo. Fyler Townsend (1891) *Aesop's Fables*, London: Routledge, p iv.

<sup>22</sup> Lüthi, *The European Folktale*, p 96.

prince's quest to know the identity of *Pilusena*, *The Hairy Girl*. Beuchat has noted that "the riddle combines recreational and educational features to an unusual degree. Young people love riddles for the amusement they provide; old people encourage their use because of their instructive value."<sup>23</sup> The Grimms' *The Peasant's Clever Daughter* is a riddle tale and one of its variants<sup>24</sup> which has a rich wicked farmer being outsmarted by a poor innocent farmer who is prompted by his clever daughter, is very similar to another of Mrs Speranza's stories *The Whitest Thing in the World*.

The proverb is also found in most cultures and is often very ancient. *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* defines it as "a short popular saying of unknown authorship, expressing some general truth or superstition."<sup>25</sup> Like the riddle, the proverb is also used to amuse and educate "and to give point and add colour to ordinary conversation,"<sup>26</sup> as it succinctly expresses a condensed form of wisdom. The story of *The Oak and the Door Latch* is an unusual folktale because it concludes with and illustrates a proverb in common usage in Palmi. *The Story of the Graces* does the same thing except that the proverb is contained in the main part of the story.

Aside from the types of stories outlined above, Mrs Speranza also knows many songs, prayers, poems, proverbs and anecdotes. However, they are too numerous to be covered in this thesis and although all of these have their origins in the oral tradition, they do not fall directly within the parameters of this work.

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<sup>23</sup> P.D. Beuchat (1965) "Riddles in Bantu" in A. Dundes [ed] *The Study of Folklore*, p 184.

<sup>24</sup> Lüthi, *Once Upon a Time*, p 127.

<sup>25</sup> Baldick, p 180.

<sup>26</sup> John C. Messenger Jr. (1965) "The Role of Proverbs in a Nigerian Judicial System" in A. Dundes [ed] *The Study of Folklore*, p 299.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE FORM AND FUNCTION OF THE FOLKTALE

#### Introduction

The power of story and story telling itself is a force that we all begin to experience in childhood and continues to enchant us as adults. Maria Tatar believes that these stories are “compelling in their simplicity and poignant in their emotional appeal” and,

have the power to stir long-dormant childhood feelings and to quicken our sympathies for the downtrodden. They also offer wit and wisdom in the trenchant formulations of the folk. There is something in them for every age and generation.<sup>1</sup>

Although the audience included children, folktales were never intended for them alone but were originally told by adults to mixed audiences of adults and children around the fireside, in spinning circles or working groups. Interestingly, folktales in general and certainly the folktales of Palmi are not child-centred as modern children’s literature usually is. Furthermore, the stories of Southern Italy almost always revolve around adults, and if children are mentioned it is to reinforce the culture of the family.

That folktales on one level are simple and straightforward and therefore appealing to a broad audience, including children, is one of their enduring qualities but the complexity and the patterns underlying their simple structure is also part of their richness: “both clarity and mystery are integral parts of it.”<sup>2</sup> According to Joseph Campbell, the folk and fairytale survives:

not simply as a quaint relic of days childlike in belief. Its world of magic is symptomatic of fevers deeply burning in the psyche: permanent presences, desires, fears, ideals, potentialities, that have glowed in the nerves, hummed in the blood, baffled the senses, since the beginning.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Tatar, *The Hard Facts of the Grimms’ Fairy Tales*, p xiii.

<sup>2</sup> Lüthi, *The European Folktale*, p 82.

<sup>3</sup> Joseph Campbell, commentary in *The Complete Grimms’ Fairy Tales* by J and W Grimm (1948) New York: Pantheon, p 863.

Folktales are all about living in and making sense of our world. They grapple with all the problems that people have encountered in the workings of nature, man's relationship with God, the difficulties of living within a society - all the things that have troubled or amused or stirred curiosity in people ever since the very beginning of man's life on earth and, because we are human, we continue to seek out explanations for the way things are. As Catherine Storr comments "folk stories tell us, in narrative form, of the great preoccupations of man's existence. They do this both in direct and in symbolic language."<sup>4</sup> John Tingay further notes that traditional stories "dramatise and interpret aspects of the human condition."<sup>5</sup> Margery Hourihan affirms that stories are important in all cultures:

a story which begins with 'once upon a time' and ends with 'and they lived happily ever after' implies things about time and change, about cause and effect, and human relationships, regardless of where it is set or who the characters are, and it asserts an essential optimism: problems can be solved, things will turn out well, happiness is achievable. That many, perhaps most, people in our society cling stubbornly to a belief in the shape of this tale, despite the disappointments and uncertainties of life as it is lived, attests to the power of stories.<sup>6</sup>

### Function of the Folktale

According to Alan Dundes, folklore has many diverse functions. Folktales, therefore, as part of folklore can be regarded in the same way. Tingay found that traditional oral tales, even when retold by famous storytellers in the past "presented a world in which the values that society espoused were underlined and reinforced."<sup>7</sup> Therefore, rather than seeing them as amusing stories for children's entertainment, though entertainment was one of the elements, we shouldn't lose sight of the fact

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<sup>4</sup> Catherine Storr (1971) "Why Folk Tales and Fairy Stories Live Forever" in *Suitable For Children? Controversies in Children's Literature*, N. Tucker [ed], Berkeley: University of California Press, p 72.

<sup>5</sup> Tingay, John (1999) "Traditional Literature in a Contemporary Text and Context" in S. Clancy [ed] *Something to Crow About*, Wagga Wagga: Centre for Information Studies, Charles Sturt University, p 179.

<sup>6</sup> Margery Hourihan (1997) *Deconstructing the Hero*, London: Routledge, p 1.

<sup>7</sup> Tingay, p 181.

that these seemingly simple stories held the condensed wisdom of an entire culture and reflected “essential developments and conditions of man’s existence.”<sup>8</sup> They were passing on knowledge, information, beliefs and the morals of the society.

According to William Bascom:

Folklore is an important mechanism for maintaining the stability of culture. It is used to inculcate the customs and ethical standards in the young, and as an adult to reward him with praise when he conforms, to punish him with ridicule or criticism when he deviates, to provide him with rationalisations when the institutions and conventions are challenged or questioned, to suggest that he be content with things as they are and to provide him with a compensatory escape from the hardships, the inequalities, the injustices of everyday life.<sup>9</sup>

In this light *The Story Of The Graces* provides a good example of many of the points Bascom makes with its emphasis on the farmer having to resign himself to his lot as that is the way things are meant to be and in fact the way God has arranged things.

Bascom also speaks of the paradox of folklore:

that while it plays a vital role in transmitting and maintaining the institutions of a culture and in forcing the individual to conform to them, at the same time it provides socially approved outlets for the repressions which these same institutions impose upon him.<sup>10</sup>

This paradox is evident in stories such as *The Landlord’s Pig* which allows the farmer to beat the system and get his own back; it is also part of the irony that exists in folktales not only in the opening and closing formulas but in the plot development where often “what happens is the opposite of what those affected have strived for or expected.”<sup>11</sup> In *The Tale of the Widow*, the woman discovers at the end that her closest friend and confidant is in fact the one who has been robbing her; in *The Precious Penny* the tiny cricket not the larger animals, gets the better of the feared goat monster; in *The Story of Saint Genevieve* not only do Genevieve and her son

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<sup>8</sup> Lüthi, *Once Upon a Time*, p 70.

<sup>9</sup> William Bascom (1965) “Four Functions of Folklore” in A. Dundes [ed], *The Study of Folklore*, p 298.

<sup>10</sup> Bascom, *Four Functions of Folklore*, p 298.

<sup>11</sup> Lüthi, *The Fairytale as Art Form*, p 129.



survive and she is proved innocent but she dies three days after her rescue. Bascom believes that folklore “plays a vital role in education in nonliterate societies” and that it serves to “sanction the established beliefs, attitudes and institutions, both sacred and secular.”<sup>12</sup>

Folktales embody all that is important to us: our desire for justice and acceptance; our craving for material comforts; our wish for everything to turn out well in the end. All of these themes are interwoven in folk tales in such a way that every aspect of us is laid bare, the noble as well as the unpleasant, and so in the telling we often have incongruities, confusion, vulgar speech, illogicalities, ambiguity, because we are dealing with the business of being alive and with things that are at the very core of our existence. According to Tingay, “in addition to being good tales, myths, legends, and other examples of traditional literature explain the important values of the society that created them.”<sup>13</sup> Essentially “the themes they deal with are universal rather than individual, and the language used to express them is composed of symbolic images.”<sup>14</sup> Folktales are not just humble little stories told for amusement, they also provide the means by which we come to a greater understanding of ourselves and our world. Bettelheim believes they are “the purveyors of deep insights that have sustained mankind through the long vicissitudes of its existence.”<sup>15</sup> Bascom further contends that:

in many nonliterate societies the information embodied in folklore is highly regarded in its own right. To the extent to which it is regarded as historically true, its teaching is regarded as important; and to the extent to which it mirrors culture, it contains practical rules for the guidance of man.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> William Bascom (1952) “Folklore and Anthropology” in A. Dundes, [ed] *The Study of Folklore*, p 33.

<sup>13</sup> Tingay, p 179.

<sup>14</sup> Sibylle Birkhauser-Oeri, (1988) *The Mother: Archetypal Image In Fairy Tales*, Toronto: Inner City Books, p 9.

<sup>15</sup> Bruno Bettelheim, (1976) *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales*, New York: Alfred Knopf, p 26.

<sup>16</sup> Bascom, *Four Functions of Folklore*, p 293.

### The Hero in the Folktale

The central figures in Mrs Speranza's stories are similar to those Ann Lawson Lucas identifies in the famous Italian story of Pinocchio where "Collodi's human characters are generally ordinary, humble folk, carpenters, farmers, fishermen, innkeepers. They eke out a bare living in poverty but face the world with a combination of resignation, defiant good humour and aggression."<sup>17</sup> These characteristics which highlight "the resilience of the poor"<sup>18</sup> are also an accurate description of the heroes in the folktales of Palmi.

In folktales the hero or heroine are the main characters, or as Lüthi expresses it, "the dominating central figures" and "all others are defined with reference to them."<sup>19</sup> Hourihan calls this "The Hero's Point of View" in which "the reader perceives the world of the text and the events which occur in it from the hero's point of view" therefore "other characters are included only insofar as they impact upon him."<sup>20</sup> Both Lüthi's and Hourihan's contentions are supported in Mrs Speranza's folktales where we see this relationship between the main character and others expressed in a number of ways: for example, in *The Tale of the Widow*, the Godfather is the adversary of the central figure, the widow. The role of adversary is also to be found in the character of the landlord in *The Landlord's Pig* and the restaurant owner in *The Fried Egg*. Sometimes the main characters are defined with reference to helpers, such as the animal helpers in *The Precious Penny*. Siblings can also help to define the main characters, as found in the story of *The Guardian Angel*, as do travelling companions in the Jesus and Saint Peter stories and *The Oak and the Door Latch*. Similarly, partners provide character definition as the wife does in *Jesus Disguised as a Beggar* and in the story of *Saint Joseph and the Wicked*

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<sup>17</sup> Ann Lawson Lucas (1997) "Nations on Trial: The Cases of Pinocchio and Alice" in *Gunpowder and Sealing-Wax: Nationhood in Children's Literature*, Market Harborough: Troubador, p 51.

<sup>18</sup> Lawson Lucas, *Gunpowder and Sealing-Wax*, p 51.

<sup>19</sup> Lüthi, *The Fairytale as Art Form*, p 134.

<sup>20</sup> Hourihan, p 38.

*Woman*. These secondary characters may also simply be “contrast figures, older brothers or sisters - who do not necessarily have to actively play the role of adversary”<sup>21</sup> as evident in *The Three Brothers* and *The Two Brothers*.

One point that Lüthi makes which is certainly very true for the stories of Palmi is that the heroes are generally:

the most peripheral members of society, children of those at the top or else of the very poor; they are prince and princess or swine-herd and goose-girl. From the point of view of both the family and society, the fairytale hero is in an extreme position, an outside position, thus isolated or easily isolatable and therefore relatively easy to draw into a central or extreme opposite position.<sup>22</sup>

Clearly evident in the stories of Palmi especially in *The Three Brothers* and *The Two Brothers* is the role of the main character and the way it conforms to The Heroic Pattern as outlined by Maurice Saxby whereby “the hero is given labours to perform, a task to accomplish or a quest to fulfil.”<sup>23</sup> Although Saxby is here referring to the ancient superheroes such as King Arthur, Heracles and Moses, the formula also holds true for the Palmi stories.

Saxby points out that “almost always the task or quest involves a journey”<sup>24</sup> and so we have in Mrs Speranza’s stories the brothers setting out in search of fortune. “The talisman, sword or magic object”<sup>25</sup> which Saxby notes the hero takes with him on his journey is here replaced by more commonplace items such as a rooster, a sickle or a skein of string and a needle.

The hero, according to Saxby, must perform a feat in which his cunning, strength and bravery are tested as is the case with such heroes as Perseus, El Cid

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<sup>21</sup> Lüthi, *The Fairytale as Art Form*, p 135.

<sup>22</sup> Lüthi, *The Fairytale as Art Form*, p 136.

<sup>23</sup> Maurice Saxby (1989) *The Great Deeds of Superheroes*, Newtown: Millennium, p 11.

<sup>24</sup> Saxby, *The Great Deeds of Superheroes*, p 11.

<sup>25</sup> Saxby, *The Great Deeds of Superheroes*, p 11.

and Gilgamesh. In the Palmi stories it is usually his cunning and pragmatism which are the qualities most aspired to as the hero shows the ignorant or less fortunate how to use the object which will improve their lives and which he is happy to part with for material gain.

Saxby further argues that “in almost every instance the ancient hero gains the reward of his labours”<sup>26</sup> which in the typical hero tales is often an elevating or awe-inspiring gift from which all humanity will benefit such as immortality or the glory of a Promised Land. In the Palmi stories the reward is immediate and much more concrete such as a meal of pasta or a sack of gold and the hero or his family are the only ones who benefit from it.

At every stage we see the evidence of cultural biases, such as the importance of wit and cunning and acquisition of material wealth. Yet the stories have a wider appeal for the same reason that the superheroes of ancient times continue to appeal to us today. Saxby contends that: “although each hero is typical of his time in history and his culture there are, in these stories, recurring themes and patterns of behaviour which belong to all ages of history and all cultures.”<sup>27</sup>

In this sense the folktale belongs to what Joseph Campbell describes as “the nuclear unit of the monomyth”<sup>28</sup> which he expresses in symbolic form as a circular pattern where:

A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Saxby, *The Great Deeds of Superheroes*, p 12.

<sup>27</sup> Saxby, *The Great Deeds of Superheroes*, p 7.

<sup>28</sup> Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, p 31.

<sup>29</sup> Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, p 31.

He identifies this formula as “separation-initiation-return”<sup>30</sup> which forms the structure of the hero tale in which the main character departs on a quest or undertakes a task and returns transformed. This formula can be applied to some of the stories of Mrs Speranza and in particular the stories of *The Three Brothers* and *The Two Brothers* who set out to seek their fortunes, encounter certain adventures and return richer for their experience.

### **Our Daily Bread**

A very telling aspect of the folktales of Palmi is the fact that food and drink play a major role, for example, the priest doesn't ask for money but for wine, Saint Peter finds a string of sausages not a cheque, the second brother seeking his fortune doesn't ask for jewels or riches but for a plate of pasta, the middle brother in *The Three Brothers* wants as much bread as he can eat with a roasted egg, the daughter is left at home to cook a meal of beans, the three brigands share a lettuce, the little old lady buys milk with her precious penny. Often the stories centre around baking bread, eating fish or fried eggs or gathering food for the winter as the ant does. Even the princess, instead of going to her embroidery or music, goes to get a plate of olives. On the one hand, this is not unusual in folktales as, “eating and drinking are among the most common everyday activities of man, food and drink among the indispensable and daily realities of life,”<sup>31</sup> and everyday reality is an important aspect of the folktale. On the other hand, it is also a reflection of the immense poverty of the people that in their stories they dreamed of having plenty of food, something which wasn't afforded them in real life. Just as we might tell a story which would end in attaining diamonds or gold or material wealth as the reward, their treasure was food because there was so little of it. Their fantasies involved food and drink and the acquisition of them.

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<sup>30</sup> Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, p 31.

<sup>31</sup> Lüthi, *The Fairytale as Art Form*, p 147.

Luigi Lombardi Satriani cites Teti when he speaks of the omnipresent theme in the Calabrian folktale:

Food, the search for it, the desire for it, hunger, the attempts through magic to resolve the problem of hunger, eating, eating well, eating poorly are in the majority of the stories we have examined, the themes, the actions, the principal acts around which in a minor position, all the other events rotate.<sup>32</sup>

He gives the reason for the presence of meat, pasta, good wine and banquets, a common factor in most Calabrian folktales, as:

the projection of justifiable desires of people for foods which they had known only through having seen them or having heard of them, more often than not through having produced them, but never, or nearly never, from having eaten them.<sup>33</sup>

As well as the difficulties with food, for the vast majority of country people in Calabria there was no television, no radio, no books or newspapers. It was quite common to grow up in a household with no books or printed material of any sort. Most farmers were illiterate as going to school was usually not an option. Education was not free and so for country people who basically lived hand to mouth, formal education was a luxury that couldn't be afforded both in terms of money or time. As soon as they were old enough the children had to help with the running of the farm or in trying to earn some sort of income for the family by gathering olives if they were girls or digging in the fields if they were boys. Life was a harsh, daily grind for survival. One small example which encapsulates all of this is the fact that Mrs Speranza's father lived his whole life with two wishes, only one of which was ever fulfilled: to be out of debt and to eat an omelette made with four eggs. He managed

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<sup>32</sup> Luigi Lombardi Satriani (1982) *Fiabe Calabresi e Lucane*, Milano, Arnoldo Mondadori Editore, p 22. Translated from Italian by Grace Nolan: "Il cibo, la sua ricerca, il suo desiderio, la fame, i tentativi di tipo magico per risolvere il problema della fame, il mangiare, il mangiare bene, il mangiare male sono, nella maggior parte dei racconti che abbiamo esaminato, i temi, le azioni, i fatti principali attorno a cui ruotano, in posizione subordinata, tutti gli altri avvenimenti."

<sup>33</sup> Luigi Lombardi Satriani, p 22. Translated from Italian by Grace Nolan: "La proiezione dei desideri legittimi di gente che tali cibi ha conosciuto solo per averli visti o per averne sentito parlare, il piu' delle volte per averli prodotti ma mai, o quasi mai, per averli mangiati."

to be debt free for a few months before he died but he never got to eat an omelette with four eggs.

### **Style and Composition**

A closer look at the style and construction of the fairy and folktale clearly reveals that there is a uniformity in the way the stories are constructed. According to Lüthi, orally transmitted narratives tend to be similar to one another not just in the way they are told but also in the way the plot unfolds and, while each story appears to offer its own version of the portrait of man, one is still left with the impression that the fairytale as a genre offers its hearers a representation of man which transcends the individual story, one which reappears time and again in countless narratives.<sup>34</sup>

One thing that stands out very clearly about the folktales of the town of Palmi is the way in which the peasant is represented and the fact that the only 'magic' that appears in the stories is not of the fairytale quality but of miracle as it is always associated with one of the saints or with Jesus himself. Lüthi says that the fairytale differs from the local legend and folk superstitions in that magicians and witches don't belong to the human world. The stories in this thesis are without doubt folk, not fairy tales as everything smacks of realism with the exception of the story of *Pilusena*, *The Hairy Girl* who is helped by a fairy godmother figure and three enchanted dresses. *The Princess and the Olive Jar* is a story which immediately sounds as if it must deal in magic and wishes, but in fact has a very down to earth resolution though still maintaining certain fairytale elements in the development of the plot.

As already noted, the attributes of fairytale and folktale over-lap, therefore when Lüthi comments, "Isolation is one of the governing principles in the fairytale,"<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Lüthi, *The Fairytale as Art Form*, p ix.

<sup>35</sup> Lüthi, *The Fairytale as Art Form*, p 42.

the observation can also be applied to Mrs Speranza's stories. In these stories not only are the figures isolated, wandering individually out into the world as in *The Three Brothers*, *The Two Brothers*, *Pilusena*, *The Hairy Girl*, *The Precious Penny*, but each adventure constitutes a unit of its own, so that even when the same thing happens again as in each episode of *The Precious Penny*, "everything is narrated anew, and completely, without any reference to the earlier episode."<sup>36</sup> This "linear style"<sup>37</sup>, as Lüthi calls it, has a beauty of its own in its simplicity and clarity. The tendency to the extreme which:

is at work in every nook and cranny of the fairytale, not just in the contrastive juxtaposition of beautiful and ugly, contributes to this clarity and sharpness: great riches, half a kingdom, the hand of the princess, or rule over the whole empire as reward if the tasks set are fulfilled, death if they are not. Luster and magnificence, on the one hand; cruel punishments or dirt and rags, on the other. One brother or neighbor is poor, the other rich. One is good, the other bad... . The hero is thought to be a numskull or is underrated as an animal child, but comes out ahead of everyone else... . The representations are everywhere sharp and straightforward... .<sup>38</sup>

There are many formulas used in fairytales which add to this "clarity of form"<sup>39</sup> and which are present in the stories analysed in this thesis. The fairytale openings and closings usually have a strict formula: "Once upon a time," or in the Palmi stories, "Na vota nc'era," meaning "Once there was" which create a distance from the present and from the everyday world of teller and listener. The Jesus and Saint Peter stories usually begin with, "Once when there weren't so many sins as there are now, Jesus used to walk around among men." The closing formulas also create a distance between the real world and the one we have been invited into as at the end of the story, "the narrator conducts himself and the listeners back into the real world."<sup>40</sup> These formulas also provide a distance between past and present, which is a more

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<sup>36</sup> Lüthi, *The Fairytale as Art Form*, p 42.

<sup>37</sup> Lüthi, *The Fairytale as Art Form*, p 43.

<sup>38</sup> Lüthi, *The Fairytale as Art Form*, p 43.

<sup>39</sup> Lüthi, *The Fairytale as Art Form*, p 44.

<sup>40</sup> Lüthi, *The Fairytale as Art Form*, p 50.



common feature in the stories of Palmi. An example of this is seen in the ending of *The Three Brothers*: “And the brothers were united, happy and content, while we’re left behind and the story is spent.” Literally, “And the three brothers were once again united together happy and content, and we have remained with the story before us.”

Formulas are also quite common in the beginning and ending of stories and also within the structure of many of the stories which have a rhyme as one of the focal points as in *The Precious Penny* and *The Story of the Graces*. There are many aids to memory, means of organising and ways of creating artistic effect which are part of the familiar structure of the folktale. Mnemonic devices, such as rhymes, appear in many of the tales as found in *The Precious Penny*:

“I am the Goat Beast scary  
 With legs thick and strong and hairy  
 And with horns as sharp as a knife  
 If you come in here I’ll end your life!”<sup>41</sup>

Or as found in *The Three Brothers*:

“Nothing I had from where I came,  
 Nothing I have, I’ll return the same.”

These rhymes are part of the pleasing rhythm and sound of a story and at the same time also play an important part in aiding the memory. They are the hook, as it were, on which the story hangs and are usually the means by which the story is remembered. A rhyming couplet or longer rhyme is commonly found in folktales, for example, in the story of *Tom Tit Tot*, the impet sings:

Nimmy nimmy not,  
 My name’s Tom Tit Tot.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Comparisons can be made between the story of *The Precious Penny* and *The Three Billy Goats Gruff* with the stylised use of repetition of words and complete sentences. Furthermore, the threatening, greedy Troll is defeated by the sharp horns of the goat.

<sup>42</sup> Kevin Crossley-Holland (1987) *British Folk Tales*, London, Orchard Book, p 53.

and in the tale of *Tom Thumb* the giant roars:

Fee! Fi! Fo! Fum!  
I smell the blood of a dangerous man.  
Be he alive or be he dead,  
I'll grind his bones to make my bread.<sup>43</sup>

This technique is very much in keeping with the pattern of rhyme and repetition found in nursery rhymes in which Saxby believes “the ear is attuned to the patterns of language, anticipation is being developed”<sup>44</sup> as is the skill of prediction. Fundamental to language and literature, repetition is also essential in the ballad - another ancient form of storytelling which, because of its pre-literate origins, has similarities to the folktale. As with the nursery rhyme and folktale:

a common characteristic of the ballad is the repetition of lines or phrases at regular intervals. This is known as the refrain. The refrain, which probably developed from the oral tradition, helps to give the narration a smooth flow and serves to intensify its dramatic elements.<sup>45</sup>

Interestingly, the prayers learnt and remembered by Mrs Speranza are also in the form of poems, with strict rhyme and rhythm. Just as with the folktales, these were important elements for people who had no access to the written word but had to rely on memory to retain knowledge. There are certain turns of phrase and common fillers which mark pauses and accentuation but are cut out by editors in book folk and fairytales (Buchmärchen) “Allura,” meaning “so being” or “well then” is very common in this collection of stories from Palmi.

Another prose formula within the narrative is the stereotyped remarks of the narrator as well as that of the hero eg. “Vabbonu ca mindi vaju” is repeated by each character in *The Precious Penny* which means “very well then I’m going” and implies

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<sup>43</sup> Crossley-Holland, *British Folk Tales*, p 165.

<sup>44</sup> Maurice Saxby (1991) “The Miraculous Pitcher: A Literature that Never Runs Dry” *Magpies*, Vol. 6, No. 1, March 1991, p 7.

<sup>45</sup> Rex Sadler, Thomas Hayllar and Chris Powell (1986) *Appreciating Poetry*, South Melbourne: MacMillan, p 228.

an urgency in its tone something like “all right, all right, stay where you are, I’m leaving.” The little old lady, “s’assettau nta porta e si misi mi ciangi,” “sat on the doorstep and started to cry” says the narrator each time an unsuccessful attempt is made to recover her milk from the oven. “The donkey tried and he couldn’t get it,” “And how can you get it?” she says to the ant, “you’re so tiny.” The cricket in the following scene is asked exactly the same question. The old lady behaves in the typical style of fairytale heroes, underestimating the abilities of potential helpers.

There is no doubt that “a certain regularity, even rigidity, in the development of the action is clearly inherent in the fairytale.”<sup>46</sup> Its tight structure and predictable formulas and “clarity of organisation”<sup>47</sup> are part of what Propp calls the “iron rules of composition.”<sup>48</sup> He describes this pattern which he believes provides the basic structure of the fairytale as “a development that starts with villainy and ends with a wedding, a reward, and the liquidation of lack or harm.”<sup>49</sup> An example of this is the story of *The Precious Penny* where the old lady is robbed of her bowl of milk which after a series of tribulations is later recovered. Alan Dundes has termed this: L-LL Lack/Lack liquidated or “a move from disequilibrium to equilibrium”<sup>50</sup> Lüthi goes even further to state that:

behind this movement stands something more general, the general human Need/Fulfilment of need. This Lack/Remedy is in fact the basic pattern of the fairytale and, moreover, of countless stories and things that occur in life in general.<sup>51</sup>

It is possible to conclude that within the composition of the folk and fairytale not only does the content reflect the realities and desires of life but its very structure also mirrors the pattern of human existence.

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<sup>46</sup> Lüthi, *The Fairytale as Art Form*, p 69.

<sup>47</sup> Lüthi, *The Fairytale as Art Form*, p 56.

<sup>48</sup> Vladimir Propp (1968) *Morphology of the Folktale* cited in Lüthi, *The Fairytale as Art Form*, p 54.

<sup>49</sup> Propp, *Theory and History of Folklore*, p 173.

<sup>50</sup> Lüthi, *The Fairytale as Art Form*, p 55.

<sup>51</sup> Lüthi, *The Fairytale as Art Form*, p 55.

## CHAPTER 3

### THE ACADEMIC STUDY OF FOLKTALES

#### Introduction

There has been extensive academic analysis and study on the nature and origin of folktales dating back centuries, in particular to the work of Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm who published their first collection of folktales *Kinder-und Hausmärchen (Children's and Household Tales)* in 1812 complete with scholarly annotations. Since the Grimm brothers, a great deal of work has been done including works by major authors such as Andrew Lang and Max Muller in the nineteenth century<sup>1</sup>, and Vladimir Propp, Bruno Bettelheim, C. W. Von Sydow, Kaarle Krohn, Alan Dundes and Max Lüthi in the twentieth century to name only a few. The discussion of folktales has included Jung and his followers who saw "folktales and myths as the chief means to the discovery of the collective unconscious"<sup>2</sup> however this only looks at the psychology of the folktale and as Lüthi contends that while,

Jung and his students astutely illuminated one side of the folktale, they themselves know that the folktale is not completely explained by their work. A poetic composition can never be fully analysed. The folktale must be interpreted on different levels and the confrontation of human beings with the external world and with the cosmos is mirrored in it just as much as the confrontation of human beings with themselves.<sup>3</sup>

It must be acknowledged that full analysis of the folktale involves a multi-disciplinary approach including anthropologists, psychologists, folklorists, philologists, historians, mythologists and literary critics and that "today only the co-operation of different scholarly disciplines can do justice to the folktale."<sup>4</sup> Lüthi takes the stance of the literary scholar and his viewpoint is closest to the perspective of

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<sup>1</sup> A discussion of some of these works is included in Richard Dorsan, "The Eclipse of Solar Mythology" in *The Study of Folklore*, A. Dundes [ed], pp 57 - 83.

<sup>2</sup> Lüthi, *The European Folktale*, p 117.

<sup>3</sup> Lüthi, *The European Folktale*, p 118.

<sup>4</sup> Lüthi, *The European Folktale*, p 124.

this thesis which, while acknowledging the importance and contribution of the other fields of study, is more concerned with the folktale as “an archetype of the art of narration” which “may provide us with information concerning the nature of literature and of human beings.”<sup>5</sup>

### **Pioneers in Academic Study of the Folktale**

Through their collection of tales, the Grimm brothers hoped to preserve the links with oral tradition and to gain a greater understanding of the German language and customs. In the folktales they saw “remnants of ancient myths, playful descendants of an ancient intuitive vision of life and the world.”<sup>6</sup> However, it is important to note that the Grimms edited the tales by eliminating, “erotic and sexual elements that might be offensive to middle-class morality,”<sup>7</sup> while refining the style of the tales to make them more acceptable for children. They did this by censoring the tales of any “harsh scenes”<sup>8</sup> and by adding “numerous Christian expressions and references.”<sup>9</sup> Even one of the most commonly known tales, *Little Red Riding Hood*, has undergone many revisions and numerous expurgations. This includes the Grimms’ modification of the earlier Perrault version in which he had already taken “truncated elements from folklore to form his own creation”<sup>10</sup> designed “to set standards and models of refined virtuous behaviour for the children of his time.”<sup>11</sup>

Although the brothers were so interested in the oral tradition, most of their informants were “familiar with both oral tradition and literary tradition and would

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<sup>5</sup> Lüthi, *The European Folktale*, p 125.

<sup>6</sup> Lüthi, *Once Upon a Time*, p 23.

<sup>7</sup> Jack Zipes (1992) *The Complete Fairy Tales of the Brothers Grimm*, Bantam: New York, p xxviii.

<sup>8</sup> Zipes, *The Complete Fairy Tales of the Brothers Grimm*, p xxx.

<sup>9</sup> Zipes, *The Complete Fairy Tales of the Brothers Grimm*, p xxviii.

<sup>10</sup> Jack Zipes (1983) *The Trials and Tribulations of Little Red Riding Hood*, Massachusetts: Bergin and Garvey, p 4.

<sup>11</sup> Zipes, *The Trials and Tribulations of Little Red Riding Hood*, p 10.

combine motifs from both sources.”<sup>12</sup> The Grimms themselves then added diminutives and quaint expressions as well as descriptive passages which would give the stories a “homey or ‘biedermeier’ flavour.”<sup>13</sup> Therefore:

contrary to popular belief, the Grimms did not collect their tales by visiting peasants in the countryside and writing down the tales that they heard. Their primary method was to invite storytellers to their home and then have them tell the tales aloud.<sup>14</sup>

Most of these storytellers were young women from the middle class or aristocracy. Zipes’ view is in keeping with the theories of Max Lüthi in his discussion about the Grimm brothers who “frequently combined several variants and picked out from each of them the episodes and features they liked best.”<sup>15</sup> Wilhelm Grimm in particular, “dealt very freely with his sources and stylized them according to his artistic sensibility.”<sup>16</sup> He was mostly responsible for the creation of the literary folktale (Buchmärchen) which is not fully representative of the true folktale but is what Lüthi calls “an elevated folktale” which can be clearly distinguished from “freely inventive stories of deliberate artfulness (Kunstmärchen).”<sup>17</sup>

Literary folktales are the most common in modern publications and date back to tales told by the Italian writer, Basile in the early 1600’s and the French author, Perrault in the later part of that century. These folktales “have an important function in that they fill the gap created by the disappearance of the oral tradition and have become the living possession of both children and adults.”<sup>18</sup> They bridge the gap, as it were, between the oral tradition and modern literature. It is because of this

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<sup>12</sup> Zipes, *The Complete Fairy Tales of the Brothers Grimm*, p xxiv.

<sup>13</sup> Zipes, *The Complete Fairy Tales of the Brothers Grimm*, p xxiv.

<sup>14</sup> Zipes, *The Complete Fairy Tales of the Brothers Grimm*, p xiv.

<sup>15</sup> Lüthi, *The European Folktale*, p 109.

<sup>16</sup> Lüthi, *The European Folktale*, p 109.

<sup>17</sup> Lüthi, *The European Folktale*, p 110.

<sup>18</sup> Lüthi, *The European Folktale*, p 110.

connection that the literary folktale is more concerned with psychological suffering, conceptual expressions and involved descriptive passages instead of the clear, simple, visual images and external action of the traditional folktale. It is important to note that “when the Grimms’ folktales returned to the folk, they tended to become purified and, in many ways, to have again approached the abstract style that was weakened by Wilhelm Grimm,”<sup>19</sup> with his “mistier, more poetical phrasing.”<sup>20</sup> Crossley-Holland contends that the traditional folktale can be recognised through its use of language which is often in the present and active tense:

The language of folk tale, like the action of folk tale, is not complicated or fatty: it is simple and lean. This is because it derives from the oral tradition; because it deals in actions always, and seldom in feelings or ideas; and because it aims to speak to a wide, often unlearned and often youthful audience.<sup>21</sup>

Lüthi argues that there is a basic structure in the traditional folktale that is perceptible to the teller’s and listener’s consciousness, “even if characteristics subject to national and geographic, individual, or temporal influences work together to shape the narrative.”<sup>22</sup> Maria Tatar agrees that, “beneath all the variations in its verbal realisation the basic form still shines through”<sup>23</sup> and notes that “for all their rich variety, fairy tales have a remarkably stable - and therefore predictable - structure.”<sup>24</sup> Lüthi and Olrik also speak about the rigid structures and at the same time the freedom which are both part of the traditional folktale: “Folk narrative finds even within its constraints of form the ways to freer and more artistic development.”<sup>25</sup> This is one of the many paradoxes of the folktale. It is clear that folk

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<sup>19</sup> Lüthi, *The European Folktale*, p 110.

<sup>20</sup> Lüthi, *The European Folktale*, p 111.

<sup>21</sup> Crossley-Holland, “Different - But Oh How Like!”, p 20.

<sup>22</sup> Lüthi, *The European Folktale*, p 108.

<sup>23</sup> Tatar, *The Hard Facts of the Grimms’ Fairy Tales*, p xvii.

<sup>24</sup> Tatar, *The Hard Facts of the Grimms’ Fairy Tales*, p xvi.

<sup>25</sup> Axel Olrik (1909) “Epic Laws of Folk Narrative” in *The Study of Folklore*, A. Dundes [ed], p 139.

narrative is governed by strict rules for “it is not only scholars, with their habits of comparison and analysis, who will develop a fixed concept of the type, but habitual listeners to folktales, who know many narratives, also carry such a concept within them.”<sup>26</sup> Keeping this in mind, we must also be aware that as listeners we “nevertheless enjoy the particular variations and cheerful flourishes of any one narrator, for such variations reveal a measure of freedom that we sense is beneficial. Compulsion and freedom coexist in a multiplicity of ways in the folktale.”<sup>27</sup>

### **The ‘Laws’ Governing the Folktale**

The Danish folklorist, Axel Olrik argues that the structure of folktales is governed by general principles of construction or formulas which he calls the Epic Laws of Folk Narrative. These “Laws” are not limited to one genre but incorporate forms such as folktale, myth, legend and folksong all of which he places under the heading of “Sage (also known as Sagenwelt).”<sup>28</sup> He believes that:

anyone who is familiar with folk narrative has observed when he reads the folklore of a faraway people that he feels a sense of recognition even if this folk and its world of traditional narrative were hitherto completely unknown to him. Two factors are often cited to explain this recognition: (1) the common intellectual character of primitive man, and (2) the primitive mythology and concept of nature which corresponds to this character.<sup>29</sup>

Olrik suggests that this is only part of the explanation as the recognition of certain characteristic details is one of the strongest elements of folk narrative and he approaches it as a systematic science, the common rules for composition or laws which apply to all European folklore. He believes that “against the background of the overwhelming uniformity of these laws, national characteristics seem to be only dialect peculiarities.” He calls these principles of Sage construction, “Laws” because

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<sup>26</sup> Lüthi, *The European Folktale*, p 108.

