The Supplies of a Respectable House

Therefore, she went up to the attic. It was a wide room, under the sloping roof, quite high, with two big windows overlooking the yard and the road, through which you could see the vegetable gardens, the valley, and the mountain. Bunches of grapes and pears hung from the beams; on the ground, golden almonds lay, together with potatoes, still yellow like apples. And there was also the grey barley bread for the sheepfold, the dark bread for the servant, the white bread for her; and flour and pasta, and legumes, and all the necessary supplies for a respectable house. Nothing was missing, and in a corner, between the two small windows, there was, finally, the servant’s pallet: a low bed made of worm-eaten wood, with a rough grey and black woolen blanket that resembled the hide of a tiger.

(from the novel Marianna Sirca, 1913)

Marianna Sirca is a young woman, a rich estate owner who falls in love with Simone Sole, a former shepherd-servant of hers, who has gone into hiding, becoming an outlaw. To see him more easily, she moves to a little house within her mountain properties. Her cousin, Marianna’s suitor, sees Simone going out of the house one night, mistakes him for a felon, and kills him. The relationship between Marianna and the outlaw is based on solidarity and
intimacy. Moreover, Simone feels responsibility to the family of his former employers.

Considering the particular story and the collocation of the plot, the narrative texts describing the food are often focused on a cooking style made in the country, by outlaws and shepherds. Therefore, when Simone is invited to have a meal in the “pinneta,” a typical building of Sardinian shepherds, Marianna’s father orders the servants to kill a sheep. Apart for the usual skewer-roast meat, there is the description of the preparation of a dish, whose existence is also attested by the shepherds of ancient Greece.

It is called sanguinaccio [blood sausage]. Made with the offal of the killed animal, filled with spiced blood, it is cooked under the embers until it gets hard. It is then sliced, so that children and adults can savor it.

I’d like to point out that the scenes with banquets are very often night scenes, thus boosting Deledda’s narrative intention, that is, to mingle food and eros, to combine this prime need – eating – with the other, more powerful one – sexual attraction. Well, many decades before Isabel Allende of Afrodit, Grazie Deledda had understood the strong, charming power of preparing a meal and eating it with her beloved.

Deledda was often accused of idealizing the figure of the outlaw, of considering him a sort of unlucky person, a victim of fate more than a real felon. To be honest, these allegations could be completely true. If we consider the story of Simone Sole, in the scene where the outlaw is cooking, again, roasted meat for himself, there is also the very Eden-like and sensual
description of him washing in the river, emphasizing his white, feminine flesh. Almost all of Deledda’s protagonists differ from the physical prototype of the Sardinian man, dark and small, as we know from our collective national image. They often have, on the other hand, brown hair, light eyes and, as is the case of Elias Porolu, we notice their fingernails, rosy like the ones of a woman!

Towards the end of the story, Marianna, having already declared her love for Simone in front of everybody, is waiting for him to come for dinner, because she wants to convince him to turn himself in. That will be their last meeting. The dinner has an even wilder ingredient compared to previous meals. In fact, the servant has to roast a little boar, an animal species that is still plentiful in Sardinia today. Wine in abundance and then grapes, taken from the supplies in the attic, will be the right addition to the meat, prince of the Sardinian menu.

Deledda also finds the way to describe the supply room, which is sometimes the cellar, but is instead the attic in the case of Marianna Sirca. Bunches of grapes and pears hang from the beams, almonds and potatoes are on the floor; there are three varieties of bread, according to its destination: barley grey for the sheepfold, black for the servants, and white for the masters. Then flour, pasta and legumes. The servant slept on a pallet set right in the attic to keep guard on all that goodness of God.