He had prepared the macaroni: this is what he called certain gnocchi as big and hard as almonds, seasoned with dried tomatoes sauce. The two friends ate in the company of a gray kitten who, with her burnt foot, took the gnocchi from the common dish and wilily took them to a corner of the kitchen.

“How curious he is!” Anania said, following him with her eyes. “We were robbed by the cat.”

“Even from us. They stole a lot of it from us! They disappear and we don’t know where they end up.”

“All the cats in the neighborhood disappear! Who steals them, what does he do with them?”

“Well, he roasts them. The meat is good, you know; it looks like hare meat. On the continent they sell it for hare: that’s what my father says.”

“Was your father on the continent?”

“Yes. And I will go too, and soon.”

“You?!” said Anania, laughing with a little envy.

(from the novel Cenere, 1904)

The passage reported talks of two important characteristics of traditional Sardinian cuisine in the work of Grazia Deledda. First, macaroni. The term does not indicate the particular pasta, the “spaghetto,” of Neapolitan origin,
but on the contrary, it presents a type of short pasta, quite elaborate, of which the young Anania and his friend were fond.

The second “culinary” trait is the allusion to the habit on the continent of cooking cats, whose meat was as good as that of the rabbit!

The almost fabulous reference to the continent, that is to say to peninsular Italy, is to be inserted in the vision by Deledda, and Sardinian people in general, of the journey across the sea, in a different and fabulous land. What was not known about Sardinia outside the island is also mutually true for Sardinia in relation to the continent. That is, the rest of Italians saw the Sardinian people as different people, almost drowned in the darkness of the centuries, just as the Sardinian people imagined fabulous and amazing things in the mythical continent.

_Cenere_ was a novel very dear to Deledda and particularly famous, so much so that Eleonora Duse in 1916, in the middle of the Great War, chose it as the only feature film on which he worked. The reference to social hunger that led to eating even cats is essential to the story itself. In fact, _Cenere_ refers to the contents of a superstitious bag that Oli, Anania’s mother, put around her son’s neck to protect him from bad luck, before abandoning him in the house of his father who, being already married, had not wanted to recognize the fruit of his clandestine union with Oli. The woman lives in the most complete misery, she feeds on herbs, and she needs to prostitute herself out of hunger and necessity. At the end of the novel Oli, recognized by his son Anania, who in the
meantime has graduated on the Continent, will kill herself out of shame.