<sup>27</sup> Lüthi, *The European Folktale*, p 108.

<sup>28</sup> Olrik, p 131.

<sup>29</sup> Olrik, p 131.



“they limit the freedom of composition of oral literature in a much different and more rigid way than in our written literature.”<sup>30</sup> He believes that “folk narrative is formally regulated to a far greater degree than one would think.”<sup>31</sup>

The first law is called ‘The Law of Opening and the Law of Closing’: the Sage begins by moving from calm to excitement and ends by moving from excitement to calm. It doesn’t begin with sudden action and doesn’t end abruptly. In *The Story of Saint Genevieve* from Palmi, the tale does not end with her sudden death or that of the deer on her grave, but moves to the peaceful conclusion of how she endured great suffering and has now become a saint. Similarly, the opening of the tale gives a serene introduction to life in the palace before the action of the story begins.

The second law is ‘The Law of Repetition’ which is a means of emphasis and designed to build tension. In Lüthi’s words “sentences used for placing emphasis also operate as a sort of stylistic formula”<sup>32</sup> and “one of the most notable characteristics of style and composition in the fairytale is the principle of repetition.”<sup>33</sup> In the stories of Mrs Speranza this is evident in the frequent repetition of the words “Caminandu caminandu” and “Camina ca ti caminu, camina ca ti caminu” to signify a great deal of walking which are common expressions in most of the stories. According to Lüthi repetition occurs in a variety of forms and on several levels: “words, word groups, formulas and also patterns of behaviour and plot sequences (episodes) are repeated.”<sup>34</sup> Words such as “allura” “well” or “well then” appear frequently in the stories told by Mrs Speranza; word groups such as “camina ca ti caminu, camina ca ti caminu” which literally means “walk because I’ll walk you, walk because I’ll walk you” but actually means “walking along” with the repetition of

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<sup>30</sup> Olrik, p 131.

<sup>31</sup> Olrik, p 139.

<sup>32</sup> Lüthi, *The Fairytale as Art Form*, p 45.

<sup>33</sup> Lüthi, *The Fairytale as Art Form*, p 76.

<sup>34</sup> Lüthi, *The Fairytale as Art Form*, p 78.

the word “walk” implying long distances and taking up the rhythm of the footsteps. Patterns of behaviour are also commonly repeated along with certain episodes as is evident in *Our Lady Among the Wheat* and *The Tale of the Widow*. Repetition in folktales also occurs with regard to the same or similar characters who keep reappearing, for example, three brothers who go out to seek their fortune or three creatures who turn up to help the old lady in *The Precious Penny* or the same robber who keeps turning up in *The Tale of the Widow*. The themes, motifs and familiar features that recur as well as the similar style and structure of the stories themselves exude an “epic calm, self-confidence, and matter-of-factness”<sup>35</sup> which is present in all fairytales. The wish to hear the story again and again and for a narrator to tell it repeatedly over a lifetime as well as the variations of the same basic story are all part of this principle of repetition.

Olrik asserts that every time a scene is repeated, this is usually tied to the number three which occurs with incredible frequency in folk narrative and he calls this the ‘Law of Three’. He contends that:

three is the maximum number of men and objects which occur in traditional narrative. Nothing distinguishes the great bulk of folk narrative from modern literature and from reality as much as does the number three.<sup>36</sup>

In the stories from Palmi too, three is a crucial number: *The Story of the Graces* involves three creatures asking for a special grace and the rhyme about the priest is in three parts; in the story of *The Three Brothers* not only are there three siblings but the dying parents leave three items in their inheritance; in *The Story of Saint Genevieve* she tells her son to leave her if she doesn’t open her eyes for three days and she dies three days after she returns to the palace; in *Our Lady Among the Wheat*, Mary passes through three uncooperative crops before she reaches the

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<sup>35</sup> Lüthi, *The Fairytale as Art Form*, p 79.

<sup>36</sup> Olrik, p 133.

wheat which provides her with safety; the girl in *Pilusena, the Hairy Girl*, is given three nuts out of which appear three dresses; in *The Oak and the Door Latch* three men see the tree; in *The Whitest Thing in the World* three men discuss the riddle; there are also the stories of *The Three Friends*, *The Three Brigands*, *The Three Cumpari* and *The Three Beans*. Well-known examples of folktales from other cultures where three is prominent include *The Three Little Pigs*, *The Three Spinners* and *The Three Billy Goats Gruff*. Maurice Saxby has noted the significance of the number three, commenting that the:

old folktales have recurring imagery and the whole of literature is built on the recognition of images. Just think of some of the recurring motifs, images if you like, in the folk literature. The number three: three pigs, three bears, three billy goats gruff and so on, mother, father and baby makes three.<sup>37</sup>

The preference of the European fairytale for the number three and of the oriental for the number four is one of the formulas of folktale Lüthi also refers to. The listener can rely on the fact that these numbers will keep turning up. They are one of the constants in the fairytale and provide both listener and narrator with pleasure and with a feeling of security. It is both a stylistic and structural formula: tripling occurs in conjunction with figures and props - three brothers, three beautiful dresses etc. and also with episodes. Lüthi states that in:

the western world the number three is woven in many ways into the general cultural structure. It is a mythic number, it has a central place in higher religion (the Trinity), it is a magical number ("Thrice must the words be spoken!"), and it occurs in children's games ("One, two three, who's got the ball?") just as in serious art (the triptych).<sup>38</sup>

Olrik also believes that in some cases, namely in Indian and Arabic tales, the 'Law of Three' is replaced by the 'Law of Four'. Here it is interesting to note that in

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<sup>37</sup> Saxby, *Magpies*, p 7.

<sup>38</sup> Lüthi, *The Fairytale as Art Form*, p 44.

the story of *Our Lady Among the Wheat* the total of four crops appear in the story which is divided into four scenes. In *The Tale of the Widow*, the woman goes to market four times before she finally gets the better of the thief. The story of *The Four Elements* divides the world into four basic substances as was the belief in medieval times. Four, therefore, does occasionally appear in the folktales of Palmi. This could be linked with the Arabic influence of the Moslem invaders in the South of Italy.

'The Law of Two to a Scene' refers to the maximum number of characters who appear at one time. This correlates to the 'Law of Contrast' which works in a number of ways: a strong character juxtaposed with a weak character, a rich landowner and a poor peasant as in the story of *The Landlord's Pig*; a clever eldest brother and a stupid younger one as in the story of *The Two Brothers*. In *The Guardian Angel* the girl is naive and trusting and the priest is sly and cunning. Hourihan has referred to this concept as "dualism and binary oppositions"<sup>39</sup> in the hero story which provides contrast, conflict and dramatic tension. This ties in with Olrik's belief that "the sage is always polarised ... this very basic opposition is a major rule of epic composition: young and old, large and small, man and monster, good and evil."<sup>40</sup> This law also corresponds to plot action: the old lady in *The Precious Penny* is saved not by the donkey but by the tiny cricket. The lawyer in *The Landlord's Pig* is outsmarted by the 'stupid' peasant, the innocent widow ends up killing the greedy and deceitful Godfather in *The Tale of the Widow*.

Olrik goes even further to show how the 'Law of Two to a Scene' and the 'Law of Contrast' can be linked to the 'Law of Twins' wherein the "word 'twins' must be taken here in the broad sense. It can mean real twins - a sibling pair - or simply two people who appear together in the same role."<sup>41</sup> This is the case in the story of *The*

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<sup>39</sup> Hourihan, p 15.

<sup>40</sup> Olrik, p 135.

<sup>41</sup> Olrik, p 136.

*Two Brothers* where at the beginning of the story no distinction is made between eldest and youngest. Both are depicted as equal or appearing in the same role. However, once they set out on their journey they are elevated to major roles and when this happens, Olrik states, “they will be subordinated to the ‘Law of Contrast’ and, accordingly, will be pitted against one another... . One is bright and one is gloomy; one immortal and the other mortal,”<sup>42</sup> or as in the story of *The Two Brothers*, one is clever and one is stupid and at the end, one is rich and one is poor.

The next ‘Law’ which Olrik discusses is called the ‘Importance of Initial and Final Position’ which states that “whenever a series of persons or things occurs, then the principal one will come first. Coming last, though, will be the person for whom the particular narrative arouses sympathy.”<sup>43</sup> This ‘Law’ is well illustrated in the story of *The Two Brothers* which begins with the first brother finding his fortune but ends with the second brother who remains happy but poor. Similarly, in *The Princess and the Olive Jar* the story begins with the princess who is at the centre of the action but ends with the poor tramp and his good fortune.

‘The Law of the Single Strand’ refers to the movement of the plot in a straight line, not going back to fill in missing details and, if necessary, giving previous background information through dialogue; this is in contrast to modern literature which entangles various threads of the plot amongst each other. According to Olrik, folk narrative is always single-stranded, its “composition is like that of sculpture and architecture; hence the strict subordination to number and other requirements of symmetry.”<sup>44</sup> This certainly makes sense in the light of what some scholars believe about the way in which folk narratives correct themselves and according to folklorist Walter Anderson, “thereby keep their remarkable stability safe from the possible

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<sup>42</sup> Olrik, p 136.

<sup>43</sup> Olrik, p 136.

<sup>44</sup> Olrik, p 137.

ravages of errors or inadvertent changes introduced by poor raconteurs with faulty memories.”<sup>45</sup>

‘The Law of Patterning’ is “a rigid stylizing of life and has its own peculiar aesthetic value. Everything superfluous is suppressed and only the essential stands out salient and striking.”<sup>46</sup> In *The Tale of the Widow*, the widow goes to market three times in succession, is robbed in the same manner and returns home to have the same conversation with the Godfather each time. In the story of *The Precious Penny* the old woman has the same conversation with the donkey, the ant and the cricket in succession and this in turn leads to the monster reciting the same rhyming threat each time.

The ‘Use of Tableaux Scenes’ is when the ‘sage’ rises to peaks in the form of “tableaux scenes”<sup>47</sup> in which the actors draw near to each other. Olrik calls them “sculptured situations”, or “lingering actions” which have the power “to etch themselves in one’s memory.”<sup>48</sup> In *The Tale of the Widow* one such powerfully evocative image is the scene where the widow unmasks the thief after having shot him. In *The Story of Saint Genevieve*, it would be when her husband finds her in the cave, sick and half-naked and still not recognising who she is, throws her his cape to cover herself. Towards the end of the story of *The Two Brothers* one vivid tableau scene is when the second brother, in the face of good fortune along the road, suddenly closes his eyes to “walk like the blind.” In *The Guardian Angel* the most unforgettable scene is when the brother picks up the priest, who is pretending to be a guardian angel, and flings him out of the window to watch him ‘fly’.

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<sup>45</sup> Olrik, p 130.

<sup>46</sup> Olrik, p 138.

<sup>47</sup> Olrik, p 138.

<sup>48</sup> Olrik, p 138.

The 'Logic of the Sage' deals with the themes presented in the stories and which must bear an influence on the plot. Plausibility is not measured in terms of external reality but "is always based upon the force of the internal validity of the plot."<sup>49</sup> Furthermore, "the tendency towards animism and even more toward miracle and magic constitutes its fundamental law."<sup>50</sup> The girl in the story of *Pilusena, the Hairy Girl*, is always helped by means of the magic nuts which produce the three beautiful dresses and win her the favour of the prince. In *The Story of Saint Genevieve*, the deer saves the queen's child from starvation and it is the same deer who eventually leads the King to her. In *The Man Who Understood the Animals*, Jesus performs a miracle for the man's wish to be fulfilled.

The 'Unity of Plot' according to Olrik is a true mark of the 'sage' and one which sets it apart from literary works. There is no "loose organisation" or "uncertain action."<sup>51</sup> The plot structure is such that "each narrative element works within it so as to create an event, the possibility of which the listener had seen right from the beginning and which he had never lost sight of."<sup>52</sup> As soon as we know that the princess has her hand stuck in a jar in *The Princess and the Olive Jar*, then we also know that everything hinges on the question of who will be the one to save her. In the story of *The Precious Penny* when the little old woman returns from Mass to find the goat monster in her oven, everything points towards who will save her by retrieving her milk from the oven.

As far as Olrik is concerned, the greatest 'Law' of folk tradition is 'Concentration on a Leading Character'. When the 'sage' recognises two heroes, one is always "the formal protagonist" and "the sage begins with his story and from

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<sup>49</sup> Olrik, p 138.

<sup>50</sup> Olrik, p 138.

<sup>51</sup> Olrik, p 138.

<sup>52</sup> Olrik, pp 138 - 139.

all outward appearances he is the principal character.”<sup>53</sup> Furthermore, he contends that “when a man and a woman appear together, the man is the most important character.”<sup>54</sup> This also applies to the stories from Palmi. It is the ragged tramp, for example, who turns out to be the main character in *The Princess and the Olive Jar*. Nevertheless, “the actual interest frequently lies with the woman.”<sup>55</sup> In the two stories, *Saint Joseph and the Wicked Woman* and *Jesus Disguised as a Beggar* it is always the wicked wife who is the most interesting character even though Jesus or Saint Joseph appear to be the main characters. Olrik concludes his finding with this statement:

From these stable features, we can determine the characteristics of particular peoples, their special types of composition and cultural themes. Our work on individual traditions can properly begin only when we can measure them along these sharp lines. And this is perhaps the best thing about our theories: they compel us to make empirical observations of things.<sup>56</sup>

In summary, these formal rules which Olrik calls “epic laws”<sup>57</sup> are not only interesting from a general folk narrative point of view, but also in reference to the folktales in this thesis which contain the structures that Olrik discusses.

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<sup>53</sup> Olrik, p 139.

<sup>54</sup> Olrik, p 139.

<sup>55</sup> Olrik, p 139.

<sup>56</sup> Olrik, p 141.

<sup>57</sup> Olrik, p 141.



## **PART C**

### **The Folktales of Mrs Speranza**

## CHAPTER 4

### TRIUMPHANT PEASANT FOLKTALES

#### **Introduction**

According to Calvino, rather than dealing with kings and queens the Southern folktales often “deal with peasants from start to finish, with an agricultural labourer as hero, whose magic powers are merely complements to natural human strength and persistence.”<sup>1</sup> Consistent with this point in the stories told by Mrs Speranza, the hero is seen as the ordinary man. Patricia Wrightson would call him “Everyman.” He is “the one with whom you identify, in whom you confirm and extend your own experience.”<sup>2</sup>

He is the battler, the poor man with the odds pitted against him; the man who dreams of having plenty of food to eat and of owning the most beautiful house in the town. He is the peasant who is forced to live in a society gridlocked by authority - the authority of the church, of the state, of the landlord. Every which way he turns he is constrained by a mightier force. His own will and determination, his wit and ability to work are what saves him and occasionally, just occasionally, there is a miracle sent from heaven.

Saxby defines folk heroes as, “humble men and women who represent the common person made a little larger than life.”<sup>3</sup> These are the heroes in the folktales of Palmi, not superhumans but “representative man”<sup>4</sup> who succeeds not because of his idealism and courage or his “prodigious strength”<sup>5</sup> as do the superheroes but because of his cunning and perseverance.

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<sup>1</sup> Calvino, p xxxii.

<sup>2</sup> Patricia Wrightson (1993) “Hero and Everyman” in *Magpies* Vol. 8, No. 1, March 1993, p 5.

<sup>3</sup> Saxby, *The Great Deeds of Superheroes*, p 6.

<sup>4</sup> Saxby, *The Great Deeds of Superheroes*, p 7.

<sup>5</sup> Saxby, *The Great Deeds of Superheroes*, p 7.

It is interesting that in these stories of Palmi the hero never leaves the material world and returns from his quest even more firmly entrenched in it, that is, literally wealthier. His family is the centre of his world. His task is not to better mankind in any way as is the course of the typical hero of both ancient and modern folklore, but extends only as far as bestowing benefits to other members of his family. Zanonato contends that this attitude is largely due to the oppression suffered by the South throughout history:

Southern Italy in the last few centuries became filled with government officials, dukes and barons, lawyers and tax collectors, who lived in comfort and luxury without paying any taxes themselves but relying on the heavy burdens placed on the peasant population. Illiterate and powerless as they were, the peasants had nowhere to turn in their poverty except to their own families.<sup>6</sup>

An example of this pattern of looking after one's own family is in the story of *The Two Brothers*. The lesson is clear: the hero must see to his own needs first and only then should he attempt to help other siblings; never does this include the wider community. The public good or the rest of the world would not even enter into his thoughts.

Propp argues that "The hero is one who wins, irrespective of the means, especially if he defeats a stronger opponent. Perhaps this is why most of such tales turn on making a fool of someone... . Intellect and cunning are the strength of a weak person: with these qualities, the hero overcomes a stronger enemy."<sup>7</sup> He believes that "the folktale deals with only one form of social struggle and social satire: the gentleman landowner and the priest are always duped and deceived by a clever hired man."<sup>8</sup> In the Palmi stories this includes anyone who is the underdog. He is the tramp in *The Princess and the Olive Jar*, the tenant in *The Landlord's Pig*, the ordinary man at the restaurant in *The Fried Egg* and the poor customer in *The Scalded Trotter*.

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<sup>6</sup> Zanonato, p 17.

<sup>7</sup> Propp, *Theory and History of Folklore*, p 28.

<sup>8</sup> Propp, *Theory and History of Folklore*, p 28.

Propp goes on to say that another such hero in the folktale is the clever thief who robs a landowner or achieves his goals by deception. This is reminiscent of the ancient heroes such as Prometheus who steals fire for humankind and Jason who steals the golden fleece. “Cunning and deception are the tools of the weak against the strong”<sup>9</sup> and it was for this very reason that the country people would have found these stories so appealing. The small victories over those in power were what gave them hope. Another reason that the folktales they loved to tell and listen to, such as *The Landlord’s Pig* and *The Scalded Trotter*, were so enduring and had the appeal they did was because they illustrated in an entertaining way the things the country people had to deal with on a daily basis. Their lives were in many ways living representations of what was happening in the stories they told.

Mrs Speranza often tells the true family story that her father loved to tell about his childhood: it was only a small incident but in some ways similar to *The Scalded Trotter*. Her father was just a boy working in the fields with his father when one day the landlord came out to bring them something to eat, probably feeling sorry for the boy who was forced to work and no doubt looked thin and hungry. The landlord brought out a raw onion and a piece of cheese and said to them “A cipolla e` past’e signori. U casu e` past’e bastasu.” This phrase is very memorable because the second line has an internal rhyme, and although the first line doesn’t rhyme, both lines have the same number of syllables giving them a rhythmic quality. It literally means, “Onion is the food of the gentry. Cheese is the food of the vulgar.” Rather than an out and out bastard, “bastardu”, which meant no social standing at all, the word ‘bastasu’ means a coarse, rough, low, or uncouth person. (See Gerhard Rohlfs *Nuovo Dizionario Dialettale della Calabria* page 756) The use of this word was a slur on all the working class - they were poor and uneducated and therefore ignorant according to the landlords who were wealthy and educated.

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<sup>9</sup> Propp, *Theory and History of Folklore*, p 28.

The landlord used the Standard Italian words, for “onion,” “cipolla” and for “the gentry” “signori”<sup>10</sup> which was considered the more refined way of speaking and the ancient dialect word for “cheese” “casu” which was regarded as a rough slang word in the dialect.<sup>11</sup> This is a very clever use of language, reminiscent of the customer’s response in *The Scalded Trotter* in that it was both rhyming and designed to further emphasise his point about the difference it made to social status in eating the two foods. The landowner was subtly trying to talk them out of eating the cheese by appealing to their pride and vanity. He was implying that onions are the food of the rich therefore of people with refined taste and good breeding. To say this to a worker in front of his son would have put pressure on the father to show that he was not a common, ignorant worker but underneath his poverty as good as any ‘lord’ by eating only the onion, the food of refined people. The cheese which was the more valued item and a food which the poor workers would rarely have tasted should be left aside for the “bastasu”. The landlord was also implying that if they ate the cheese they were admitting to such status.

The landlord who was known to be a miser, wanted to appear generous without actually being so. He had no idea what it was to be truly hungry without the chance of ever really satisfying that hunger and how this affected the priorities of the poor. The boy’s father turned to his son and simply said, “Let’s eat the cheese then and the lord can eat the onion,” implying “It’s much more fitting in our position to eat the cheese. The onion is obviously too good for us” and the landlord was left stunned and foolish while they both ate the cheese.

The teller’s father would recount this story with relish of the day his own father got the better of the landlord. The clever use of the rhyme in this true story is reminiscent of *The Scalded Trotter* in that it was both rhyming and designed to elicit

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<sup>10</sup> Literally “The Lords.”

<sup>11</sup> “Furmaggiu” was the more common dialect word for cheese.

a certain response. The customer's reply in the folktale has the same effect as the farmer's unexpected reply in this incident: in both cases the rich and powerful are left speechless and beaten by the wit and directness of those they are trying to bully. This true story is also very like Aesop's fable of *The Fox and the Crow* in which the fox tricks the crow out of his piece of cheese by appealing to his vanity.

The country people were totally at the mercy of the landowner and this placed them in an invidious position. Due to their isolation and illiteracy, they had very few choices: "the peasant was tied to the land and had nowhere to go. The economic stranglehold of the landowners made it impossible for him to alter his mode of living."<sup>12</sup> The landlords had all the power and the farmers had none, even over their own lives as their day-to-day survival depended so much on the outcome of the crops which they had to share with the landlord. Even though he did none of the work and bought none of the livestock or seeds, half of everything went automatically to him because he owned the land. *The Landlord's Pig* clearly illustrates this situation even by the fact that the pig in the story is referred to as "the landlord's pig" despite the fact that the farmer has bought it and raised it himself. This was a common problem for the farmers particularly with the Christmas rooster which the peasants were expected to fatten up for a year and give to the landlord at Christmas time. A well-known rhyme was said throughout the year by the farmers whenever they heard the rooster crow:

"Cooked may you be  
In a brand new pot,  
And may your owner never taste you  
Either cold or hot!"<sup>13</sup>

It reflects their attitude towards the landowner as well as their constant desire for food, the food which was sometimes under their very noses and which they were

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<sup>12</sup> A. Maraspini (1968) *The Study of an Italian Village*, Paris: Mouton, p 21.

<sup>13</sup> Translated from dialect by Grace Nolan: "Cottu mi si, Nta na pignata nova, E lu to patruni nommi ndi prova!"

ripening or growing such as the pig in the first story in this chapter, but which they could not help themselves to as it belonged to the landlord.

The rooster was only one of the delicacies set aside for the landlord. Other such treats were freshly picked bunches of grapes and ripe figs which were never to be taken to the landlord by means of a donkey in case the jolting might crush or bruise the fruit and be unacceptable to the landlord. It had to be taken on foot, spread out in wicker baskets so that the fruit would arrive as fresh as the moment it had been picked. Hot, tired and hungry, the farmer would then have to knock on the landlord's door where a servant would answer, take the foods in to the lord and bring back a small sweet such as a piece of nougat as a gift from the landlord to the peasant and his family for Christmas.

Bettelheim speaks of a theme which he believes is common to all cultures in some form: "the fairy-tale motif which features a giant in conflict with an ordinary person." He gives the example of the Grimms' story *The Spirit in the Bottle*. He argues that for children, the only way they know to be safe from adult wrath, apart from doing their bidding, is through outwitting them. Significantly, if parents tell children stories about how children can get the better of the giant, of outwitting them and cutting them down, it gives children the most important reassurance of all: "that we approve of their playing with the idea of getting the better of these giants."<sup>14</sup>

The 'giants' in the stories of Palmi were the wealthy landowners and solicitors, like the ones who appear in *The Landlord's Pig*, the priests as in *The Shepherd's Crook* and *The White Wine* and all the other anti-clerical stories, and the restaurant owners and shopkeepers like the ones who appear in *The Scalded Foot* and *The Fried Egg*. The 'giants' were all those who did not need to rely on their wit and cunning to feed themselves and their families the way the farmers were forced

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<sup>14</sup> Bettelheim, p 28.

to do. In short, the 'giants' to be defeated included anyone who was not poor. In the folktales of Palmi the peasant is always triumphant. There is no question that he will beat those in authority through his superior cunning and wit. All they can do is stand by and watch as he outsmarts them every time.

This was the fantasy of the poor along with having plenty to eat and their stories reflect these hopes and wishes. One of the common local sayings: "Nci poi scriviri carn'i porcu" meaning "You can write it off as pork meat" is the clearest example of how rare it was for the ordinary people to taste meat. The saying referred to anything that was anxiously awaited but regarded by those with any common sense as wishful thinking: the event was as likely to happen as having a meal of pork meat - in other words, an impossibility. The first story in this chapter *The Landlord's Pig* illustrates the eternal struggle of the peasant against the landlord and against a system that was designed to crush him but over which in every folktale he emerges triumphant.



### (1) THE LANDLORD'S PIG <sup>15</sup>

Once there was a landlord who had a tenant and this tenant bought himself a pig and was raising it. One day, when it suited the landlord, he said to the tenant, "One of these days the two of us will kill this pig and divide it between us." The poor tenant who had raised the pig, couldn't possibly want to give half to the landlord. "No," he said, "the pig is mine." "Well then I'll take you to court," said the landlord.

The tenant went to the solicitor and said to him, "You know, sir, here I have raised a pig," he said, "and the landlord wants us to divide it between the two of us and the pig is mine." The solicitor said, "I will defend your case, don't worry at all, because when I tell you what to say you will win the case. When we go into court and he calls you up and says, 'You raised the pig on my land,' you say to him, 'Piffiti.' When he says, 'We'll have it half each,' you say to him, 'Paffiti.' One time say 'piffiti' and the other 'paffiti'. For the entire duration of the case, you always say these two words: 'piffiti, paffiti' and I can assure you that you'll win the case.

When they called him up in court, the landlord was saying to him, "Well then, we must share the pig because you raised it on my land." The tenant said to him, "Piffiti." When the landlord said again, "We'll both kill the pig and have it half each," he said, "Paffiti." For the whole duration of the case, he always kept saying these same two words, "Piffiti. Paffiti." and he really did win the case, the landlord returned to his house and the tenant went back home and the pig remained with him.

After the case was over, the solicitor went up to him and said, "I told you we would win the case." He said, "Now we'll kill the pig and divide it between the two of us." The tenant said to the solicitor, "Piffiti. Paffiti." The solicitor kept saying, "No,

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<sup>15</sup> This story was presented as a paper by the writer of this thesis at the "Old Neighbours, New Visions" conference of the Australian Children's Literature Association for Research held at the University of South Australia 4th-6th April, 1997. Refer: M. Nimon [ed] (1997) *Old Neighbours, New Visions*, Magill Campus: Centre for Children's Literature, University of South Australia, pp 31 - 40.

you're not meant to say that to me, you were supposed to say that in court." "Piffiti," he said again, "Paffiti." He pretended he didn't understand until he had won. He won the pig off the landlord and he won it off the solicitor too.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> The expressions "off the landlord" and "off the solicitor" are direct translations of dialect expressions which have no satisfactory English equivalent. This translation, although not grammatically correct, attempts to capture the physical act of taking something away from another person which is implied in the term "nciu` vinciu" and is usually told by Mrs Speranza as "nciu` futtiu" literally meaning "he f...ed it off him" which is even more forceful. It amplifies the elation of both the farmer and the teller at the outcome. A closer translation of the expression would be "He ripped it off them," or in coarser terms, "He stuck it right up them," or "He screwed them." The tenant didn't just win, he took the pig away from the other person - he was victorious over the landlord and relished his triumph. Similar expressions are used at the end of many of the stories: refer for example, to the last line in *The Fried Egg* also included in this chapter.

## COMMENTARY

Fighting over a pig might not seem important, but to the country people of Palmi it was a most prized possession as it was one of the only sources of income for the entire year. It was either sold in the town after being fattened up on the farm, or sold to travelling butchers who would go from farm to farm during the right season, hoping to pick up a bargain. The money would then provide the family with essential food items like bread and flour or an item of clothing. It was never eaten by the family as it was too much of a luxury. Meat of any kind was only ever eaten on very special occasions like Christmas, Easter and weddings and even then in very small quantities as it was very expensive.

The value of a pig is hard to describe in today's terms. It took a full year of hard work to fatten it up. There was no left-over food to give it and grass had to be gathered for it which was not easy to find: hardly any grass grew after World War II and any of the wild grasses that could be found were cooked and eaten by the people. A common saying in Palmi that illustrates the value of livestock to them is: "Si pia' u porcu e pur' a catina," or "Ncez' u porc' e a corda," which literally means, "He took the pig and also the chain," or, "He gave him the pig and the rope," meaning he got taken; he gave the pig away for practically nothing. In other words, "he didn't realise it but he was robbed." Or if referring to the thief, "he took everything - not just the pig but the rope as well." Being careful to bargain for a good price for it was essential as Mrs Speranza's husband knew only too well. His bitter experience of being tricked into selling the family pig for much less than it was worth, went down in family history, never allowed to be mentioned, yet passed on quietly to every member of the next generation, illustrating that it was no good to have too trusting a nature because it was bound to lead you into being swindled. To be good and kind was to be considered stupid. One had to be wary and cunning. To try to outdo the other fellow was regarded as smart and to be encouraged. To cheat someone and

get away with it was generally considered commendable. To learn to be hard was an important lesson as it was a matter of survival.

Poverty didn't allow for many options and the society held in esteem some blatantly unchristian values which were hard to break away from. In these attitudes we see once again the existence of pagan influence in a society which was predominantly Catholic. The cycle of poverty and crime exists to a certain extent even today. Stealing was rife and usually resulted in crops never reaching maturity as the tiny fruits or vegetables were stolen just as they were beginning to ripen. Quite often potatoes were planted but no crop ever appeared because the seed potatoes would be dug up and stolen during the night to be eaten by hungry families. Sometimes the farmers themselves were forced by hunger to eat the beans or chick peas etc. that were supposed to be kept for seed. In Mrs Speranza's words, "Era stritta, stritta. Jamu, non si potia campari. Non aviva rama mi mi tegnu," meaning, "Let's face it" or "don't let's pretend; things were very, very tight. Come on, or, let's not mince words, you couldn't live. I didn't have a branch to hold onto," which is an idiom meaning there was nowhere to turn to for help. In one way and another, it was a desperate situation which left the way open for crime and injustice to flourish.

*The Landlord's Pig* speaks so clearly of the life of a typical farmer and his vulnerability under the landlord's power. The farmers would have loved this story with its 'fairytale' ending: the poor farmer beating both the landlord and the solicitor at their own game, because in reality the chances of this happening were almost non-existent. It is also done in a humorous and witty way, making the story entertaining and instructional at the same time. "Piffiti" and "Paffiti" are nonsense words and don't have any meaning. They could be translated as "Pippity, poppity." The funny sound of the words adds to the humour and to the effect that the farmer is ostensibly too stupid to be argued with. The irony of this is that each time he says these words, he is actually making fun of the landlord and later, the solicitor. Once

again, the common theme appears of the poor man overcoming the rich and educated through his innate intelligence and cunning.

There is a sense of rejoicing at the end as justice triumphs because no matter what the legal claim, the farmer was the one who deserved to win; he was the only one who had worked to raise the pig and had bought it with his own money. The landlord's argument that it was on his land was a frustrating reality for the farmers.

The story teaches not to let others get the better of you and not to trust anyone in a position of authority or wealth, these two positions being synonymous in that society: to be wealthy meant to have authority. It teaches to be on your guard even against people who are supposedly trying to help you because they too will try to take advantage of you as the solicitor in this story does.<sup>17</sup>

Courtroom scenes are common in European folktales and are an important part of two of Mrs Speranza's stories in this chapter. Often the court comes to the wrong decision, sending the victim of the crime to prison or rewarding the wrongdoer with "the characters representing power and authority" showing that they are "irrational and inept."<sup>18</sup> The Grimms' story *The Blue Light* recounts that "the soldier was brought to trial, and although he had done no evil, the judge sentenced him to death."<sup>19</sup> Lawson Lucas notes the importance of the courtroom scenes in *Pinocchio* and *Alice in Wonderland* both of which illustrate the "arbitrary and irrational miscarriage of justice which appears to be the norm."<sup>20</sup> This ineptitude of the court and those in authority is also true in Mrs Speranza's stories. According to the law, the judge pronounces the wrong verdict as the landlord had some entitlement to the

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<sup>17</sup> Three variants of *The Landlord's Pig* appear in the R. Lombardi Satriani collection, Vol. xi, one entitled *Mastru Franciscu 'u Maliziusu*, p 126, the other, *Imprinci Amprinci*, p 163 also *Ciffi Ciaffi*, p 165.

<sup>18</sup> Lawson Lucas, *Gunpowder and Sealing-Wax*, p 56.

<sup>19</sup> J. and W. Grimm, *The Complete Fairy Tales of the Brothers Grimm*, p. 421.

<sup>20</sup> Lawson Lucas, *Gunpowder and Sealing-Wax*, p 54.

pig. However, due to his intelligence and cunning, the peasant tricks the court into giving him full ownership of the animal. The result of this error and confusion is that the right decision is made as far as the peasant and natural justice are concerned. In these stories from Palmi this general lack of confidence in the law as experienced by the ordinary people is clear.

Other European folktales ridicule the judicial system as ineffectual, but the stories of Palmi go one step further. The peasants subvert this idea in their stories by showing that they are smarter than all those in authority. They are capable of using the incompetence of the system to their advantage. In their folktales they ensure that the peasant always emerges triumphant.

## (2) THE FRIED EGG

Well<sup>21</sup>, there was once a restaurant which served food. A man was passing by and went inside. He said, "Would you make me something to eat?" The woman who owned it came out and said, "What would you like?" "Make me a fried egg," he said, "a quart of wine and a quarter of a kilo of bread." When he had finished, he asked for the account. He asked, "How much does it cost?"

"The bread costs this much, the wine costs this much and the *egg* -"<sup>22</sup> she got a pen and a piece of paper and she said, "and the egg if I had put it under the hen, it would make me chickens and then the chickens would make eggs and these would make the other chickens. So," she said, "in total it comes to four hundred ducats."

"What!" said the man, "And do I have four hundred ducats to give you for a fried egg? I'm not going to pay you all this money."

She said, "Well then, go and I'll take you to court."

"Do what you like," said this man.

When it came to the time, one morning, she leaned out and saw him outside in the town square. "Well," she said, "friend, the court case is going to be tomorrow at nine; make sure you're there."

He said, "All right, but first tomorrow morning I have to go and plant some cooked beans."

The woman said to him, "And how can cooked beans grow?"

"Oh, may you be blessed!" he said, "the way cooked beans won't come out, a chicken won't come out of a fried egg and another thing, I can't come anyway - I haven't got a jacket to wear to court."

"Oh, if it's for that," she said, "I'll lend you a jacket. You can take one of my husband's."

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<sup>21</sup> "Well" appears at the beginning of many sentences as an integral part of Mrs Speranza's telling of the stories. Sometimes there is a noticeable pause after it but at other times it flows into the rest of the sentence with no break. In the written version, a comma is used to indicate the pause used by the teller where appropriate.

<sup>22</sup> In the spoken story, the word "egg," when the woman first takes out her pen and paper to write out the list, is greatly emphasised through use of pause and tone, to show that this is the focal point of the story and that her list could continue into infinity.

“In that case, tomorrow I’ll come to your house and get the jacket.”

When it was time, he arrived at her house, took the jacket and put it on and they went to court. When they arrived in the court, they began to argue<sup>23</sup>: “Do you know that this man came to eat at the restaurant and I gave him a quart of wine, a quarter of a kilo of bread and I gave him a fried egg and he didn’t pay me for it because I asked him for such and such a sum and he didn’t want to give it to me.”

He turned to the judge and said, “Leave her be, she’s mad. You can’t pay any attention to what she says. Do you want to see,” he said, “that she is going to say that this jacket is hers.”

When she heard this, she began to shout, “Yes, that’s my husband’s jacket, of course it’s mine.”

