Translator’s Preface

_Around the Dinner Table with Grazia. Food and Cooking in the Work of Grazia Deledda_, by Neria De Giovanni, underlines the love of Grazia Deledda (1871-1936) for her people’s traditions, historic events, and food. It shows that Sardinians, adhering to an agropastoral economy, follow a very simple way of preparing food; they utilize vegetables and products from livestock farming and especially sheep; they respect traditional recipes and customary ways to preserve food. For instance, they prepare distinctive dishes, such as _pane currasau_, that last several weeks without decomposing; _porcetto_, a small pig usually cooked with myrtle and almond sweets, and _seadas_, a fried dessert filling with cheese. Another representative practice of Sardinian tradition is the conservation of fruit, such as grapes and melons, in home attics because it guarantees the right temperature and humidity. With this practice, Sardinians make seasonal fruit, abundant during the summer, available throughout the year.
Neria De Giovanni, journalist, essayist, Editorial Director of the online journal PortaleLetterario.net,\(^1\) and President of the International Association of Literary Critics,\(^2\) is a scholar from the University of Cagliari and the coordinator of the literary festival titled *I Venerdi di Propaganda: Temi e Autori* (The Fridays of Propaganda: Themes and Authors) at the Libreria Internazionale Paolo VI in Rome. As a literary critic, she has received numerous awards, including one from the Minister of Cultural Heritage in Rome for her book *Ilaria del Carretto, la donna del Guinigi*.\(^3\) She is the author of forty books of literary prose and criticism devoted to the exploration of important women who contributed greatly to the fields of literature, art, and history, as did Amalasunta, Arianna, Dolores Prato, Eleonora d’Arborea, Ilaria del Carretto, Hildegard of Bingen, Maria Carta, and Grazia Deledda, among others. Having

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\(^1\) https://www.portaleletterario.net/
\(^2\) https://aicl-org.webnode.it/chi-siamo/
\(^3\) Neria de Giovanni, *Ilaria Del Carretto, La Donna Del Guinigi* (Lucca: M. Pacini Fazzi, 1988).
devoted twelve volumes to the study of Grazia Deledda, she is considered an expert on this author.

Grazia Deledda is the only Italian writer who has received the Nobel Prize for Literature, in 1926, “for her idealistically inspired writings which with plastic clarity picture the life on her native island and with depth and sympathy deal with human problems in general.”

Deledda, a great chef herself, who was attentive to learn the secrets of other women’s recipes, ironically remembered when the messenger from the Swedish delegation arrived to her house to announce she had won the Nobel Prize. He kissed her hand, which smelled like onions since, she had just finished browning the herbs and onion for some ragu sauce.

It is worth noticing that although Deledda wrote her books in standard Italian, her mother tongue was Logudorese

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4 From the award ceremony speech: https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1926/ceremony-speech/.
Sardinian,\textsuperscript{6} which is one of the two written versions of Sardinian, often regarded as the most conservative of all Romance languages. The absence of significant impact from languages other than Romance has been considered an important reason for the manifestation of conservative language features.\textsuperscript{7} Deledda grew up immersed in Sardinian legends, folklore, and native customs that preserved cultural traits from ancient times. For these cultural reasons, Deledda called the place where she was born, Nuoro, “a bronze-age village.” This respect for old regional customs is reflected in the preparation of the old recipes described in this volume.

De Giovanni’s examination of Deledda’s representations of food includes, among others, \textit{Ferro e fuoco}, \textit{Marianna Sirca}, and \textit{Cenere}, works completed from 1895 to 1937. This collection of scenes associated with the preparation of food, according to De Giovanni, allows one to establish universal anthropological

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and cultural connections. It has been often demonstrated that although the study of food and eating is noteworthy for its own sake, since the main purpose of food is nutrition, it has also a cultural component, according to which individuals select their food considering not only flavor or nutritional value, but also historic, economic, social, cultural conditions and environmental elements. Therefore, an analysis of food can advance anthropological discussions and approaches. For instance, such an analysis may cover considerations on food security, ethical consumption, the treatment of animals, the health consequences of meat consumption, eating and rituals, and eating and identity.

Similarly, in De Giovanni’s collection, Deledda’s representations of eating are not only described as biological action, but also grasped and conveyed in numerous representative means and customs associated with selecting, preparing, and consuming. The consumption of food in these examples always has meaningful connotations and means of interaction. Food discloses evidence about the people who
prepare it; Deledda’s choice of food reveals Sardinian ideals, likes, and dislikes, and also information about the region she travelled and the people she encountered during her voyage, such as in the Romagna town of Cervia, where Deledda loved to spend her summer holidays. As such, Deledda’s food scenes permit an analysis of her private and public stories, her connection with Sardinian popular traditions, the relationship between food and her literary works, and the creation of the kitchen, perceived as a special space in which the author can conceive and shape her own identity.

The intersection between Deledda’s passions for writing and cooking is very significant. De Giovanni in her introduction refers to the difficulty women writers had in combining their ability to cook with their passion for writing. Women have been historically perceived as food providers; consequently, they were expected to learn how to cook for themselves and others. However, in the case of women’s writers, the challenge was augmented, since they also needed to enter a space that
traditionally had been dominated by men. Deledda’s life underlines clearly her effort to acquire a position in the literary world. Her literary career, which started very early when at seventeen years old, she wrote her first short story, *Sangue Sardo* (Sardinian Blood), published in the women’s fashion magazine, *Ultima Moda* in 1887, persisted without disruption. She continued to write even after becoming a mother of two sons, Sardus and Franz. In later life, her children remembered how the family was accustomed to providing her with the crucial time of at least two hours every day to write her literary production. Franz, her younger son, when he was an adult, expressed his recollections in an outstanding way: “Unconsciously, we understood that in that room, for those two hours, Genius was rising to creation.”

Deledda strongly contributed to examining the time, place, characters, and culture of her Sardinian peasant neighbors. Her works have been recognized by critics for their deep

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psychological insight, and recent studies of her work have
explored her interest in the role of women in Sardinian society at
the turn of the twentieth century. She greatly contributed to
enhancing the field of women’s writing, which as a separate
category of scholarly writing, has only received attention
relatively recently, since the eighteenth century. Deledda’s
consideration for ancient Sardinian folk stories and traditions
related to women calls attention to women’s broader cultural
contribution, which can be found as far back as the eighth
century BC. For instance, in early times, Hesiod compiled a
*Catalogue of Women*, a list of heroines and goddesses, and
Plutarch listed heroic and artistic women in his *Moralia*; in the
Medieval period, Boccaccio employed allegorical and biblical
women as moral examples in *De Mulieribus Claris* (On Famous

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Women), and, moreover, he inspired Christine de Pisan to write *The Book of the City of Ladies* (1405).

Finally, the selections of Deledda’s literary works that Nerio De Giovanni collected and commented on in this volume evoke a passion for conviviality and gathering, which is an important aspect that links Sardinian culture to all the cultures surrounding the Mediterranean Sea. As the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) declares, “Eating together is the foundation of the cultural identity and continuity of communities throughout the Mediterranean.” The preparation of food underlined in these stories, emphasizing the values of friendliness and sociability and bringing together people of all ages, conditions, and social

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classes, may invite an intercultural dialogue and a way of life
guided by ideas of tolerance and respect for diversity.