“There you are,” he said, “do you see? The way that story’s not true is the same way as the story that I didn’t pay for the fried egg.”

And he won the case and he got her jacket off her as well.

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<sup>23</sup> “Si liticavanu” has been translated as ‘argue’ because in the dialect it is the common term used to describe an ordinary argument. It has overtones suggesting they were “litigating” in the legal sense. The phrase “Do you know” is said in the polite form which means that the woman was addressing the court, signifying that this scene is already part of the court case.



## COMMENTARY

The centrality of food to the lives of the people is emphasised in this folktale. While many folktales deal with jewels or gold as riches, these people loved to hear stories about food, since their own supply was so short. An egg appears in a couple of the folktales because it was a luxury: anyone who owned chickens had to sell the eggs for more essential food items. The people who owned food stores could charge whatever they wanted and often would grossly overcharge. A quarter of a litre of wine and a quarter of a kilo of bread were a standard measure and were shortened in the dialect to a quart, “nu quartu.” The cooked beans in the story are broad beans which are called “favi” in the dialect and were a common crop. “No nnesci,” is the same word for a bean sprouting out of its casing as for a chicken hatching out of its egg, so that the expression is very cleverly employed by the man in his analogy.

The fact that ducats are the currency reflects the age of this story as they stopped being used in Palmi around the turn of the twentieth century. It is one of the key words in the story which never changes, no matter how many retellings. Four hundred ducats was an outrageous amount - it was like asking for four thousand dollars and in today's terms still doesn't express the value: in one version the teller says, “He could have bought the whole town for that price,” but this was included as an explanation for the listener and was not in the original story told by the teller's father.

The owner in this instance had to be a woman because the story begins with food being prepared and this was seen as a woman's role. “Ffacciau,” “She leaned out,” from her balcony or window is understood, as usually the restaurant was on the ground floor and the living area was upstairs. Her “leaning out,” captures the atmosphere and lifestyle of the town where even today, it is an everyday occurrence for people to watch from their balconies or to lean out of their windows and engage in conversation with those outside or below.

The expression, “Oh chimmi siti santa!” literally means, “Oh may you be blessed!” and is said sarcastically. The tone implies exasperation, as though the person who says it really means, “You foolish idiot!” or “Oh, how can you be so stupid!” In court, when she says, “I asked him for such and such a sum,” in the dialect it is said as, “Nci cercai tanti sordi,” literally meaning, “I asked him for this much money.” This is not to be confused with the other meaning of the word, “tanti,” “a large sum.” In this case, she is simply indicating the amount she charged without making any comment on whether it was acceptable.

The man outwitting the woman was essential to reinforce the superiority of the male gender. The theme of the ordinary man outsmarting the wealthy owner in the position of power, is again present and as her greedy nature is exposed through her ridiculous claims, our sympathies are again with the victim and she must lose if justice is to prevail. Of course, her loss of the jacket as well, not only gives a humorous twist but serves to show us how clever the customer is, even if he is too poor to possess a jacket in which to appear in court. It also stresses that she got what she deserved, as the commonly used expression, “nci futtiu,” reappears at the end, meaning, “he outsmarted it off her, so good for him!” The two words imply all of this. The Grimms’ story *The Good Bargain*<sup>24</sup> ends in a similar way to this story. With the king sitting in judgment over the case, the farmer wins triumphant and tricks the Jewish man out of his jacket.

The man and woman in *The Fried Egg* always address each other in courteous terms and in the polite form which shows the distance between them so that when the man orders his meal, “please” and “thank you” are unnecessary as the polite form covers this adequately. When the woman calls out, “friend,” to him it’s simply a polite way of saying, “Hey you,” but at the same time it is also used to reinforce the attitude of being suspicious of anyone who calls you a friend. For all

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<sup>24</sup> J. and W. Grimm, *The Complete Fairy Tales of the Brothers Grimm*, pp. 28-32.

this show of courtesy and deference, again in this story, the abuse of position and power by the wealthy is subverted by the wit, humour and native cunning of the common man. Once again, the peasant proves himself triumphant.

### (3) THE PRINCESS AND THE OLIVE JAR

Once there was a king and a queen and they had a daughter. They were preparing a meal. The queen's daughter went into the room where they kept all the things to eat to get a plate full of olives in brine. She reached into the jar to get a handful of olives and she couldn't get her hand out because the mouth of the jar was too small.

Well when the parents saw that she wasn't coming, they went into the room to see why she was taking so long to bring the olives onto the table. The queen's daughter was bent down with her face over the jar and she couldn't get her hand out because it was full of olives and she was asking for someone to help her pull her arm out. No one was able to. Days and days went past with her hand in that jar until she couldn't stand it any more.

Well the king sent out town criers to every place to let it be known that his daughter had her hand stuck in an olive jar and couldn't get it out, what was to be done, and that if there was anyone able to get her hand out of the jar they would marry the princess.

When they made the proclamations, everyone gathered in the square, "What has happened? What happened at the queen's house?"

"The princess has her hand in a jar and she can't get it out."<sup>25</sup>

Hearing this, all the single men formed a long queue to each have a turn to go up to the palace and see if they could take this hand out of the jar because the one who was able to would marry the princess. Each one who tried and went up to where the girl was with that hand in the jar would say to her:

"Pull and your hand will come out. Pull and ... ." <sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> These questions one after the other without any indication of who is speaking, evoke a sense of urgency and excitement and create the effect of a crowd gathered where everyone is talking at once.

Well try this one and try that one, they were almost wrenching her arm off. No one could do it. No one was able to get her hand out of the jar. It was obvious that of all the ones who went up there, each one was more stupid than the other.

Well, there happened to be passing by, a poor, dirty tramp. He says, "What's happening there at the king's house?"

"The princess has her hand in a jar and she can't get it out."

"Stand aside," he said to them, "I want to go up there."

"None of us were able to take her hand out and you think you can," they said to him.

"You're all ragged and your clothes are torn; do you think the king will let you go up?"

Everyone was making fun of him and they didn't even want to let him go up into the palace. So this poor man was saying, "Isn't it true that if I am able to take her hand out of the jar I can marry the princess?"

He thought he'd be throwing his cap into heaven because he was so poor. "But," he said, "I want to go up and have a try."

"It's not for you. Better men than you have tried," said the others.

"Let me go up. I want to try too."

When he reached the room and went up to the young lady, she was already half dead from having her hand trapped in the jar in such a way for so many days. He went over to her and said, "Let go of the olives in your hand and pull your hand out."

When she opened her hand, the olives she was holding dropped down and her hand slid out because it was empty.

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<sup>26</sup> In the telling, the voice here trails off like an echo. This oral technique creates the impression that the instruction was repeated many times to the girl.

The king and queen went onto the balcony and started to shout to the crowd outside saying that their daughter was saved because her hand had been taken out of the jar and that now this man was going to marry her. Look at what beautiful things happen in this world: the one who seemed the most stupid was instead the cleverest of all and he succeeded in marrying the king's daughter. And he made his fortune.

### **Alternative Ending<sup>27</sup>**

Well, the one who seemed the most stupid was instead the cleverest of all except that he wasn't wearing beautiful clothes. To be able to marry the queen's daughter after the promise made by the king, they put him into half a barrel and they scrubbed him down with a scrubbing brush and soap. That way he was a made man among all the others who had beautiful suits. And this is how the story ended.

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<sup>27</sup> In one telling of the story this was the ending given instead of the concluding paragraph above. The first ending would seem to be the more authentic one according to the 'Laws' governing folktales as outlined in Chapter 3 of this thesis. The alternative ending, although more vivid, seems to be embellished with Mrs Speranza's personal humour.

## COMMENTARY

The people of Palmi lived among olive groves so that this story, which has echoes of so many other fairytales, has been adapted for their particular environment, as olives were one of their staple foods. The story has overtones of one of the folktale genre's favourite themes: the fool makes good. The difference is that in this case the tramp is no fool, he only seems that way because of his ragged appearance. The Grimms' story called *The Clever Little Tailor* <sup>28</sup> is similar to the Palmi folktale in that a tailor proves that he is cleverer than everyone else and wins the hand of the princess. Like the tramp, he is not discouraged by the insults of the other suitors once he has set his mind to the task.

The interesting scene at the beginning of *The Princess and the Olive Jar*, with the royal family preparing a meal and sending the princess for the olives, is a description of a common, domestic situation in Palmi. Olives were one of the staple foods of the poor and retrieving them from their storage containers was a daily event. They were kept in earthenware jars which varied in capacity from fifteen to one hundred litres and were at the minimum one metre tall. The jars were enormous as they usually contained enough olives to last the family for two years. This scene makes it subtly evident that there was no conception among the ordinary people of the lifestyle of royalty. However, there is always a sense that royalty is "high", not only in that materially they lack nothing, but also physically where the king and queen speak from a balcony and the suitors must go 'up' to the palace.

Once again, the theme of marriage is evident and making one's fortune through a good match. The question of love doesn't enter into it. It's simply a matter of setting oneself up for life. The rags-to-riches theme is always satisfying especially for those struggling to survive. This story highlights the fact that you can't judge people by what they wear - the poorest one has the most common sense and

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<sup>28</sup> J. and W. Grimm, *The Complete Fairy Tales of the Brothers Grimm*, pp 414 - 416.

intelligence. He is the only one able to see the solution which seems so obvious and simple yet baffles all the richer people. Perhaps there is also a subtly Christian message in the denouement where the tramp who has nothing, is the only one who realises that the princess must let go of everything if she is to be saved. She and everyone else stubbornly insist on holding on to what she has in her hand and due to their greed are blind to the fact that she is about to lose her life because of it. Both the princess and the tramp are winners at the end because she is freed from her entrapment and he is free of his poverty and all this good fortune as a result of chance or fate: the tramp merely happens to be passing by, thus implying that there is always hope even for the most desperate or impoverished.

Greed may be one of the subtle undertones in the story but prejudice is the main theme as poverty and stupidity are considered one and the same thing: the tramp is made fun of and jeered at because he is dirty and ragged and therefore regarded as stupid. The interesting thing about this point is that like the other stories it reflects the society the stories come from. It was a part of life to be teased or treated with contempt by richer relatives or landlords and so on if you were poor because wealth was equated with intelligence and poverty with stupidity. This of course explains many beliefs and values held by the people of the town, one example being that it didn't matter how you acquired money as long as you were able to get it and if you could put one over on someone else you were considered very cunning and intelligent.

As in many of the folk tales, the voices of the speakers in the story aren't distinguished grammatically, with "he said," or "she sighed," etc. This creates a sense of immediacy and has the effect of bringing the story to life. The change of character is usually conveyed through the voice of the speaker by a change in tone or pitch and perhaps accompanied by gesture. When the tramp states finally, "But I want to go up and have a try," because of the word "but", his decision sounds rather



weak. The actual tone of the word in the spoken story conveys the meaning, “Hang it all,” or “stand aside” whereas on paper the words themselves suggest a more insipid response. This is an excellent illustration of how the oral tradition conveys meaning through the tone and demeanour of the teller in a way which the written word cannot always communicate.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> The Grimms’ tale, *Clever Else*, although not a variant of *The Princess and the Olive Jar*, has many similarities to it especially with regard to the stupidity of the daughter.

#### (4) THE SCALDED TROTTER

Once there was a man who used to go to the butcher's each week and buy a calf's trotter because there was a good amount of meat on it and it didn't cost much and he did this for a very long time. The two that used to work there got tired of him going there every week to buy the same thing. They said, "How can we change this so that he comes for something else?" So the two of them decided to scald the calf's trotter - to immerse it in boiling water for a second so they would be sure it could never cook.

This man didn't go back again for a while because he realised they were making fun of him but eventually he returned to the same place. When they saw him the next time they said to him, "Good morning, friend. How are things?" and he replied like this and said,

"It has never been known to happen before  
That the food in the pot has cooked itself raw.  
I wasted a forest and water galore,  
But the horns on your head  
Are much softer instead  
Than the trotter I bought from your store!"

and he slapped his reply in their faces and they didn't even sell the trotter after that.

## COMMENTARY

“Scalding” in this story would have been instantly recognised by the listeners as a way of cooking certain foods, particularly green, leafy vegetables and grasses. The method involved immersing the chicory or other greens in boiling water for only a moment so that they remained crisp and looked raw but were in fact cooked or blanched. The opposite was true if this was done to meat: it would remain raw, tough and inedible no matter how many hours of boiling it had after that. The fact that the meat still looked raw after it was scalded is what the story relies on for humour. The listeners would have known this without explanation but Mrs Speranza in telling the story adds the short explanation for the benefit of an audience removed from the source of the story. After telling the story she added “U futturu e iddi pensavanu ca non si ment’addunu.” meaning “They swindled him (literally ‘f...ed him’) and they thought he wouldn’t notice,” with the implication in her tone, “ but he showed them !”

The customer in *The Scalded Trotter* can’t afford anything better than the calf’s trotter and simply because he is poor, he is scorned and ridiculed, but his feeling of satisfaction at the end of the story more than compensates for this. It is clear that he is much cleverer than the rich owners and he proves this by leaving them dumbfounded at the end by his witty reply and rebukes them by withdrawing his custom, little though it be. The implication is that they are either the store owners or even if they are the servers, they are certainly in a better financial position than the customer. In the society of Palmi, it was automatically assumed that anyone who had a job away from the land had secured for himself a higher social status. Thus, shopkeepers and their assistants were regarded as part of the establishment which served to keep the farmers poor. There is no question that they are ‘the rich’ in the story or, at the very least, the ones who have the advantage over the main character. We know this because our sympathy is immediately on the side of the poorer but much more intelligent customer who is at the mercy of the other two. It was common in the town for the wealthier customers to be served first in any shop

and to be treated with deference and respect. The poorer ones were forced to wait and were generally pushed aside to make way for “i gnuri,” “the gentry,” who were considered the ‘the better class of person’. The insidious greeting of the two servers, “Good morning friend” teaches the listener never to trust anyone - even if someone calls you a friend it’s just a pretence especially if this is someone in a position of power.

In the clever rhyme which is very difficult to translate so as to capture the humour of it, the main character implies that the two servers are cuckolds by referring to the horns on their heads, the traditional symbol of the cuckold. The rhyme translated literally means:

It has never happened to me at any tavern  
 To cook till well done and for it to return raw.  
 I wasted a forest and water a water-tank full  
 And it became harder than your horns.

In the society of Palmi and throughout Southern Italy, it was the worst insult imaginable to call someone a cuckold or to imply it especially in public. It would have led to the total humiliation of the injured party, in this case the two men serving him. The storyteller and listeners would have crowed with delight at the ‘hero’s’ victory. They couldn’t change their situation but they could show up those in authority through small personal victories.

The underlying lesson is: “don’t mess with the peasant or you will come out worst off.” This story for them was another convincing and reassuring example of how they could get the better of the rich and powerful through their wit and intelligence. The story was the perfect tool to reinforce, in an entertaining way, their feelings of defiance against the system.

## CHAPTER 5

### ANTI-CLERICAL FOLKTALES

#### **Introduction**

One of the strongest themes that emerges from the folktales of Palmi is the negative attitude of the country people towards the clergy. Any of the stories told by Mrs Speranza which involve a priest are blatantly anti-clerical. This is not unusual as there are also countless anti-clerical stories in the Di Francia and Raffaele Lombardi Satriani collections. In looking at all these stories more closely two main points emerge, that whenever a priest is mentioned in a story it is bound to show him in a bad light and that the priest was an important part of life in Southern Italian towns such as Palmi. Tatar notes that traditionally, folktales were expurgated of “anything that smacked of anticlerical sentiment or sacrilegious conduct.”<sup>1</sup> This is not the case with the stories presented in this chapter which reflect how the peasants obviously delighted in telling humorous stories about the clergy. Many of their folktales, jokes, sayings and proverbs candidly related the corruption of the priesthood. A story in the Grimms’ collection called *Old Hildebrand* does the same, with the priest convincing the farmer’s wife to lie to her husband so that “he could spend one whole day alone with her in pleasure.”<sup>2</sup> This story illustrates that an anti-clerical feeling existed, to a certain extent, throughout Europe though perhaps it was strongest in Italy: in this German folktale it is interesting that the priest sends the woman’s husband on a pilgrimage to “Mount Cuckold in Italy.”<sup>3</sup>

This anti-clerical attitude was not only evident in Calabria but existed throughout Italy. It can be traced back in history to the close association of Church

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<sup>1</sup> Tartar, *Off with Their Heads!* p 4.

<sup>2</sup> J. and W. Grimm, *The Complete Fairy Tales of the Brothers Grimm*, p. 349.

<sup>3</sup> J. and W. Grimm, *The Complete Fairy Tales of the Brothers Grimm*, p. 350.

and State which meant that secular interests often affected the selection and appointment of clergy: affluent families and government officials had enormous influence in the decision making and this contributed to the feeling among the poor that priests were part of the oppressive rule. Added to this was the fact that those joining the priesthood often did so with hidden agendas and with little or no true vocation so that from both ends of the social hierarchy many of those who entered the Church were totally unsuited to religious life. Domenico Ficarra notes:

The higher clergy normally consisting of members of the feudal aristocracy who entered the church rather than from authentic religious vocation, did so to safeguard from within that important religious body the privileges of their class and the interests of their families. The lower clergy was instead usually represented by children of the farmers, the youngest or the one unfit for reasons of health to work the land... . It was a matter of poor people who entered the monasteries to resolve the problem of living, or better still, of survival.<sup>4</sup>

Although Maraspini, in his *Study of an Italian Village*, refers to the town of Calimera in Calabria, the same observations hold true for Southern Italy in general and certainly for the town of Palmi. According to Maraspini the priest wields enormous power:

not only because he is backed by the authority of the Church, not only because he is 'God's deputy', but also because, through the sacrament of confession, he is aware of everything that goes on.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Domenico Ficarra (1993) *La Calabria e La Sua Storia*, Edizioni Grafiche Abramo, pp 111-112. Translated by Grace Nolan: "L'alto clero era costituito normalmente da membri dell'aristocrazia feudale che entravano nella Chiesa piu' che per vocazione religiosa autentica, per tutelare, dall'interno di quell'importante organismo religioso, i privilegi della loro classe e gli interessi della loro famiglia. Il basso clero era, invece spesso rappresentato da figli di contadini l'ultimogenito o quello inidoneo, per motivi di salute, al lavoro agricolo... . Si trattava di povera gente che entrava nei monasteri per risolvere il problema dell'esistenza, o meglio della sopravvivenza."

<sup>5</sup> Maraspini, p 17.

Two of Mrs Speranza's folktales, *The Shepherd's Crook* and *The Guardian Angel*, revolve around the confessional and the way this was an intrinsic part of life for the peasant. Maraspini points out that the priest "is not really liked: his unique position, and the celibacy of the clergy, both invite distrust. In some ways, his position is analogous to that of the Carabinieri<sup>6</sup>: an integral part of the social structure, and indispensable to its proper functioning, he remains, nevertheless, outside it."<sup>7</sup>

The clergy were regarded as part of the elite ruling class and were treated with great reverence. There were certainly no close friendships between them and lay people:

The priest in Italy was seen as more 'aloof', as 'generally keeping to himself', 'a little above' the people he was ministering to, enjoying social prestige and authority in the town; in other words, as a person belonging to a higher class.<sup>8</sup>

As far as the country people were concerned, the priest was one of the landed gentry and, like the landlord, was therefore resented and envied. It was obvious to all that "the house of the priest was one of the best of the town."<sup>9</sup> Maraspini further notes that:

power, wealth, rank, are judged in terms of land. It is basically a simple equation: the ownership of land means power, and power means status. Hence there are really only two major social groupings: the land-owners and the landless. In the past, the land-owners, 'the barons,' formed the nobility, and the landless, their serfs.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> "Carabinieri" refers to members of a militia maintained by the government for police duties.

<sup>7</sup> Maraspini, p 17.

<sup>8</sup> Adrian Pittarello, (1980) *Soup without Salt: The Australian Catholic Church and the Italian Migrant, A Comparative Study in the Sociology of Religion*, Sydney: Centre for Migration Studies, p 15.

<sup>9</sup> Pittarello, p 16.

<sup>10</sup> Maraspini, p16.

In this light it is completely understandable that the peasant in *The Story of the Graces* can think of nothing he would rather have more than his own land. It would have been the dream come true of any farmer living in a small town like Palmi up until the 1950s when this folktale was still being told around the fire. Mrs Speranza often referred to their situation under the landlord system as being like slaves: their landlord held onto her father's bankbook for twenty years, drawing out the pension he was given after being wounded in the First World War and making him pay interest on his interest which was called "ntereseddi" "little interest" so he could never get out of debt.

The priest in some ways was considered as being even above the landlord, and therefore worse, because apart from being wealthy, he was backed by the authority of the Church. He ate well, he didn't have to do hard physical labour to survive and he was treated with respect which was something the country people valued above all else. He was part of the ruling class who "made the laws" as the priest points out to the shepherd in *The Shepherd's Crook*, laws which the peasants had no choice but to uphold no matter how arbitrary or unjust.

The actions of the elite such as the landlord and the priest, totally impacted on the lives of the ordinary people not only through having to pay taxes they couldn't afford but even in the most private aspects of their existence. They were in every way vulnerable to those in authority who often exploited their positions of power. Unable to fight back in any legal way because of illiteracy and poverty, the peasants fought back in the only way they could and the only way that was socially acceptable - through their stories. In them the priest was shown up as a hypocrite and his greed



and cunning were revealed for all to see and laugh at in folktales such as *The Story of the Graces* and *The White Wine*. Everyone in the town believed that priests were “mbrogghiuni” that is, “tricksters” as Mrs Speranza explains at the end of *The Shepherd’s Crook*. The stories and sayings were their way of getting some of their own back for all the injustices they suffered.

Centuries of oppression, mostly under foreign rule, had left the Southern Italians with a deep-seated mistrust and resentment of all forms of authority. In many ways the Church was under more suspicion than local or government authorities - it was expected that those in positions of power were there first and foremost to line their own pockets. The Calabrians understood and expected this, after all, it was their personal philosophy too. The Church, on the other hand, preached a completely different doctrine, one of charity and service. While the local priest professed to this way of life, the peasants believed that it was all pretence and that therefore his hypocrisy made him worse than anyone else. The folktales of the region reflect this attitude without any doubt. The three stories in this chapter along with *The Guardian Angel*, another of Mrs Speranza’s folktales, leaves the listener in no doubt as to the strength of the anti-clerical feeling among the population.

In the folktales of Palmi, the clergy is portrayed as morally, sexually and in every way corrupt. Yet the people had a fervent belief in the power of the sacraments so although they didn’t trust the priest, due to his position, he still commanded respect and had an unchallenged authority. The people believed that they couldn’t get to Heaven without the blessing of the Church: “moriu senza cumpessatu” meaning “he died without having received Confession” was regarded

as a grave misfortune which hindered or even thwarted entry into the next life. Similarly, it was believed that the Christening should be performed as soon as possible after birth for it was considered a dangerous thing if the baby should die without having been Baptised. As for marriage - to live in a sexual relationship without the blessing of the church was not even a consideration. It would result in being ostracised from the community for life and being treated with contempt and derision.

With this belief system and the strict moral codes that ruled the lives of the farmers it is clear that ironically the priest was regarded as a necessary evil. It was a fact that many priests once sent by Rome to many of the Southern towns were then forgotten by the Church and left to their own devices. Like Kurtz in *Heart of Darkness*, this situation was often too much for them. There may have been some who were corrupt to begin with but the blend of superstition and religion, of pagan and Christian beliefs and the harsh reality of life in these isolated places would have made it difficult for the strongest individual not to succumb to certain temptations. *The White Wine* and *The Guardian Angel* are stories that illustrate the way in which members of the clergy exploited their positions of power over people who were in every way vulnerable. To compound this, the priest would have been going into a society which looked on him with suspicion; a society which feared him yet treated him with the utmost respect. Zanconato notes that history has taught Southern Italians mistrust and resentment towards people in authority:

not only the state authorities, but also the church authorities, for too long, at least in the eyes of the people, have dominated them; have imposed on them extravagant taxes so that they

could live in luxury; have easily condemned them and excommunicated them.<sup>11</sup>

In order to survive, the peasants “were obliged to work even on Sundays and often Holy Days” and usually this was with the blessing of the Church as “ecclesiastical authorities often obliged them to do so.”<sup>12</sup> Yet for all the resentment this created against the Church, the most important point of all must not be forgotten: the momentous events of life - birth, marriage and death - were all subject to the authority of the priest and the sacraments only he could bestow. It was the perfect breeding ground for corruption to flourish.

Like the landowner, the priest was regarded as both rich and influential: rich as he obviously had a beautiful house to live in and always had enough food without doing any manual labour and influential because he played a role in every aspect of the lives of the peasants. Joseph Visentin notes that:

Rich and influential people are treated like little gods, “signori”. Poor people envy them, honour them, beseech them, hate them and defend them; but they cannot do without them. They are an integral part of the system.<sup>13</sup>

Their folktales and the local proverbs and sayings reflect this paradoxical attitude towards the clergy which is illustrated by the rhyme which appears in *The Story of the Graces*. The rhyme itself was regarded as a proverb and was often recited in Palmi in its own right without the folktale. As a popular saying in the town, it reveals the extent to which the priest was involved in the lives of the peasants:

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<sup>11</sup> Zanconato, p17.

<sup>12</sup> Zanconato, p 17.

<sup>13</sup> Joseph Visentin, Southern Italian Culture, p 10.

“At your birth the priest eats first  
 When you wed the priest is fed  
 On your death bed laid the priest is paid.”<sup>14</sup>

This was obviously a common Southern saying as it also appears in a collection of Calabrian proverbs from the Tropea area edited by Antonino Basile along with the sayings: “It’s better to have debts than to have anything to do with priests”<sup>15</sup> and “With monks, priests and dogs always have a stick handy.”<sup>16</sup> The resentment of the ordinary people towards the Church was embodied in their stories and sayings and usually with a mixture of sagacity and humour. A Calabrian proverb in Francesco Spezzano’s collection succinctly encapsulates the predominant attitude of the peasants towards the clergy: “And about priests, go to Mass and then run!”<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Giuseppe Chiapparo (1990) “Proverbi Calabresi di Tropea e Dintorni” in A. Basile [ed] *Folklore della Calabria*, (Vol ii), p 304. Translated from dialect by Grace Nolan: “Si nasci, u previti pasci, si ti mariti, u previti mbiti, si mori, u previti godi.”

<sup>15</sup> Chiapparo, in A. Basil [ed] *Folklore della Calabria*, (Vol ii), p 291. Translated from dialect by Grace Nolan: “E megghiu aviri debiti c’aviri chi fari cu’ previti.”

<sup>16</sup> Chiapparo, p 292. Translated from dialect by Grace Nolan: “Cu` monaci, previti e cani, statti cu` lu vastuni a li mani.”

<sup>17</sup> Francesco Spezzano (1992) *Proverbi Calabresi*, Firenze: Giunti Gruppo Editoriale, p 105. Translated from dialect by Grace Nolan: “E` di previti sienti 'a missa e fuji.”

### (5) THE STORY OF THE GRACES

Once there was a day set aside when God bestowed the graces. To whoever arrived first he would grant whichever grace they asked for. Well the priest got up at break of day and he presented himself there first. It's not as if the other mornings he would be up first, it was so that he could ask for this grace before all the others.

When he arrived, he said to God, "Good morning, Master." God said, "Tell me which grace you want." "I want Everything," said the priest," and Everything means:

"At your birth the priest eats first  
 When you wed the priest is fed  
 On your deathbed laid the priest is paid" -

Everything is his.

Well after him there went many others and they all asked for the same thing. God said to them, "That grace has already been taken. The smartest one asked for the best things and those that were lacking brains couldn't catch up to him because the priest had already taken Everything.

Then the little chicken presented herself. God said, "What would you like?" "I want Everything." "Everything has already been given. I'll give you a quarter of a kilo of wheat each day to eat," said our dear Lord. The chicken said, "No. I want to stay all day with my beak to the ground," and do you see how the chicken is always eating? If you let it out in the daytime it eats, at midnight it eats, it's always with its beak to the earth finding something - it never stops eating.

After that, the farmer went there and said, "Good morning, Master." "Good morning," He said "and what do you want?" He said "I want Everything." "Everything has already been given." "Well then I want to have enough land to be able to dig it every day." God said to him, "That grace is made for you." He turned for home to find his work.

After that, one by one as all the others went, they asked for Everything because they knew what a wonderful thing it was but instead the first request was taken by the priest. And truly do you notice how the priest has a finger in every pie because everything has to pass through his hands: if it's marriage, if it's death, if it's baptism, he's beautifully situated.

## COMMENTARY

This is another humorous yet scathing attack on the clergy. The priest is portrayed with complete irreverence, "It's not as if other mornings he would get up first," highlighting his greed and self-interest. But more than this, the story is an attempt to explain why things are as they are. The priest is at the top of the hierarchy and the farmer is at the bottom. That was the way things were and the way things were destined to remain as far as the farmer was concerned. The story, after all, comes out of the oral tradition, from the insights of the country people. This is the way they perceived life. This is the way things were for them and like most of their stories, it's told with humour and irony and always has a sting in it because that was the reality of life.<sup>18</sup>

The presence of the chicken gives the story an earthy feel as well as placing it in the context of the natural order of things. The chicken was a very important part of life for the ordinary farmer. In fact, it appears in many of the folktales. Even if you had only one chicken you weren't totally destitute.

In keeping with the folktale tradition, the number three is intrinsic to this story: there are three important stages in life - birth, marriage and death - and three rhyming lines to illustrate this. There are three characters, the priest, the chicken and the farmer. Together they represent all the different stations in life according to the way of thinking of the country people of Palmi. The farmer's lot in life was inevitably to work the land and ironically, the best he could hope for was more work. On the

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<sup>18</sup> A story in the Grimms' collection, *Eve's Unequal Children*, although not a variant of *The Story of the Graces*, also shares this theme of justifying the social order by explaining it as God's will and creation. Another Grimms' story, *The Life Span*, has God determining the life span of all the creatures, including man, and dispensing this in a similar way to the gifts in, *The Story of the Graces*.

other hand, the priest didn't have to do anything and yet he had "Everything," a fact that was obvious to the farmer. This story shows how he makes sense of this blatant injustice by accepting it as God's will, thus the idea of the bestowing of the graces. It was understood that the smartest work less and the most ignorant have to earn their living by doing backbreaking physical work and being subservient to the others. This belief persisted until recently where office workers or anyone connected with work that was not of a manual kind was not considered to be working at all and was being paid for simply turning up. In turn, an arrogance exists among those who 'have book learning' in their dealings with others and the entire working system is clogged by corruption and under-the-counter deals, harking back to the way the landlords had to be kowtowed to because they always had the upper hand.

As far as the landlord was concerned, the farmer was considered the lowest on the scale of intelligence. The frustration at the farmer is also evident in the tone of the narrator: the farmer is not quick off the mark. He wants "Everything" but it's already been given to someone else. He's always pipped at the post. Every other morning, he gets up before dawn to start work, why this of all mornings did he have to get up so late? And then what he asks for! Couldn't he use his brains? And so, when the country people tell this story, they are resigned to their plight. This is the reason for it: the action of one stupid farmer, just like Eve in the garden of Eden making things difficult for the rest of humanity by her foolish action.

The priest is the smartest, at least in a cunning way as he makes sure he is first in line and the farmer the most stupid as he asks for more work. Though from what we know of circumstances at the time, it stands to reason that a farmer's



greatest wish would be for land. He can only ask for what he knows. The land was his means of survival and was usually very scarce and, furthermore, owned by a landlord. The implication is that he is not smart enough to see the bigger picture, to look beyond his own station and ask for something more or better. His thinking capabilities are limited, in fact on a par with the chicken: he wants “Everything” just like the priest but he is not quick-witted enough to get in first.

What the priest asks for is very difficult to translate: “U Tuttu”, literally means, “The All.” It’s like being given a wish by a genie and saying that you wish for unlimited wishes - a bit like tricking the wish giver - in this case God, again showing the priest’s cunning, and because the priest was the first one in line, God granted it to him.

The little rhyme on which the whole story hangs, illustrates clearly that from your birth to the day you die, the priest always profits. The rhyme serves two purposes: it is the hook by which you remember the story - a very important point in oral tradition, and it illustrates the main objective of the story - to expose the clergy - in a humorous way. In three simple rhymes it sums up the priest’s situation. Literally these are:

“If you’re born you feed the priest,

If you marry you invite the priest,

If you die the priest delights.”

Each one involves payment and feasting so not only does the priest get paid on every occasion but he eats good food as well since he is always the first to be

present. He's always getting something out of every stage of people's lives. He never loses, for him it's all gain.

This also emphasises the importance of religion in the lives of the people. They could no more think of going without the Sacraments of Baptism, Marriage and the Last Rites than living and breathing. It was part of the natural order of things. To them it *was* life, so in the scheme of things, the priest was essential - life couldn't go on without him. He was totally indispensable. This belief meant that the priest was not only rich in the material sense but also that he had complete power over all those 'who came after him' and this in turn laid the way completely open for all forms of corruption by the clergy.

## **(6) THE SHEPHERD'S CROOK**

Once there was a man who looked after his sheep and didn't have a crook to make them go where he wanted. Well while he looked this way and that, he saw an olive tree that had many shoots sprouting from its trunk. So he said, "I'll cut myself one of these and I'll make myself a crook." He went and cut himself one.

He felt that he had committed a sin by doing this and went to the priest to confess. He said to him that he had sinned because he had cut a shoot to make a crook to guide his sheep. "Well then," said the priest, "Did other shoots remain where you took that one?" He said, "Yes, many remained." The priest said, "No, it's not a sin." The man replied and said, "If I must confess true and properly, I have to tell you that I cut the shoot from your property."

"Oh no!" said the priest, "It's a mortal sin! I'm going to have you arrested!" "But first you said it wasn't a sin and now you say to me that you'll have me tied up!" The priest said, "It has to be done to take away the guilt of your sin." The shepherd said, "Ah no! I won't be coming to church anymore!" The priest said to him, "But this is the way we make the laws."

## COMMENTARY

Those hearing this story would have been very familiar with all that is mentioned in it: the olive tree, the shepherd and the priest - all part of everyday life for the people of Palmi. Olive trees were their main source of income. They were surrounded by them and had intimate knowledge of them so they would have understood immediately the shepherd's action in making himself a crook. It was an ordinary everyday occurrence for the audience. Most country people, whether they were shepherds or not, carried a crook or staff, usually made from an olive shoot, as they roamed around the olive groves where they lived. A thick, sturdy shoot was chosen and placed over the flames of an open fire just close enough for the heat to make the wood pliable. The straight stick was then bent into the shape of a crook. Each year numerous shoots sprouted from the main trunk of every olive tree and would have to be cut off and cleared away. Although some shoots might occasionally be used to strike new olive trees, most of them would have to be thrown away as useless rubbish.

The story illustrates the extent to which the priests had control over the population by instilling a sense of guilt: the shepherd felt he had to go to confession for taking something which was virtually worthless and wouldn't be missed. The fact that he feels guilty and needs to go to confession shows his own morality and honesty and magnifies the priest's corruption. At the same time, the fact that the shepherd at first conceals from the priest whose property it was until he is assured of his own innocence, reveals a certain native cunning of the 'simple' man as he traps the priest into answering honestly.

As the shepherd reveals the full truth, the priest's hypocrisy and double standards are also revealed as well as his willingness to break the sacred seal of the confessional to seek personal revenge for a petty matter. The simple olive shoot in this story is used to highlight the priest's meanness in the way he deals with the shepherd: he won't give away even one of the numerous shoots. The audience would not have to be told that there were countless shoots to choose from so this description doesn't even appear in the story. They would have been well enough acquainted with olive trees to know this without question. The statement: "We make the laws" shows the power of the clergy in influencing secular affairs, in particular to protect their own interests. In the face of the priest's overwhelming power and duplicity, the shepherd is left with the only defence he can resort to - non attendance at church, a tradition still prevalent in Southern Italian religious practise.

Mrs Speranza made this comment at the end of the story: "Ca iddi cumandanu. N'e cridivan'e previti ca eranu mbrogghiuni." Meaning, "They (the priests) are in charge or they rule. They (the people) didn't believe priests because they were 'mbrogghiuni'." This word is not as harsh as 'liars' but it means 'tricksters' - people who tangle the truth - 'Mbrogghiari' means to tangle up. The inference is that you should always be on your guard against those who distort the truth.

**(7) THE WHITE WINE**

Once there was a husband and wife. The husband died. The wife went to the priest to confession. "My husband has died," she said to him, "and I'd like to know where he is, if he's in heaven, in hell, or in purgatory." The priest said to her, "For me to be able to tell you where your husband is, you must bring a demijohn of white wine of the best there is."

When she went back to get the message, the priest said to her, "We've drunk the wine but we can't find your husband anywhere, neither in paradise, in hell, nor in purgatory. We don't know where he's ended up. To tell you where he is, I haven't looked yet to see what else you have to bring."

## COMMENTARY

The story of "The White Wine" is another example of the corruption of the clergy. Again we have the blend of religion and superstition, the importance of food and drink to the audience and the far-reaching power of the clergy, even beyond death. This short story reveals a great deal about life in the past in Palmi. It uses humour to make its point, firstly in the matter-of-fact attitude of the wife in having complete faith that the priest must surely know her husband's new abode and also in the priest's reply at the end: "I haven't looked yet to see what else you have to bring," though the humour here is sardonic - the tone being: "Of course, just like a priest!" It's obvious that he will continue to take advantage of the woman's gullibility and emotional vulnerability as well as her faith, to extort valuables from her.

He asks for a demijohn of wine not just a bottle. Demijohns - large bottles with wicker casing and handles, were common receptacles in the south of Italy. They came in different sizes ranging from about five litres to sixty litres. As soon as the word demijohn is mentioned, Mrs Speranza felt sure it must mean the ten-litre one as it was the most commonly used. Regardless of the measurement, its purpose in the story is to signify a large quantity, just as the white wine is meant to signify an item of great luxury.

White wine was regarded as the superior quality wine, lighter and more drinkable. There wasn't much of it around at all, not even for the rich, as it had to be made separately using different containers so it wouldn't get mixed in with the red. Even though the south of Italy was known for its vineyards, and wine was one of the main products of the region, only red wine was ever made by most of the ordinary

farmers. The white grapes were more delicate and difficult to grow. The plant also produced far fewer grapes and consequently was not economically viable so the purple grapes were planted in preference. It would have been very unusual for the 'common' man even to have tasted white wine. It was known to them only by reputation. When Mrs Speranza left Italy to migrate to Australia in the 1950's, her mother-in-law went to the extravagance of purchasing half a litre of white wine to mark this extraordinary event. At that time migration was considered to be like a death as it was expected the person would never be seen again. The large family treated the white wine like liqueur, sipping it in tiny amounts.

When we become aware of these facts, we can appreciate the poignancy of the title and that the priest asks specifically for white wine, not just ordinary wine and not just an ordinary bottle but a demijohn. Both point to the excessive nature of the demand and so highlight the excesses of the priest and the extent of his corruption. He doesn't have any qualms about what he does - it's all part of being a priest: both the teller and listener would have been in complete agreement with this. They would have laughed about it but accepted it as a fact. As soon as white wine, demijohn and priest were mentioned in the same story there would have been absolutely no doubt to the listener about the point it was trying to make: they instantly would have thought - "That Bastard! Taking advantage of a poor, stupid woman!" That the woman was considered stupid, superstitious and gullible went without saying. It is an underlying theme in most of the folktales of the region and was a commonly accepted fact among the male population in particular.



The suggestion at the end of the story is that the priest will ask for more delicacies when he says he must check what else he needs. This reinforces the importance of food and drink to an audience who were constantly battling with hunger and thirst. By the fact that the priest asks for luxuries we know that his interest is in desires, not needs and certainly not her needs. So that instead of providing her with comfort in time of distress, he draws on her uncertainty to exploit her - an uncertainty which he, through the church, is responsible for creating in the first place. The listener is left in no doubt at the end of the story that the priest, although a necessary part of life was not to be trusted. That any story which has a priest as one of the characters immediately portrays him as 'the wicked wolf' makes it very clear about the people's attitude towards the clergy: the priest like the landlord was a reality in the day-to-day life of the peasants, but they didn't have to like him. In fact, every chance they got, the peasants showed the priest up for what they believed him to be - yet another member of the rich upper class who had complete power over the poor.

## CHAPTER 6

### JESUS AND SAINT PETER FOLKTALES

#### **Introduction**

Jesus and Saint Peter stories were a common part of a Calabrian storyteller's repertoire and they can be found in most collections of folktales taken from the oral tradition of the region. Calabria appears to have an especially rich tradition of these folktales as they are part of the Di Francia collection which presents three Jesus and Saint Peter stories in a similar style to those in this chapter. They follow each other as episodes in a day in the life of Jesus and his Apostles as they journey from town to town. Two of the stories are variants of the first two stories in this chapter. Another of Di Francia's folktales, *Jesus, Saint Peter and the Poor Man* is a longer story which is told separately as is the story of *Saint Peter's Mother*. This last story is also part of Mrs Speranza's collection and although Jesus and Saint Peter are mentioned at the beginning, the story centres on Peter's mother.

Di Francia notes that in these legendary tales, two characters are drawn distinctly and colourfully:

Jesus and Saint Peter; one is mild, smiling, good-natured, often discerning and quick-witted, who roams about the world bestowing graces and rewarding good and evil with perfect justice; the other, a bit egotistical, selfish and annoying, lazy and argumentative, who feels the need to contradict and criticize foolishly, everything he hears said or sees done by his Teacher, incapable of penetrating with his narrow and limited mind the imponderable mysteries of the divine justice and the wide horizons opened by Jesus, with deeds and with words.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Di Francia, (Part 3), p 138. Translated from Italian by Grace Nolan: "Gesù e S. Pietro; L'uno mite, sorridente, bonario, non di rado fine e arguto, che trascorre per il mondo, dispensando grazie e ricompensando con perfetta giustizia il bene ed il male; l'altro un po' egoista, interessato e petulante, poltrone e cavillatore, che sente il bisogno di contraddire e criticare stoltamente tutto quello che ode dire o vede fare al suo Maestro, incapace di penetrare con la sua mente angusta e ristretta nei misteri inescogitabili della divina giustizia e negli ampi orizzonti aperti da Gesù, con gli atti e con le parole."

These stories which related incidents in the lives of Jesus and Saint Peter are many and varied throughout Italy and are popular from as far north as Friuli to Sicily in the extreme south. Calvino notes:

The cycle of popular legends about Jesus and the Apostles who go about the world is common throughout Italy, and almost always these short narratives pivot around Peter, with whom the people are on very familiar terms. Popular tradition makes of Peter a lazy man, glutton, and liar, whose elementary logic is always contrary to the faith preached by the Lord.<sup>2</sup>

Calvino presents two groups of Jesus and Saint Peter stories. The first set entitled *Jesus and Saint Peter in Friuli*,<sup>3</sup> includes four separate stories, none of which appears in either Mrs Speranza's or the Di Francia collection. All the stories were originally told in the Friulian dialect of Northern Italy and were collected in the mid eighteenth hundreds by Caterina Percoto and early nineteenth hundreds by Gortani and Zorzut. Calvino's second group of four stories is entitled *Jesus and Saint Peter in Sicily*<sup>4</sup> and these are taken from the eighteenth hundreds collection of Giuseppe Pitre which was originally in Sicilian dialect. Each individual story has been given its own title, one of which is a variant of *Jesus, Saint Peter and the Rock* which appears in both Mrs Speranza's and the Di Francia collections. Sacca` in his collection which is presented as part of De Gubernatis' *Rivista Delle Tradizioni Popolari Italiane*<sup>5</sup> also has a version of this particular story and Pasquale Rossi in his "Rumanze" also makes reference to it.<sup>6</sup> Pio Mazzucchi's collection in his work, *Tradizioni dell' Alto Polesine* contains a variant of *Jesus Saint Peter and the Pumpkin*<sup>7</sup> which is part of Mrs Speranza's repertoire.

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<sup>2</sup> Calvino, p 724.

<sup>3</sup> Calvino, p121.

<sup>4</sup> Calvino, p 594.

<sup>5</sup> V. Sacca` (nd) in *Rivista delle Tradizioni Popolari Italiane*, A. de Gubernatis [ed], Bologna, pp 510-511.

<sup>6</sup> Rossi, p 71.

<sup>7</sup> Pio Mazzucchi (1912) *Tradizioni dell' Alto Polesine*, Bologna, Arnaldo Forni Editore, p 24.

Di Francia argues that the Jesus and Saint Peter stories are so prolific that one need only open any collection of legends, Italian or foreign, to find examples of them and he notes two French collections one by Blade` and the other by Vinson which also feature Jesus and Saint Peter in their daily travels. Di Francia makes further reference to other notable Italian collections such as those of Finamore, Castelli, De Nino, Ferraro as well as the Pitre` and Sacca` mentioned above.<sup>8</sup> One Jesus and Saint Peter story is also part of the Raffaele Lombardi Satriani collection entitled '*U Vijanu* which means *The Farmer*.<sup>9</sup> Two Jesus and Saint Peter stories are also found in the Grimms' collection, *Gambling Hans*<sup>10</sup> and *The Rejuvenated Little Old Man*.<sup>11</sup>

In these folktales there are undertones of the Apocryphal Gospels which contain many stories about Jesus and the Apostles in commonplace situations very like the stories in this chapter. In the Apochrypha, Jesus and the Apostles are portrayed as a friendly group, participating in casual conversations. They are in many ways an ordinary group of travellers except that they have miraculous events attributed to them. Peter Lum also recognises the part Christianity has played in Italian folktales when he notes: "everywhere the influence of Christianity is felt, even in tales which echo a time before Christ. Christ himself and his disciples often appear in stories in a most informal way."<sup>12</sup> They illustrate not so much the pagan and Christian strands coming together as the Christian and secular, or sacred and profane, where we see Jesus associated with a string of sausages or performing a

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<sup>8</sup> Di Francia, (Part 3) p 138.

<sup>9</sup> R. Lombardi Satriani, Vol. xi, p74. The entire Raffaele Lombardi Satriani collection could not be accessed and therefore it may contain other Jesus and Saint Peter stories.

<sup>10</sup> J. and W. Grimm, *The Complete Fairy Tales of the Brothers Grimm*, p 300.

<sup>11</sup> J. and W. Grimm, *The Complete Fairy Tales of the Brothers Grimm*, p 502.

<sup>12</sup> Peter Lum (1972) *Italian fairy Tales*, London: Frederick Muller, p 8.

'miracle' with a pumpkin and in all sorts of every-day situations which reflected the lives of the ordinary people.

It is interesting that each collection of the Jesus and Saint Peter stories follows this same pattern of three or more stories grouped together and told one following the other. Although they are actually separate stories they are always presented in this style. The order can vary but they are always told in the way we might treat a book containing affectionate anecdotes about the life of a famous person. Di Francia notes:

The life and deeds of Jesus, in His brief but illustrious earthly drama, have left in the memory and in the tradition of diverse peoples indelible traces, nourished and rekindled continuously by the Gospels, be they genuine or apocryphal, and in general by the whole collection of sacred Scriptures. Beside these, there blossoms and lives, more often than not embellished or distorted by the imagination of the common people, an epic which is handed down orally from one generation to the next and spreads widely in the lowest levels of the common people, in every language and dialect.<sup>13</sup>

Antonino Basile believes that the Apocryphal Gospels have influenced the traditions and folklore of Calabria as well as other Regions of Italy. He questions which may have come first and concludes that the oral tradition and the Apocryphal Gospels influenced each other - what started as a story passed on by word of mouth was then written down and returned to the people who added their own creative imaginations to change or embellish it. The same is possible for other stories and songs which began in written form and were told to the ordinary people, most of

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<sup>13</sup> Di Francia, (part 3), p 138. Translated from Italian by Grace Nolan: "La vita e i fatti di Gesu', nel suo breve, ma luminoso dramma terreno, hanno lasciato nella memoria e nella tradizione dei diversi popoli tracce indelebili e profonde, alimentate e ravvivate continuamente dagli evangelii, sia genuini che apocrifi, ed in generale da tutto il complesso delle sacre Scritture. Accanto a queste fiorisce e vive, piu' o meno abbellita o deformata dalla fantasia popolare, tutta

whom were illiterate, and who retold them, adding their own details or removing anything which they could not relate to. Basile refers specifically to the Apocryphal Gospels and the countless tales concerning Jesus, Mary and Saint Joseph when he asks questions about the origins of these stories which form such a large part of the oral tradition of Southern Italy:

Now there presents itself the problem of the origin of the songs and stories that find their echo in the Apocryphal Gospels. Is it a matter of direct derivation or not? Are the Apocryphal narratives the font from which folklore originates?<sup>14</sup>

The questions which Basile asks are the same ones raised by folklorists all over the world about the origins of particular folktales: did the folktales begin in the oral tradition or was there a written source? Did one influence the other and if so which one came first? Many scholars would argue that the oral tradition preceded most folktales. Basile believes that “the Apocryphal Gospels are part of the same folk traditions, that part which at first lived in oral folklore, then found its place in the various texts set down by the writers.”<sup>15</sup> Basile further argues that the Apocryphal Gospels were:

a late work (none of them seems prior to the second century) these Apocrypha were not written with heretical intent but with the purpose of satisfying, with imaginative stories - at times conflicting with the true evangelical spirit - the curiosity of the common people. Of these gospels there remains not fragments, but entire compilations, sometimes in many languages.<sup>16</sup>

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un'epopea che si tramanda oralmente da una generazione all'altra e circola ampiamente nei piu` bassi strati dei volghi, in ogni lingua e dialetto.”

<sup>14</sup> Antonino Basile, [ed] *Folklore della Calabria*, (Vol i), Palmi: Societa` di Etnografia e Folklore, p 305. Translated from Italian by Grace Nolan: “Ora ci si presenta il problema della derivazione dei canti e delle storielle che trovano la eco nei Vangeli Apocrifi. Si tratta di derivazione diretto o no? Rappresentano, le narrazioni degli apocrifi, la fonte da cui e` derivato il folklore?”

<sup>15</sup> Basile, (Vol. i), p 305. Translated from Italian by Grace Nolan: “I Vangeli Apocrifi sono una parte della tradizioni popolari stesse, quella parte che dapprima viva nel folklore orale, trovo` poi la sua sistemazione nei vari testi ad opera degli scrittori.”

<sup>16</sup> Basile, (Vol i), p 287. Translated from Italian by Grace Nolan: “Opera tarda (nessuno di essi sembra anteriore al II secolo) questi apocrifi (Continued next page)

Basile's point that these stories were not intended to be heretical is a very valid one when we consider the strong faith of the people who told them and held the stories dear enough to pass them on to their children, just as Mrs Speranza and her father did. Never for one moment did they believe these stories to be anything other than completely genuine and true. The stories, particularly those about Jesus and Saint Peter, were enjoyed because of their humour and earthiness and were told with affection for Peter and love of Jesus. To know this for certain, the stories must be examined in their original dialect form which is often not available as most of the collections are presented in Standard Italian with small references either left out or lost in the translation. For example, "U Signuruzzu" of the dialect versions, which is a term of endearment meaning "Our dear Lord", "Dear Jesus," or "The sweet Lord", is replaced in Standard Italian with "Gesù" or "Il Signore" simply, "Jesus" or "The Lord." These small alterations at first seem insignificant but they change the atmosphere and flavour of the story and the warm relationship created between the characters, the teller and listeners. Quite often the translations sound flat and colourless and the humour has not been successfully captured because the unique idioms and turns of phrase which are part of each dialect have not fared well in translation. This is not simply the fault of the translator but a problem with the language itself. Many stories are left dull and lifeless when their original dialect form, with its vitality and vivid expressions, is stripped away.

The peasants listened to these stories and told them with a mixture of delight and reverence. The lessons they taught were nothing short of religious education to the illiterate population who savoured every word and revelled in Saint Peter's antics.

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non furono scritti con intenti ereticali ma con lo scopo di soddisfare, con fantasiosi racconti – a volte in contrasto col vero spirito evangelico – la curiosità dei volghi Cristiani. Di questi vangeli ci rimangono non frammenti, ma redazioni intere, a volte in più lingue."

Peter represents “Everyman”<sup>17</sup> and the ordinary people related to his doubts and questions. They understood his greed and deceit and his elusive search for the easy way out. Lüthi notes that the Jesus and Saint Peter stories, which he calls “farcical religious fairytales”<sup>18</sup> demonstrate the clever use of “scene management and manipulation.”<sup>19</sup> This is achieved through irony as the opposite of what is intended by Peter occurs as he constantly tries to manipulate the situation to his own advantage. This in turn leads to “a lot of high spirits and mischievousness”<sup>20</sup> which is an integral part of these stories. Both he and Jesus are painted as lovable characters with the added dimension that Jesus was God and Peter was a saint. These are two of the reasons for the popularity of these stories but just as important, they were also enjoyable and had valuable lessons to teach.

A variant of *Jesus Saint Peter and the Pumpkin* can be found in Gwenda Davey’s thesis on *Folklore and the Enculturation of Young Immigrant Children in Melbourne*. In this case it is a Serbo-Croatian story with “Religion” and “The Wise and the Foolish” listed as its main motifs.<sup>21</sup> Although Jesus and Saint Peter do not appear in it, the idea is the same and the pear tree also appears in the Mazzucchi collection instead of the olive tree which is in the Palmi version. This is evidence of small changes to the stories to accommodate cultural and geographic differences as the stories travelled around Europe and sometimes beyond. The olive tree was an

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<sup>17</sup> P. Wrightson, p 5.

<sup>18</sup> Lüthi, *The Fairytale as Artform*, p 132.

<sup>19</sup> Lüthi, *The Fairytale as Artform*, p 132.

<sup>20</sup> Lüthi, *The Fairytale as Artform*, p 132.

<sup>21</sup> *The Man and the Pear Tree*:

“A man was lying under a pear tree, and was thinking aloud “Why should God have given such a big tree such small fruit when a pumpkin which is such a big fruit, grows on the ground? At that moment a pear dropped on his head, and he quickly thanked God that God was wiser than men.”

Gwenda Davey, (1982) *Folklore and the Enculturation of Young Immigrant Children in Melbourne*, Unpublished M. Ed thesis: Monash University.



important part of life in Calabria whereas in the other stories the pear tree obviously had more significance.

The Jesus and Saint Peter stories in this chapter are presented together as they were never told separately. Although they are four individual stories, they belong together as a series. They may sometimes have been referred to individually if an incident occurred during the day which would remind someone of one of the stories. However, if they were actually told they would always be told as a set.

### **(8) JESUS, SAINT PETER AND THE LAZY MAN**

Once when there weren't so many sins as there are now, Jesus used to walk on foot with all the twelve apostles. As they walked along, there was a man who was sleeping with his feet in the water and our dear Lord asked him, "Could you show us where this road leads to?"

"Ah," said the man, "if I had my head where my feet are, I would have had a drink because I'm parched from thirst and I can't even be bothered turning my head around to drink, as if I can get up to show you the way." And he didn't get up. It wasn't that our dear Lord didn't know the way, but to assure himself of how lazy that man was, he put that question to him.

So, walking further along, he arrived at a house and knocked and a woman came out with her sleeves rolled up and wearing an apron, very busy-looking because she was making bread. The Lord said to her, "Could you show us where this road leads to?"

This woman leaves the bread, leaves everything and goes with The Lord and the twelve apostles to show them where that road leads. After she was satisfied that she had shown them the road, she returned to her house to finish the bread and these ones continued to walk on their way.

The Lord turned to Saint Peter and said, "Peter, did you see the man who was lying with his feet in the water? He is to be this woman's husband. Saint Peter said to Him, "And why do you do this?"

The Lord replied to him and said, "If they are both lazy, they will starve to death and so it must be like this," our dear Lord said to him.

### **(9) JESUS, SAINT PETER AND THE ROCK**

Well as they walked, Saint Peter was more cunning, more sneaky than the others but The Lord knew what Saint Peter was up to. So much so, that one time as they were walking, they had to cross a river and to climb up a hill. On the way, Jesus said to all of the twelve apostles,

"When we reach that hill we'll all rest. Take a rock each and carry it up and when we get to the level ground we'll sit down.

All the others heaved onto their shoulders a huge rock, bigger than they could carry. Saint Peter gets a little pebble and puts it into his hands. When they reached the flat ground, our dear Lord made everyone sit down, He took those rocks and blessed them. Those rocks became bread. For Saint Peter that one became bread, that tiny one he had in his hands. He said, "Teacher, and only this for me?"

"Well," said The Lord, "That's the stone you brought up in your hands. You can eat that because that is enough for you."

Saint Peter thought he could know more than The Lord, instead it wasn't true. The others had so much bread that they couldn't finish it, but Saint Peter ate that little mouthful that he had and he kept quiet.

### (10) JESUS, SAINT PETER AND THE STRING OF SAUSAGES

Well as they were walking, Saint Peter always wanted to do silly things, much sillier than all the other twelve apostles. Well as they were walking along the road there was a place where a butcher had sausages hung up. Saint Peter went and took a string of them. The Lord saw that he had those sausages and said to him, "Peter, where did you get those sausages?" He said to Him, "Teacher, you know I got these sausages, I saw them on the ground and I picked them up..."<sup>22</sup>

"Well then," The Lord said to him, "Now you can call out and say, "Who lost a string of sausages? Who lost a string of sausages? because whoever lost them will come and get them."

Saint Peter instead knew that he had stolen them. Saint Peter was calling out and going, "Who has lost a string," and then very, very quietly, "of sausages?" so that no one could hear him. The Lord was saying to him, "Again Peter, shout out louder," and he would do the same thing: "Who has lost a string - of sausages?" he would whisper and it couldn't be understood what they had lost, because he didn't want to give them back. Well no one came - these delicious little sausages were eaten by Saint Peter.

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<sup>22</sup> Here the teller's voice trails off in imitation of the way Peter is speaking to Jesus. The voice doesn't come down as it would normally do at the end of a sentence to punctuate it, that is, to complete the statement, instead it remains high, which has the effect of leaving the listener to fill in the gaps. This technique of using the voice to continue a sentence even though the words have finished, implies that it is obvious what happened after that, so there is no need to mention all the petty details. For example, Peter begins his explanation to Jesus and ends half way through it for two main reasons. The first one is that they are simply boring details and don't need to be spelled out. The second is that in this case Peter is lying, so instead of incriminating himself too much he begins painting the picture of what happened and leaves Jesus to use His own imagination about the rest. Peter's tone implies: "You know how it is, so I don't need to say anymore, do I?"

**(11) JESUS, SAINT PETER AND THE PUMPKIN**

And so they walked on in this way following The Lord. The Lord knew that Saint Peter was curious about everything. And so walking along, they arrived at a spot where there was an olive tree. Jesus said, "Shall we rest for a bit?" Saint Peter and all the others said, "Yes, let's sit down here," and they sat under that olive tree. Every so often a little olive would fall and land on Saint Peter's head. Saint Peter said to The Lord, "Oh Teacher," he said, "what stupid things you have made. This tree that's so big makes this fruit that is so tiny."

Well they brushed themselves down and walking on again they arrived at a place where there was a vine. The Lord said, "Peter, we'd better rest under this shade because we're tired." It was a pergola that had a pumpkin vine growing on it with pumpkins as big as watermelons. Saint Peter sat down. When He thought it was the right moment, Jesus causes one of the pumpkins to detach itself and makes it fall on Saint Peter's head.

"Oh Teacher," said Saint Peter, "what have you done? On this high place you make grow these things that are so heavy! Everything you make is wrong!"

The Lord said to him, "Peter, do you remember when you said to me about the olive tree that such a great big tree made that tiny little fruit? If a pumpkin fell on you from up there, wouldn't it kill you? Well then, heavy things must be close to the ground. I know what I'm doing."

Dear Jesus, seeing that Saint Peter was so ingenuous and so much wanting to put himself above The Lord, He consigned to him The Keys of Heaven and said to him, "You are the best of all the twelve apostles."

## COMMENTARY

The Jesus and Peter stories show a relaxed and friendly relationship between the two main characters. Each story serves to teach something about life. The stories can be told in any order: in the taped version of Mrs Speranza's stories, Jesus ends up giving Peter the Keys of Heaven after the incident with the sausages, although the way they are presented here is the usual sequence. While they can also be told individually, the stories are regarded as a day in the life of Jesus and His apostles as they travelled along the road. They can be seen as episodes or adventures in the life of Jesus and His apostles.

Walking is mentioned constantly and the same technique is used as in the other folktales: "Caminandu, caminandu" giving these stories a similar folktale quality. "Can you show us the way," "ndi mostrati aundi vai sta strata?" literally means, "Can you show us where this road goes to?" and the image of Christ and His followers walking, also identifies Him closely with the life of the impoverished Calabrians, who relied on walking as their means of transport. The opening formula: "Once when there weren't so many sins as there are now, Jesus used to walk on foot with all the twelve apostles," is also very much in keeping with the folktale genre. This introduction to the stories serves to separate them from the everyday world of teller and listener. It gives the impression that a long time has passed because the world then was a very different place - a place where Jesus was still able to walk around among people because men and women weren't as sinful as they are now. This type of opening sentence is a storytelling technique which is used to create a distance between the past and the present and, because the characters in the stories are historical figures, this formula adds to the atmosphere of authenticity.

Similar opening formulas are used in some of the other collections. For example, the Di Francia collection of Jesus and Saint Peter stories begins with, “When the Lord walked around the world with the twelve Apostles.”<sup>23</sup> The Grimms’ story called *The Rejuvenated Little Old Man* begins with the sentence, “At the time when our Lord still walked on the earth, he stopped with Saint Peter one evening at the house of a blacksmith and received lodging for the night.”<sup>24</sup> Another story from the Grimms’ collection called *The Ear of Corn*, although not a Jesus and Saint Peter story, begins in a similar way: “In olden days when God himself still walked upon the earth, the soil was much more fruitful than it is now.”<sup>25</sup>

The first story in this chapter serves to teach about marriage and God’s role in the matching of couples. Peter’s question: “E pecchi` faciti cusi`,” “Why do you do this?” meaning, ‘why do you organise things in this way?’ is a query about the apparent puzzle of mismatched couples and Jesus’ answer reaffirms the community’s belief that marriages are predestined and that there is a good reason for the way people are partnered. As with *The Story of the Graces* it also reinforces the belief that each person must be happy with his lot as it has been decided for him by God. In the life of the ordinary people, the institution of marriage was unquestioned and the community functioned as a tight and often interrelated unit to make separation, let alone divorce, totally unacceptable. The story teaches that although one partner may seem to have an unfair deal, in the greater scheme of things it is all for the best and God has already sorted things out.

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<sup>23</sup> Di Francia, (Part 3), “Quando lu Signuri caminava pe lu mundu, cu i dudici Apostuli,” in *Lu Signuri e San Petru*, p 135.

<sup>24</sup> J. and W. Grimm, *The Complete Fairy Tales of the Brothers Grimm*, p 502.

<sup>25</sup> J. and W. Grimm, *The Complete Fairy Tales of the Brothers Grimm*, p 614.



The example of the man being too lazy to drink is an excellent one as it highlights the extent of his laziness. Water was very precious and was usually carried to the fields in earthen jugs. There was never enough to last the day and most workers experienced great thirst. Mrs Speranza's husband always spoke of the immense thirst which was even worse than the hunger the field workers had to endure daily as there were no containers or spare bottles in which to take water to work. There was usually one "cortara" "earthen-ware jug" and one of the children was usually sent to fill it and bring it back to the men. The well was a good twenty minute walk away so that by the time the child brought the water back and each man had a drink out of the jug it was time to go for another trip. The men's thirst was never quenched because they were doing hard physical labour from dawn till dusk and there was never more than a small drink to go round. The location of a tap was known throughout the district as it was of great importance; so, in this story, when the man is too lazy to turn his head around in a place where he has a never-ending supply of water and prefers to be, "parched from thirst," the full extent of his laziness is revealed.

The woman is shown to be the complete opposite. She leaves her bread-making which is known as a thing of "finutu," "a thing of finishing," to help the travellers. In other words, bread was something you did not leave for a moment as it could be ruined and was far too precious to risk. Bread-making was a task that was done from start to finish without other distractions as it was too important to run the risk of losing the precious little supply of flour and yeast. Bread and water are the symbols by which this 'parable' teaches its message to people who understood how vital these two things are as essential requirements for life.

The story also teaches about the importance of hospitality towards strangers. Like the Irish law of hospitality which required everyone to provide assistance when called upon, the Southern Italian peasants also abided by an unwritten law which required them to help anyone in need, including strangers. The man in the first story did not give assistance when it was required. This attitude was frowned upon by the poor who relied on each other for survival. It was regarded as a matter of duty to help others as you might one day need support which would otherwise not be given.

Zanconato notes:

Together with many shortcomings, there are, however, in the Southern Italian culture many customs and traditions which are deeply warm and richly human, like the virtue of hospitality or the earnestness with which people help and support one another.<sup>26</sup>

Mrs Speranza remembers one incident when she was a young girl and was trying to transport a heavy bundle of kindling and couldn't manage to lift it onto her head because of its weight. (Carrying loads on the head was the usual method of transporting heavy objects) A woman stopped and helped her lift and balance the load and Mrs Speranza thanked her gratefully. The woman replied, "E` doveri," "It's my duty". Mrs Speranza said, "No it wasn't your duty." "Yes," she said, "because you couldn't lift it on your own and you would have had to remain here." In other words, the woman didn't regard it as an act of charity but of necessity. These simple actions were, for the poor, basic elements of survival. The man in this first story is shown not only as lazy but inhospitable as well which made him a complete good-for-nothing. The woman left her breadmaking without a second thought to help the strangers. This was regarded as more than kindness - it was an obligation or duty placed on the person who had been asked for help and her behaviour is strongly reinforced in this

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<sup>26</sup> Zanconato, p16.

story. The poor knew they could not rely on the rich. They had to be able to rely on each other as a 'charitable' act in times of dire need could be the difference between life and death.

In these stories it becomes obvious that it is Peter who is Jesus' closest companion as they talk in a familiar tone and Jesus directs questions and converses constantly with Peter whom He regards as, "the best out of all the apostles," none of the rest of whom are ever named. It is important to note that Peter, for all his boldness, always addresses Jesus in the polite form, indicating that while they are companions, he defers to Jesus and they are not peers. Peter's sly nature comes to the fore in, 'Jesus, Peter and the Rock' but instead of being upbraided for this, the words, "furbu" and "malizziusu" used to describe him are actually praising this quality: in the dialect they mean, "not taken in easily" and "wise to the ways of the world." So that on the one hand Peter is looked on with approval because of these traits and on the other, Jesus rebukes him with the dismissive, "You'll have to make do with that," for trying to be too clever.

Each story is told with humour and is meant to be fun as well as instructional as seen in *Jesus, Peter and the String of Sausages*, in which the "silly things" that Peter liked to do, could be translated as, "stupid things," or "playing pranks," which is what Saint Peter is known for by the audience. Everything about these stories leaves the listener with a great affection for the two characters and a sense of being part of the friendship.

Meat and sausages hanging up beside the road were a common sight and Jesus' response to seeing the sausages in Peter's hand is far more humorous than the translation allows. Jesus literally says, "Peter, and you those sausages?" which is said in a tone of bemusement, nor does the written version give justice to Peter's reply which trails off as he covers up the real story. When Jesus tells Peter to "vandia" or "spruke," this is a common word in the dialect - as well as a common occurrence - used to describe calling out, similar to what a town crier would do to let something be known, or what people selling wares would do to attract attention and give information about their products.

A "string of sausages" in the dialect is literally called a "rope of sausages" and therefore makes more sense when Peter calls out, "To who has lost a rope," which would have been valuable in itself though nothing like what was actually lost. Peter constantly tries to hoodwink Jesus and the point is repeatedly made that this deception is impossible as nothing can be hidden from Him. In this rendition, the teller says, "Saint Peter knew that he had stolen them," this being the reason he wasn't very keen to call anything out, but more often, the story is told with the words, "Jesus knew that Saint Peter had stolen them," which gives greater emphasis to the point that Jesus is aware of all that goes on.

More than anything else, it is the verbal telling of this story which creates the enjoyment and makes it the funniest of all the Jesus and Peter stories: the shouting, juxtaposed with the whisper and the knowledge that Peter is being very cunning all add to the humour and the aural appeal.

The word “satizzeddi,” means “little sausages” but also means, “dear, lovable, delectable, little sausages,” as they would have been a delicious luxury and the people hearing this story would have relished the fact that Saint Peter didn’t have to return them and ended up eating them himself. Peter represents the ordinary man and the common people would have strongly related to him.

The fact that he outsmarted everyone would have been applauded by all and even Jesus reveals that Peter is His favourite and tells him that he is the best of all the twelve. This reinforces the notion that to outwit others, even dishonestly, was a quality to be praised as Jesus hands over the Keys of Heaven; literally consigns the keys to Peter’s safe-keeping after the sausages story, in the taped version, emphasising that Jesus loved him all the more for his slyness. He is actually called, “scartu,” meaning “intelligent” or “smart,” in one version as Jesus notices how “scartu” Peter is and confers on him the highest honour.

Peter has an inquiring mind; he always questions Jesus and is not afraid to challenge Him. He doesn’t automatically go along with what all the others do and because of this, sometimes he wins and sometimes he loses but Jesus loves the fact that he is “ingenuous,” or “open” and doesn’t hide anything yet, ironically, Peter steals the sausages and tries to get away with the pebble instead of the rock Jesus asks him to carry. This is another clear example of the Christian and pagan values co-existing in the culture: on the one hand, following Jesus and doing what He asks is important as seen in *Jesus, Saint Peter and the Rock* but on the other hand it is Peter that Jesus loves more than the others, the open, inquisitive Peter but also the

cunning, deceitful Peter who ends up eating the sausages and having the Keys of Heaven consigned to his safe-keeping.

These stories illustrate more than any other folktales the qualities which the peasants prized above all else. It is through Peter and his antics that we come to know what characteristics according to the people of Palmi, God most loves, because after all, Jesus gives the keys of Heaven to Peter and not to one of the other Apostles. Peter is portrayed as the lovable rogue. He is alert and inquisitive and is not intimidated by authority of any kind. He obeys Jesus - if Jesus keeps a close eye on him but gets away with whatever he can. The peasants considered this very smart behaviour. The idea of conscience does not enter into their way of thinking.

Zanconato, in his work on Southern Italian Culture argues that Southern Italians believe in a “magical religion” which is bound up in a mixture of Christian worship and pagan rites. In this type of religion “people do not incur moral punishment, but simply misadventure or revenge. Individual people are deprived of any inner moral strength and therefore they need to be controlled from the outside.”<sup>27</sup> What we might call Peter’s dishonesty and deceitfulness the peasants would have seen in a completely different light: it was no more than they would do themselves given the same opportunities. In fact, they would have considered it foolish for Peter to return the sausages to their rightful owner, remembering that Peter represented the peasant or ‘poor man’ to the country people who cherished

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<sup>27</sup> Zanconato, p 11.

these stories. The assumption was that the owner of the sausages was rich compared to Peter and therefore didn't need them as much as he did.

The peasants were the ones who 'owned' the stories. Peter represented them. All his faults and qualities were their faults and qualities so in their stories of course Jesus was going to love Peter best of all and there was no question that Peter who represented them should be given the Keys of Heaven. According to themselves, they were much smarter than the landlords, the solicitors, the doctors and any other figures of authority. Their cunning was such that no one could put one over on them: many stories in the Raffaele Lombardi Satriani collection show the peasant outwitting God himself. It makes no difference whether this was just wishful thinking or what they really believed about themselves, the fact is that these folktales reveal the qualities which they deemed important - and Peter possessed all of them.

Again, in the final story the focus is on ordinary things like the olive tree and the pumpkin; things associated with the land which people knew very well. As in the first story they are used to illustrate that God knows what He's doing and there is a good reason for the way things are, even if it is not obvious to the ordinary man. This is reminiscent of the Grimms' story *Godfather Death*, in which the poor man, in search of a Godfather for his thirteenth child encounters "the good Lord who already knew what was on his mind." The poor man doesn't want God to be his child's Godfather and challenges Him in a similar way to Peter in the Jesus and Saint Peter Stories. He openly accuses God of injustice saying: "You give to the rich and let the poor go hungry." The narrator is quick to restore balance to the situation in the next sentence: "the man said that because he did not know how wisely God distributes

wealth and poverty.”<sup>28</sup> This is an example of what William Bascom calls the function of folklore<sup>29</sup> - that it maintains cultural stability by reinforcing the notion that people should be content with things as they are. It is particularly the case with the poor, such as the Calabrian peasants, who might feel like challenging the *status quo*.

The “pergola” in the story is a type of wooden frame with a vine or climbing plant growing on it which all country people would have had somewhere around their house or property. It was one of the everyday things that the people would have recognised and understood very well. To teach Peter and the listeners a lesson, Jesus causes a pumpkin to miraculously detach itself through His unspoken command. It comes from a man-made construction to make the point as Jesus says that the natural world has been created in such a way that heavy things grow only on the ground, making it very clear that people from these parts, even up until relatively recent times had never seen or heard of coconuts. There is no word in the dialect for this food.

In their stories are things that are important to the people; things that they understand and experience daily like bread and water, pumpkins, sausages and olives. Again, the concentration on food is evident, just as in the parables from the Bible, where Jesus talks to the Hebrews about yeast and mustard seeds and wheat and things that are part of an agrarian society in that part of the world and need no explanation. Through these simple things Jesus is able to make complex theological points.

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<sup>28</sup> J. and W. Grimm, *The Complete Fairy Tales of the Brothers Grimm*, pp 160 - 163.

<sup>29</sup> Bascom, “Four Functions of Folklore” in Dundes [ed], *The Study of Folklore*, p 298. (Refer also Chapter 2, p 30 of this thesis).



These Jesus and Peter stories which have been handed down through the generations, illustrate the way the country people of Palmi viewed the world. They epitomise everything that is important to them: their beliefs about God and Creation, their attitudes towards marriage, their concern with food, the types of vegetation that grew around them and the values they relied on for survival in a tight-knit community. Jesus is referred to alternately as, “U Signuri,” and “U Signuruzzu,” as mentioned earlier and these terms are used in the dialect to refer to either Jesus or God and there is no distinction between the two. (Interestingly, the shortened form “gnuri” means “landlord.”) This is evident when Peter, who is on familiar terms with Jesus, challenges Him with such questions as, “E pecchi` faciti cusi`?” literally meaning, “And why do you do this?” but the full meaning is “Why do you make things happen in such a way?” or “Why do you arrange or organise things in this way?” “Chi facistu?” “What have you done?” literally translates as, “What have you made?” and here Peter is not referring to the specific incident of the pumpkin falling on his head but to the ordering of creation in a way that would allow this to happen, for he goes on to qualify his question: “Tutti cosi storti faciti!” “You make everything in a stupid way!” confirming that in the beliefs of these people, Jesus the person and God the Creator are one and the same. The Grimms’ story *God’s Unequal Children* has Eve challenging God in a similar way when she exclaims, “Lord, how unequally you divide your blessings! They’re all my children, you know... . You should bestow your blessings on them equally.”<sup>30</sup> After God’s explanation, Eve is satisfied that things are as they should be and pleads “Oh, Lord, please forgive my rashness and interference.”

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<sup>30</sup> J. and W. Grimm, *The Complete Fairy Tales of the Brothers Grimm*, p 571.

Peter is never so openly contrite after Jesus' lessons. He is quietly put back into his place as Jesus remains serene and unflappable. The listener knows that it is not in Peter's nature to be contrite; like the genial, fun-loving, mischievous fellow Peter is painted to be in these stories, he is ready to challenge Jesus at the next opportunity. This is what the peasants loved about Peter - that he was able to do what was taboo for them: he could challenge the order of creation, the unfairness of life and all the other things they saw as travesties of justice in their situation. In reality the peasants would never have done such a thing. To question any aspect of Religion or the divine was regarded as sinful and blasphemous. Ordinary people would never openly challenge what they considered to be the workings of God. To do so would mean to risk the anger of God or one of the saints which could result in divine retribution. This is very much the pagan belief of honouring and respecting the gods to appease their capricious wrath. An element of fear was involved in their faith and worship, something that Peter, as their spokesperson, wasn't subject to. With a mixture of fun and daring, he was the champion of the peasant - who else was in a better position to hold the Keys of the Kingdom!

## CHAPTER 7

### INSTRUCTIONAL FOLKTALES

#### **Introduction**

Although the folktales in this chapter were chosen for their obvious instructional content, it must be emphasised that all the stories told by Mrs Speranza have elements of instruction. They range from the nature of existence as in *The Four Elements*, survival and the significance of work as in *The Cicada and the Ant*, the importance of family and of material wealth as in *The Two Brothers*, the need to be on guard against all those who are not relatives as illustrated in *The Widow and the Godfather* and the necessity of never being wasteful as *The Three Brigands* so colourfully emphasises.

None of the folktales are overtly didactic except for *The Four Elements*, relying instead on humour, farce and storyline to amuse and reinforce certain behaviour and moral standards. Not one of the folktales forces a particular message. Even *The Cicada and the Ant* leaves the listeners to make up their own minds about the moral. Although the narrative leads the audience along a certain path and uses occasional comments which show particular characters in a bad light, no folktale from this collection announces a moral at the end as is found in Perrault's tales and Aesop's fables.

Mrs Speranza is definite about the fact that her father never pointed out the lesson in a story or gave moral instruction using a folktale as an example as he told the story. He simply told the stories and enjoyed telling them and everyone enjoyed hearing them. Perhaps this was because it was obvious that there were things to be learnt from them so the lessons didn't need to be forced and, like the true folktales from the oral tradition, the listeners are left to make up their own minds about the message or the lesson to be learned from the story. The other and very important

reason for this is that it was part of the art of storytelling as the best storytellers draw the audience into the world of the story where they are then left to reach their own conclusions. This increases the impact of the narrative as it allows the listeners through their own perception and imagination to be involved in the story. This in turn means that it is then more likely to have a lasting effect on the listeners. In contrast, a poor storyteller would rather turn a story into stodgy fare which is difficult to stomach for the sake of driving home an all too obvious moral lesson.

During the course of the day if an incident occurred which brought to mind of one of the folktales, the story would be referred to at that appropriate moment. For example, if anyone was throwing out vegetable peels which might have had a bit of vegetable attached to them, Mrs Speranza's father would say "You're doing what the three brigands did who first threw away the leaves and afterwards ate them even though they had been pissed on." The children knew then that he was saying not to waste anything at all because there wasn't enough to go round to satisfy everyone's hunger just like in the story of *The Three Brigands*.

Not all folktales were long and involved. The shorter stories such as *The Three Brigands* and *The Three Friends* were no less important than the longer stories. Actually, they often tended to be the overtly instructional ones. In this chapter *The Four Elements*, is a good example of a brief tale which, although only a couple of lines long, contains more didactic content than all the other folktales in the collection because it reveals the peasants' view of the world.

Apart from the stories in this chapter, the other folktales, in one way or another were all instructional, either reinforcing particular views about the world or subtly teaching about acceptable behaviour. There is no doubt that all the stories entertain and are meant for this purpose, but often the subtext beneath this is also to

instruct. According to Sara Cone Bryant, “story-telling is first of all an art of entertainment; like the stage, its immediate purpose is the pleasure of the hearer, - his pleasure, not his instruction first.”<sup>1</sup>

Storytellers like Mrs Speranza and her father knew this instinctively. The stories they told were not overtly instructional but imparted wisdom with humour and entertainment. One of the main reasons they were so memorable was that the whole experience was wonderful fun for both the teller and the listeners.

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<sup>1</sup> Sara Cone Bryant (1934) *How To Tell Stories To Children*, London: Harrap, p 22.

**(12) THE FOUR ELEMENTS**

Christ created the four elements: Air, Water, Fire and Earth and He created one more powerful: He created Man and formed him out of earth.

### COMMENTARY

In a community which was for the most part illiterate, instructional stories such as this one, took the place of Bible readings. The teller regards this as a creation story, describing the Earth before Man and the fact that God created it all and that Man was His crowning glory. When questioned about Christ as the one to whom creation is attributed in this story, Mrs Speranza made it very clear that it made no difference whether you said Christ or God as they both meant the same thing but she settled on Christ for the telling of this story even though one time out of the three she started with, "God created." She said that when telling this story, her father always explained how the first four things are so important, "Quant'e` amata l'acqua," literally translated as, "How much water is loved" etc. meaning how highly valued they are and necessary, and that this was how the Earth was before people. Then men and women were created and made of earth and return to the earth when they die.

The grouping of the universe into four elements as shown in this story, was commonly accepted in ancient times right up to the Renaissance, as the way in which everything was ordered. As stated by Hollander and Kermode in *The Literature of Renaissance England*:

In ancient and medieval science, the four basic substances of which all matter was composed: earth, water, air, fire ... . All four elements, being material, are below the sphere of the moon (above, there is a fifth: the quintessence).<sup>2</sup>

Interestingly, the fifth element in this folktale is Man. To the people of Palmi, Man was regarded as the "quintessence" of Creation.

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<sup>2</sup> John Hollander and Frank Kermode (1973) *The Literature of Renaissance England*, New York: Oxford University Press, p 1051.

**(13) THE CICADA AND THE ANT**

The little ant works all summer to find her food for the winter. She goes underground, makes a little hole and carries everything she finds. The cicada instead does nothing. Her work is to sing. Well when the winter came, the cicada went to the ant to see if she would give her something to eat. The little ant said to her, "Vain one!" she said, "You set yourself up in a tree and sing to make everyone notice you. You sing so much that you burst and fall dead off the branch of the tree. Instead, I work all summer and I gather my food for the winter and I'm so tired because the load I carry weighs more than I do. Make do now with nothing! Go and work if you want to eat."



### COMMENTARY

This short instructional story, in the style of a fable, was well-known and referred to often in the country community of the town. When people were sitting round idly they'd say, "Facimu com'a cicala,"- "We're doing as the cicada did," or "Faciti com'a cicala chi bada sulu p'o cantari e poi vai cercandu se nci'unanu ncuna cosa," - "Are you to be like the cicada who only cares about singing and then goes asking if they'll give her something."

The two main characters, the cicada and the ant, were insects that the people of Palmi would have been completely familiar with as they were part of everyday life on a farm. The story illustrates many things but above all that life was hard and so were the people - they had to be to survive. It teaches that you must work even when the work is too hard or you don't feel like it. You must work to feed yourself as there will be no handouts. What the ant says to the cicada at the end leaves no room for doubt: "Go and work if you want to eat." A popular saying of Palmi also illustrates this attitude: "Cu no laura non mangia," "Whoever doesn't work, doesn't eat." Everyone was expected to do their share of the work; in Mrs Speranza words, "Appena potiva posar'i pedi nterra," "as soon as he could place his feet on the ground," meaning as soon as children could walk, they had to help with the work. She goes on to explain, "Pe` quant'era picciriddu u figghiolu, nc'er'o lauru picciulu" which means "For however little the child was, there was a small enough job for him."

In the country community of Palmi as with the other peasant communities of Southern Italy the concept of playtime for children didn't exist. The distinction between children and adults was not as clearly defined as it is in modern society. Along with the adults, they had to work and contribute to the family: they were all bound together as members belonging to one group, "each one according to his

role.”<sup>3</sup> Mrs Speranza’s husband, for example, was working in the fields at the age of six and by the age of nine was put in charge of the digging and of supervising the work of his younger brother. This lack of distinction between child and adult helps to explain why there were no separate stories for children. Just as everyone was included in the work, the singalongs, prayers, dancing and any other of the daily round of activities, so were they all part of the storytelling experience - children and adults alike.

In keeping with the fable genre, the story teaches the pre-Christian view of life: the law of the jungle - that you must be selfish to survive. When the ant in the story says, “Make do now,” the words, “arranciate ora,” literally mean to make do but they also mean, “It’s too bad for you now,” with a sting in it. The tone of the words when used in this way mean, “It’s your bad luck, you got what you deserve.” The ant’s actions seem very callous but it reinforces the point of not relying on the kindness or generosity of others as it can’t be relied on. The farmers always helped each other but they weren’t necessarily generous because they wanted to be charitable but because they would otherwise not be helped if they were in need. It’s called “doveri,” “duty.” It was a person’s duty to repay a kindness with a kindness. Gift-giving was regarded as an obligation placed on the one who received. A Calabrian proverb “Friendship lasts if a gift comes and goes”<sup>4</sup> which means that to maintain a friendship it is essential to reciprocate gifts. “Cannistru” literally a wicker basket was the container in which most things were carried and therefore exchanged as gifts; this referred to food, mostly fresh fruit or vegetables or whatever was available or in season.

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<sup>3</sup> Zanconato, p 23.

<sup>4</sup> Spezzano, p 71. Translated from dialect by Grace Nolan: “L’amicizia si manteni si ‘nu cannistru va ed unu veni.”

The ant is often called “fermiculedda” in the story, meaning “little ant” or “dear little ant” and she is the character who gets all the approval in the way the story is told. The cicada is never once given this form of endearment, instead she is regarded as lazy and vain because she spends the summer singing and wanting to be noticed. This also shows that activities other than manual labour were considered useless and time wasting. In this society there is no room for individual talents or pursuing what is in one’s nature to do - such as singing is for the cicada. None of that is taken into consideration. When faced with poverty and the prospect of starvation, there is no time for what would have been seen as pleasant pastimes. Everything else must be put aside in the battle for survival.

It was believed that cicadas actually burst out of their skins from singing themselves to death - a vain and foolish creature as far as the ant is concerned and there is certainly no sympathy for its plight at the end of the story. “You set yourself up in a tree to make everyone notice you,” says the ant - the words, “mi ti fai a ssentiri,” literally mean “to make yourself be heard” but also imply that the cicada’s activity is just a means of showing off. It’s not contributing anything of value.

This story illustrates so well the mindset of the people of Palmi: any occupation that didn’t require hard physical labour was worse than a waste of time. Even today the people of Mrs Speranza’s generation don’t regard office work or teaching, for example, as real work and plans of early retirement by the younger generation are looked on with suspicion because in the older generation’s view, God didn’t intend life to be like that. What these people knew best was how to work the land and this shaped their view of the world and the meaning of existence. They had no experience of anything else.

The story illustrates clearly the attitude to life and work of the people of Palmi but even more far-reaching than this, it explains the root of some of the problems caused by the migration experience of many Calabrians who went to countries such as Australia. They were coming straight out of this agrarian way of thinking and didn't understand and couldn't appreciate the different lifestyle of the new country. They saw the way of life as lazy and foolish because most people weren't involved in farming the land when there was so much available. They also believed that much about the lifestyle, particularly leisure activities, was a waste of time and of no importance even though to the Australians it was life, just like singing was for the cicada.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> A variant of *The Cicada and the Ant* can be found in Aesop's Fables, retold by Elizabeth Hardie entitled *The Ant and the Grasshopper* p 132, and in *Racconti Popolari Calabresi, Vol xi*, R. Lombardi Satriani, entitled 'A Parra 'I L'Animali, p 201.

**(14) THE WIDOW AND THE GODFATHER**

Once there was a woman whose husband had died and who had five children. Well, to feed these children what was she to do? She had many animals so she took them one at a time to the livestock market to sell them. In her house she had a man for support: it was the Cumpari. So this poor woman would seek advice from this man:

“Cumpari, tomorrow I’m going to the market to sell a calf so that I can buy something for these children.”

“All right Cummari, I’ll meet you there.”

So the Cumpari would turn up at the market and ask, “Cummari, how did it go today?”

“I sold the calf,” the Cummari would say to him.

“That’s good,” he would say to her.

He would walk a few steps further away, he would hide behind the bushes with his neckerchief in front of his face and he would steal the widow’s money.

When he went to visit her in the evening,

“Cummari, how did it go?”

“Cumpari, I sold the calf but my money was stolen.”

“Oh well, let’s look forward to the next time,” he would say to her.

When the next week came, this man would go on ahead. This woman would get another calf and go to the market. This man would meet her there, “Cummari, did you sell the calf?”

“Yes Cumpari, I sold it.”

“I’ll see you this evening,” he would say.

Then he'd very quickly walk ahead, he would go behind some bushes, as usual, he would use something to cover his face and he would take the widow's money.

When he went to visit that evening,

"Cummari, how are you? You seem unhappy."

"Cumpari, my money was stolen again."

"Oh well, let's think ahead to the next week," he would say to her again.

When the next week came, this lady would get another calf and go to the market. This man would turn up and meet her there,

"Cummari, did you sell it?"

"Yes Cumpari, I sold it."

When he decided it was safe, he would walk a few steps ahead, he would go to the same place, with his neckerchief in front of his face and he would steal her money again.

In the evening he would return to the house,

"Cummari, how did it go today?"

"Cumpari, my money is being stolen every time. I don't know what to do. I'm losing all my animals and my children are starving."

"Cummari, let's think ahead to the next time because the next time I'll give you a pistol and no one will take your money. When the man comes out to steal your money, you take out this pistol and shoot him."

This woman did the same thing that she did all the other times. The Cumpari came out and she took out the pistol, but the pistol didn't fire. So he stole her money again.

When he arrived at her house that evening,

“Cumhari?”<sup>6</sup>

“They took my money. They took my money again, Cumpari.”

“Oh Cumhari,” he said. “Who knows how you held it. You didn’t know how to hold it.”

This woman realised that something was wrong. She got a real gun and put it in her pocket.

When she went to the market again, she sold the other animal; this man met her there.

“Cumhari, did you sell it?”

“Yes Cumpari, I sold it.”

“I’ll see you this evening,” he said again to the Cumhari.

The Cumhari, poor thing, headed for home with this precious money in her apron. The Cumpari went again behind the bushes with that neckerchief in front of his face. He came out because he knew that the pistol was empty but he didn’t know that the Cumhari had the good one. He came out in front of her; the Cumhari took out the good pistol, shot him, then went up close to him and took the neckerchief away from his face and saw that it was the Cumpari on the ground. “Ah,” she said, “Cumpari, it was you each time who stole my money. You f...ed my money off me and you paid for it with your life .”

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<sup>6</sup> When the Cumpari simply says “Cumhari?” in a questioning tone it means, “What’s news?” or “Tell me how things went today?” or “What have you got to say for yourself?” This is common in conversation in Palmi among people who are on friendly terms with each other as it implies a certain relaxed familiarity.

### COMMENTARY

The titles “Cumhari” and “Cumhari,” are a form of address for which there is no satisfactory English equivalent and refer to a particular relationship between people. In Palmi it was a very popular term, the Cumhari being either the Best Man, the Godfather, or the sponsor of one of the children who had been especially chosen by the husband and wife as someone they wanted as a very close family friend, usually best friend. The two parties then address each other as “Cumhari,” for the male and “Cumhari” for the female. It was also used for neighbours and people who knew each other well. Despite this, they used the polite form to address each other, as in this story, denoting the distance between them, that is, that they were not related and so could never be on intimate terms with each other and should never try to be too close. The relationship usually begins with the birth of a child when a Godfather and Godmother are chosen and as Maraspini points out:

the choice is an invidious one, as the role of god-father creates a bond which is considered equal to blood-kinship. This link is not only between god-father and god-child, but between the god-father and the child's parents.<sup>7</sup>

The choosing of a Godfather also commonly appears in the Grimms' folktales which illustrates that this type of relationship was an important part of peasant society. This was not simply because of the exchange of gifts but because of the bond it created between the people involved.

However, any man who appeared to be a close family friend was particularly under suspicion as far as Calabrians were concerned and many jokes and stories were often told about the wiles of the Godfather and his designs on the “Cumhari,” the wife of the friend. A popular saying in Palmi was “U chiu` nemicu nt'a cas'e` u cumhari” - “The biggest enemy in the house is the Godfather” which meant that

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<sup>7</sup> Maraspini, p 19.



although he was not a blood relation he was regarded as one of the family but

because of this he was the one to be the most wary of. Maraspini comments:

The 'compare' is the only man who can visit the family informally and unannounced, even in the absence of the husband. It is a very close relationship, and inevitably, is somewhat suspect: on the one hand, there are ribald jokes current about the intimacy of 'compare' and 'commare'; on the other, a current use of 'compare' to mean 'accomplice, boon companion' implies a degree of intimacy with the child's parents.<sup>8</sup>

The Godfather became part of the household and supposedly a trusted friend but the problem with this was that Calabrians didn't believe in friendship. Many sayings and proverbs of the region teach to be always on guard against those you regard as friends because they are most likely to be your worst enemies. One common proverb is "Friends with everyone, faithful to no one"<sup>9</sup> meaning "Be friendly towards everyone but be trustworthy and loyal to no one." Another proverb which expresses similar sentiments is "Don't tell a friend everything because one day he will be your enemy."<sup>10</sup> One local expression, "Your best friend will betray you" was a constant reminder to all those who were in danger of letting down their guard. The thinking behind this was that trusted friends knew everything that went on in the family and could easily turn this to their own advantage if they wanted to steal anything or, as was more commonly expected, make sexual advances towards the wife or daughters. He was your closest friend and therefore could become or might already be your worst enemy.

For poor people, however, friendship with neighbours, for example, was considered a necessity rather than friendship: a closer definition would be "keeping

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<sup>8</sup> Maraspini, p 19.

<sup>9</sup> Translated by Grace Nolan from the dialect: "Amicu cu tutti, fidili cu nuddu."

This proverb is also found in Spezzano, *Proverbi Calabresi*, p 69 as "Amicu ccu` tutti, fidili cu` nullu." It is further recorded by Chiapparo in A. Basile [ed], *Folklore della Calabria*, (Vol. ii), "Amicu cu' tutti e fidili cu' nuju." p 178.

<sup>10</sup> Spezzano, p 70. Translated from dialect by Grace Nolan: "Nun diri all'amicu quantu saj ca` 'ngunu juornu nimicu l'avraj."

in good” as you never knew when you might need help from them. Maraspini argues that “the only intimate and close social relations which the villagers recognise are kinship ones”<sup>11</sup> therefore it was considered foolish not to be on your guard against all those who were not relatives. He further notes that:

Friendship is not accepted as a close tie. Wherever friendship goes beyond mere acquaintanceship, it is usually given another name: a friend is called ‘compare’ or ‘congiunto’ (which means relative) or by some other kinship or quasi-kinship term.<sup>12</sup>

*The Widow and the Godfather* teaches not to be too trusting or open as this will most certainly lead to deception and theft. One local saying recalled by Mrs Speranza illustrates this common attitude, “Cu vai dirittu campu affrittu”<sup>13</sup> “He who is honest lives in affliction” which means both physical poverty and emotional distress. If you wanted to get on in life, and avoid trouble and misfortune, according to the people of Palmi, honesty was not the direction to take. The story teaches both men and women to be suspicious of any man who is not a relative.

This story further comments on this relationship by exposing its true nature and holding it up to criticism. It has a sinister undertone with the unscrupulous character of the Godfather, yet it is told with a certain light-heartedness: the teller and the listener know what’s going on so they’re sharing the joke but they’re also sharing the serious side of it and are in possession of facts which the characters don’t have. They have seen inside these relationships and know how they work. The listener and teller tacitly agree that this is true. It’s like a knowing nod and wink between two parties who understand how these situations invariably turn out.

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<sup>11</sup> Maraspini, p 19.

<sup>12</sup> Maraspini, p 19.

<sup>13</sup> Also found in Spezzano, p 99. “Chi va derittu campu affrittu.”

Our sympathies are with the woman who is referred to as “poor thing,” which not only describes her impoverished state and therefore her vulnerability but also implies that she is naive in trusting the Godfather. The story imparts knowledge and wisdom to the innocent and also reinforces it to the knowing. The lesson to be learnt is: never allow the Godfather to be too close to the family as he is sure to abuse the position and ultimately betray you. The Godfather was, “In her house,” which translated literally sounds as though he was living with the widow but actually means, “He was part of the family,” and signifies his important position in relation to her family. The other lesson the story teaches is to be wary as you are bound to be hoodwinked by unscrupulous men if you are too trusting and that all men, given the right circumstances, will behave in this way. Furthermore, if this is the way your best friend is going to treat you, watch out for anyone else, especially if you are a woman on your own or a man entrusting your wife to the care of another man.

The fact that the widow needs to have a man for “fortezza,” which literally means, “strength,” in a protective role to look after her interests and give her guidance and advice, is very typical of the society of the time which didn’t allow women to have any independence. A woman alone was vulnerable, like the widow in the story who turns to the Godfather for advice only to be deceived on every occasion. When she says to the Godfather, “I don’t know what to do,” he shows no mercy or compassion that her children are starving. He has to give her something because she has asked him for help so he gives her something useless like an empty gun.

Justice wins out in the end when she manages to outsmart him after she wakes up to the fact that something is amiss. We feel no pity for the Godfather, as the suggestion is that he would have kept stealing from and deceiving the widow until she had nothing left. The relationship between Cumpari and Cumhari is the

focus of this story and the address is used constantly between the two main characters not only to add to the humour but to reinforce the point about the danger of such a relationship.

The story ends with a satisfying conclusion; 'You got what you deserved' as the widow implies. The actual words are, "Vui m'i futtistu i sordi," "You f---ed my money off me," in other words, "You robbed me," or "You tricked me out of my money." To be more polite, on the tape, the teller said, "Vui m'i fumastu i sordi." The literal meaning being, "The money went up in smoke," "fumu" meaning "smoke" but the actual meaning is, "You stole my money." The story is told with the coarser term because on all other occasions Mrs Speranza ended the story in this way. It gives a much punchier ending and would have been the most likely response of the widow under the circumstances and in that time and place.

**(15) THE TWO BROTHERS**

Once there was a mother and father and they had two sons and so these people as their inheritance for these sons were going to leave one a rooster and the other one a skein of string, because he was a shoemaker, and a needle. When their parents died the two brothers parted. The one who had the rooster said, "I'm going in search of having the most beautiful house that there is in the town. This is the grace that I ask for." The one with the string said, "I'm going in search of a feed of pasta as much as I can eat."

The one took the rooster and set out walking on his journey. When he arrived at a place, he saw a little light ahead and said, "If God gives me health, I must get to that house by this evening. When he arrived there, he knocked on the door and he said to those living there, "Could you give me lodging for tonight?" They said, "Yes." So this man went inside. Everyone went to bed and one of them climbed up onto the roof of the house. This man said to them, "Why so? What's he doing? Isn't he going to bed to sleep?" "No," they said, "because a star comes out early tomorrow morning and that way, we know what time it is because we have to get up to go to the fields." "Oh, how silly!" he said. "Go to bed everyone because I have something in this sack and when it's time, I'll call you to get up."

Well, he took out the rooster. The rooster after midnight begins crowing. Anyone who is familiar with it knows when it's two o'clock, when it's two thirty, when it's three - it's just like a watch. So, he said to them, "At what time do I need to call you?" After they had said to him "Call us at two, call us at three...,"<sup>14</sup> when he knew it was that time because the rooster had crowed, he called them to get up. "How wonderful!" one of them said. "We all slept last night and so then will you sell us this

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<sup>14</sup> The mention of two different times is used instead of saying "for example". The narrator is implying that this detail is not important, except for the fact that it was very early in the morning and they wanted to be called at a certain time.

thing?” The man said, “Yes.” They said to him, “We will buy it. What do you want?” He said, “I would like my haversack filled to the brim with gold marengoes.” Well, he took the haversack packed with gold marengoes, he went away and built himself the most beautiful house that there was in his home town - all from that rooster.

The other one with that skein of string and that needle set out walking on his journey to have himself a feed of pasta. Well, wherever he went to mend shoes no one had any pasta. He'd mend their shoes and continue on. He kept travelling to see if he could find someone who had a feed of pasta. The one who was rich knew that his brother had gone for a feed of pasta and that he was about to return to his town. The shoemaker was calling out, “Who wants to have their shoes mended? Who wants to have...? Who wants to...?” The rich one said to his servants, “Look out for a man who will be passing by,” he said to them. “Gather all the old shoes and put them here and prepare the cauldrons because this man is travelling to have a feed of pasta.”

Well, the rich one filled a wallet with money and he went out to the road where he knew his brother would be passing by. Just a little bit before his brother got there, he came out from behind the thorn bushes, threw the wallet on the ground so that as soon as his brother passed by, he could take it. When his brother got to the spot near where the wallet was, he said to himself, “Ah, now I want to close my eyes to see how blind people walk.” He closed his eyes and the wallet remained on the ground and he went past. His brother came out and took his wallet back again. “Can you believe it!”<sup>15</sup> he said, “What a dick of a brother! Look at what a cretin he is! So stupid,” he says, “that he walks with his eyes closed! He didn't want to get rich.” He took the wallet and left.

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<sup>15</sup> The word is literally “But” used as an exclamation in an exasperated tone which can mean “Who would credit it!” or “Goodness gracious!”

When he arrived back in town his brother was calling out, "Who wants their shoes mended? Who wants...?" The servants knew who he was. One looked out over the balcony and called him saying, "Come here because there is work for you today." When he arrived there and saw all those shoes!<sup>16</sup> He didn't recognise that the other one was his brother but his rich brother recognised him, the one who was still travelling for the pasta.

When he had finished the shoes, the rich brother said, "What would you like? How much do you want?" He says, "I don't want anything," he says, "I want a feed of pasta." And so they prepared all that pasta - a great quantity - he ate as much as he could and he said, "God, I thank you. I am satisfied with what I asked for. What I asked for has been fulfilled." His brother came out and said to him, "It's incredible what a big dick you are!<sup>17</sup> Do you remember," he said, "on that road where you were walking like the blind? I had thrown you down a wallet," he said to him, "and you didn't want to get rich. And so both brothers felt happy in the consolation that their wishes had been fulfilled. They lived in the same house and that was all they asked for. They had been given everything that they had wanted."<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> The exclamation is said in a tone of disbelief and implies the delight of the brother in seeing so much good work for him to do.

<sup>17</sup> This is a common expression which means "How stupid you are!"

<sup>18</sup> A variant of this story called *The Three Sons of Fortune* can be found in the Grimms' collection.

## COMMENTARY

This story is a variant of another of Mrs Speranza's stories called *The Three Brothers* and follows the same storyline of the legacy, the quest and the fulfilment of the wishes. The theme of the quest and of one rich brother and one poor one are common aspects of many folktales. The Grimms' collection in particular includes many stories about two, three or four brothers setting out on a journey to prove their worth or find their fortune.

Mrs Speranza's story of *The Two Brothers*, like its variant, emphasises the importance of such simple things as a rooster. It is difficult for modern city people to appreciate how vital it was on a farm - the people of the land relied solely on the sun, the moon and the stars to tell them the time of day or night. There was no electricity and they had no watches or clocks. Mrs Speranza relates a personal family story about her mother-in-law who had to listen for the clock chimes in the town each night to wake up her two eldest sons so that they could be at the fields, a two-hours walk from home, by dawn ready to start work. A couple of times she counted the wrong number of chimes and they got to the fields when it was only midnight. Since it was too far to go back home and return to the field by dawn, they had to spend the rest of the night in the cold. The two workers were only nine and seven years old.

The instructional part in the story about the rooster and the different times it crows during the night, "Unu chi l'avi praticu sapi," stating, "One who is familiar with it [the rooster] knows," is added by the storyteller for the benefit of the audience whom the storyteller knows is not familiar with country life. This part has been included by her to explain how useful the rooster is. When asked about it, she said that her father didn't need to say that in the story because everyone listening to it knew that already. Once again this is evidence of the gradual changes that occur as we become further removed from the source of the stories, though it is important to



note that these changes are never major and don't influence the development of the plot in any way.

A rooster, a skein of string and a needle don't seem of much value to us but to the people of Palmi they were important enough to be left as an inheritance and through them the brothers are able to fulfil their quests. In this story there is no differentiation between the older and younger brother although perhaps this is implied but we certainly have the distinction between the smart brother and the foolish one. This is highlighted by the fact that the smart one must support his brother and provide him with food and shelter for the rest of his life because he was "too stupid" to ask for the right "grace". He was too short-sighted in his approach to the quest and this is taken up literally when he closes his eyes to experience what it would be like to "walk like the blind". Asking for as much pasta as he could eat, tells us of the poverty of the time: that a person could have no greater wish than to completely satisfy his hunger at least once in his life. Both brothers in the story ask for our two most basic requirements for survival: food and shelter and both want the greatest quantity they can manage.

The story stresses that the one who asked for the marengoes was the most intelligent as with them he can buy whatever he wants whereas his brother gets only one good meal with his wish. The importance of keeping your wits about you and literally keeping your eyes open at all times, is one of the themes in this story. The second brother is ridiculed for walking around with his eyes closed like a blind man - the implication being that you must always have your eyes wide open so as not to miss any opportunity that may come your way. This story reveals so much about the society of the time, their values and way of life. In a society where poverty was rife, this story tells the listener to make the most of everything he has - everything is valuable. If you find something, it's yours. There is absolutely no question of trying to

find the owner, as is the implication with the wallet. God is to be thanked for the fulfilment of every desire and money is valued above all else.

One of the most interesting words used in the story is “marenghi”. When the first brother asks for “marenghi d’oru”, “gold marengoes”, the sound of the word is unusual and conjures up exotic images. Mrs Speranza has never known what this word means and neither did her father who passed down the stories. He said that he had never seen one to know what it looked like but the storyteller always imagined it to mean gold medallions with frilled edging. The word in fact means money. The Calabrian dictionary defines it as, “moneta antica” “ancient money”. This is a clue as to the age of the story as the word continued to be passed on even though the storytellers no longer knew its meaning. Interestingly, marengoes were used as currency but were originally commemorative medallions. They would have circulated around Italy as Napoleonic money during the early eighteenth century after Napoleon won the battle of Marengo. The story itself however could be much older, substituting the word marengoes for another form of money.

This folktale contains elements of fairytale such as the quest, rewards and riches, wish fulfilment and the unusual items left as an inheritance which are the means to a fortune. Using gold as a motif is also very much in keeping with the fairytale tradition as is the use of an aesthetically pleasing image as well as the sound of a word, the meaning of which is unknown, but is pleasant to say. As Lüthi states the:

fairytale itself is not ahistorical; it is subject to the tastes of the times, if less strongly than the corresponding individual literature, but in addition to particular features which are dependent on the epoch, which vary from region to region, and which are tied to social class, it also displays important and characteristic elements which are timeless and independent of region or class.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Lüthi, *The Fairytale as Artform*, p 159.

As with the rooster and the skein of string, the marengoes remained an intrinsic part of the story, anchoring it to a particular place and time in history though overall, this story has a timeless quality about it, again very much in keeping with the fairytale. Nothing ever changed in the retelling - except the instructional comments intended for the listener who was removed from the source of the stories.

The “past’asciutta” that the second brother asks for is one of the most common dishes of the area: spaghetti or macaroni with plain tomato sauce. This story has many changes of tone when the first brother ridicules the second in a sneering voice full of contempt and frustration. This is clear in the oral telling - the words aren’t enough to convey the force of this feeling. The exclamation made by the first brother, “Ai” is impossible to translate. It is a very common sound signifying disdain, a sort of “Oh really! Oh how stupid!” As the storyteller grew up with four brothers, she would often have heard these sorts of expressions and being the second youngest would have found herself, no doubt, on the receiving end of most of them thus her incorporating them quite naturally in the story. This adds to her colourful retelling of the story with inflections on the insults.

The word “house”, “casa” and “palazzu” what we might consider as the word “palace” are interchangeable in this story, as “palazzu” actually means a house that is not a single-story building and therefore denotes wealth. The word, “palazzu” has come into everyday usage in modern times as most people now own a palazzu, highlighting the fact that the people to land ratio is a problem and more importantly, that the ordinary person can now live like a king.

When the two brothers first set out on their journey and go in search of their quest, the literal translation is, “I’m walking to find or to have”. When the second brother closes his eyes, the word used is “stuppau”, meaning “he blocked them up”,

the same word as when something is corked up, as though he was completely shutting out the world.

Although the first brother berates the second brother for being so stupid, there is no question at the end that the brothers will live together “in the same house” and that the eldest or cleverest will take care of his not so fortunate brother. For Southern Italians, maintaining strong family ties took priority over all else. Visentin notes that while this strong family cohesion has many benefits it also has many disadvantages such as, “excessive dependence upon the opinion of one’s relatives... . They are concerned with their own families exclusively; the rest of the world does not really interest them.” This in turn leads to “traditional apathy toward public institutions and toward any government.”<sup>20</sup> They have no time for the welfare of the wider community and there is resentment against any form of public authority. All of this was true but the story of *The Two Brothers*, celebrates personal prosperity and helping one’s family while at the same time like all true fairytale endings, proving that wealth has the power to give prestige and status even above other members of one’s own family.

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<sup>20</sup> Visentin, p 7.

**(16) THE THREE BRIGANDS**

Once there were three men who were walking along a road and they were called the three brigands. One of them when he thought they had been walking for a good while said, "We're hungry. What should we buy to eat?" Well one of the three said, "Let's buy a lettuce so that we don't waste anything."

On the road as they were walking there was a tree. They said, "We'd better climb up the tree and eat this lettuce and they began to throw away the outside leaves because they said they were no good. They threw them on the ground and pissed on them saying, "We may as well eat the good part."

Well when they finished it they still felt hungry. They said, "Those leaves are good. We'll climb down and gather them." All three of them went down to the ground and ate the leaves they had thrown away and pissed on as well.

Afterwards a man was passing by. He saw that tree and went to sit under it to rest a bit. The three brigands up the tree saw that he had sat there and were pissing on his head - they were pissing all over him. That poor man was looking up and saying, "But what is it? Is it raining? The weather seems so beautiful and it's raining only here!" When he was well and truly soaked, he looked up the tree and could hear laughter. He realised it was some kind of joke. He got up and went away.

### COMMENTARY

This folktale is actually two tales that are always told together one following the other probably because the same characters are involved. The second episode in the story could be defined as a farce using a ridiculous situation purely for amusement and entertainment. Like all the stories which ended by making a fool of someone, it was regarded as hilarious by the country people of Palmi. This was especially the case since the use of bodily functions was an essential part of the plot. According to Tatar, in traditional folktales such “functions were celebrated in both their degrading and reproductive aspects.”<sup>21</sup> Another story which is not included in this collection and which was told by Mrs Speranza’s grandfather involves three sons who had to prove how much they loved their father. The winner in the story is the one who loves his father as much as a good shit!

Swearing, the use of what many would call rude and crude language, and expressions which refer to genitals, were commonly used by most Calabrians. In translation these words jar and shock but for the people of Palmi they were simply a part of the language with no particular importance placed on them except to add emphasis or colour; this is why they are so often part of their stories. They do not carry the weight that a modern audience places on them. The temptation is sometimes to ‘clean up’ the stories and tidy them up grammatically but unlike earlier collections which have been sanitised, Mrs Speranza’s stories are presented “warts and all.” Some of the stories and expressions in the Di Francia and Raffaele Lombardi Satriani collections have also been allowed to remain in their original form which includes occasional references to topics which may generally be considered ‘unrefined’. This is unusual as folklorists up until very modern times have excluded such words and expressions and even entire stories as unsuitable for repetition let

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<sup>21</sup> Tatar, *Off With Their Heads!*, p 5.

alone publication.<sup>22</sup> Tatar further notes that “even in the recent past, folklorists have felt obliged to keep their anthologies clean and to file away any ‘dirty’ stories they may have heard from raconteurs.”<sup>23</sup> This was generally for the simple reason that the stories would otherwise be considered unsuitable for publication.

The name of this story seems incorrect or inappropriate but Mrs Speranza has never referred to it by any name other than *The Three Brigands*. We are not told about any of the men’s criminal activities, the only other episode about them is the second part of the tale which is the farcical escapade where they are again up a tree and is presented as just another event in their daily travels. In this way it is similar to the *Jesus and Saint Peter* stories. Why they need to climb a tree to eat the lettuce in the first place is not explained except that perhaps because they are brigands, they need to keep themselves hidden. It is interesting that like the little old woman in *The Precious Penny* who chooses to buy milk so that nothing will be wasted, their reason for choosing the lettuce is the same. One lettuce between three men isn’t much of a meal. This illustrates the scarcity of food and that ironically, they did waste some to begin with. The story teaches to be careful even in times of plenty and illustrates a rhyming proverb of Palmi:

Mentit’a speragnari quand’a giarra e` china.

Quand’u fundu d’a giarra pari

No ccumensari a speragnari.

Start saving when the jar is full.

Don’t start saving when the jar is empty.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> It must be noted that earlier stories from the Medieval tradition, such as those from Boccaccio and Chaucer, did contain a ribald element and coarse stories.

<sup>23</sup> Tatar, *Off With Their Heads!* p 5.

<sup>24</sup> The second sentence literally says “When the bottom of the jar can be seen, don’t start saving.” The word used in this proverb for jar, “giarra” refers to a large container of either fifty or one hundred litres which held the olive oil for the family for a year or two. Oil was as precious as (Continued next page)

This particular story of *The Three Brigands* is one which Mrs Speranza's father often referred to: in her own words "sempri muntugava sta storia," "he always used to mention this story." Although in many respects farcical, the instructional elements of this folktale are very obvious and for the time and place its message of "waste not want not" was quite simply a matter of survival.<sup>25</sup>

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gold and was regarded as the wealth of Calabria because the way most farmers earned a living was through the olive crops. It was essential to the people's lives as part of every dish they cooked and was also used for healing purposes.

<sup>25</sup> A variant of *The Three Brigands* can be found in Di Francia (Part 3) entitled *U Feticchiu Di La Nanna*, p 69.



## CHAPTER 8

### FOLKTALES REFLECTING ATTITUDES TOWARDS WOMEN

#### **Introduction**

Ruth Sawyer speaks of “the storyteller’s integrity”<sup>1</sup> which includes instinctive choice and personal discrimination and the part they play in the selection of stories that a storyteller will include in their repertoire:

This intimate relationship between story and teller must be reckoned with. It is as personal a matter as the clothes one wears. Some become one, and some do not; and what storyteller, her personal liking to the contrary, would present herself to any group of listeners with an unbecoming story?<sup>2</sup>

This is an important point as the stories told by Mrs Speranza, though very typical of the folktales of Palmi as seen in Di Francia’s and Lombardi Satriani’s collections, are atypical in their treatment of women. While they do have the same underlying attitudes which were obviously part of the society, there are no folktales which deliberately hold women up to ridicule or show women in a particularly bad light as compared to men and importantly there are none which involve the women being physically beaten as was common in Calabrian folktales. The folktales in this chapter not only reflect the attitudes towards women in the society but also the attitudes towards men because the two are directly related and therefore dependent on each other - a story cannot represent one without revealing the other.

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<sup>1</sup> Sawyer, p 106.

<sup>2</sup> Sawyer, p 106.

When Mrs Speranza was asked whether she knew any other folktales which she had never told, the answer was yes but they were rude ones and she didn't like telling them. When asked if she knew any folktales about women and how stupid or bad they were she said no. She was asked if her father ever told any like that and she said no. She said that her father often wished that his children were all girls as his four boys had always given him a great deal of trouble, but he was very happy with his four girls. This is an unusual attitude for the time and place as male children increased a family's social standing whereas girls were considered a burden on the family's finances: a girl could not marry without a dowry and to add to this, the parents of the bride had to meet all the wedding costs.

Mrs Speranza fondly refers to a family story which illustrates the importance of the dowry in Southern Italy. It is a true story which was well-known throughout the community of how one of her cousins purchased her daughter's entire dowry with one egg. Although her cousin was very poor, she did have one egg. It wasn't known how she came by the fertilised egg, whether she found it among the olive groves where chickens would often run loose or whether it was given to her. However it was, she placed the egg under a hen and it hatched into a chick. That little chick became a chicken which laid an egg a day. The woman would sell the egg each day and with the money, buy the chicken a handful of wheat or corn. With any money left over she would buy whatever she could for her daughter's dowry, one handkerchief at a time. Sometimes she might put the money aside to go towards larger items. She did this until she had completed the full dowry. This was looked on with admiration by everyone and went down in the history of the community as it was a difficult task even for the comfortably well off.

A responsible mother would begin a daughter's dowry from the day she was born, setting aside what she could to buy all the necessary items. There were strict rules about what a dowry should contain: a certain number of sheets and pillow cases, a set number of towels, blankets, bedspreads, table linen, underwear and any other linen that would be needed to set up house. An excellent dowry consisted of every item given in sets of twelve, this is why in Raffaele Lombardi Satriani's folktale *Holy Reason*<sup>3</sup> (Refer Appendix D) we know the girl was rich because she was given sets of twenty for her dowry.

Occasionally engagements were broken off because of disputes over the dowry and when this happened the girl was left with a bad reputation and might even miss out on marriage altogether. It was imperative that the dowry be started years before the marriage as it was an expensive process and had to be undertaken a little at a time as each item had to be purchased with the money that was needed for essentials such as bread and other basic foods. So the daughter, like the dowry, was prepared for marriage from the day she was born and the sooner she could be married off the better so that she could become someone else's responsibility. In one of the Di Francia stories the girl is twelve and ready to be married. In the country community of Palmi, it was common knowledge that on certain occasions the 'intended' had to wait for the girl to reach puberty before she could be engaged.

It was little wonder that many men were openly hostile towards the wife and baby if the baby happened to be born a girl often even refusing to see the child. One man was so annoyed and contemptuous at the birth of a daughter that he refused to

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<sup>3</sup> R. Lombardi Satriani, *Vol. xi*, p 215.

see the baby and ordered his wife to throw her into the cactus plants. A story which is part of the Raffaele Lombardi Satriani collection begins with the king throwing the queen out of the house because he thinks she will give birth to a girl when he already has six daughters. When the queen, exiled to the stable, gives birth to a boy, the king takes him back to the palace with “pomp and celebrations.” No mention is made of the queen at all. The most interesting thing is that this all takes place in the first paragraph and is not an important part of the story. It is simply regarded as acceptable treatment of any woman, even a queen, who would dare to have six girls.<sup>4</sup> One of the stories in the Calvino collection begins with a king losing patience with the queen for having a girl every time she has a baby. The first paragraph ends with his threat: “If you have one more girl, I shall kill it.”<sup>5</sup>

Mrs Speranza’s father, from whom she received the stories, was however, rather different. Mrs Speranza remembers her father with great love and affection. By all accounts he was a kind, gentle man who enjoyed the company of his daughters and their evening get-togethers around the fireside where he would tell them stories. He was a shy, peace-loving man which would have placed him at odds with the society in general as men were normally very controlling and tyrannical. As he was never aggressive or argumentative his sons, although they loved him, had no respect for him as the head of the household, a position which was traditionally held by a father who was expected to be harsh and dominating. Due to this lack of respect, his sons in fact grew up wild and out of control, not taking advice from him and bringing great hardship to the family because of their waywardness.

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<sup>4</sup> R. Lombardi Satriani, *Vol viii, U Destinu di nu Principi*, p 202.

He often told a true story of his childhood about a neighbour, well known to his family, who used to beat his wife to the point of actually breaking her limbs. When neighbours would come running to investigate the woman's screams the man would say that he had hardly touched her, in fact he had only hit her with a "paniculata" - a dry corn husk. Mrs Speranza's father would hold this man up to ridicule to his daughters and say how stupid he was and how everyone knew he was lying. Others couldn't interfere as it was accepted practice and quite common for a husband to beat his wife just as it was common practice for a father to beat his children. It was in fact considered a requirement of a man of "valori" a man worth something and the wives themselves were proud to have a husband of 'valour'. Mrs Speranza's mother would often have to go to the rescue of a neighbour's child who was given a weekly beating by her father till she at times collapsed into unconsciousness. The girl's mother would yell out to her husband, "mina ca t'a tengnu" - "you hit her - I'll hold her down," which became an absurd catch phrase in our own home when we were referring to any sort of bizarre occurrence.

It is because of this personality of the teller's father and his own attitude towards women that many of the folktales which blatantly portrayed women in a negative way must have been excluded from his storytelling repertoire. However, in all the folktales where women are mentioned, there is a definite negative slant towards women even if it is not openly stated, so that the attitude of society in general is captured in these stories. In their society it was perfectly acceptable for men to beat lazy or insolent wives and for brothers to beat lazy or overbearing sisters, for fathers to beat disrespectful daughters or children in general, and so on.

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<sup>5</sup> Calvino, p 563.

Interestingly, there is no story in Mrs Speranza's or her father's repertoire which is overtly misogynistic or which includes physical violence towards women. Both Mrs Speranza and her father believed that there was injustice in the treatment of women, yet they were products of their society and, while not agreeing with physical violence, they still believed that women should have a subservient role to men. However, the folktales of the region bear witness to the general acceptance of physical violence against women: page after page of Raffaele Lombardi Satriani's collection of Calabrian folktales, for example, is about the deceitfulness, greed, laziness, stupidity, gullibility and weakness of women generally. Negative attitudes towards women are reinforced at every turn, the stories usually ending with the woman receiving a beating or punishment of some sort. It should be added that this is usually dealt with in a humorous way so that both men and women enjoyed the story and found it very amusing and clever.<sup>6</sup>

One example of this is the story in the Raffaele Lombardi Satriani collection called *Holy Reason* (Refer Appendix D) in which the girl's lazy and insolent character is a bane to her husband. He eventually "tames" her by playing on her stupidity and religious gullibility, much the same as the priest does in Mrs Speranza's story of *The Guardian Angel*, although for a different motive. Many sayings and proverbs of the town also reflect this attitude towards women, for example: "A fimmana avi i capiddi longhi e a menti curta" "Women have long hair

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<sup>6</sup> The Grimms' story, *Sharing Joys and Sorrows* also deals with wife-beating in a humorous way. A story called *The Clever People*, in the same collection, treats violence towards women as a normal course of events if the wife is considered stupid or disobedient. The farmer threatens his wife with these parting words as he leaves for a trip to the country: "So I'm telling you, don't do anything stupid. Otherwise, I'll colour your back black and blue, and I won't need paint for that, just this stick in my hand. And you'll wear those colours for a good year at least. You can depend on that!" It must be noted that this attitude of acceptance of physical violence towards

and a short mind” meaning that they have a small brain and therefore are of limited intelligence. This was believed to be one of the reasons for women being closer to the Church than men. Pittarello in his study of Italian migrants, notes: “It is part of the Italian culture that women are believed to be constitutionally more religious than men.” One Italian migrant in his survey states “She is simpler, more suitable for it.” This attitude says Pittarello “explains, at least partly, why Italian women go to confession, communion, and mass more regularly than men. It is part of their cultural inheritance that they should do so.”<sup>7</sup> They were also regarded as more in need of redemption than men. Von Franz argues that because Western society is mainly patriarchal:

in our civilisation one of the most widespread unconscious reflections - perhaps not quite unconscious, but still at the back of people’s minds - is an association between Evil and woman. In the story of the Garden of Eden, Adam told God that Eve was responsible. She had talked to the devil. Over and over you come across that negative connection and the identification of evil with the woman’s problem.<sup>8</sup>

A Sicilian story entitled *Lame Devil* in the Calvino collection reflects this belief that women are responsible for the problems in the world and certainly for the downfall of men. When the devil asks why so many men are dying and going straight to Hell, the dead reply, “All because of women.” The Lame Devil goes out and discovers the reason for himself exclaiming, “So it’s true that men all go to Hell through the fault of you women!”<sup>9</sup> One Calabrian proverb expresses some of this sentiment, of women being the cause of trouble and disaster: “Quannu canta la

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women has been present in most cultures in the past. The old English saying, “A dog, a woman and a walnut tree – the more you beat them the better they be,” reflects this same attitude.

<sup>7</sup> Pittarello, p 30.

<sup>8</sup> Von Franz, p 53.

<sup>9</sup> Calvino, p 586.

gallina 'a casa si ruvina."<sup>10</sup> The literal translation is: "When the chicken crows the house goes into ruin," and means, when the wife rules the roost the household falls into ruin or if a woman is allowed to take charge it will be disastrous. On the other hand, one of the ironies that exists in the region is the elevation of motherhood to divine status. According to Maraspini, "the mother is sacred. Like God, her name may not be taken in vain; to a man, the merest disrespect towards his mother is a mortal insult." This male attitude is not only true in Maraspini's surveyed town of Calimera, but for Calabrian men in general.

Two aspects of woman appear in these stories from Palmi which encompass the attitudes to women in general. The extremes are present here as with other aspects of the society: the woman is seen as either a goddess or saint as in the stories of *Our Lady Among the Wheat* and *The Story of Saint Genevieve* or as a whore as in *Jesus Disguised as a Beggar*. One of the songs of the region also reflects this elevation of Mary as a goddess and creator of the universe. It is "an invocation to the Virgin Creatrix, exalted as unguent which heals every wound of the soul:

My Mother divine, divine Mother,  
 You who created human creatures,  
 You are the unguent, You are the medicine,  
 Your unguent every sore heals.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Spezzano, p 70.

<sup>11</sup> Basile (1990) *Folklore della Calabria*, (Vol ii), p 154. Translated from Italian by Grace Nolan: "Invocazione alla Vergine Creatrice, esaltata come unguento che sana ogni piaga dell'anima: Matri divina mia, matri divina, Vui chi criastivu criaturi umani, Vui siti unguentu e siti medicina, Lu vostru 'nguentu chi ogni caia sana." (This song shows reverence for Mary by addressing her in the polite form which could be translated using thee, thou and thine instead of "You".)



Here we have an example of what Birkhauser-Oeri calls “the Life-Giving Nature Mother,”<sup>12</sup> linked with the maternal goddess of pagan antiquity. Birkhauser-Oeri argues that, “as self-portraits of the human soul, fairy tales sketch the Earth Mother in an endless variety of positive and negative images.”<sup>13</sup> She further notes of women in fairytales that they often:

possess subhuman or superhuman traits. For one thing they are better or more evil than the average human woman. In their appearance too they are often different. There are awful ugly witches with red eyes and enormous noses which they use for poking the stove, or ethereally beautiful fairies, like goddesses.<sup>14</sup>

The story of *Our Lady Among the Wheat* elevates Mary to the status of creator as she changes the crops to become what they are today: she causes the chick peas to become bitter, the lupin to become salty, the flax to become a tangled mass and the wheat to become the most loved crop in the world. Like Demeter, the goddess of the harvest, she walks through the fields bestowing blessings and curses on nature and protecting her child from the threat of harm. It is through her actions that nature itself is transformed. Von Franz believes that:

As the conscious religious views of Western Europe in the past two thousand years have not given enough expression of the feminine principle, we can expect to find an especially rich crop of archetypal feminine figures in fairy tales giving expression to the neglected feminine principle. We can also expect to retrieve from them quite a few lost goddesses of pagan antiquity.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Birkhauser-Oeri, p 127.

<sup>13</sup> Birkhauser-Oeri, p 13.

<sup>14</sup> Birkhauser-Oeri, p 13.

<sup>15</sup> Von Franz, p 10.

Pitre` notes that the Sicilian peasants are religious “fino allo scrupolo”<sup>16</sup> “scrupulously so” or “to a fault.” They honour God in innumerable songs “but not as much as Mary, sigh of every breast. In singing about Her, Hyperdulia Theology becomes Latria of which no amount of praise is enough, nor word can succeed in portraying her.”<sup>17</sup> In this Pitre` expresses the religious fervour which surrounds Mary whom the peasants placed on a par with God as is evident in countless popular Sicilian songs which he collected.<sup>18</sup>

In this devotion to the Virgin Mary, Calabria, and certainly the town of Palmi, is at least equal to Sicily. Evidence of this is the feast of the Varia, which although is also celebrated in Sicily, is Palmi’s most important feast. In Sicily a doll is placed on the float to represent Mary whereas in Palmi a young girl is chosen. Folklorist, Antonino Basile believes that some of the popular religious songs which exist in Sicily may well have originated in Calabria “regione dal sentimento religioso fortissimo”<sup>19</sup> “region of strongest religious feelings.”

However, in the society of Palmi, girls were considered a liability and a man who had more than one daughter had the sympathy of the whole community as well as less social standing. A popular local saying which illustrates this attitude is: “Figghi fimmani e utt’i vinu, cacciali chiu` viatu chi poti siri.”<sup>20</sup> “Daughters and barrels

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<sup>16</sup> G. Pitre`, (1870 reprinted 1978) *Canti Popolari Siciliani*, Vol.i, Palermo: Il Vespro, p 76.

<sup>17</sup> G. Pitre`, *Canti Popolari Siciliani*, Vol.i, p 77. Translated from Italian by Grace Nolan: “ma non tanto quanto a Maria, sospiro d’ogni petto. La teologica iperdolia si converte in latria cantando di Lei, cui non e` laude che basta, ne` parola che giunge a ritrarre.”

<sup>18</sup> Hyperdulia means the worship of Mary above all other saints. This shows us where Mary is placed in order of importance as far as the peasants were concerned. According to Pitre`, this devotion goes even one step further as Latria is the highest kind of worship due to God alone.

<sup>19</sup> Basile, *Folklore della Calabria*, (Vol. ii), p 163.

<sup>20</sup> Also found in Spezzano, p 68. “Figli fimmini e vutti ‘e vinu dalli caminu.” Translated from dialect by Grace Nolan: “Daughters and barrels of wine, move them on.”

of wine, get rid of them as fast as possible” as Mrs Speranza explains: “before the wine turns into vinegar and the daughters turn into old maids.” If a girl reached the age of twenty and was unmarried, she was regarded as already too old and would likely remain a spinster. It was considered much superior to have sons and those who had many sons were looked on as important members of the community.

A girl had only two choices in the society of Palmi: to marry or to stay single and live with her parents until death. Quite often there was no choice at all as the marriage was arranged and she had no say in it. Mrs Speranza remembers her own betrothal with a mixture of humour and disgust at the way these things used to be done: Her eldest brother said to her one day out of the blue, “Did you see that man who came to the house the other day? He’s your fiance`. If you don’t like him, you can go to Master Paul and order one to your liking.” “And that,” says Mrs Speranza, “was the engagement!” Master Paul was the potter in the town who worked in terracotta. In those few words, her brother let her know in no uncertain terms that it was that man or no one and that she was in no position to argue if she knew what was good for her.

Women in many ways were powerless but they had their own ways of coping with this unbalanced attitude in society. One very popular proverb of Palmi is: “A gaddina faci l’ovu e o` gaddu nci’abbrusci’o` culu.” “The chicken lays the egg and the rooster’s bum burns” which means that the chicken does all the work and the rooster still finds something to complain about. Literally, after a chicken lays an egg the rooster crows about it for a long time afterwards. The country people often said this to each other after the landlord had been to the fields to inspect their work and invariably complained about it. The proverb is particularly popular with women who

use it among themselves to imply that the woman makes all the effort or does all the work and the man always manages to find fault with what she has done. It can also mean that the woman suffers and the man acts as if he is the one in pain.

**(17) THE THREE FRIENDS**

Once there were three friends who loved each other very, very much and wherever they went, they went together<sup>21</sup> and one was called Fire, one Water and the other one, Honour. Well the time came for them to separate and for each one to take his own path.

When they parted all three said to each other, "Where are we to find each other the next time we want to meet again?" The Fire spoke up and said, "Wherever you see smoke, come and I will be there. The Water said, "Wherever you see low land, come because you will find me there." Honour spoke up and said, "When you lose me you won't find me again."

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<sup>21</sup> This is literally, "wherever they walked, they walked together."

**COMMENTARY**

This moral tale about fire, water and honour, cleverly personified, is aimed at teaching about the importance of women's chastity, which once lost could never be regained. "Honour" and "chastity" were interchangeable terms in the dialect, highlighting the value placed on it in the society of Palmi. In the story, its importance is emphasised by placing it side by side with fire and water, the most fundamental and concrete elements, and by the fact that the story ends with the warning that "honour" or "virtue" once lost is gone forever. It begins with three friends, thus establishing a conversational and friendly tone, but ends on a very sober note that lends weight to the dire consequences of separating from one's honour.

The word, "Honour," was not used in the broader sense as we know it, by the country community of Palmi, but specifically referred to a woman's virginity which was essential to her future as it was a prerequisite to marriage. One incident which highlights the extent of this attitude occurred in Palmi when Mrs Speranza was a young girl. Her fifteen-year-old cousin spurned the sexual advances of her brother-in-law. The consequence of this was that he shot her seven times, obviously with the intention of killing her. After long months of illness, she survived and was rewarded for her behaviour by the highest acclaim possible in the society of Palmi: an incredible number of suitors came forward, all desperate to win her hand in marriage. As Mrs Speranza stated, "Everybody wanted her." The reasoning behind this was that if she was willing to die rather than lose her 'honour' then she would never betray her husband and would be trustworthy under any circumstance. She had the pick of the most eligible young men and although it may never have been openly stated, she was considered a very fortunate girl by every other female: all the

suffering and pain she endured was worth it since the outcome was a good marriage. It must be remembered that marriage for a woman in this society was her only guarantee of a secure life.

Loss of virginity, was not as important for men. It was, to a certain extent, regarded as undesirable for men to enter marriage as virgins: it was considered that a man should be superior to women not only in knowledge but also in worldly experience. Furthermore, a man could not make his wife a cuckold, no matter how unfaithful he was, whereas a woman, whether it be his wife, daughter, mother, sister, mother-in-law or sister-in-law, could throw a shadow over a man's reputation and taint his social position for life.

If any one of his female relatives, discounting cousins and those further afield, was found out to be on intimate terms with someone from the opposite sex outside of marriage, her father and brothers would be openly laughed at and treated with scorn and derision by the community in general and particularly by other men. The reasoning behind this was that the man was too weak to keep his daughter, sister or other close female relative under control. He was a "grocculu" a good for nothing weakling, literally a "brocculi": freshly picked broccoli begin to wilt as soon as they are cut; they become limp and lifeless very quickly. He was therefore considered a man not worth his salt and not worthy to be allowed into certain social groups. For example, a man who was a cuckold was not allowed to join the 'ndranghita' - the local mafia. He would not be considered a "malandrinu" a 'hard' man who would do whatever was necessary if called upon. He did not command the automatic respect of the others therefore his only means of entry into the elite group was by paying a

fee. However, he knew this would not stop the other men from laughing at him behind his back.

Joseph Visentin notes that what Southern Italians value most is “respect”: it is “the necessary prerequisite for every other relationship.” While they may be flexible about money and business transactions “they do not admit compromise or forgiveness when it is a question of prestige and honour.”<sup>22</sup> Visentin further argues that for Southern Italians the world of the family is all-important to the extent that “they feel strongly bound to maintain good family relationships and the family honour at all costs.”<sup>23</sup> This type of system, however, can be completely restrictive as it does not allow for different lifestyles, differences of opinion or anything at all that does not conform to the strict moral codes and cultural traditions which rule behaviour even when people go to live abroad. In fact, for Southern Italians “family cohesion goes beyond death.”<sup>24</sup>

In the society of Palmi there were strict social rules about behaviour and if a person stepped outside those rules they were marked for life. For a man, to be a cuckold was the worst social stigma possible and punishable by death: if he killed the woman who was the cause of his social disgrace then his ‘honour’ would be restored.

This story of *The Three Friends* in many ways highlights the attitudes to women in the society of Palmi as well as the relationship between men and women:

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<sup>22</sup> Visentin, p 5.

<sup>23</sup> Visentin, p 6.

<sup>24</sup> Visentin, p 6.



the woman served to give the man social standing in the community. She was his responsibility but also his possession and had to be controlled at all times if the man was to have the respect of the group. *The Three Friends* was therefore a tale of instruction to men as well as to women. It reinforced the fact that if a woman respected herself and her husband and other male relatives, she would control her behaviour and be very careful and guarded in her dealings with all men. The story was also a warning to women to be celibate until married and faithful thereafter as their sexuality was their most precious possession. It was what they were most valued for and what secured them a future. If a woman's virtue was ever called into question the consequence was at the very least shame on all her household - for her it meant the possibility of death. For women, the concept of honour had a double edge to it: it threatened them with pain of death but paradoxically the virtuous woman was prized and protected and had the highest standing in the female community.

**(18) JESUS DISGUISED AS A BEGGAR**

Once there was Jesus who used to travel around dressed as a little old man with a sack over His shoulder, who didn't want anyone to recognise who he was. As He walked along, he arrived at a house and He wanted to rest. He knocked on the door and a man came out and He asked, "Can I rest here tonight." His wife heard talking and looked out to see who it was. This man who was her husband said, "Yes, yes, come in. You can stay here." She didn't want him to stay. Her husband put him in a nook under the stairs. Our dear Lord said, "It's just till tomorrow morning, so that I can rest, then when it's day I'll go."

Well the Lord knew what this man who had let Him rest for one night must hear. When it was midnight there was a knock at the door; the angel went in. The angel knew where the Lord was and said to Him, "Teacher, a soul has been born. Which star will you predict for it?" The Lord said, "For him to live twenty-four years and then he climbs a tree and falls and kills himself." Then the Lord said to the angel, so that the husband of the woman would hear, "This woman who lives in this house, her star is to be a whore for seven years and then to return home again." Her husband heard all these words and thought to himself, he says, "So who can this old man be?"

In the morning when it was day, the Lord left and this man, the master of the house, saw that his wife was gathering all her clothes to leave. He couldn't stop her because that was her star, you see. She went around to play the whore.

When the seven years of her star were over, she returned home again and her husband, having heard the word of the Lord that he had heard with his own ears, took her back again into the house because he thought that such had been her star.

**COMMENTARY**

This story is one of the clearest examples of the pagan belief in destiny which underpinned the Christian belief system of the Southern Italians. It reveals what they believed about life and death at the most fundamental level: that they were given no choice but lived life according to a pre-arranged plan. They believed that everything is pre-determined by God and humans are merely his pawns. This runs parallel to the pagan view of the world but instead of people having to endure the vagaries of the gods, for the people of Palmi it was the whims of one God, Jesus.

When the angel enters and Jesus is asked to foretell the future of the newborn soul, it is not merely a prediction which Jesus gives but a decision - a determining of what life has in store for that soul. Jesus is the one who chooses what will happen to each one. This belief in destiny is very strong, “nesciu cu dda stilla,” is often said, “he was born or came into the world with that star,” meaning he will live and die in a certain way as has already been determined for him by God.

The teller says after this story, “Non era curpa d’idda cher’a so stilla pronotata,” meaning, “It wasn’t her fault because it was her star or destiny.” In this unforgiving society that didn’t accept moral deviation of any sort, this belief served in some measure to soften the blow. But it also had far-reaching consequences for this profound belief in destiny was a way of reinforcing all crime, the evils of the landlord system and every bad thing that happened. It was a way of excusing even murder, which was relatively common regarding matters of ‘honour’ as the belief was that God had decided what you would do when you were born and you have no choice in

the matter. Some compassion could also be felt for the transgressor as he was also living out his 'star'.

The angel's appearance in the story has three definite purposes apart from it being linked with the Christian belief in angels and their appearance at critical moments in the Bible, for example, the Annunciation of Mary and in Joseph's dream. In a similar way, Jesus wants to forewarn the husband - it is as a favour or miracle that the husband is allowed to hear what the angel says to Jesus. In fact, the implication in the story is that Jesus has visited this house for this very purpose. With the introduction of the angel, not only does Jesus teach the man about life and the turn it is about to take for him and his wife, but it also teaches him that this is God's will and at the same time, the story teaches these things to the listener. It was rare, if not completely unheard of, for the husband to take back a straying wife under normal circumstances.

One variant of this story from Polistena, a neighbouring town, is found in Luigi Lombardi Satriani's collection of stories and is called "U Destinu," "Destiny". In this story the husband finds a young girl sitting on a rock and brings her home thinking she is mute and homeless. The couple try to help her but she remains sitting mutely on the chair that the husband has placed her on. At midnight a voice calls out to her that the milliner's wife has had a baby and asks the girl what will it become. The reply is "a whore." This happens three times, each time the girl "giving" the newborn "its destiny". She then tells the man to take her back to the rock and place her exactly as he found her and woe betide him if he makes a mistake in doing this. "Think well" she finishes with, "because I am destiny."

This story has a much more sinister tone with the young child used to personify destiny. This insidiously plays on the usual portrayal of the child as innocent and helpless which the girl seems to be at first. This child is something to be feared and left alone. The messages are clear: don't be too quick to do a good deed; innocence is not to be trusted as it is not always what it seems and most of all, destiny is not to be tampered with.

**(19) THE THREE BEANS**

Once there was a mother and father and they had a daughter. The mother and father went to the fields to work and left the daughter at home. The mother said to her daughter, "For this evening, put three beans on to cook so that when I come back we'll add the pasta."

Well she put three into the pot like her mother had said to her. Every so often she would go to have a look in the saucepan and she could see that they were bobbing around in the water and she would say, "One goes down and one comes up." Then she ate one to see if it was cooked. Another one she dropped when she went to put it onto the wooden spoon. In the saucepan one remained.

When her mother got back home and went to put the pasta in the saucepan there was nothing there. There was only water and one bean.

Her mother said to her "But where are the beans?"

She said "You told me to cook three beans and I did. Well, I tried one to see if it was cooked, one fell off the wooden spoon and the other one's there" - because she was more stupid than long zucchini!

**COMMENTARY**

This story which contains elements of farce is told in the way a joke might be told. It is meant to illustrate the stupidity of the daughter in taking her mother literally: to say, "Put three beans into the pot," is the same as saying in English, "Put a couple of peas on the plate," meaning a few. This bean recipe is a very common dish in this town and throughout Calabria so the story would have needed no explanations. The beans are put into a saucepan to simmer for quite a long time as they are dry beans and then the pasta is added when the beans are soft.

The story is meant to be humorous but it also has the undertones of the prejudiced attitude towards young women and why they shouldn't be allowed to make important decisions - with implications for choice of partner, marriage or any other life decision. While young girls could be put to work on the household chores and drudgery, they are not to be expected to take initiative or given control. Furthermore, young girls were expected to be unquestioningly obedient. Interestingly, even when the daughter strictly follows the instruction of the parents, she still finds herself in trouble - she is unable to please.

Her observation of, "One goes down and one comes up" refers to the beans boiling in the water - the three of them having plenty of room to travel around the saucepan. This phrase is used to mean that the observation made is an unnecessary statement of the obvious and therefore silly, whereas for her it is meant to be a profound observation. The word used for "bobbing around" is "gaddiavanu" which is literally "they were behaving like a rooster" and means they were lively or



spry. The word is very expressive and is commonly used to describe a person's frolicsome behaviour.

The story closes with an implied criticism made by the older woman and the overt criticism made by the narrator. The expression "more stupid than long zucchini" was a common idiom used in Palmi. Literally it referred to a particular type of zucchini which grew long and curved. The word used for 'stupid' has a double meaning in the dialect: apart from 'stupid' it can also mean 'twisted' or 'bent'. The humorous use of this idiom plays on the double meaning of the word, emphasising the extent of the daughter's stupidity. The condemnation from one of her own gender supports the general belief usually espoused by the males that young girls, because of their stupidity, were to be respected less than more mature women. The more subtle point being made is that between these two females they are incapable of providing even the most basic meal for the household. After the wastefulness of the daughter in squandering two of the three beans, and the questionable instructions of the mother, there is no doubting who in the family will get the remainder of the meal, paltry though it may be.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> A variant of *The Three Beans* can be found in the R. Lombardi Satriani, *Vol xi*, collection entitled: *Donna Rosa*, p 13 - and another variant in the Di Francia, (Part 3), collection entitled: *La Paccia*, p 91.

**(20) THE MAN WHO UNDERSTOOD THE ANIMALS**

Once dear Jesus used to travel on foot and so when he got to a place there was a river. He didn't want to cross it - well he did want to cross but he wanted a man to carry him to the other side on his shoulders to discover what that man wanted and if He, Jesus, could help him because He knew that the man was very poor.

He said to him, "Good man," He said, "I would like to cross the river but I'm not able to," the Lord said to him. "Oh," the man said to Him, "don't worry I'll take you across." He bent over, he put Jesus on his shoulders and he crossed him to the other side of the river.

When he got to the other side, the Lord said to the man, "You must say what you would like," He said to him, "because I can enable you to have it." The man said to Him, "I want to know what the animals say when they talk." "Is that all?" dear Jesus said to him. "Yes." He allowed him to know what the animals say when....<sup>26</sup> "And don't you tell anyone," Jesus said to him, "because if you tell someone," He said, "after three days you will die." "No," the man said to Him, "I won't tell anyone."

So, when the birds sang, this man knew what they said and he would start laughing. When the animals talked, he knew what they were saying and he would start laughing. Well one day he took his mare and got on it and there was the foal

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<sup>26</sup> Here the voice of the teller trails off very slightly and is abruptly cut off then quickly goes on to the next part of the story. This implies that there is no need to repeat the words, "they talk" as it is obvious what comes next and also increases the feeling of urgency in the next sentence. The shared secret is the most important part of the story and the voice and facial expressions are modified to convey this.

behind and his wife who was holding onto the foal's tail. When the little foal spoke, she said to her mother, "Don't walk fast," she said, "because I'm little and I can't keep up with you and apart from that, this woman is killing me the way she's pulling my tail." The big mare said, "It's worse for me. I'm walking as fast as I can because I've got this weight on my back that's too heavy to carry. I just want to take him where I have to take him and get this weight off me," and this man started to laugh.

When he began laughing, his wife from the ground said to him, "Why are you laughing?" He said to her, "Don't ask because I can't tell you." "Oh no!" she said, "You have to tell me." "Come on," he kept saying to her, "I can't tell you because if I tell you I'll die." She says, "I don't care about that. I want to know why you were laughing." Until, stupid cretin that he was, he told her that the mare was saying that she had a weight on her head, that she had a weight on her neck, that... <sup>27</sup> He was tricking her until finally he couldn't hold out any longer and had to tell her the truth. After about three days this poor man got sick and died and his wife was left with the mare like a cretin.

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<sup>27</sup> Here again the voice trails off for a brief moment indicating that a long list of excuses was given which went on for quite a while. This storytelling technique of cutting off the sentence is used to convey to the listeners that there is no need to mention them all. We are left to imagine what other excuses might have been given. This method has two effects: it keeps the story moving at a fast pace, focusing on the action and it adds humour because of the shared joke between teller and listeners. It is often accompanied by a flourish of the hand or a smile and raised eyebrows to highlight the silliness of the excuses and the fact that the more excuses were given the more contrived they sounded.

## COMMENTARY

This story has obvious connections with the legend of Saint Christopher, one of the most popular of all the saints. So little is known about him that in recent years he was removed from the official list of saints as it was believed he was not a real person. After further research into the matter, he was once again reinstated by the Vatican. It is believed that he died a martyr in the 3rd century during the reign of Decius. The most popular legend about Saint Christopher relates that he helped people across a raging stream over which it was believed that he also carried the Christ Child which explains his name Christopher, "Christ-bearer." As the patron saint of travellers, he is always depicted crossing a fierce torrent with the child Jesus on his shoulders.

The first part of *The Man Who Understood the Animals* is clearly linked with this legend but portrays Jesus as an adult who gives the man an opportunity to be granted a wish since "the man was very poor." One of the most interesting things about the story is not only the wish that he asks for but that Jesus again is represented as a hybrid God - a mixture of Pagan and Christian: on the one hand He is kind enough to want to help the poor man but on the other He is full of threats and menaces. Like Jesus of the Gospels, He asks the man to keep this favour or miracle a secret but like the pagan gods of the Greeks and Romans, if he doesn't, he will die in three days. Again, here in this story we have the appearance of the number three which is part of the folktale tradition.

This story combines humour, legend, fairytale and animal story, a variant of which can be found in Raffaele Lombardi Satriani's collection of folktales.<sup>28</sup> That a poor man should ask to understand what the animals say as his biggest wish is wonderfully childlike and much more understandable when we know that the society of Palmi, being mostly farmers, relied on animals for transport, work, food and even clothing to a certain extent. Their contact with animals was a major part of daily life. If the family was lucky enough to own a donkey, it usually lived in close quarters with them in a partitioned area in the main room of the house or in the area below the stairs if the house was in the town. A donkey or mule was very valuable to them and was treated accordingly. It is interesting to note that Andrew Lang in his discussion on the origins and diffusion of folktales mentions Straparola's *Piacevoli Notti* (Venice, 1550): "the tale of a man who knows the language of animals, and is warned by them against telling secrets to women."<sup>29</sup> It is a tale which recurs among the Santal tribe of India and has obvious common elements with this folktale from Palmi. Another story about a man who understands the language of the animals called *Animal Talk and the Nosy Wife* also appears in the Calvino collection. In this story the man acquires the knowledge through magic but he too will die in three days if he tells anyone. This tale ends with the man staying alive and his wife receiving a sound beating as "the husband took his belt and lashed the daylight out of her."<sup>30</sup> The Grimms' story *The Sun Will Bring it to Light*<sup>31</sup> has a similar theme of a man keeping a secret under pain of death. Although it is not about understanding animals, the husband ends up dying three days after he reveals the secret to his wife. She is portrayed as nosy and weak-willed like the wife in the Palmi story.

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<sup>28</sup> R. Lombardi Satriani, Vol. xi, contains a variant of *The Man Who Understood the Animals* entitled *A Parra Di L'Animali*, p 198.

<sup>29</sup> Andrew Lang (1996) *Myth, Ritual and Religion*, (Vol. 2), London: The Guernsey Press, p 310.

The portrayal of the woman as a stupid and heartless cretin is fairly typical of the folktales of the area. The reaction of the wife to the husband's secret and her flippant attitude to his response of "if I tell you I'll die" once again reflects the attitude towards women. In this case it's their weakness of character that is criticised. The unstated but underlying lesson is "they don't care if they kill you as long as their curiosity is satisfied." The husband is also condemned as a cretin at the end of the story for being so open. In the Calvino story the farmer ends up saving his life by taking the advice of the rooster and keeping his wife firmly under control. He keeps the secret to himself, admitting that the rooster has more brains than he has in the way he rules the roost. Openness and honesty were not sought after qualities in the society of Palmi. The story in its different variants teaches that being secretive and deceitful is important and keeping certain things to yourself can be a matter of life and death. There is no soft option at the end of the story - the man was told he would die if he revealed the secret and he does.

When the man says to his wife, "Don't ask because I can't tell you," he literally says, "keep on walking because I can't tell you." This is a very common term that reflects how much a part of everyday life walking was for people as it appears in many stories, sayings and expressions. When Jesus "allowed him to know when the animals speak what they are saying," he literally, "gave him the knowledge."

According to Birkhauser-Oeri, one aspect of the hero is that he understands the language of nature, "the hero in fairy tales often understands the language of water or of animals... . As both Christianity and Judaism stress the value of spirit as

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<sup>30</sup> Calvino, p 641.

compared with nature, it is understandable that folk tales present the ability to understand the voice of nature as a rare ability which only the hero has.”<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> J. and W. Grimm, *The Complete Fairy Tales of the Brothers Grimm*, p 417.

<sup>32</sup> Birkhauser-Oeri, p 158.

## **CHAPTER 9**

### **CONCLUSION: THE POWER OF STORY**

There is something very powerful about folktales and their ability to speak to us on so many levels; their capacity to stir in us emotions that are difficult to describe in ordinary speech - their language of emblem and symbolism, revealing universal truths common to all people. Adeline Yen Mah believes that “all stories, including fairytales, present elemental truths which can sometimes permeate your inner life and become part of you.”<sup>1</sup> The opposite is also true, that is, that we become part of the stories: humanity is captured in this “magic mirror” as Bettelheim calls the fairytale which he says, reflects our “inner world.”<sup>2</sup> Lüthi calls fairytales, “glass pearls”<sup>3</sup> in which “the whole world is reflected.”<sup>4</sup> Something which has the art to reveal both our internal and external worlds has to be a powerful medium. Lüthi has observed that:

each single folktale has its own meaning and can be analysed and interpreted according to different points of view. At the same time, when taken as an harmonious group, folktales present an encompassing image of humankind and the world.<sup>5</sup>

Therefore, while folktales are interesting from the point of view of what they reveal about the biases of the specific tellers and listeners and the location in which the stories thrived, in a much wider sense, “rather than giving us personalised wishes and fears, they offer collective truths, realities that transcend individual experience and that have stood the test of time.”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Adeline Yen Mah, (1999) *Chinese Cinderella: The Secret Story of an Unwanted Daughter*, Puffin Books p ix.

<sup>2</sup> Bettelheim, p 309.

<sup>3</sup> Lüthi, *Once upon a Time*, p 93.

<sup>4</sup> Lüthi, *Once upon a Time*, p 93.

<sup>5</sup> Lüthi, *The European Folktale*, p 125.

<sup>6</sup> Tatar, *The Hard Facts of the Grimms' Fairy Tales*, pp xv - xvi.



The themes within the stories presented in this thesis, distinctly reveal the culture they came out of, specific to the town of Palmi in Southern Italy but, in a broader way, they also reflect the universal themes that are encompassed in all folktales. Lüthi notes that there are:

themes which crop up time and again in the fairytale: readiness to help, die or fight ... dangers threaten from within the family, from within one's circle of friends ... the small and weak can triumph over the large and strong; justice prevails; appearances are deceptive ... destiny is inevitable.<sup>7</sup>

As this thesis has established, all of these themes as well as many others are present in Mrs Speranza's folktales. Lüthi further comments that "the folktale leads us into the midst of the rich nuances of the life of the folk and the individual, it thus leads us to the great constants of the human condition."<sup>8</sup>

It is true that many of the motifs used in the folktales of Palmi particularly specific food and drink such as wine, beans, roasted eggs, olives, animals such as the donkey, the pig, the chicken, and the rooster or activities such as working in the fields, baking bread, walking to find water, all anchor the stories to a particular place and time. There are, however, many elements and universal themes present in the stories which we can all identify with as human beings and which give the stories a timeless, universal quality.

They are an accurate reflection of the economic and cultural realities which produced them and give an insight into the lifestyle of the society from which they originate. They reveal the realities of life at that time and place, being concerned with issues such as finding enough food to eat, tricking the landlord, laughing at the hypocrisy of the priest and so on. However, they also reveal more fundamental

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<sup>7</sup> Lüthi, *The Fairytale as Art Form*, p 125.

<sup>8</sup> Lüthi, *The European Folktale*, p 125.

truths about life - that the weak can win, that to laugh at problems makes them more bearable or that the unexpected can happen, to name a few. In these ways they were used to transmit and inculcate the values of the society as they illustrated what was considered crucial to survival and demonstrated how people related to each other and the natural world.

Just as they tell us about the poverty and deprivation, the folktales of Palmi also reveal the religious attitudes and beliefs and what the people held to be important and sacred. In short, their whole attitude to life and death and everything in between is encapsulated in these folktales. The stories were told for entertainment, but within that were contained the inseparable elements of instruction and enculturation, both religious and social. They reveal the qualities and values that were considered vital in this small insular world which didn't allow for any form of deviation from what was considered normal. It is in these stories that the people of Palmi come alive. If we understand their stories we understand the people too, and how they related to the world and interacted with each other and with nature. The folktales were an intrinsic part of country life and like the songs and prayers they were part of the fibre of society.

In the chapter entitled "Triumphant Peasant Folktales", it is evident that these folktales of Palmi reflect the attitude of the peasants towards the landlord, the solicitor and the law in general. Even though they were illiterate and surrounded by poverty and injustice, their stories showed them winning every battle by using their innate intelligence. Through their stories the peasants were able to thumb their noses at all those in authority, where in reality they had to treat them with great respect. The chapter on anti-clerical folktales illustrates the obvious mistrust the peasants had of the clergy and, ironically, the way that the clergy was an integral part of their lives. It was in their folktales that the ordinary people could express what

they really felt: due to their religious beliefs, the priest was regarded as a figure of great importance but at the same time they believed he was corrupt. Their folktales held the priest up to ridicule and through these stories, the peasants were able to have a laugh at his expense. The Jesus and Saint Peter stories show a clear link with the apocryphal gospels and were very common in Palmi and throughout Italy. Peter represents the peasant so that once again through their stories the ordinary people were able to challenge the authority of the Church and God himself, something which was totally forbidden in reality. The chapter entitled "Instructional Folktales" reveals many stories which served to reinforce certain aspects of the culture such as the importance of being hard-working and the necessity of not being wasteful. Although entertainment was one of the primary intentions of the folktales, they simultaneously educated and instructed about survival and the qualities which were needed to live in the community. The attitudes towards women and their place in the world are of major concern in the folktales of Palmi as revealed in the chapter entitled "Folktales which Reflect Attitudes Towards Women". The emphasis on chastity for women, their role of subservience to men and the common belief that women had a smaller brain and were therefore stupid and inferior to men is evident in these stories. As with most of the folktales from Calabria, the focus on humour invites everyone to enjoy the stories which might otherwise seem alienating to part of the audience.

For a modern audience to understand and appreciate the folktales which are presented in this dissertation in their raw state, directly out of the oral tradition, we need to recognise that the stories have come from a culture which is different from ours and therefore a way of thinking and of seeing the world in a different way to the way we, from a literate culture, experience the world. Before we can do that, we need to know something about the time, place and culture out of which these stories

have emerged as this is the key to unlocking the real meaning of the stories and their significance.

The stories presented in this thesis are unique in that there is no other story in the other collections mentioned throughout this work which is exactly the same as any one of them. There are some that are unquestionably variants and many others that are similar in their style and content. Therefore, there is no doubt that Mrs Speranza's stories belong to the European folktale tradition. They follow the Epic Laws of Folk Narrative as outlined by Olrik; the patterns and formulas discussed by Lüthi such as the recurrence of the number three, the importance of rhyme, the use of repetition and the structured opening and closing formulas; the style, structure and themes present are in keeping with those in the huge Grimms' collection, and many other leading folklorists around the world. The work of Di Francia and Raffaele Lombardi Satriani, two of the most notable folklorists who concentrated on Calabrian folktales as well as the extensive Calvino collection of Italian folktales, all reinforce the fact that Mrs Speranza's stories are part of this same genre. The work of previous folklorists confirms that the folktales in this thesis belong to a pre-literate, European culture which has its roots firmly planted in the oral tradition. The structure and the major themes which emerge on closer analysis of these stories such as the culture of anti-clericalism, the strength of the peasant and the presence of the divine in the daily life of the ordinary person are the same themes that can be found in other European folktales.

Furthermore, for the first time, these stories are being presented in both their original dialect as taken directly from the keeper of the stories and in English so they are accessible to a wide audience. The culture they belong to is a pre-literate one or as Zanconato calls it an "illiterate culture"<sup>9</sup> which shares common elements with all

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<sup>9</sup> Zanconato, p 22.

other pre-literate cultures. Mrs Speranza's stories help us to experience the differences in the way these two cultures relate to the world while at the same time they highlight our common humanity with all its hopes, dreams and fears which we share with every human being.

Of the many difficulties which have had to be surmounted when transferring the spoken word into written text for this thesis, one of the biggest problems is related to the difference between these two methods of communication. Spoken language is in many ways flexible and free. In anticipation or in the excitement of the moment, some sounds are dropped, words run into each other, are sometimes fast and sometimes slow, sometimes loud and sometimes soft. They are alive with facial expressions, hand gestures and body movement. To set all this down on paper is impossible. Some of it is inevitably lost when transposing spoken language into written text. The aliveness of spoken words, that spirit and vigour that they are infused with is often the first thing to disappear. The second is that huge part of language which allows the speaker to take for granted that the listener understands what is being said - and everything that comes with that knowledge such as the enjoyment of puns, irony and sarcasm and everything behind those words. Words which express beliefs and culture and are just the surface of something so deep that you can't get to the bottom of it. To preserve the stories which exist only as spoken language is one of the aims of this thesis, otherwise they would be lost in what is fast becoming a literate culture world wide. To do this though, is to destroy a part of them, that part which the written word cannot capture because no matter how expressive it is, it remains two-dimensional and therefore inadequate.

It is these folktales in particular, from the country town of Palmi, which show how little the language had changed over such a long time. The echoes from the past which reverberate in Di Francia's stories from the end of the nineteenth century

become easily interwoven into the present when we compare them to Mrs Speranza's stories. Time, as far as language and social customs was concerned has almost stood still. Transplanted to Australia in the 1950's, the language, beliefs and culture have remained in a sort of time capsule, at least for one migrant woman who continued to live her life as though she was still part of the pre-literate family culture she had left behind in the small country community of Palmi, Southern Italy. Wrightson in commenting on folklore and its ongoing relevance makes the perceptive point that "sometimes it seems to reach out from the past like a touch from a great-great-grandparent, sharing with you humanity and the unchanging nature of human needs."<sup>10</sup> This is exactly what these folktales do.

The folktales told the story of the ordinary people in an interesting and clever way. They are good fun and even now - stripped of their original vitality of life and sound, presented in two dimensional black and white instead of the multicoloured, multi-flavoured fare that they really are - even now they are enjoyable to read. This must be the true and lasting testament to the wit and sagacity of the ordinary person. It is the spirit of the ordinary "Everyman"<sup>11</sup> his wisdom and common sense which shines through all these stories and despite poverty and illiteracy it is a story of hope and perseverance in the face of soul-destroying odds and always and without wavering, told with profound understanding of the human condition and with wickedly delicious humour. Di Francia called the folktales he collected over one hundred years ago "humble wildflowers."<sup>12</sup> This description seems the most fitting for a bunch of stories that have been gathered in their natural state and have an unexpected beauty. They have been strong enough to survive time, and change of country, language and culture. They have refused to be forgotten. They are our link with the past and the missing link between the oral tradition and modern literature.

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<sup>10</sup> Wrightson, p 7.

<sup>11</sup> Wrightson, p 7.

<sup>12</sup> Di Francia, (Part 1), in Dedication: "umili fiori selvatici."

These folktales passed down to us directly from the oral tradition are a precious gift to an audience which has become removed from the source of its own well-spring of knowledge. They are a living testament to the power of story.

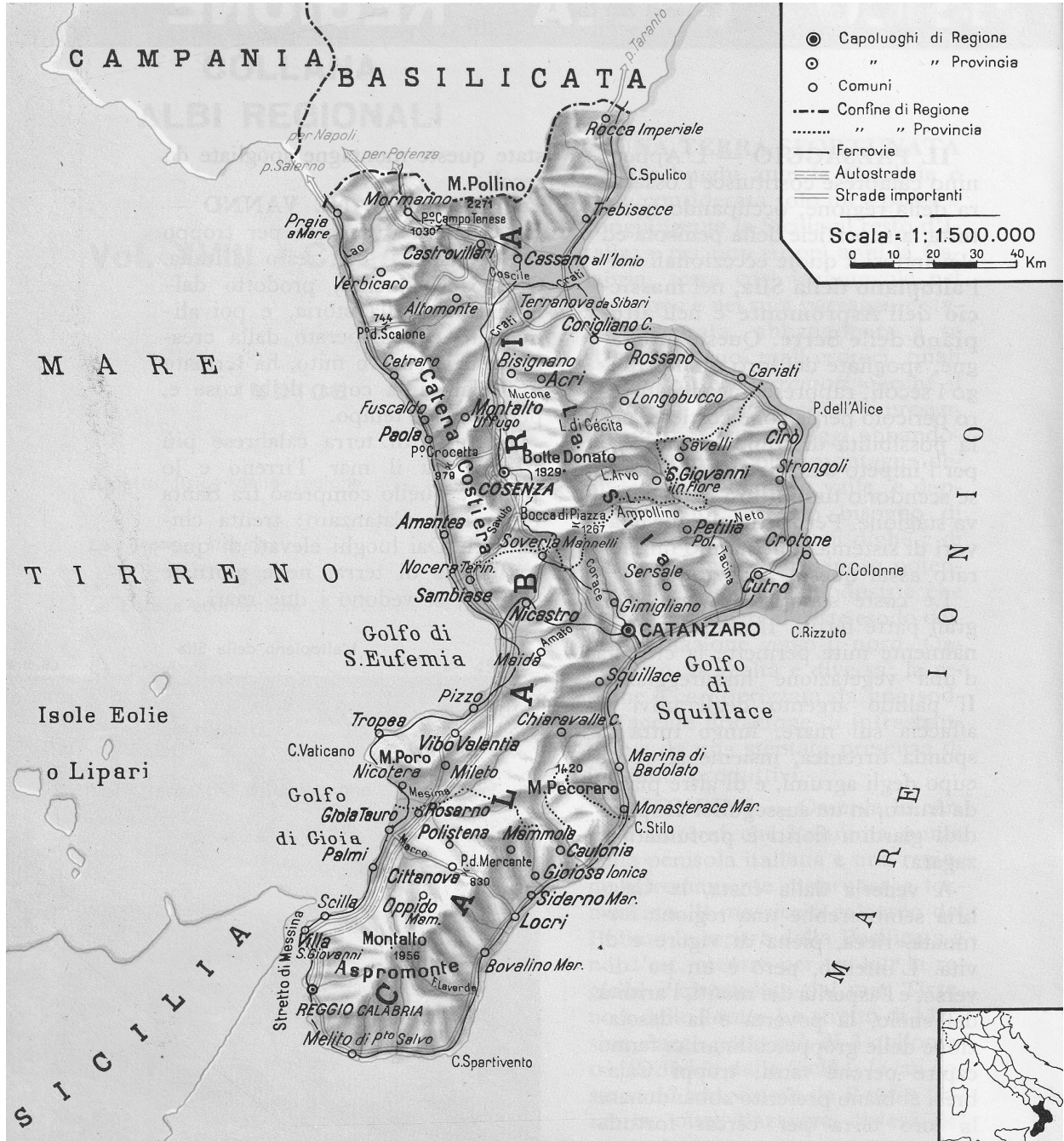
# **PART D**

## **Appendices**



### APPENDIX A

Map of Southern Italy showing the town of Palmi on the South West coast.



Map of Calabria taken from:  
G. Zanini, (1984) *Alla Scoperta Della Calabria*, Brescia: La Scuola Editrice, p 4.

## **APPENDIX B**

### **A Complete List of Mrs Speranza's Folktales All stories mentioned in this thesis are marked with an asterisk.**

#### **Triumphant Peasant Folktales**

1. *The Landlord's Pig\**

A poor farmer outwits the wealthy landlord and ends up owning the pig.

2. *The Fried Egg\**

A man who is overcharged for a fried egg refuses to pay and is taken to court but outsmarts the greedy shopkeeper.

3. *The Princess and The Olive Jar\**

A princess gets her hand stuck in a jar of olives. She is eventually rescued by a pauper whose reward is her hand in marriage.

4. *The Scalded Trotter\**

A man goes to the butcher to buy a calf's trotter but is deceived by the two shop assistants.

5. *The Three Cumpari\**

Three men order a meal at a restaurant and trick the owner into paying for everything himself.

#### **Anti-Clerical Folktales**

6. *The Story of the Graces\**

On the day God bestows all the graces, the priest takes the best one for himself.

7. *The Shepherd's Crook\**

A shepherd confesses to a small misdemeanour and the priest wants him sent to jail.

8. *The White Wine\**

A widow wants to know whether her husband is in Heaven, Hell or Purgatory. A priest assures her that he will find out as long as she can provide him with a large quantity of wine.

9. *The Guardian Angel\**

A girl is deceived by a priest into believing he is her guardian angel.<sup>1</sup>

### Religious and Aetiological Folktales

10. *Our Lady Among The Wheat\**

Mary tries to save her child from being killed. As she flees from the brigands, she passes through various crops which she alternately blesses and curses.

11. *The Deluge\**

A version of the Noah's Ark story explaining why crows are black and evil and why doves are white and have red feet.

12. *The End of the World*

A variant of *The Deluge* with the explanation of the origins of mountains and valleys and Our Lady changing God's mind about the end of the world.

13. *The Rooster That Resurrected\**

A man refuses to believe in God unless he sees a cooked rooster come back to life.

14. *The Story of the Liar and the Deceitful Woman*

Jesus tests a man and woman and finds them to be deceitful. The story explains the origins of the Adam's apple and the armpit.

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<sup>1</sup> This story was presented as a paper by the writer of this thesis at the "Old Neighbours, New Visions" conference of the Australian Children's Literature Association for Research held at the University of South Australia 4th-6th April, 1997. Refer: M. Nimon [ed] (1997) *Old Neighbours, New Visions*, pp 31 - 40.

15. *Saint Anthony and the Orphan Girl*

An orphan girl prays to Saint Anthony to provide her with a good marriage and is amply rewarded for her faith.

16. *Saint Joseph and the Wicked Woman\**

A husband and wife give Saint Joseph lodging for the night but the woman mistreats him and receives just punishment.

17. *Jesus and the Basket of Fish*

Jesus feeds the twelve apostles with one fish as the basket keeps replenishing.

### **Jesus and Saint Peter Folktales**

18. *Jesus, Saint Peter and the Lazy Man\**

Jesus teaches the apostles about marriage and its link with destiny.

19. *Jesus, Saint Peter and The Stone\**

Jesus changes the stones to bread.

20. *Jesus, Saint Peter and The String of Sausages\**

Peter steals sausages and is eventually given the Keys of Heaven.

21. *Jesus, Saint Peter and The Pumpkin\**

Jesus teaches Peter about the order of nature.

22. *Saint Peter's Mother\**

Saint Peter tries to get his mother out of Hell but she is too selfish to be helped.

### Instructional Folktales

23. *The Three Friends\**

Fire, Water and Honour are personified.

24. *The Four Elements\**

Man's supremacy over Air, Water, Fire and Earth.

25. *The Cicada and the Ant\**

The ant teaches the cicada about the importance of work.

26. *The Tale of The Widow\**

A poor widow with five children is deceived and robbed by a family friend who pretends to help her but she gets her own back.

27. *The Oak and the Doorlatch\**

Three men cut down an oak so that one of them can carve a large statue of Saint Anthony. The workman is so inept that he only manages to make a doorlatch.

28. *The Three Brigands\**

Three men share a lettuce and learn not to be wasteful.

29. *The Three Brothers\**

Three brothers are given their small inheritance and must journey out into the world to make their fortunes.

30. *The Two Brothers\**

A variant of *The Three Brothers* story with two brothers in search of their fortunes. The parents leave the sons a different inheritance in this story.

31. *The Whitest Thing in the World\**

Three men solve the riddle of the whitest thing in the world.

### Stories Reflecting Attitudes Towards Women

32. *The Story of Saint Genevieve\**

Queen Genevieve is slandered by a wicked servant and abandoned in the wilderness to die. Through suffering she is saved and finally becomes a saint.

33. *The Three Beans\**

A daughter is left at home to cook a meal of beans but the task proves too difficult for her.

34. *Jesus Disguised as a Beggar\**

Jesus disguises himself as a beggar and teaches about destiny.

35. *The Man Who Understood the Animals\**

Jesus grants one man a wish. His wish is to understand what the animals say. A humorous story with a twist.

36. *The Father and His Daughter*

A father is imprisoned and starving and is kept alive by his daughter who suckles him through the prison bars.<sup>2</sup>

37. *Cuckold from the Cuckoldery*

A woman's husband is ridiculed by his peers for being a cuckold. His wife sets matters straight by calling them all to task and declaring her husband the winner of all cuckolds.<sup>3</sup>

38. *The Woman and the Battalion of Soldiers*

A battalion of soldiers isn't enough to satisfy this woman's sexual appetite.

### Miscellaneous Folktales

39. *The Precious Penny\**

An old lady is robbed of her bowl of milk by the feared goat monster and different animals come to her aid.

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<sup>2</sup> A similar scene is found in Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*. In the final chapter, the Joads' daughter, Rose of Sharon, suckles a man dying of starvation. Refer, John Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*, London: Heinemann, p 480.

<sup>3</sup> This story is part of Mrs Speranza's repertoire but was not learnt from her father but from her mother-in-law.

40. *The Vanished Lard* \*

The pork offcuts are prepared and set aside for the winter. They are supposed to congeal but they disappear instead.

41. *Pilusena, the Hairy Girl*\*

A poor girl dressed in animal furs marries the prince with the help of a fairy god-mother and three enchanted dresses.

42. *The Right Hand and the Left Hand*

The right hand berates the left hand for being vain and lazy.

43. *When the Stars Talked*

This story is about falling stars.

44. *The Little Old Woman*

A short rhyme which is told in place of a story when the storyteller doesn't feel like telling a long story or is having a joke on the listeners. The rhyme follows folktale structure and begins with the opening formula "Once upon a time."

45. *Fireplace and Chimney*

A short nonsense rhyme about a personified fireplace and chimney making bread. Once again, like *The Little Old Woman*, it has an opening formula in keeping with the structure of folktales.

**APPENDIX C**  
**DIALECT TRANSCRIPTION OF STORIES IN THIS THESIS**

**(1) U PORCEDDU D 'U PATRUNI**

Na vota nc'era nu patruni chi aviva nu culonu e allura stu culonu si 'ccattau nu porceddu e u crisciva. U patruni, quandu nci pars'a iddu, nci diss'o culonu, "Stu porceddu ncunu jornu u 'mmazzamu tutt'i dui e nd'u spartimu." Iddu povareddu l'aviva crisciutu iddu u porceddu, potia voliri mi nci dun'o menz'o patruni. "No," ncissi iddu, "U porceddu e` u meu." "Allura ieu ti portu a corti nci diss'u patruni."

U culonu sind'iu ndi ll'abbocatu e nc'issi, "Sapiti abbocatu, cca ieu criscia nu maiali," nci dissi, "E u patruni voli mi nd'u spartimu tutt'i dui e u maial'e u meu." Nc'issi l'abbocatu, "A causa t'a difendu ieu e tuni no tindi 'ncarricari ca quandu ti dicu ieu mi dic'i sta maniera tu a causa a vinci. Quandu trasimu nta corti e chiddu ti chiama e ti dici, 'U porceddu u criscisti nta terra mia,' tu nci dici, 'Piffiti'. Quandu dici, 'Nd'u spartimu,' tu nci dici, 'Paffiti'. Tu dici na vota 'piffiti' e na 'ota 'paffiti'. Affinachi` dura tutt'a causa tu dici sempì sti du' palori: 'piffiti', 'paffiti' ca t'assicuru c'a caus'a vinci."

Quand'u chiamaru nta causa nci diciva u patruni, "Allura ndam'a spartir'u porceddu ca tu u porcedd'u criscisti nta terra mia." Nci dissi chidd'o patruni, "piffiti." "Quandu tornau a diri natra vota u patruni, "U porceddu nd'u mmazzamu tutt'i dui," dissi iddu,"paffiti." Finacchi` durau a causa iddu diciva sempì ssi du' palori: "Piffiti, paffiti," e verament'a caus'a vinciu, u patruni sindi tornau p'a casa e iddu sindi iu a casa sua c'u porceddu nci'arrestau a iddu.

Allura quandu finiu a causa, l'abbocatu ambicinau ndi chiddu e nc'issi, "T'u dissi jeu c'a causa a vincimu!" Nc'issi, "Or'o porceddu nd'u 'mmazzamu tutt'i dui e nd'u spartimu." Nci faciva iddu a l'abbocatu, "Piffiti, paffiti." Nci'civa l'abbocatu, "No m'ammia nomm'a dir'issa maniera; tu nci l'aviv'e diri dda, a corti." "Piffiti, nci faciva



iddu natra vota, paffiti.” Iddu faciva finta ca no capisci affinachi` u vinciu. Nci`u` vinciu o patruni e nci`u` vinciu a l`abbocatu puru.”

## (2) L' OVU FRITTU

Allura, nc'era na trattoria chi faciva da mangiari. Passau n'omu e trasiu danintra. Nci dissi, “Mi faciti ncuna cosa pe mangiari?” Nesciu a patruna e nc'issi, “Chi voliti?”

“Facitimi n'ovu friutu,” nciss'iddu, “Nu quart'i vinu e nu quatr'i pani.” Quandu finiu, chistu nci cerca`u cuntutu. Nc'issi, “Quantu gusta?”

“Tantu gust'o pani, tantu gust'o vinu e l'ovu,” si piau na pinna, mostr'i carta e nci dissi, “e l'ovu se u mentiva sott'a hiocca mi faciv'e puddicini, apoi i puddicini facivanu l'ova e mi facivanu l'atri gaddini...Allura,” ncissi, “tuttu peuttu vennu quattrucentu ducati.”

“E jeu,” nc'issi chiddu, “aiu quattrucentu ducati mi vi dugnu a vui pe n'ovu frittutu! Jeu no vi pagu tutti chissi sordi.”

Nc'issi idda, “Allura itivindi ca jeu vi mand'a corti.”

“Faciti comu voliti,” nc'issi st'omu.

Quandu fu ll'ura, na matina ffacciau chidda e u vittu nt'a chiazza ddaffora.

“Allura,” nc'issi, “amicu, viditi ca domani si faci a corti e novi, pemmi siti prontu.

Nc'issi iddu, “Vabbonu, prima, jeu domani matinu,” nc'issi, “aiu e ghjri mi chiantu ddu favi cotti.”

Nc'issi chidda, “E i favi cotti ponnu nesciri!”

“O chimmi siti santa!” nc'issi iddu, “E comu no nnescin'i favi cotti, no nnesci manc'u puddicinu dill'ovu friutu, e di n'atra manu, no ppozzu veniri mancu, ca non ai'u giaccu mi vegnu a corti.”

“O, s'e` pe chissu,” nc'issi idda, “u giaccu v'u dugnu jeu; vindi prest'un'i me maritu.”

“Allura domani matinu, pass'i doch'i vui e mi pi'u giaccu.”

Quando fu l'ura, 'rriuvau a casa sua, pia' u giaccu, si mis' u giaccu e sind' iru nda corti. Quand' arrivaru nda corti si liticavanu:

“Sapiti stu cristianu vinni mi mangia nd' a trattoria e nci dezi nu quart' i vinu, nci dezi nu quart' i pani, nci dezi n' ovu friutu e nomm' u pagau pecchi` nci cercai tanti sordi e iddu nomm' i vozzi dari.”

Si votau iddu nd' u giudici e nc' issi, “Dassatila stari. Chiss' e` paccia, 'i chissa no potiti piari cuntutu. ‘Oliti vidiri,” dici, “ca dici ca stu giaccu e u soi?”

Chista quandu ntis' i sta manera, 'ccumensau a gridari, “Si chiss' e` u giacch' i me maritu; comu non e` u meu.”

E allura, nc' issi, “A viditi? Comu non e` chissu fattu, non e` u fattu ca non ci pagai l' ovu frittutu.”

E a vinciu iddu a causa e nci futtiu pur' u giaccu.

### **(3) A PRINCIPESSA E A GIARRA D'ALIVA**

Na vota n' cera nu rre` e na rigina e avivanu na figghia. Priparavanu pe mangiari. A figghia d' a rigina trasiu nta stansa aund' avianu tutti cosi di mangiari mi pia nu piattu di liva salata. Allura 'llongau a manu nt' a giarra mi pigghia nu pugu d' aliva e a manu n' a potia cacciari c' a` ucca d' a giarra era troppu picciula.

Allura i genituri, quandu vittaru ca non veni, trasiru nta stansa mi vidinu pecchi` addimurau tantu pemmi porta sta liva supr' o taulu. A figghia d' a riggina era vasciata c' a facci supr' a giarra chi nno potia cacciari a manu ca l' avia china d' aliva e cercava aiutu mi nc' iaiutan' a tirari stu grazzu. Non era capaci nuddu. Passaru jorna e ghiorna cu da manu ntadda giarra chi chista non arrisistiva chiu`.

Allur' o rre` mis' i genti mi vandianu fora nto paisi pe tutt' i vandi ca so figghia av' a manu nta giarra d' aliva e n' a poti cacciari, com' ann' e fari, se nc' e` ncharchidunu chi si fida mi nci cacci' a man' i nta giarra ca s' a marita a sta principessa.

Allura quandu ficiar' u bandu si cogghiru tutti nta chiazza,

“E chi succediu dda? E chi succediu nd’a casa d’a rigina?”

“Nc’e` a principessa ch’av’a manu nt’a giarra e n’a poti cacciari.”

Senttendu tuttu chistu, tutti l’omani schetti si misaru dda fora a un’a unu a ffila mi nchiananu supr’o palazzu mi vidinu se nci ponnu cacciari sta manu i nt’a giarra ca cu si fida mi nci’a caccia s’a marita. Ognidunu c’a mbicinava dda nchianava dda supra aund’era sta figghiola cu dda manu nta giarra e tutti nc’icivanu, “Tirala pe ffora c’a manu ti nesci, tirala c’a...” Allora prova chistu e prova chiddatru nci stavivanu scoddand’u grazzu. N’a potianu fari, nuddu fu capaci pemmi poti cacciari sta man’i nta giarra. Si vidi ca chiddi chi nchianavanu eranu unu chiu` stort’i natru.

Allura si trovau a passari nu povaru pezzenti, tuttu lordu; ici, “Chi succediu dda nd’a casa d’u rre`?”

Dici, “Ncest’a principessa ch’av’a manu nt’a giarra e n’a poti cacciari.”

“Facitimi largu,” nc’issi iddu, “ca vogghiu mi nchianu ieu.”

“Ma no ffummu capaci nuddu mi nci cacciam’a manu e nci’a cacci tu?” Ncissaru,

“Vatindi, tu si tuttu cu ssi rrobbi scianchati i ssa manera; a ttia ti faci nchianar’u rre`?”

Tutt’u zanniavanu chi nno u volianu mancu fari nchianari nt’o palazzu. Allora stu povareddu nci’cia, “Se jeu mi fidu mi nci cacci’a manu i nta giarra a principessa m’a maritu?” Pensava ca ietta a barritta nto paravisu pecchi` iddu non avia propia nenti.

“Ma,” nciss’iddu, “vogghiu nchianari mi fazz’a prova.”

“Ma non e` cosa pe tia, ndappi megghi’tia,” ncissaru chidd’atri.”

“Dassatimi nchianari ca vogghiu mi provu puru ieu.”

Quand’arrivau dan’intra e ghiu nd’a signurina, gia` chidda era menza morta di quantu jorna avia chi teniv’a manu i dda manera nt’a giarra. Mbicinau e nc’iss’a chidda, “Libbara sa cosa chi ai nt’a manu e tira a manu pe ffora.” Quandu chista

apriu a manu nci catt'a liva c'avia dan'intra e a manu si scifulau e sindi nesciu pecchi` l'avia vacanti.

U rre` e a rigina sind'iru nt'o barccuni e cumensaru a gridari a tuttu du populu chi era fora e nci dissaru ca so figghia si sarbau ca cacciau a man'i nt'a giarra e cca ora chistu s'a marita. Vardati cosi belli chi succedi nt'o mundu: chiddu chi pariv'o chiu` stortu mbec'er'o chiu` scart'i tutti e rinesciu mi si marita a figghia d'u rre`. E si fici a so fortuna.

Allura chiddu chi pariv'o chiu` stortu mbec'er'o chiu` scart'i tutti sulu ca non avia i robbi belli i ncoddu e pemmi si poti maritari a figghia d'a rigina dopu d'a promessa d'u rre` u misaru nta menzu tineddu e u spudditriaru cu na scupitta e sapuni. Cusi` era n'omu fattu a menz'a tutti chidd'atri cu i vestiti belli. E a faula finiu cusi`.

#### **(4) CHIDDU D'U PEDI SCADDATU**

Na vota nc'era n'omu chi ogni simana iv'a chianca e s'accattava nu ped'i viteddu ca nc'era bella carni e gustava pocu e sta cosa a fici pe longu tempu. Iddi dui chi lavuravanu dda s'u ncrisciru ca iva tutt'i simani p'a stessa cosa. "Ici com'am'e` fari mi cangia chistu mi veni pe n'atra cosa?" Allura sti ddui s'a pensaru m'u scaddanu ddu pedi - m'u calan'e mu nchiananu nta l'acqua ugghiuta cusi` eranu sicuri ca non si coci mai.

Chistu pe nu poch'i tempu no ghiu ca s'a rregulau c'o zannianu ma poi tornau sempri dda. Quand'u vittar'a prossima vota nc'issaru, "Bongiornu amicu. Comu si va?" e iddu nci arrispundiu cusi` e nci dissi,

"Nomm'a successu a nessuna taverna

Mi cociu cottu e crudu m'a rritorna

Strudia nu voscu e acqua na isterna

E diventau chiu` duru di li vostri corna.”

E ncia` ssettau nta facci iddu a risposta, e no vvindiru mancu u pedi chiu`.

### (5) A STORIA D'I GRAZZII

Na vota nc'era na jornata chi Diu cuncediva i grazzii e nc'era nu jornu stabbilitu a ccu 'rrivav'o primu nci dava quali grazzia voliva. Allora u previti si levau a bon matinu e ssi presentau dda u primu. Pari ca l'atri matini si levava u primu, era ca voliva mi nci cerca sta grazzia prim'e tutti l'atri. Quandu arrivau nc'issi, “Bongiornu Maestru,” nc'issi u previti a Diu. Nc'issi Diu, “Dimmi chiddu chi voi.” “Jeu vogghiu ‘U Tuttu’,” nc'iss'u previti e U Tuttu esti:

“Se nasci u previti pasci

Se tti mariti u previti mbiti

Se mori u previti godi” -

Sunnu tutti cos'i soi.

Allura dopu d'iddu nd'iu tanti atri e nci cercavanu tutti a stessa cosa. Nc'iciva Diu, “Ormai chissa grazzia e` ddata.” U chiu` scartu cercava i cos'i megghiu e chiddi chiu` scarsi no potianu arrivari dda ca ormai si llavi'a piatu u previti.

Poi si presentau a gaddinedda. Nc'issi Diu, “Chi voi?” “Vogghiu U Tuttu.” “Ormai U Tutt'e datu. Ti dugnu n'quart'i ran'o iornu pemmi t'u mangi,” nc'iss'u Signuruzzu. A gaddina nc'issi, “No. Vogghiu mi staiu tutt'a jornata c'u beccu nterra,” e viditi c'a gaddina mangia sempri: se a cacciat'ojornu mangia, se a cacciati a menzanotti mangia, - E` sempri c'u beccu nterra chi trova ncuna cosa. No fini mai i mangiari.

Apoi iu u veddanu e nc'issi, “Bongiornu Maestru.” “Bongiornu,” nc'issi, “e tu chi voi?” Nc'issi, “Vogghiu U Tuttu.” “U Tuttu ormai e` datu.” “E allora ogghiu mi aiu

terra mi pozzu zappari tutt'i jorna." Nc'issi Diu, "Chissa grazia e` fatta pe ttia." Sindi girau p'a casa mi trova lu lauru soi.

Apoi a man a manu comu ivanu tutti l'atri, tutti cercavan'u tuttu ca sapianu quali cosa bella e`. Mbeci a prima cucchiarinata si ll'avia pighiat'u previti e daveru viditi c'o previti e` a tutt'i pignati, c'ann'e passari tutti cosi d'i mani soi: se ssi marita , se ssi mori, se ssi vattia, e iddu e bellu sistematu.

### **(6) A STORIA D'U VESTUNI**

Na vota nc'era unu chi ssi vardava i pecuri e non aviv'o vestuni pemm'i faci girari pe undi voli iddu. Allora comu vardava pe na vanda e pe natra, vittu na luvara chi aviva tanti virguluni. Allora dissi, "Mindi tagghiu un'i chiddi e mi fazzu nu vestuni." Sind'iu e sindi tagghiau unu. A iddu nci paria ca fici nu piccatu e ghiu nd'u previti mi si cumpessa.

Nc'issi ca avi stu piccatu ca tagghiau stu virguluni mi si faci u vestuni mi gir'e pecuri. "Allura," nc'iss'u previti, "Nd'arrestau atri aundi pigghiasti chissu?" Iddu nc'issi, "Si`, nd'arrestau tanti." U previti nc'issi, "No, non e` ppiccatu." Chistu nc'arripundiu e nci dissi, "Se m'a'e cumpessari ver'e propia v'ai e diri c'o virguluni u tagghiai ndi vui.

"O no!" nc'iss'u previti, "e` ppiccatu mortali. Ora ti cureru!"

"Comu, prima m'icistu ca non e` ppiccatu e ora m'iciti ca mi facit'attaccari?" Nc'iss'u previti, "Mi ti scurp'u piccatu sav'e far'accussi`." U pecuraru nc'issi, "A no! A chiesa non ci vegnu chiu`."

Nc'iss'u previti, "Ma nui a leggi a facimu ccussi`."

### **(7) U VINU JANCU**

Na vota nc'era nu marit'e na mughieri. U maritu moriu. A mughieri sind'iu nd'u previt'e si cumpessau. "Moriu me maritu,"nc'issi, "e voliva sapiri aund'e`, se e` o paravisu, o mpernu, o o prigatoriu." Nc'iss'u previti, "Mi ti pozzu dir'aund'e` to` maritu, a pportari na damungiana i vinu jancu u chiu` megghiu chi nce`."

Quando iu mi si pigghi'a mbasciata nc'iss'u previti, "Nui u vinu nd'u mbivimmu ma a to` maritu n'o trovam'a nudda vanda: no o paravisu, no o mpernu e no o prigatoriu. Non sapim'aundi jiu a finiri. Mi ti dic'aund'e`, ancora no vardai chi atru `e pportari."

### **(8) GESU`, SAN PETRU E L'OMU VACABBUNDU**

Na vota quando non c'eranu tanti piccati i chi nci su' ora, u Signuruzzu caminava appedi cu tutt'i dudici apostuli. Comu caminavanu nc'era n'omu chi dormiva ch'i pedi nta ll'acqua e u Signuruzzu nci domandau, "Ndi mostrati aundi vai sta strata?"

"Ah," nc'issi chiddu, "se aviv'a test'aund'a'i pedi, avia mbivutu ca su' ngaghiatu 'i siti e nommi giru a testa mi mbivu, arreulativi se mi pozzu levari mi vi mostr'a strat'a vui." E no si levau. Pari c'o Signuruzzu a strata n'a sapia, ma pemmi s'assicura quantu e` vacabbundu d'omu, nci fici 'ssa domanda.

Allura caminandu caminandu ancora, arrivau ndi na casa e battiu, e nesciu na fimmana cumbiata cu nu faddali d'avanti, tutta mpacendata chi faciva u pani. U Signuri nci dissi, "Ndi potiti mostrari undi vai sta strata?" Sta fimmana dassa'u pani, dassau tutti cosi e sind'iu a press'o Signuri cu i dudici apostuli mi nci ammostra dda strat'aundi vai. Dopu chi ffu soddispatta ca nci 'mmostrau a strata, chidda sindi tornau p'a casa mi finisci'u pani e chisti cuntinuavanu a caminari.

U Signuri si votau ndi San Petru e nci dissi, "Petru, u vidisti d'omu ch'era curcatu chi pedi nta ll'acqua? Chiddu av'e` siri u maritu di sta fimmana." Ncissi San Petru, "E pecchi` faciti cusi`?"

Nci arrispundiu u Signuri e nci dissi, "Se ssunnu tutt'i dui vacabbundi morin'i fami e allura av'essiri cusi`," nciss'u Signuruzzu.

### **(9) GESU`, SAN PETRU E A PETRA**

Allura quandu caminavanu, San Petru era chiu` furbu, chiu` malizziusu i chiddatri pero` u Signuri sapiva chi faci San Petru. Tantu chi na vota comu caminavanu avian'e passari na hiunara e mi chiananu nta na nchianata. Pe strata nciss'u Signuruzzu a tutt'i dudici apostuli, "Quand'arrivamu nta dda nchianata nd'arripusamu tutti. Piativi na petra l'unu e portatila dda supa ca quand'arrivamu nto chianu nd'assettamu."

Tutti chidd'atri si iutaru na sorta di petra chiu` grand'i quant'a potivanu. San Petru si pigghia na petricedda e s'a menti nte mani. Quand'arrivaru nto chianu, u Signuruzzu fici mi si 'ssettanu tutti, pigghiau ddi petr'e i benidiciu. Ddi petri addiventaru pani. A San Petru nci addiventau chidda pani, dda picciridda chi aviva nte mani. Nc'issi, "Maestru, e a mia chistu?" "E," nc'iss'u Signuri, "tu chissa petra nchianasti nte mani. Ti mangi chissa ca chissa t'abbasta." San Petru si cridiva ca poti sapiri chiu` d'u Signuri, mbeci non era veru. Chiddatri nd'avianu pani chi no'potivanu finiri, ma San Petru si mangiau dda muzzicata ch'avia e si stezzi zittu.

### **(10) GESU`, SAN PETRU E A CORDA D'I SATIZZI**

Allura comu caminavanu, San Petru era sempi chi volia fari cosi storti, chiu` stort'i tutti chiddatri dudici apostuli. Allura comu caminavanu nta la strata nc'era na vanda chi nc'er'a chianca chi aviv'e satizzi mpicciati. San Petru piau e s'a pigghiau na corda. U Signuri vitti c'avi ddi satizzi e nc'issi, "Petru, e tu ssi satizzi?" Nc'issi, "Maestru, sapiti, pigghiai sti satizzi, i vitti ddanterra, e pigghiai..." "Allura," nc'iss'u



Signuri, “ora vandii tu e dici, ‘A cu perdiu na cord’e satizzi?’ ‘cu perdiu na cord’e satizzi?’ - ca cu’i perdiu ven’e s’i pigghia.”

San Petru mbeci sapia ca sillavi’a ‘rrobbatu. Vandiaa San Petru e faciv,’ “A cu perdiu na corda” apoi chianu chianu faciva, “i satizzi?” chi no potiva sentiri nuddu. U Signuri nc’iciva, “N’atra ota Petru. Grida chiu` forti.” E iddu faci’u stessu: “A cu perdiu na corda - i satizzi?” facia chianu chianu e non si capisciva chi pperdiru, pecchi` iddu no volia mi nc’i duna. Allora no vinni nuddu - sti satizzeddi s’i mangiau San Petru.

### **(11) GESU`, SAN PETRU E A CUCUZZA**

E allora caminavan’i sta manera comu diciv’o Signuri. U Signuri sapia ca San Petru esti nu curiusu. Allora caminandu caminandu arrivar’a na vanda chi nc’era nu ped’i luvara. Nciss’u Signuruzzu, “Nd’arripusamu mostu?” Nc’issi San Petru e tutti chidd’atri, “Si, ‘ssettamundi cca,” e s’assettaru tutt’a ddu ped’i luvara.

Ogni tantu cadiva nu cocciceddu d’aliva e nci cadiva sup’a test’e San Petru. Nc’issi San Petr’o Signuri, “O Maestru,” nc’issi, “chi cosi storti chi facistu. St’arburu tantu grandi faci stu fruttu tantu picciriddu.”

Allura si ‘ddirizzaru, caminandu n’atra vota, caminandu, arrivar’a na vanda chi nc’era na pergula. Nc’iss’u Signuri, “Petru, megghiu ca nd’arripusamu sutta stu friscu ca simu stanchi.” Era na pergula i cucuzzara ch’i cucuzzi eranu quantu nu zipangulu. Si ‘ssettau San Petru. Quandu nci pars’a iddu, u Signuruzzu distacca na cucuzz’e chiddi e ncia mina nta test’e San Petru. “O Maestru,” nc’issi San Petru, “chi facistu? Supa stu gatu faciti sti cosi tanti pisanti. Ma tutti cosi storti faciti!”

Nc'iss'u Signuri, "Petru, ti ricordi quandu m'icisti p'a luvara ca ddu sorta d'arburu fici ddu fruttu picciriddu? Se ti cadiva na cucuzz'e dda supa, attia no tt'ammazzava? Allur'e cosi pisant'ann'e siri nterra. leu sacciu chiddu chi fazzu.

U Signuruzzu videndu ca San Petru era tantu ngenue tantu propia chi voliva mi si menti supa d'u Signuri, nci cunsinnau i chiavi d'u Paravisu e nc'issi, "Tu si u meggh'i tutt'i dudici apostuli.

### **(12) I QUATTRO OLIMENTI**

Christu criau li quattu olimenti: l'aria, l'acqua, lu focu e la terra e ndi criau una chiu` potenti: criau l'omu e lu fingiu di terra.

### **(13) A CICALA E A FERMICULA**

A fermiculedda laura tutt'a stati mi si trov'o pani p'o mbernu. Si zicca sutta terra, si faci na tanicedda e ccarria chiddu chi trova. A cicala mbeci no faci nenti. U lauru soi e` mmi canta. Allora quandu vinni nto mbernu a cicala sind'iu nd'a fermicula se nci duna ncuna cosa mi mangia. Nci'ss'a fermiculedda, " Tu venitusella!" nci'ssi, "Ti menti sup'a l'arburu e canti mi ti fai a ssentiri. I quantu canti, scatti e zboti i sup'a ram'e l'arburu. Mbeci eu lauru tutt'a stati e mi fazz'u mangiari p'o mbernu e ssu` tanta stanca chi u viaggiu chi carriu pisa chiu` di mia. Arranciati ora senza nenti! Va llaura se voi mangiari."

### **(14) A VEDUVA E U CUMPARI**

Na vota nc'era na fimmana chi nc'iavia morut'u maritu e avia cinqu figghioleddi. Allora mi campa sti figghioli com'avi'e fari? Avia tanti nimali; a un'a vota sind'iv'a fera e s'i vindiva. Nta casa sua nc'era n'omu pe ffortezza ch'er'o Cumpari. Allora st'amara si cunsigghiava di st'omu, "Cumpari, domani vaj'a fera mi mi vindu nu viteddu, mi nci'accattu ncuna cos'a sti figghioli. "Vabbonu Cummari, ndi vidimu dda."

Allur'ò Cumpari nesciv'a fera, nci domandava, "Cummari comu jv'avoi?" "U vindi'o viteddu," nc'iciv'a Cummari. "Vabbo'," nc'iciva iddu. Si faciva na par'e passi chiu` ddavia, si mentiv'arret'i na sipala cu na pezz'avanz'a facci e nci piav'e sordi a Cummari.

Quando iv'a sira mi nci faci visita, "Cummari comu iu?"

"Cumpar'u vitedd'u vindia ma i sordi m'i piaru."

"Ma, pensamu p'a prossima ota," nc'iciva iddu.

Quand'er'a prossima simana, stu cristianu sindi iva, sta fimmana si piava n'atru viteddu e sind'iv'a fera. Stu cristianu si faciv'a vvidiri dda, "Cummar'u vitedd'u vindistu?"

"Si Cumpar'u vindia."

"Ndi vidimu sta sira," nci'civa iddu.

Iddu vjatu vjatu, sind'iv'avanti, si mentiv'arret'a na sipal'o solitu, si mentiva na cos'avanz'a facci e nci pigghiaiv'e sordi a cummari. Quando iv'a sira, "Cummari, comu siti? Mi pariti dispiaciuta."

"Cumpari, n'atra vota m'i piar'i sordi."

"Ma, pensamu p'a prossima simana," nci'civa iddu n'atra ota.

Quando veniv'a prossima simana, sta cristiana si piava n'atru viteddu e sind'iv'a fera. Stu cristianu si faciv'a vidiri dda nt'a fera,

"Cummar'u vindistu?"

"Si cumpar'u vindia."

Quando nci pariv'a iddu ca idd'era sicuru, si faciva na par'e passi chia` 'vanti, si mentiv'o solitu postu c'u muccaturi avanz'a facci e nci piav'e sordi n'atra ota.

Quand'er'a sira, tornav'a casa chistu, "Cummari, comu iv'avoi?"

“Cumpari, tutt’i voti m’i stannu pigghiand’i sordi; non sacciu com’ai e ffari. Staiu perdendu tutt’i nimal’e i figghioli l’aiu mort’i fami.”

“Cummari, pensamu p’a prossima ota, c’a prossima ota vi dugnu na pistola, ch’i sordi novvi pigghia nuddu. Quando nesci chiddu mi vi pigghi’e sordi, vui piati sta pistol’e nci sparati.”

Piau chist’e fic’iu stessu comu fici tutt’i voti. U cumpari nesciu e chista cacciau a pistola, m’a pistola no sparau. Allora stu cristianu nci piau i sordi n’atra ota. Quand’arrivau a cas’a sira,

“Cummari?”

Ncissi, “M’i piar’i sordi; m’i piar’i sordi n’atra vota Cumpari.”

“O Cummari,” nc’issi, “Cu sa’ com’a tenistu. N’a sapistu teniri.”

Sta fimmana s’a reulau ca nce` ncuna cosa sbagliata. Pigghiau na pistola ver’e s’a misi nt’a sacchetta.

Quando iu a fera n’atra ota, si vindiu l’atru nimali. Stu cristianu si faci’a vidiri dda, “Cummar’u vindistu?”

“Si Cumpar’u vindia.”

“Ndi vidimu sta sira,” nc’issi iddu n’atra ot’a Cummari.

A Cummari, povaredda, tirava p’a casa cu sti sordiceddi nta ddu faddali. U Cumpari si misi n’atra vota arret’a sipala cu ddu muccatur’avanz’a facci e nesciu, pecchi` u Cumpari sapiva ca chidda er’a pistola vacanti, non sapia c’a Cummar’aviva chidda bona. Nesciu davanti, a Cummari cacciau a pistola giusta, nci sparau, avvicinau vicinu d’iddu e nci cacciau ddu muccatur’avanz’a facci e vitti ca er’o Cumpari dda nterra. “Ah,” nc’issi, “Cumpari, eravu vui tutt’i voti chi mi futtistu i sordi. Vui mi futtistu i sordi, e nci’appizzastu a vita.”

### (15) A STORIA D'I DDU FRATI

Na vota n'cera na mamma e nu patri e avianu ddu figghi masculi e allura sti cristiani pe lascitu di sti figghi quandu iddi morivanu, a unu nci dassaru nu gaddu e a l'atru na matassa di spacu, ca iddu era nu scarparu, e na ughia. Quandu chisti cca nci moriru, i ddu frati si spartiru. Chiddu chi aviv'o gaddu dissi, "Jeu caminu mi pozz'avir'a casa a chiu` bella i nt'o paisi. Chist'e` a grazia chi cercu." Chidd'atru c'u spacu dissi, "Jeu caminu mi pozz'aviri na mangiat'e pasta sciutta pe quantu ndi vogghiu."

Chiddu dda si pia' u gaddu e sind'iu caminandu caminandu. Quandu arrivau a na vanda vitti na lucicedda e dissi, "Se Diu mi duna la saluti, stasira aiu a rrviri ndi dda casa. Quand'arrivau dda, bbattiu a porta e nci dissi a chiddi, "Mi potiti dar'alloggiu pe stasira?" Nci dissaru chiddi, "Si`." Allora trasiu intra stu cristianu. Tutti si curcaru e un'i chiddi sindi nchianau supr'o tettu d'a casa. Nc'issi chiddu, "E pecchi`? Chistu chi faci? Non si curca mi dormi?"

"No," dici, "pecchi` nesci na stilla," dici, "domani mattina a matinata e nui sapimu chi ura e`, e ndavim'e levare mi jamu a campagna."

"Ai` !" nc'issi iddu, "Curcativi tutti ca jeu aiu na cosa nta stu saccu e quand'esti ura vi chiamu jeu." Allora caccia' u gaddu; u gaddu dopu menzanotti cumens'a cantari sempi. Unu chi l'avi praticu sapi quandu su i ddui, quandu su i dui e menza, quandu su i tri - esti propia com'u rrioggiu. Allora nc'issi iddu, " A chi ura vaiu e chiamari?" Quandu iddi nci dissaru, "Chiamatind'e ddui, chiamatind'e tri," quandu nci pars'a iddu ca cantau stu gaddu, pigghiau e i chiamau a chiddi.

"Chi bellezza!" nci dissi, "Sta notti dormimmu tutti. E allura nd'a vinditi sta cosa?" Nci dissi chistu cca, "Si`." Nci dissaru chiddi, "Nd'a ccattamu nui. Chi voliti?" 'Ici, "Volarissi stu zainu caricatu di marenghi d'oru," nc'issi iddu. Allora si pigghiau stu zainu caricatu di marenghi d'oru, sind'iu e si fici na cas'a chiu` bella chi nc'era nt'o paisi cu stu gaddu.

Chidd'atru cu dda matass'e spacu e ccu dda ugghia, sind'iu caminandu caminandu pemmi si faci na mangiat'e pasta sciutta. E allur'aundi iva mi consa sti scarpi non d'avia nuddu pasta, nci consav'e scarpi e sindi jva.

Caminav'ancora mi vidi se poti trovar'a ncharchidunu, se avi ncuna mangiat'e pasta. Stu cristianu ch'era riccu sapiva ca so frati sind'iu pe na mangiat'e pasta sciutta e cca stav'arrivandu natra vota nt'o paisi. E chiddu vandiav', "A ccu si voli consar'i scarpi, a ccu si....."

Nc'issi iddu e serbi, "Viditi ca passa nu cristianu," nc'issi, "Cogghiti tutt'i scarpi vecchi e mmentitili cca, e preparati i caddari ca chistu camina pe na mangiat'e pasta sciutta."

Allura chidd'u riccu si inchiu nu portafogli'i sordi e sind'iu nt'a strata aundi sapiva ca passa so frati. Primicedda m'arriva so frati dda, nesciu i nt'a sipala iddu, ettau ddu portafogliu dda nterra, appena passa so frati mi s'u pigghia. Quand'arrivau so frati vicin'u portafogliu, quantu dissi, "Ah, ora maj'e stuppari l'occhi pemmi vidu comu caminanu l'orbi." Si stuppau l'occhi chiddu e u portafogliu arrestau dda nterra e iddu passau. Nesciu so frati e s'u piau n'atra vot'o portafogliu. "Ma!" dici, "ma chi cazz'i frati! Varda ch'e` cretinu! Tantu stortu," ici, "camina cu l'occhi chiusi. Non si voz'arricchiri." Si pia'u portafogl'e sind'iu.

Quand'arrivau nt'o paisi chiddu vandiava, "Pe ccu voli conzat'i scarpi. A....." Chidd'u sapivan'i serbi - affaccia un'e nt'o bbarcuni e u chiamau. Dici, "Veniti ca cca nc'e` lavuru pe vui avoi." Quand'arrivau chiddu e vitti tutti ddi scarpi! Iddu n'o canusciva ca chiddu er'o frati soi, ma so frat'u riccu canusciva ch'era chiddu chi caminav'ancora p'a pasta.

Quando finiu di sti scarpi, dici, "Chi voliti? Quantu voliti?"

Dici, “No vogghiu nenti.” Dici, “Vogghiu na mangiat’e pasta.” Allora prepararu tutta dda pasta quantu nci pars’a iddu, ndi mangiau quantu ndi potti e nci dissi, “Signuri, v’arringraziu. Sugnu soddispattu di chiddu chi cercai.” Nesciu so frat’e ncissi, “Manch’i cani chi ssi ccazzuni! T’arricordi,” nc’issi, “nta dda strata aundi caminavi comu l’orbi? Taviva jettat’u portafogliu,” nc’issi, “e non ti volist’arricchiri.”

E allora si cunsularu tutt’i ddu frati, si stezaru nt’a stessa casa e chissu fu tuttu chi cercaru. Apparu tutti cosi chiddi chi vozaru.

### (16) I TRI BRIGANTI

Na vota nc’eranu tri omani chi caminavanu nta na strata e si chiamavanu i tri briganti. Un’i chiddi quandu nci pars’a iddu ca avi nu bellu pocu chi caminanu ‘issi, “Ndi faci fami. Chi voliti mi ndi ccattamu mi mangiamu?” Allora dissaru unu d’i tri, “Ccattamundi na lattuca cusi` no ghiettamu nenti.”

Nt’a strata comu caminavanu nc’era n’arburu. Dissaru, “Megghiu ca ndi nchianamu sup’all’arburu e nd’a mangiamu sta lattuca,” e accumensaru a ghiettari i foggh’ifora ca dicianu ca no mbannu. I jettaru nterra e nci pisciar’i dda supa ca dissaru, “Ormai ndi mangiamu chista ch’e` bona.” A poi chidda non ci abbastau. Allora quandu s’a finiru nci faccia chiu` fami. “Dissaru, “Calamu e ndi cogghimu chiddi fogghi ca su’ boni.” Calaru dda nterra tutt’i tri e si mangiaru chiddi fogghi chi avianu jettatu e pisciat’i supa puru.

Poi passava n’omu, vitti dd’arburu e sind’iu mi s’assetta dda ssutta mi s’arripesa nu pocu. I tri briganti supa ll’arburu u vittaru ca s’assetta dda` e nci pisciavanu sup’a testa, nci pisciavan’i ncoddu. Ddu povaru cristianu vardava pe supa e diceva, “Ma chi e`? Chiovi? U tempu pari tantu bellu e chiovi sulu cca?” Quandu era bellu sculatu vardau sup’all’arburu e ssentiv’arridiri. S’arregulau ch’e` ncunu scherzu. Si levau e sind’iu.

**(17) I TRI AMICI**

Na vota nc'eranu tri amici chi ssi` volianu ben'assai assai e quandu caminavanu, caminavan'a nita. Allora vinni l'ura chisti cca mi si spartinu, mi pian'a via sua e si chiamava un'u Focu, una L'acqua e n'atru L'onori.

Quandu si spartiru si dissaru tutt'i tri, "Quandu ndavim'e ncuntrar'a prossima vota aundi nd'am'e trovari?"

Arrispundi'u Focu e nci dissi, "Aundi vidi fumu, veni ca ieu sugnu dda."

Nci dissi L'acqua, "Aundi vidi vasciu, veni ca ammia mi trovi dda."

Arrispundiu L'onori e dissi, "Quandu mi perdi nommi trovi chiu`."

**(18) U SIGNURUZZU VESTUTU DI VECCHIAREDDU**

Na vota nc'er'u Signuruzzu chi caminava vestutu di vecchiarreddu cu nu saccu ncoddu chi non si volia fari canusciri cu e`. Caminandu caminandu quandu 'rrivau ndi na casa voliva mi s'arriposa. Battiu a porta e nesciu n'omu e nci dissi, "Mi pozz'arriposari cca sta sira?" So mughieri ntisi parrari e 'ffacciaiu mi vidi cu e`. St'omu chi er'o maritu ncissi, "Si`, si`, trasiti ca vi staviti cca." Idda no voliva. So maritu u mis'a na vand'a na 'rribbatedda tutt'a na scala. U Signuruzzu nci dissi, "Quantu mi m'arriposu fin'a ddomani matinu ca poi quandu e` gghiornu mindi vaiu.

Allur'o Signuri sapia c'av'e sentiri st'omu chi u dassau mi s'arriposa pe na notti. Quandu fu menzanotti abbattiu a porta, iu l'angialu. L'angialu sapiv'o Signur'aund'e` e nci dissi, "Maestru, nesciu n'anima. Chi stella nci pronotati?" Nci dissi u Signuri, "Mi campa vintiquattr'anni e dopu nchiana supa n'arburu e cadì e s'ammazza. Poi nci dissi u Signuri all'angialu, p'amuri mi senti u marit'i chidda, "Sta fimmana chi stavi nta sta casa - a stilla sua e` mi faci a mala cristiana pe sett'anni e poi mi sindi torn'a casa n'atra vota. So maritu ntisi tutti sti palori e pensau, dici, "Allura stu vecchiu cu' sa' cu' e`?"



A matina quandu fu gghiornu, u Signuri sindi iu e st'omu, u patruni d'a casa vitti a so mughieri ca si cogghi tutt'i rrobbi mi sindi vai; n'a potti fermari pecchi` a stilla sua era chidda, no? Sind'iu ngiru mi faci a mala cristiana.

Dopu chi finiri sett'anni di a stilla sua, sindi tornau a casa n'atra vota e so maritu, sentandu a palora d'u Signuri chi ntisi ch'i ricchi soi, s'a piau n'atra vota nta casa pecchi` pensau c'a stilla sua era chidda.

### **(19) I TRI COCC'I SURIACA**

Na vota nc'era na mamma, nu patr'e avianu na figghia. A mamma e u patri calar'a campagna e dassar'a so figghia a casa. So mamma nci diss'a sso figghia, "Pe stasira menti tri cocc'e suriaca supa mi si coci ca quandu vegnu jeu mentim'a pasta."

Allura idda ndi misi tri, comu nc'issi so mamma. Ogni tantu iva mi varda nt'a pignata e i vidiva ca gaddiavanu nta ll'acqua e diciva, "Unu cal'e unu nchiana." Poi un'u provau mi vi se e` cottu; n'atru nci catti comu iu m'u pigghia supr'a cucchiara. Nt'a pignata nd'arrestau unu.

Quandu so mamma si ricogghiu e ghiu mi ment'a pasta nt'a pignata, non c'era nenti, nc'era sulu l'acqua e nu cocciu. Nc'issi so mamma, "Ma suriaca non d'avi?" Nc'issi idda, "Tu tri coccia m'icisti mi mentu e jeu i misi. Allura un'u provai mi vidu s'e` cottu, unu mi catt'i supr'a cucchiara e l'atr'e` ddocu - ca era una chiu` storta d'i cucuzzi longhi!.

### **(20) CHIDDU CHI CAPISCIV'E NIMALI**

Na vot'o Signuruzzu caminav'appedi e allura quand'arrivau a na vanda nc'era na hiumara e iddu non voliva passari - voliva passari ma volia m'u passa nu cristianu

ncoddu mi vidi chi voli ddu cristianu, s'o poti aiutari ca sapiva ch'era nu povareddazzu.

Nci dissi, "Bell'omu," nci dissi, "volarria passar'a hiomara ma jeu nommi fidu," nciss'u Signuri. "O," ncissi chiddu, "no'vwind'ancarricati ca vi passu jeu." Si vasciau, si mis'u Signuruzzu sup'e spaddi soi e u passau dda da hiomara.

Quand'arrivau dda vanda nc'iss'u Signur'a ddomu, "Avit'a diri quali casa voliti," nci dissi, "ca jeu v'a pozzu far'aviri." Nc'issi iddu, "Vogghiu sapiri chi cosa dinn'i nimali quandu parranu." "Tuttu chissu e'," nc'iss'u Signuruzzu!" Allora nci diss'u Signuri, "Si'," Nci fici a sapiri quandu parran'i nimali chi... . "E nommi nci'u dici a nuddu," nc'iss'u Signuri, "ca se tu nciu dici a ncharchidunu chi dinn'i nimali," nc'issi, "dopu tri ghiora tuni mori." "No," nc'iss'iddu, "ca non ciu` dic' a nuddu."

Allura chistu cca quandu cantavan'i cedduzzi sapiva chi dinnu e si mentiv'a 'rridiri. Quandu parravan'i nimali sapiva chi dinnu e si mentiv'a 'rridiri. Allora nu jornu si pigghiau a hiumenta iddu e sindi nchianau sup'a hiumenta e nc'er'a hiumentedda picciridda arretu e so mughieri chi ssi teniva d'a cuda d'a hiumentedda. Quand'a hiumentedda picciridda parrau nci dissi a so mamma, "No caminari viatu," nci dissi, "ca jeu sugnu picciula e nommi fidu mi vegnu cu ttia e sparti chista mi tira a cuda chi mmi stav'ammazzandu." A hiumenta randi nc'issi, "Tu chissu dici. Jeu caminu chiu` chi pozzu ca aiu stu pis'i ncodd'i mia," nci dissi, "e non pozzu m'u portu. Quantu m'u lev'aundi l'aiu e levari mi mi cacciu stu pisu." E si misi m'arridi stu cristianu.

Quandu si misi m'arridi, so mughier'i dda nterra nc'issi, "Pecchi` arridi?" Nc'iss'iddu, "Camina ca no tt'u pozzu diri." "E no," nc'issi, "tu mi l'a diri." "Camina," nc'iciva iddu, "ca jeu no tt'u pozzu diri, ca se t'u dicu moru." Ici, "A mmia nommi ntaresa. Vogghiu sapiri pecchi` arridivi tu." Affina, cretinu stortu pe comu fu, nciu` dissi ca chidda diciva c'av'u pisu ntesta, c'av'u pisu nto coddu, ca... . Nci

mbrogghiava finachi`poi quandu non ndi potti chiu`, nci app'e dir'a verita`. Nc'iss'a verita`. Dopu ncuni tri ghiorna, catti malatu stu povareddu e moriu e so mughier'arrestau c'a hiumenta comu na cretina.

## **APPENDIX D**

This story is taken from *Racconti Popolari Calabresi* collected by Raffaele Lombardi Satriani, *Vol. xi*, p 215. Translated from the dialect by Grace Nolan.

### **HOLY REASON**

Listen, all you youngsters, who are growing up, who need to be obedient and to respect your husbands and not be simpering; now I'll tell you what happened.

Once there were four brothers and they had only one sister. These brothers were all young and arrogant and didn't allow anyone to get the better of them, but they loved their little sister who was the youngest: they let her have anything she wanted, they gave in to her and spoilt her and so she grew up lazy. The discontented girl was beautiful and one day a master tailor asked for her hand in marriage. The brothers said yes, because the tailor was handsome and hardworking. So they finalised the marriage plans, they gave the dowry at twenty, and two hundred ducats in money because they were rich. They married rich and wanting for nothing, but after two or three days of happiness, sourness set in. When he saw that she didn't know anything and answered him back:

"Don't worry, I'll tame you."

He was forceful and knew how to tame her. One day he found that nothing was done in the kitchen. He took a stick and gave her a good portion and she ran to her brothers.

"Do you see how that brute hurt me?"

"What did he hit you with?"

"With a stick."

The brothers run.

"Did you by God take her for a donkey, to hit her with a stick? By God, we'll kill you."

The poor husband didn't reply because there were four of them:

“If I speak, I’ll cop it.”

And he couldn’t even tell them the reason.

“Next time you touch her we’ll make you pay for it.”

Another time, because she answered him back, the husband couldn’t put up with it any longer:

“I’ll let her have it with this piece of rope.”

Back she goes to her brothers. Another argument, that you don’t hit with a rope. The poor man had a lot to put up with and another time he gave her a good slapping. Another argument. At the end of it, he couldn’t touch her, because she had her brothers to defend her. What did the husband think to do one day? He bought a whip and wound it all around with a red ribbon and here and there he decorated it with bows of every colour.

“What is that, my husband?”

“Ah! my wife, do you know what it is?”

“What is it?”

“Holy Reason.”

“Really, isn’t she beautiful!”

“Yes, my wife, she is a miraculous saint. We must worship her and not touch her because it’s a sin.”

“Yes, my husband, I’ll light a candle in her honour.”

And so she swallowed the story because she wasn’t very bright. When the husband saw that he had convinced her, he left her with work to do and said to her: “When I get back, I’m to find the chores finished. Do you hear?”

“Off you go and don’t worry about it.”

The husband returns that evening and he finds that she has done nothing.

“Ah! You don’t want to listen! You take advantage of the fact that you have brothers!”

He takes Holy Reason and starts thrashing her until she was black and blue.

She runs to her brothers:

“He’s killed me! He’s killed me the wretch! I’m bruised all over!”

“With what did he do it?”

“With Holy Reason.”

“He beat you with Holy Reason?”

“Yes, my brothers, with Holy Reason.”

“Well since he beat you with Holy Reason, don’t come here again or we’ll give you the rest.”

“And so, no one will defend me?”

“We can’t defend you when you get a beating with Holy Reason.”

She ran away crying and she believed that if she copped it with that Holy Reason, no one could say anything because it was a sacred thing. And in this way, she learned to be obedient and hardworking and her sookiness and simpering, disappeared.

# **PART E**

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